1 Paul's First Journey

Key Theme

- God uses people to accomplish His perfect plans.

Key Passage

- Acts 14:1–20

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how God used Paul to share the gospel in Iconium.
- Explain how the people responded to the gospel in Lystra.

Lesson Overview

Come On In

Write on the board, "How did people respond to the first missionaries?"

Students will complete the Memory Verse Review Sheet and recite the verse together.

Studying God's Word

Paul traveled with Barnabas on his first missionary journey. Wherever Paul traveled, his purpose was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. He did that boldly. God healed through Paul and did other signs and wonders to show that what Paul was preaching was true. Some people believed and others did not. In both Iconium and Lystra, unbelieving Jews stirred up violence, and the two moved on.

- ☐ Study the Prepare to Share section.
- ☐ Go Before the Throne.

Activity: First Missionary Journey

You will lead students through Acts 13–14 and record the basics of what happened in each city Paul and Barnabas visited.

- ☐ Student Guides
- ☐ Pencils
- ☐ First Missionary Journey Answer Key from the Resource DVD-ROM

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Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

After Jesus's death, Resurrection, and ascension back to His Father, God quickly presented circumstances that allowed the gospel to spread to all nations. He used the great persecution which arose against the church at Jerusalem to scatter believers throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). God sent an angel to the missionary Philip to preach to an Ethiopian man (Acts 8:26–27). It is very likely this man went back to his homeland of Ethiopia with the good news of Jesus Christ, the Savior (Acts 8:37).

God continued to spread the gospel through the Jew Peter who preached to the Gentile Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:24–25). Until now, Jews and Gentiles were separated. They couldn't eat together or visit each other's homes. But God was changing all that. And God showed Peter that anyone can be saved! People from every nation—whoever fears God and believes the gospel—will be accepted by God (Acts 10:35).

God's plan was that more Gentiles be exposed to the gospel. That was the mission He ordained for the Jewish leader Saul. This powerful Jew was bent on making havoc of the church, dragging off men and women of the Way and committing them to prison (Acts 8:3)—until he met the living Savior on the road to Damascus and was dramatically transformed (Acts 9:5–6).

Saul, who is also referred to as Paul in the Bible, was a means God would use to preach the gospel to the Gentiles through three remarkable missionary journeys. He was accompanied by other apostles as he traveled. The first journey included sailing to Cyprus where Paul preached in Salamis and Paphos. They then continued on by boat to Perga in Pamphylia. They departed Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. They moved on to Iconium and continued to preach. From Iconium they proceeded to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13–14).

As Paul preached in these cities, he would first of all speak in the synagogues to the Jews, telling them that God had fulfilled the promise of a Savior made to the fathers (Acts 13:32–33). Unfortunately, many of these Jews did not believe. And often it was the Gentiles who begged to hear Paul preach and who wanted to learn the truth (Acts 13:42). As Paul preached, and the word was gladly received by many, the Jews became envious. They contradicted, blasphemed, and openly opposed the things Paul was teaching (Acts 13:45). Their own unbelief was judging them to be unworthy of eternal life. This response led Paul to turn his attention and preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

Reactions were varied and unpredictable to Paul's message of salvation. In Iconium, there were unbelieving Jews who tried to stir the Gentiles up and poison their minds against the truth. This did not dissuade the missionaries; in fact, the Bible says they remained a long time there, speaking boldly in the Lord, who allowed them to do signs and wonders as witness to God's grace and truth (Acts 14:2–3).

In the city of Lystra, the Bible records an incident that occurred where God allowed Paul supernatural power to heal a man (Acts 14:9–10). This evoked yet another reaction. The people in Lystra were so moved by the miracle that they believed their idolatrous gods had come down to them in the form of Paul and his companion, Barnabas. They even intended to make sacrifices and worship the two men (Acts 14:11–13). Paul quickly denied this to be true or acceptable. He explained these were the very useless things and customs they should turn away from as they turn to the living God (Acts 14:15).

How fickle and easily influenced these people were! It wasn't long before the Jews from Antioch and Iconium who had not believed Paul's message followed Paul to Lystra. These Jewish leaders stirred up the people of Lystra once again—this time in opposition to Paul! And they were persuaded to stone him and drag him out of the city (Acts 14:19).

God mercifully spared Paul's life, and he continued on his journey from Lystra to Derbe, where he preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples (Acts 14:21). His journey was nearing the end. But Paul could not think of ending this first missionary journey without going back to see those he had preached to—who had believed on the name of Jesus Christ. He longed to see how they were getting along. Although it surely meant more danger for him, he went back to the cities where he had preached to strengthen and encourage the converts in the truths of the gospel (Acts 14:22).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Most scholars believe that Paul, the apostle, was born around AD 5 in the city of Tarsus. Saul, as he was called then, was raised in an orthodox Jewish home, moved to Jerusalem as a child, and studied under the

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Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He persecuted the church following the day of Pentecost in AD 33, but was saved dramatically around AD 35 on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). During Saul's meeting with the living Lord and subsequent salvation, he lost his sight (Acts 9:8). After his sight returned (Acts 9:18), Paul traveled to Arabia and then back to Damascus where he spent three years—a time in which he, no doubt, studied the Scriptures (now as a believer), solidified his new faith, and preached boldly in the name of Jesus (Galatians 1:15–24). After this, Saul came to Jerusalem but because of plots to take his life, he was sent to Tarsus where he stayed for a number of years (Acts 9:26–30). There is little known about these years. However, it is believed that this was when Paul had his heavenly visions discussed in 2 Corinthians 12:1–10.

Around the mid-40s AD, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Paul, and brought him back to Antioch, the capital of the province of Syria. Here the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch set apart Barnabas and Saul for a ministry to which the Holy Spirit had called them (Acts 13:1–3). And Paul's first missionary journey began about 11 years after his conversion.

The first century, when Paul was alive, was much different from our time and culture. For one thing, travel took much longer. There were no automobiles or airplanes; travel was mostly done on foot, on a donkey, or by boat. However, travel was much easier than it had been a hundred years earlier. The vast improvements made by the mighty and wealthy Roman Empire made travel far more efficient.

Historian Lionel Casson notes the conditions for travelers of the time: A traveler "could make his way from the shores of the Euphrates to the border between England and Scotland without crossing a foreign frontier. . . . He could sail through any waters without fear of pirates, thanks to the emperor's patrol squadrons. A planned network of good roads gave him access to all major centers, and the through routes were policed well enough for him to ride them with relatively little fear of bandits."

Due to the Pax Romana (Roman Peace) instituted under Emperor Augustus (27 BC–AD 14), these conditions prevailed when Paul traveled the Roman world. The philosopher Epictetus declared, "There are neither wars nor battles, nor great robberies nor piracies, but we may travel at all hours, and sail from east to west."

The Roman roads extended across the Roman Empire—a total of 63,000 miles of paved roads, connecting centers of government, culture, and power. This helped to advance the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to the known world at that time. It is clear that God had certainly ordained this time in history for His Son to come as the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Even with the nice roads, travelling was often tiresome. Travelers would wear heavy shoes or sandals, had capes and broad-brimmed hats, and often carried bedding, tents, and provisions. The average traveler walked three miles per hour for about seven hours a day—or about 20 miles per day. So, for example, the 90-mile walk from Perga to Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14) would have taken about 4–5 days.

Travel during the winter was difficult due to the snow that sometimes blocked high passes, and the heavy rains in the fall and spring caused the rivers to swell making them difficult to cross. When in remote areas, travelers might face dangers from robbers, as well as from wild animals such as bears, wolves, and boars. It's likely that Paul had some of these difficulties in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians: "I have been . . . in perils of waters, in perils of robbers . . . in perils in the wilderness" (2 Corinthians 11:25–26).

This first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas occurred sometime between AD 46–50. Paul and his companions traveled between 1,300 and 1,500 miles, by land and by sea, over a period of about two years. They boldly preached the gospel of the risen Christ and made many disciples. Elders were appointed for the newly established churches, and then the missionary party returned to Antioch and reported all that God had done through them (Acts 14:21–26).

BEFORE THE THRONE

Father, you filled Paul with faith, love, courage, and devotion to you. Thank you for the example of his boldness in sharing the gospel. I pray, Lord, that you will empower me and my students with the same power and strength that we may proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost. And for those students who do not know you, save them Lord by your grace. Use this message to turn their hearts and minds to you and away from the world and its desires. To you be the glory!

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Review

As we move into the final quarter of our study through the Bible, we are continuing through the book of Acts to understand how God used various people and situations to spread the gospel and grow the church in the Mediterranean world. The principle person we will be looking at is Saul, who we know as Paul. At some point after his conversion from a blasphemous persecutor of Jesus, Saul the Jew began to be known as Paul the Christian, adopting the Roman form of his name. He is referred to as Paul from Acts 13:9 onward (with the exception of his own testimony in Acts 22:7 and 26:14) and in all his epistles.

As the Christians were spreading out from Jerusalem as a result of the persecution there, many people came to know Jesus as Savior. Luke records the details of the journeys that Paul and his companions took in an effort to spread the gospel. Our next four lessons will look at each of these journeys and how various people responded to the message of the gospel—both Jews and Gentiles.

Refer to the New Testament History Poster to set the timing of the events.

We will be picking up in Acts 13, but we haven't heard anything from Paul since he left Jerusalem in Acts 9. Saul's conversion happened in about AD 35, and the first journey happened approximately twelve years afterward based on clues about the timing described by Paul in Galatians 1:15–2:2. (The 14 years mentioned in Galatians 2:1 is likely the time period from his first visit to Jerusalem to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.)

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.

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First Missionary Journey

MATERIALS

- ☐ Student Guides
- ☐ First Missionary Journey Answer Key
- ☐ Pencils
- ☐ Paul's Missionary Journeys Map

INSTRUCTIONS

Today we are going to walk through the first missionary journey of Paul described in Acts 13–14 before we zoom in on two of the cities he visited. Open up your Bibles to Acts 13.

In your Student Guide you will find the First Missionary Journey activity. We are going to move through the passage quickly with the goal of getting the big picture of the entire journey. *Use the First Missionary Journey Answer Key from the Resource DVD-ROM and refer to Paul's Missionary Journeys Map as you walk through each account below. If time is short, move through this activity by providing the basic answers for the students and encourage them to go back and read the entire passage later.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

? What patterns did you notice in this passage? *They typically went to the synagogue first and then preached to the rest of the people. The Jews who did not believe stirred up others and sought to kill Paul and Barnabas to stop the message.*

All these events cover the span of up to two years. It took a long time to travel in those days, and they also spent unspecified amounts of time in each city. In all of this, the gospel was being spread widely and influencing the regions of Galatia, Pamphylia, Syria, and Cyprus (part of Cilicia). Despite the opposition, they continued to preach the gospel, shaking the dust off of their feet as they moved to the next town where there were many who desperately needed to hear the good news of salvation in Christ.

Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Now that we have a big-picture view of this first missionary journey, let's read Acts 14:1–7 together and look at how Paul and Barnabas were used to spread the gospel. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

➤ Write on the board, "How did people respond to the first missionaries?"

Acts 14:1–7

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

? What city is referenced? *Iconium.*

? Who does "they" refer to? *Paul and Barnabas are the missionaries (13:50).*

? Where did they go first in Iconium? *They went to the Jewish synagogue.*

➤ Print the Map Pronunciation Guide from the Resource DVD-ROM for help pronouncing the place names.

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? **Who did they speak to at the synagogue?** *They spoke to both Jews and Greeks.*

? **What was the result?** *A great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed the message.*

? **What did they say to the people?** *It is not specifically recorded, but we can be sure it was a presentation of the gospel. It may have been similar to the message proclaimed in Antioch described in 13:16–41. Encourage the students to read this passage later to see Paul's proclamation of the gospel and use of Old Testament texts.*

? **Did everyone respond positively?** *No.*

? **Who rejected the message?** *Some of the Jews did not believe.*

? **What did the unbelieving Jews do in response to the message and the positive response of so many?** *They stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned them against the brethren.*

? **Did this opposition stop the message being spread and taught?** *No.*

? **How long did they stay in Iconium?** *They stayed there a long time, but the exact period is not known. It was likely many months based on other clues and similar language in Acts.*

? **How did the opposition influence the preaching?** *Paul and Barnabas continued to preach boldly.*

? **How was God involved in the preaching?** *God was bearing witness to the words by granting signs and wonders through the hands of Paul and Barnabas.*

➤ Remind the students that we must interpret Scripture with Scripture and in context. See Acts 4:30, 5:12 for examples.

? **What were these "signs and wonders"?** *While they are not specifically identified here, we can assume from the context of the book of Acts that these were healings and casting out of demons.*

? **What was the purpose of these signs and wonders?** *They authenticated the message being preached and the grace of God in the message.*

? **How did the people of the city respond to all of this?** *Some sided with the unbelieving Jews, and some sided with Paul and Barnabas.*

? **How are Paul and Barnabas described in verse 4?** *As apostles.*

? **What does the word "apostle" mean?** *An apostle is someone who is sent to proclaim a message under someone's authority.*

? **In what sense were Paul and Barnabas both apostles?** *We don't typically think of Barnabas as an apostle, but both of these men were sent out by the church at Antioch to proclaim the gospel under the guidance of God the Holy Spirit.*

? **What situation made Paul and Barnabas leave?** *Eventually the leaders of the Jews and Gentiles threatened violence against them, so they chose to leave.*

? **What word is used to describe their departure?** *Flee; "they fled."*

? **What does this word imply?** *It implies they left quickly and in fear for their lives.*

? **Where did they flee to?** *To the region of Lycaonia—the cities of Lystra and then Derbe.*

? **What did they do when they got there?** *They preached the gospel.*

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? How does this series of events in Iconium compare to the previous events in Antioch in Pisidia? *The series are almost identical: preaching in the synagogue, some believed, some Jews stirred up the people, the apostles left under threat.*

Discover the Truth

As we think about this passage, we can see a clear example of how God uses people to accomplish His plans. The Holy Spirit had called Paul and Barnabas to go to these places and proclaim the glories of Jesus Christ. They were sent out as messengers from the God who created and sustains the universe—they had His authority to proclaim the message. To authenticate the message, God was pleased to do signs and wonders through them. The Spirit was at work in the hearts of the hearers to convict them of sin and call them to repentance and faith in Jesus. And as they heard the message, Acts 13:48 says, ". . . as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

wise

? How is God's wisdom demonstrated in sending these men to preach the gospel? *God sent these men, filled with the Holy Spirit, to interact with various people in various cultures. Although this may seem foolish to us, it was the way God chose to carry out the delivery of the gospel message. God is pleased, in His infinite wisdom, to use people to preach the gospel.*

Despite the negative response from some, the gospel was received with joy by many Jews and Greeks in Iconium. God used the words spoken by Paul and Barnabas and the miracles performed through them to draw many to Himself. We have a good model to follow in these two men who preached the gospel boldly to all people.

READ THE WORD

Let's move on to what happened in the city of Lystra in Acts 14:8–20 after they fled the threats in Iconium. *Have someone read the passage aloud, beginning in 14:5 to pick up the context.*

Acts 14:8–20

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

? What were Paul and Barnabas doing in Lystra? *They were preaching the gospel.*

? What is the setting of Paul's preaching in Lystra? *He is in some public forum (marketplace or town center), but it may have been the area near the city gates based on verse 13.*

? How is the man whom Paul healed described? *He was crippled from birth, having no strength in his feet; he could not walk.*

? What was the man doing? *He was listening to Paul preach.*

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? **What did Paul notice about him?** *He saw he had faith to be healed.*

? **How did Paul "see" the man's faith?** *He may have noticed a change in the man's countenance that indicated the change happening in his heart. We cannot "see" faith, but we can see the effects of faith producing change in a person. Consider asking the students if they have ever experienced a similar thing as they shared the gospel with others.*

? **How did Paul heal the man?** *He said in a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet."*

? **How did the man respond?** *He leaped and walked.*

? **Who was ultimately responsible for the healing?** *God performed the miracle through Paul.*

? **What did the people of Lystra think about Paul and Barnabas because of the miracle?** *They believed the gods had come down to earth.*

? **Who did they believe Paul and Barnabas were?** *Paul was supposed to be Hermes and Barnabas, Zeus.*

? **Did Paul and Barnabas understand what they were saying?** *No, since they were speaking in Lycaonian.*

? **What was the priest of Zeus preparing to do?** *He was bringing oxen and other things to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas.*

? **What did Paul and Barnabas do once they realized what was happening?** *They tore their clothes and tried to persuade them that they were just men, not gods.*

? **What did the tearing of the clothes represent?** *This was a sign of deep remorse.*

? **What were the main points of Paul's message to them?** *He acknowledged that they were men just like the people of Lystra, that they should turn from their useless idol worship, they should worship the creator God, and that God gives a witness to Himself in creation.*

? **Why did Paul talk about the common benefits of God rather than quoting Old Testament passages (as he did in the synagogue in Antioch)?** *He knew that these people did not have a background in the Old Testament truths, so he used the experience of God's common blessings to all men as a point of connection.*

➤ This passage sounds very much like the message in Romans 1:18–20.

? **How did Paul distinguish God from the other gods the people knew?** *He referred to God as the creator of everything and the sustainer of all life on earth.*

? **Did this explanation immediately persuade the crowds?** *No.*

? **What happened next?** *Jews from Antioch and Iconium appeared on the scene. This seems to be an awkward turn in the narrative, and there is probably some transition between these two scenes that Luke did not record for us.*

? **Why were these Jews following Paul and Barnabas?** *They were the same Jews who ran them out of town, and now they were seeking to frustrate their efforts in Lystra.*

? **What did the Jews persuade the multitudes in Lystra to do?** *They persuaded them to stone Paul to death.*

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? What type of change happened in the thinking of the crowds in Lystra? *They had gone from thinking Paul was Hermes, one of the gods they worshipped, to trying to kill him on the word of these Jews from another city.*

? What did they do with Paul after they stoned him? *They dragged him out of the city.*

? What did they believe about Paul after the stoning? *They thought he was dead.*

? Was Paul really dead? *No. (Some suggest that he had his vision of heaven described in 2 Corinthians 12:2 at this time, but the timing does not align to account for 14 years between the writing to the Corinthians and this journey.)*

? Who gathered around Paul after his stoning? *The disciples in Lystra who had believed in Paul's message.*

? What happened to Paul after the stoning? *He rose up and went back into the city.*

? Who is responsible for preserving Paul's life? *God.*

? When did Paul leave Lystra? *He left the following day with Barnabas.*

? Where did they go next? *To Derbe.*

Discover the Truth

Stop and think for a minute about what Paul and Barnabas faced for the sake of sharing the gospel. They had been run out of town multiple times, yet they persevered in sharing the message they had been sent to proclaim. God had given them the authority to proclaim the gospel, and He had also given them the power to affirm that message through the healing of the lame man.

Can you imagine this man's joy as he leapt to his feet and was able to walk? Can you imagine the amazement of the crowds gathered around to hear Paul's message? They knew something supernatural had happened, but without any background information about the one true God, they assumed it was another god's power at work. It was a natural conclusion for them, but their worship of creatures—Paul and Barnabas—was not acceptable, and the apostles sought to persuade them to direct their worship to the only one worthy of worship.

And then the crowd decided to stone them! What a radical demonstration of the fickle nature of the human heart—one minute they were bowing down to them in worship and the next they were throwing stones at them with murderous intent. And that is why we all need the gospel to transform our hearts. That is why we need ambassadors to proclaim the only truth that can offer forgiveness of sins and direct worship to the only God worthy of that worship.

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Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Many people have risked many things for the sake of spreading the gospel, and we can thank God for the record of the faithfulness of Paul and Barnabas. Despite facing what we would consider challenging traveling arrangements and continual oppression from Jews and Gentiles, God used these two men to expand the kingdom of God and the number of those who will be worshipping around the throne of God.

By preaching in the Jewish synagogues, preaching in the markets and palaces of the Gentiles, and affirming the message with signs and wonders, these apostles were able to help many people see their own sinful condition and their need for the Savior. Paul tailored his messages to the audience he was standing before, but he never swerved from preaching about God as the Creator and Savior of all men. Even when this brought a strong reaction, Paul was willing to endure the suffering that came so that Christ would be exalted among the nations.

We can also see the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in emboldening Paul and Barnabas as He sent them from the church in Antioch (Syria) to preach the gospel. They were never alone as they traveled, but the Spirit was with them and in them to guide them as they spoke, to work the miracles, to fill them with joy, and to bring conviction of sin and regenerated hearts to those who believed.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

? As you think about the events of this first missionary journey, what impresses you the most about what Paul and Barnabas were able to accomplish in serving the Lord? *Discuss various answers.*

? In what way are the experiences of Paul and Barnabas as they preached the gospel a model for us as we do the same? *As we preach the gospel to others, we should seek to be faithful to the truths of the Bible, be bold in our proclamation, and expect that some will receive the message while others ignore or seek to suppress the message. We must proclaim the gospel despite the response of others, even expecting to face persecution for the sake of the gospel.*

? What are some examples of what this might look like practically in your daily life? *Allow discussion.*

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? Do you tend to follow a pattern when you share the gospel with others? What are the benefits of a pattern? What are the dangers? *Discuss various answers. Having a basic format to share the gospel can offer personal confidence, but it can also get us stuck in a rut where we wind up approaching every witnessing encounter the same and not interacting with the individual person in front of us.*

? Some people think that proclaiming the gospel in marketplaces and parks used to be normal and more acceptable, but it is not a good idea today because of the opposition. How does this claim stand up to the description of Paul's experience of preaching the gospel in similar environments? *The response to the proclamation of the gospel has always been the same: some will respond favorably, and some will respond negatively.*

? How were the actions of the church in Antioch a part of the Great Commission? How is your church body involved in similar activities? *The members of the church at Antioch sent out the two missionaries after laying hands on them. Though it is not mentioned, they likely gave them material support as well. Discuss how your church body is involved in both local and global efforts to spread the gospel. This is an important aspect of ministry in a local church.*

? When Paul was preaching in the synagogue in Antioch, he used many Old Testament passages and directly quoted them. When he was trying to pacify the masses in Lystra, he loosely talked about God's attributes and common blessings for all people. What does this approach teach us about how to use Scripture in different circumstances? *While we should never hold back from proclaiming the truths of God's Word, it is not necessary to quote verbatim from a passage. We can communicate the truth of a passage without quoting it, but there is certainly benefit in memorizing Scripture and proclaiming it to the lost. Paul used the direct quotes when his audience knew the context of the Old Testament and made the connections in those passages to Jesus. The people of Lystra did not know this context, so Paul used another point of contact to engage them.*

MEMORY VERSE

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for sending ambassadors to share the gospel.
- Praise God for His wisdom in using broken vessels to spread the gospel.
- Ask God for boldness by His Spirit to proclaim the gospel.

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Notes

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