

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: December 10, 2017
Lesson Title: "Misguided Worship"
Lesson Passage: Acts 14:8-20

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Wherever the gospel went in the first-century world it attracted believers, but it also ran into opposition. In Pisidian Antioch, the Asian city featured in last week's lesson, the ministry of Paul and Barnabas met with unusual success when, on a sabbath "almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God" (Acts 13:44), and many Gentiles there "glorified the word of God" (13:48). Yet, because of Jewish opposition, the apostles were driven out of that region (13:50). They had a similar experience in Iconium, where, after they initially won widespread approval (14:1), hostile Jews stirred up so much antagonism toward them, they finally had to flee the city to avoid being stoned by an angry crowd. Then, at Lystra, after Paul's healing of a lame man made the onlookers want to deify the apostles (14:8-11), Paul was stoned and left for dead outside the city; but he miraculously survived (14:19-20). However, the missionaries went back to these cities, despite the danger, to nurture new converts in the faith (14:21-22).

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Describe the life-threatening situations faced by Paul and Barnabas at Iconium and Lystra. (2) Explain how the return of the missionaries to Lystra, Icononium, and Antioch exemplified an important principle related to the practice of evangelism today.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Relate this story: In a small African nation, the Communist government abruptly outlawed all Christian meetings. Church buildings were confiscated and closed. Even in private homes it was illegal to have gatherings of more than five people. A few pastors met together to deal with this emergency. They decided to continue having meetings for prayer and Bible study; but they limited the groups strictly to five. And quite often, a group would include only two or three Christians, because they wanted to leave room for non-believers. Amazingly, from the time church meetings were outlawed, the number of Christian converts in that country has increased threefold. *Then add these comments:* This story is a contemporary example of something that has always been true of Christianity. From the beginning, the gospel has thrived in the face of opposition. Today's lesson presents two illustrations of this truth.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Call attention to the name "Iconium" in Acts 14:1. Locate Iconium on a map, and note its geographical relationship to Antioch of Pisidia, the setting of last week's lesson. Refer to the fact that Paul and Bar-

nabas followed their usual pattern, going first to the local synagogue.
NOTE: The word "together" in v. 1 means literally, "according to the same" or "in the same way." In other words, they began their missionary work at Iconium "in the same way" they had begun in Antioch, in the Jewish synagogue. This was a very logical strategy, since they themselves were Jews.

2. *Call attention to the similarity between what happened at Antioch (see Acts 13:43-45) and the experience of Paul and Barnabas at Iconium (Acts 14:1-2):* In both places, they initially succeeded in winning a number of the Jews to the Christian faith; then they fell victim to the malicious attacks of "unbelieving Jews," who poisoned the minds of Gentiles outside the synagogue against the Christian missionaries.

3. *Focus on the events at Lystra (Acts 14:8-20):*

A HEALING (14:8-10): (1) Paul "looked intently at him" (v. 9). APPLICATION: The easy way to escape responsibility for people who are in need of help is to ignore them. Disabled people report that people on the streets often pretend not to see them, so as not to be embarrassed by them. When we "look intently" at others, we risk getting involved with them. (2) The man "had faith to be healed." APPLICATION: Those who seek God's blessing must be active participants in the process, not just passive objects to be acted upon.

AN UNEXPECTED PROMOTION (14:11-18): (1) As a result of the healing, the apostles suddenly found themselves promoted to the status of gods. APPLICATION: In our day, too, people are sometimes prone to turn religious leaders into objects of veneration. (2) *Compare the simple sermon spoken to these pagan Gentiles (14:15-17) with the more elaborate message presented in the synagogue (13:16-41).* APPLICATION: The message must always be adapted to the hearers. (3) The apostles "scarcely restrained the people" from worshipping them. APPLICATION: This required more humility than some of today's "celebrity" religionists can muster.

A CLOSE CALL (14:19-20): (1) With persistent hatred, Jews from Antioch and Iconium pursued Paul to Lystra. (They did the stoning in v. 19, not the Lystrans.) (2) The "disciples gathered around him" (v. 20). APPLICATION: The "wounded" members of the Christian fellowship need brothers and sisters in Christ to "gather around them."

4. *Let someone read Acts 14:21-22, then make this point:* The apostles returned to the very cities in which their lives had been threatened. Why? To instruct and encourage the new converts. APPLICATION: Contrary to a certain kind of evangelism that ignores converts once they have been baptized, Paul and Barnabas risked their lives to see to it that new converts were well-grounded in the faith.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Pose this question for discussion: As you try to function as a Christian in today's world, do you encounter opposition? In what form?"