

# MISGUIDED WORSHIP

Only God is worthy of worship and praise.

## ACTS 14:8-20

**MEMORY VERSE: ACTS 14:15b**

- **READ** Acts 1:1–4:31, First Thoughts (p. 24), and Understand the Context (pp. 24–25). Consider your own preparation for worship as you read.
- **STUDY** Acts 14:8-20, using Explore the Text (pp. 25–29). As you study, make a list of all the things that you have allowed to interfere with worship of the one true God. For further insight, consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from LifeWay.com).
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 30–31). Consult *QuickSource* for additional discussion questions (available from LifeWay.com). As you prepare, consider ways that you may make the group time a more worshipful experience.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: ☐ Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: ☐ **PACK ITEM 1** (*Map: Paul's Missionary Journeys*); ☐ **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of Acts*); ☐ **PACK ITEM 7** (*Poster: Key Cities in Paul's Journeys*); and ☐ **PACK ITEM 9** (*Poster: Difficulties Faced by Early Missionaries*).



## KEY DOCTRINE

### God

There is one and only one living and true God.

## BIBLE SKILL

*Compare and contrast passages looking for similarities.*

Read Romans 1:26-32. Compare Paul's explanation of the response of pagans to the good things of God and the sermon he preached in Lystra in Acts 14:15-17. We refer to God's revelation in conscience and nature as "natural" or "general revelation." What is the role of general revelation? What are the similarities between the two passages? What can we learn about sharing the gospel by comparing these two passages?

---

---

---

---

# FIRST THOUGHTS

When it comes to worship, the focus is often more on style than on substance. The purpose of all worship is not to please the crowd, but to worship God. Sometimes we are guilty of making ourselves the focus of worship, thinking that the music and other elements must please us. Instead, we should always be asking if our worship is pleasing to God.

(In PSG, p. 19) **How would you describe most people's attitudes toward worship? For what reasons do people attend a church worship service?**

---

Only God is worthy of our worship and praise. In Lystra, Paul faced the problem of misguided worship. After Paul became the instrument through whom God healed a lame man, the crowds mistook him for one of the gods and wanted to offer sacrifices to him. Barnabas and Paul were grief stricken when they saw the uninformed response from the crowd. When Barnabas and Paul corrected the crowd's misunderstanding, the sentiment changed from worship to one of hate and persecution.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## ACTS 14:1-28

Last week we left Paul in Antioch of Pisidia where he delivered a powerful message in the synagogue, demonstrating that Jesus was the long-anticipated Messiah who alone could bring forgiveness of sin and a right relationship with God. After the synagogue service was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who were persuading them "to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43). When the size of the crowd increased the next Sabbath, the Jews began to oppose Paul by insulting him. Paul and Barnabas declared that it was necessary to preach first to the Jews, but since the Jews had rejected the message, they would now focus on the Gentiles (14:36). The response from the Gentiles was immediate and the message spread through the whole region. This resulted in persecution and expulsion from the region, but the disciples' response was one of joy prompted by the Holy Spirit (13:52).

The pattern of successful preaching in the synagogue followed by great division in the community was repeated in Iconium. When Paul and Barnabas discovered that the Jews and Gentiles and their rulers planned to assault and stone the two of them, Paul and Barnabas fled the countryside around Lystra and Derbe. But rather than hiding out from their persecutors, Luke affirms, "And there they kept evangelizing" (14:7).

Lystra was a city in south central Asia that was considered to be an important Lycaonian center. According to Acts 16:1 it was the home of Timothy, a young man who, in God's timing, would become one of Paul's companions and fellow-laborers.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### HEALING (ACTS 14:8-10)

#### VERSES 8-10

On one occasion while Paul was preaching, a lame man was part of the audience. Luke made it abundantly clear that this man was totally incapable of walking which, in turn, bore testimony to the miraculous nature of the cure. Luke speaks of his inability to walk in three different ways—***without strength in his feet, had never walked, and had been lame from birth***. It goes without saying that he would be seated to hear Paul, but Luke adds that final note to indicate that everyone who knew this man would know that his disability was total and permanent.

Paul saw the lame man listening to his message and watched him closely. The apostle determined that he had the faith to be healed. Luke doesn't indicate how Paul was able to discern this, but we must assume he was informed by the Holy Spirit. Both in the Gospels and in Acts, faith is regularly mentioned as a condition of receiving both spiritual and physical healing.

Paul commanded him in a loud voice, ***"Stand up on your feet!"*** The man exhibited his faith by his ready obedience to Paul's command. Without hesitation, a man who had never taken a step in his life, ***jumped up and began to walk around***. He didn't walk like a toddler who is tentatively attempting to take a first step, but he walked around giving full evidence that a miracle had occurred.

There are clearly similarities between this account and Peter's encounter at the temple gate with the man who had been lame from birth (see Acts 3:2-8). When healed, the man at the temple gate likewise started to walk and was seen leaping and praising God in the temple complex. The response from the crowd and the follow-up, however, was markedly different. Those in the temple complex were filled with awe and astonishment, which provided the context for Peter's message. In Lystra, the pagan audience was convinced they had been visited by the gods.

(In PSG, p. 22) **How does God use people today to accomplish His work? How does that compare to how He used Paul in this passage?**

---

---

### BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "The Greek Gods" in the Winter 2017-2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

### ACTS 14:8-10

<sup>8</sup> In Lystra a man was sitting who was without strength in his feet, had never walked, and had been lame from birth.

<sup>9</sup> He listened as Paul spoke. After looking directly at him and seeing that he had faith to be healed, <sup>10</sup> Paul said in a loud voice, "Stand up on your feet!" And he jumped up and began to walk around.

## REACTION (ACTS 14:11-13)

The reaction to the miraculous healing was instantaneous and enthusiastic, yet not what Paul and Barnabas would have desired. The predominately Gentile audience believed the gods had come among them in the form of men, and they prepared to worship the missionaries.

### ACTS 14:11-12

<sup>11</sup> When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” <sup>12</sup> Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

#### VERSES 11-12

Amazement over the healing of the lame man rippled through the crowd. They believed that two of the pantheon of gods had visited them in the persons of Paul and Barnabas. The use of the local vernacular explains why Paul and Barnabas did not clearly understand that preparations were being made to worship them as gods until plans were already underway (see v. 13).

The missionaries became aware of the confusion when the crowd began to refer to Barnabas as **Zeus** and Paul as **Hermes**. These gods, Jupiter, and Mercury in the Latin form, were found combined in cults over a wide area. Zeus was the chief god in the Greek pantheon and Hermes was the herald of the gods. The people of Lystra may have identified Barnabas with Zeus because of his more dignified bearing and Paul with Hermes because he was the chief speaker.

#### Zeus and Hermes

Zeus	Hermes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>god of the sky</i></li><li>• <i>chief of the Greek gods</i></li><li>• <i>his devotees believed the elements of the weather were under his control</i></li><li>• <i>Greek equivalent of the Roman god Jupiter</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>god of oratory and inventor of speech</i></li><li>• <i>messenger of the gods and their chief spokesperson</i></li><li>• <i>associated with elequence</i></li><li>• <i>Greek equivalent of the Roman god Mercury</i></li></ul>

### ACTS 14:13

<sup>13</sup> The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the town, brought bulls and wreaths to the gates because he intended, with the crowds, to offer sacrifice.

#### VERSE 13

Since the people believed the gods had visited them in the forms of these two messengers, the locals made plans to give them appropriate honors. The local **priest of Zeus**, whose temple was just outside the city gates, prepared an appropriate sacrifice. The **bulls** would have been decorated with festive garlands as befitted animals being offered to the gods.

The people had heard Paul share the gospel message and had seen the power of the gospel displayed through the healing of the lame man. However, they missed the point and tried to explain what they saw in terms of what they were already willing to believe. They were either unwilling or unable to recognize God’s work.



(In PSG, p. 23) **What are some ways people misunderstand or misinterpret God's work today? Why do some people incorrectly attribute God's work to other people or circumstances?**

---

---

---

## REDIRECTED (ACTS 14:14-18)

When Paul and Barnabas fully understood that the crowd was preparing to worship them as gods, they tore their robes as an indication of their utter horror. They immediately attempted to redirect the focus of the crowd to worship the one true God.

### VERSE 14

It may sometimes be tempting for us to take the praise for what God does through us. But such was not the case for Paul and Barnabas. They were appalled at the response of the crowd and indicated it by tearing their robes. When the Jews tore their robes it was a dramatic response that communicated strong emotion. For example, in Mark 14:63 there is an account of the high priest tearing his robes when Jesus responded in the affirmative about His identity as the Messiah. The missionaries could not tolerate such a misunderstanding. After tearing their robes they ***rushed into the crowd, shouting*** their corrective teaching.

### VERSE 15

Barnabas and Paul first questioned the crowd's motivation. ***"People! Why are you doing these things?"*** They affirmed that they were men with the same human nature as everyone in the crowd. The difference was that they had a message of ***good news***. The message delivered here is worthy of our close attention since it was delivered to an audience that was primarily pagan in its make-up (see also Acts 17:22-34). Paul put his message in the framework of his audience's understanding. We often refer to this as contextualization. For example, in Paul's sermon to a Jewish audience in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, he appealed to Old Testament events and prophesies (13:16-41). In Lystra, to an audience that seems to have consisted of Gentile pagans, Paul appealed less to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and more to the natural revelation of God in creation. There was a difference in emphasis because of the nature of the audience, yet his message was consistent with basic biblical truth.

Paul first affirmed what even the Jews would have affirmed. Idols are ***worthless*** and God is the one true and ***living God***. The works of creation—***the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them***—indicate that God is living and supplies the needs of men. We find a similar emphasis in Paul's letter to the Romans: "since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes,

## ACTS 14:14

<sup>14</sup> The apostles Barnabas and Paul tore their robes when they heard this and rushed into the crowd, shouting:

## ACTS 14:15

<sup>15</sup> "People! Why are you doing these things? We are people also, just like you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.

that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19-20).

**There was a difference in emphasis because of the nature of the audience, yet his message was consistent with basic biblical truth.**

### ACTS 14:16-18

<sup>16</sup> In past generations he allowed all the nations to go their own way, <sup>17</sup> although he did not leave himself without a witness, since he did what is good by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.” <sup>18</sup> Even though they said these things, they barely stopped the crowds from sacrificing to them.

#### VERSES 16-18

In past generations God allowed the nations **to go their own way**. You will find a similar statement and emphasis in Paul’s message to the people of Athens. After affirming that the one true God created everything that exists and gives life to all people, he concluded: “Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

In both passages (chaps. 14 and 17) Paul affirmed that the providential care of God for all people is evidence of His existence and character. In the passage we cited from Romans 1, Paul indicated that this limited revelation is sufficient to make people accountable. The penalty for the rejection of the limited light is God’s giving men over to their own desires. In our present passage, Paul again emphasized God’s honoring the nations’ decision to go their own way. The point is not that God was indifferent or indulgent of man’s sin, but that He was gracious in His patience. Because of His goodness, **he did not leave himself without a witness, since he did what is good**. God showed His goodness in the gift of **rain** and **fruitful seasons** which satisfied the hearts of people with **food** and **joy**.

In spite of the protests of Paul and Barnabas and the clear nature of their witness, the missionaries were barely able to stop the crowd from sacrificing to them.

**What can we learn from Paul’s contextualization of his message based on his audience? How can we use the good things we do for others as a means of pointing them to the goodness of God?**

(In PSG, p. 25) **What were the potential dangers if Paul and Barnabas had accepted the praise from the people? What attitudes did Paul and Barnabas display in pointing the people to Jesus?**

## REJECTED (ACTS 14:19-20)

Events in Lystra intensified when hostile Jews from other cities came to Lystra and rallied the crowd against Paul. Paul was left for dead but found alive by his companions. The passage ends with an affirmation that Paul and Barnabas were undeterred by persecution.

### VERSE 19

Luke did not mention a synagogue in Lystra, but such seems likely. It would certainly help us to understand how the Jews from **•Antioch and •Iconium** were able to win over the crowd and turn them against Paul and Barnabas. It is fascinating how the sentiment of a crowd can change so quickly. Paul and Barnabas, recently acclaimed as messengers of the gods, were now the target of mob violence. Paul was **stoned ... dragged ... out of the city**, and left for **dead**. Paul mentioned the stoning as one of the indignities he was allowed to face for Christ (see 2 Cor. 11:25; 2 Tim. 3:11). He considered the wounds from his stonings and beatings as the marks of Jesus on his body (see Gal. 6:17). In other words, the actions of the crowd in Lystra were not simply actions taken against two men but they were a rejection of Jesus and His messengers.

## Paul and Barnabas were undeterred by the opposition of men.

### VERSE 20

What is most fascinating about verse 20 is the simplicity with which it is told. Paul was stoned and left for dead, but after the disciples surrounded him **he got up and went into the town**. His ability to stand up, walk into town, and depart for continuing ministry clearly implies a miraculous healing. The note that the disciples **gathered around him** suggests that they were praying for God to raise him up from sure death.

The immediate departure for **•Derbe** does not suggest fear on the part of the two missionaries. On the contrary, it clearly indicates their commitment to complete the mission given to them by God. Paul and Barnabas were undeterred by the opposition of men.

(In PSG, p. 26) **To what lengths might a person go to discredit or silence the gospel message? What can we learn from Paul's response that might help us deal with efforts to discredit or quiet the gospel message today?**

---

---

---

### ACTS 14:19

<sup>19</sup> Some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and when they won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead.

### ACTS 14:20

<sup>20</sup> After the disciples gathered around him, he got up and went into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**DIAGRAM:** Draw attention to the subject of worship by charting the act of worship. Label a whiteboard with the word “Worship.” Write the word “Worshiper” on the bottom left of the whiteboard and the word “God” on the top right.

**ELICIT:** Invite the group to identify factors that facilitate worship, such as setting and preparation. Depict these with arrows from the worshiper to God. Between the two, add barriers blocking the arrows. Use information from the main paragraph on page 19 of the PSG to discuss style versus substance.

**QUESTION:** *If you were to chart your worship, what would it look like? Would it be an orderly, seamless flow of praise? Disrupted? Or misdirected?*

**TRANSITION:** Note that Paul’s activities in Lystra represent a lesson on how to keep our worship in proper order. Use **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of Acts*) to identify the cities and order of Paul’s travels. Note that today’s study places Paul in Lystra. Use **Pack Item 7** (*Poster: Key Cities in Paul’s Journeys*) and read the information about Lystra. Highlight **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Paul’s Missionary Journeys*) to point out its location.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** Direct the group to read Acts 14:8-10 to themselves (PSG, p. 21) and underline any words or phrases that could be interpreted as acts of worship. Call for responses.

**REMARK:** Point out that Paul’s sermon took a dramatic turn when a supernatural healing became a byproduct of his message.

**FOCUS:** Draw attention to Paul’s notice of the crippled man’s faith, both in the way that he listened raptly and in the way he responded.

**RESPOND:** Encourage the group to decide whether this was an act of worship for the crippled man or Paul—or both. Then ask: *How does God use people today to accomplish His work? How does that compare to how He used Paul in this passage?* (PSG, p. 22)

**REFER:** Draw the group’s attention to page 22 of the PSG. Direct a volunteer to read the paragraphs under Verse 10 that discuss Acts 3:2-8. Note that faith was a key ingredient to that healing, too.

**TRANSITION:** *Such a spectacular display of God’s power had an immediate and dramatic effect not only on the crippled man but others who witnessed that healing.*

**READ:** Direct the group to read Acts 14:11-13 silently. Lead them to call out any words or phrases that could be construed as worship.

**LIST:** Call on volunteers to identify the ways that the people engaged in misguided worship.

**DISCUSS:** Lead a discussion about how worship became misguided. Ask: *What caused the misunderstanding?* Suggest that language barriers may have been a factor, but it’s more likely that the people relied on their own understanding.



**ASK:** *What are some ways people misunderstand or misinterpret God's work today? Why do some people incorrectly attribute God's work to other people or circumstances? (PSG, p. 23)*

**READ:** Direct the group to read Acts 14:14-18 and underline the action verbs in the passage. Invite volunteers to call out the words they underlined and write them on the whiteboard.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Circle the words that described Paul and Barnabas' actions. Point out that the verbs suggest urgency.

**DISCOVER:** Direct the group to the PSG (pp. 24–25) under Verses 15-17 to help outline the ways that Paul again tried to direct the people's attention to the one true God.

**DETERMINE:** *Paul and Barnabas managed to prevent the sacrifice. What makes that so important?*

**TRANSITION:** *What were the potential dangers if Paul and Barnabas had accepted the praise from the people? What attitudes did Paul and Barnabas display in pointing the people to Jesus? (PSG, p. 25)*

**READ:** Direct the group to read Acts 14:19:20 and underline action verbs. Identify words attributed to Jews, noting that those who disrupt worship may be as forceful as those who facilitate it.

**INDICATE:** Talk about the stoning Paul endured. Draw attention to **Pack Item 9** (*Poster: Difficulties Faced by Early Missionaries*) and the PSG, page 26, to draw parallels to the stoning of Stephen, recorded in Acts 7:54–8:1. Discuss the determination and faith required to keep focused on sharing the gospel despite persecution.

**TRANSITION:** Reread verse 19, which depicts Paul's survival of the stoning after being ministered to by other believers and his subsequent continuation of his missionary journey. *To what lengths might a person go to discredit or silence the gospel message? What can we learn from Paul's response that might help us deal with efforts to discredit or quiet the gospel message today? (PSG, p. 26)*

---

## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**DIRECT:** Guide the group's attention back to the worship chart. List some of the barriers encountered in the study: language, refusal to listen, skepticism, agitation, and so forth.

**APPLY:** Invite the group to call out ways that misguided worship happens today. Also point to the ways that we may apply principles of worship as Paul and Barnabas did.

**REFER:** Call on a volunteer to read aloud the bulleted points under In My Context (PSG, p. 27). Point out: *Our challenge is to do our part to keep worship pure. Worship belongs to God, and we should be pointing people to Him and stay out of the way.*

**RESPOND:** Call attention to the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 27): *List ways you can help unbelievers and skeptics identify God's work in the world. How can your group help you do the things you listed? What needs to change in your own life to point others to Christ?*

**PRAY:** Close in prayer for an understanding of God's work in this world. Ask God to search the hearts of each person present to reveal attitudes that may need change.



## PRACTICE

- As the group leader, follow up by organizing a special worship time during the week. Rather than a meeting time, it could be sharing testimonies of God's goodness or simple words of adoration through a group text or email.
- Email the group during the week and share a list of worship facilitators that they may want to take advantage of, such as the name of a Christian radio station, a link to an inspiring sermon, or an online journal.
- Text the group before your next meeting with an invitation to participate in worship by attending and taking part in your next meeting.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As the group arrives, place them into small teams and ask each team to list examples of ways to facilitate both public and private worship, as well as examples of how worship may become misguided.

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To add to the discussion on healing, lead the group to discuss ways God uses demonstrations of His power to open the door for believers to share the gospel.
- To deepen the group's understanding of Barnabas and Paul's response, direct them to read Psalm 146. Ask: *How does this psalm address the situation Barnabas and Paul faced?*
- To inspire others to keep on serving God no matter the obstacles they encounter, research and share a story of someone who did not quit despite encountering severe hardships or condemnation. Search online stories using the word *persevered*.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Suggest that the group keep a log of their public and private worship encounters during the week, noting factors that served to enhance their worship or that became barriers. Remind them to include church experiences, small groups or personal devotions, social media, TV, radio, and so forth. Encourage them to discern ways to remove barriers or to correct misguided worship as it occurs. If input from the rest of the group is needed or desired, suggest a group email or text for immediate feedback.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Share the lyrics to the song "One True God," by Steven Curtis Chapman. Invite participants to share the words or phrases that particularly resonate with them or facilitate worship.