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### The Conclusion of the First Missionary Journey

W. O. Vaught

*Ouachita Baptist University*

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## THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 58  
ACTS 14:20-28

Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr.  
Immanuel Baptist Church  
Little Rock, Arkansas

ACTS 14:20-28 "Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples."

In our last study we saw that Paul was stoned to death. But notice the wording of this next verse.

ACTS 14:20 "Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." The word "Howbeit" is a conjunction of contrast and reads as follows--"But he rose up". Please remember this is the greatest believer and missionary of all times. They thought Paul was dead, but he sat up then stood up. This was a miracle and God performed it.

Let us go over in another passage and read what actually happened.

2 COR. 12:1-4 "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." So Paul actually died and his soul was caught up into the third Heaven. But God performed this miracle so Paul could be resuscitated and go on and finish the great work God had in mind for him to do. Think of the letters in the New Testament that would not have been written, and think of the churches that would not have been established had God not performed this great miracle on Paul. After his experience in the third Heaven, God sent Paul's soul and spirit back into his body. We call this resuscitation and not resurrection. Many years later Paul will be killed on the road outside of Rome and one day in God's appointed time, his body will be resurrected. Once resurrected you never die again. The only one to be resurrected thus far is Jesus Christ. He is the first-fruits. This is explained for us in 1 Cor. 15. When the Church Age is completed and the church is taken out of the world, then all the believers of the Church Age will experience resurrection. Then will come the tribulation period of seven years, at the end of which Christ will return to the earth and then Old Testament saints will be resurrected. Then at the end of the millennial reign of Christ, the believers of that thousand-year period and the tribulation martyrs will be resurrected and this is the concluding part of what is called "The First Resurrection". The second resurrection will come at the end of time when all unbelievers are resurrected and are called to stand before the great white judgment throne.

Later on we will read Paul's statement that he has fought a good fight, he has kept the faith, and he has finished his course.

2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8 "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." But at this time at Lystra he has not finished his course and God performed a miracle, raised him up, and sent him on his way. Please notice that Paul was stoned to death by religious and legalistic people. Religion always persecutes grace. The next day Paul and Barnabas departed for Derbe.

So this is the end of their first missionary journey and they are ready to start back. They came from Antioch, then to the Island of Cyprus, then to the mainland of Asia Minor and had visited Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. It would be a great temptation for them to take the shortcut back, go through the great mountain pass and head toward Tarsus, the home town of Paul. But back in all those towns they had visited there were Christians who needed guidance and there were churches where stability was needed. If they went back to visit these places, they would face their old enemies and old antagonism. But duty called them back, and they must go.

ACTS 14:21 "And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch" Here we have the return itinerary. The word "taught" in this verse means to train. They returned that 116 miles and it was 116 miles of terrible danger. It was 16 miles from Derbe to Lystra, 40 miles from Lystra to Iconium, and 60 miles from Iconium to Antioch in Pisidia. It was 116 miles of danger and perils. Let us read about Paul's perils in 2 Cor. 11:24-28

2 CORINTHIANS: 11:24-28 "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." These were the perils Paul would face, and some of them were faced on this return journey.

ACTS 14:22 "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" The word "Confirming" comes from epi-sterizo and means to establish or stabilize. Notice, they came to stabilize their souls. When the Holy Spirit is given a chance in the soul and is fed doctrine, then the Holy Spirit takes doctrinal truth and feeds it into the various aspects of the soul and Christian character is stabilized. This is the way perfect inner peace and perfect inner happiness is developed. So this return tour became a doctrinal tour and these new converts were taught doctrine. The soul is saved and this is phase 1. Now the inner life is stabilized with doctrine and this is phase 2. Paul and Barnabas had left behind them spiritual babies and they needed to be stabilized. Pseudo-spirituality is so easy to come by and they need doctrine in their souls. These were converts but they were converts minus doctrine. The word exhort comes from para-kaleo and means that doctrine is called from the immediate source of Paul's mind and is transferred over to them.

To continue really means to abide in the faith. These people are going to face great antagonism and opposition, and through much tribulation, they will enter into the Kingdom. Here in this earth in the period of time is the only place where God can indoctrinate his people. This is the way God demonstrates his love toward us in times of trouble and disaster. Just remember that God's plan is greater than any trouble or disaster.

Four Points On Suffering

1. All suffering is designed for our blessing.
2. There is one exception to this --Divine discipline. Hebrew 12:6
3. This exception is removed by rebound when we use 1 John 1:9.
4. Only the plan of God can turn cursing into a blessing.  
In Romans 8:28 we read, "All things work together for good."  
All things plus a believer equals blessing. Only God can convert cursing into a blessing.

Twelve Different Categories Of Suffering

1. Divine discipline. Hebrews 12:6
2. Self-induced misery. Matthew 7:1-2 Proverbs 14:30
3. To resolve the angelic conflict. Job 1 and 2.
4. To present and illustrate God's message to God's people. Book of Hosea
5. To learn obedience to the divine plan. Hebrews 5:8
6. To provide orientation to the grace of God. 2 Cor. 12:1-10
7. To develop the faith rest technique and occupation with Christ.  
1 Peter 1:7-8, Romans 5:3
8. To demonstrate the power of God and the grace of God in deliverance.  
2 Cor. 12:7-10
9. To manifest the fruit of the Spirit. 2 Cor. 4:8-11
10. To help others when they suffer. 2 Cor. 1:3-24
11. To witness for Jesus Christ. 2 Cor. 3 and 4
12. We suffer because other believers get out of fellowship.  
Compare 1 Cor. 12:13 to 1 Cor. 12:26

ACTS 14:23 "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." Here we pass from the individual to the church. Paul established and organized churches. He ordained elders. Paul realized that he had a personal responsibility to pick out pastors and spiritual leaders. "Ordained" comes from a word which means to stretch out the hand, to touch.

"Elder" comes from "presbuteros" and means the one in command.

"Bishop" comes from "Episcopas" and means overseer.

"Elder" is a title and "Bishop" is a function.

"The phrase "praying with fasting" does not mean that they got some spiritual benefit by not eating. Now some could get much spiritual and physical benefit by not eating so much, but that is not the point here. Fasting, as used here, means to take the time you would ordinarily use in eating and use that time for prayer. In other words, the time Paul and Barnabas would ordinarily use for eating, they used for prayer and thinking and Bible study. Paul realized that he would probably not come this way again and he wanted to do a good job and organize the churches so they would grow and witness. So Paul was trying to get these pastors ready with a crash course to get them ready for their ministerial task. You can teach people just so much, then you have to commit them into the Lord's hands. This is what Paul and Barnabas will do here with these pastors. They will teach them the best they can, and then they will commit them to the Lord. "Commended" here is from para-tithemi and means "to deposit them" or "to lay them in the Lord's hands". Parents have to learn this lesson in dealing with their children. You can do just so much for them, then you have to drop it all in the hands of God.

Please notice it says, "On whom they had believed". Even preachers have to be born again if they are going to do anything worthwhile. Now that may seem strange to you, but in some sections of the nation today not too much emphasis is placed on the spiritual life of the preacher.



ACTS 14:24 "And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia." Here they have returned to the land of robbers again. But Paul and Barnabas were men of courage and they would not try to avoid the hard places.

ACTS 14:25 "And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia" Attalia is the port which was founded by Attalus II, and he left it to the Roman Empire.

ACTS 14:26 "And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled." At last they arrived home. "Had been recommended" comes from the word "para didomai" and means to give from an immediate source. It means to be delivered over. These men had been delivered over to the grace of God. When you deliver someone over to the grace of God, then you relax for you have done all that you can do. It simply meant that the Antioch Church has, as we say, "Dumped them on the grace of God", and they didn't worry and fret about how things would turn out. They put Paul and Barnabas into the hands of the grace of God and left them there.

ACTS 14:27 "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." So Paul and Barnabas returned and gave a missionary report. They had been gone for 18 months so they would have many things to report to the church at Antioch. It is always good for the home church people to hear and up-to-date report of what God is doing on the mission field. I am sure the saints of the Antioch Church must have rejoiced when Paul and Barnabas recited how great things the Lord had accomplished through them.

ACTS 14:28 "And there they abode long time with the disciples." So Paul and Barnabas took a vacation and relaxed. Please notice that they didn't trot down to Jerusalem and make a report. The Jerusalem Church had lost her place of leadership through legalism and the center of the church had now moved to Antioch. But trouble was brewing at Jerusalem and Paul and Barnabas will have their vacation cut short with the call of the great Jerusalem Conference.