

Acts 14:1-23

Aim of Lesson

To show the courage and humility of Paul and Barnabas, and their commitment to the work of spreading the gospel to the Gentiles.

Background study

Acts 4:36-37; 11:22-26; 13. Find a map showing Paul's first missionary journey. (Four separate simplified maps are recommended for use in the following series of lessons, showing clearly the routes of the missionary journeys and the journey to Rome.)

Suggested outline of lesson

Beginning with a map of Palestine and Asia Minor, point out to the children the area in which, so far, all the events of the New Testament have occurred, i.e. Palestine. It was here that Jesus and his disciples lived and worked, for this was, and is, the land of the Jews. To these people God had given the Law, and sent judges and prophets, and finally his son, to teach his purpose. Explain that Saul was a Jew, and as such was keen to teach his own people what he had so dramatically learned, that Jesus was the Son of God. However, God gave him a specific mission - to take the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles in other lands. You should explain the word "Gentile" and the idolatry that characterized the non-Jewish population of that day. Point out that these people believed in deities of their making, personifying the forces associated with human emotions and natural elements, e.g. love, war, thunder, the sea, etc. Children will probably be familiar with some of the Greek and Roman myths. Discuss with the class the difficulties of beginning to preach about Jesus and about God's purpose to people with no knowledge of the Creator. This difficult and often dangerous task was not to be tackled alone. Introduce Barnabas at this point, referring briefly to his background and his dedication.

Indicate on the map the progress of the journey made by Saul and Barnabas to Cyprus by ship, and then to Asia Minor. Explain that from now on Saul is known as Paul. We are not told why this was, but the probable reason is that Saul was a Hebrew name, by which Saul would be known to the Jews; now that he was going abroad to preach to the Gentiles he took a Roman name.

Explain that in all the towns they visited there was a community of Jews. Naturally they approached the Jews first, with the good news about Jesus. Some gladly believed, but many scorned the message. Quote chapter 13:46-49 to show how God directed the mission of Paul and Barnabas towards the conversion of the Gentiles, and blessed their work with success. Explain that this very success brought them into danger because the unbelieving Jews were so angry and jealous that they attacked the two men, driving them out of some of the cities they visited.

Undaunted by this frightening experience, Paul and Barnabas passed on to the city of Lystra and immediately began to preach. Among his audience he noticed one particular man who was listening intently. Describe in visual terms the crippled man, unable to stand, his legs and feet deformed, his muscles wasted. He must have had to depend upon others for his livelihood and to help him get about. When Paul spoke of Jesus the man was filled with hope and wanted to know more. What followed caused a sensation. Explain that Paul had received from God a measure of the power Jesus had shown, in order to demonstrate that his words were of God. The people interpreted the miracle in the only way they understood. They knew that no ordinary men could do such a thing and, therefore, thought that Paul and Barnabas must be gods in human form.

Paul and Barnabas were horrified to think that the very sign which was intended to demonstrate the power of the one true God had, in fact, been misinterpreted as the power of pagan gods. In spite of Paul's heartfelt witness to the evidence of the Creator in their own lives, the crowd's reaction could not be changed. The demonstration that followed hindered the work of Paul and Barnabas, and roused the people to a state of excitement that led them to riot when the Jews from the other cities arrived. Vividly describe the hysteria that swept through the crowd, resulting in a complete change of attitude towards the missionaries, from misguided worship to hostile rejection. Describe the frightening power of the mob who, without recourse to legal procedures, took it upon themselves to condemn and execute Paul. The method was cruel and primitive. Convey the distress of the other disciples and their fear that Paul was dead. However, as Paul was to declare later, God preserved him for the great work he had planned for him. With what joy he and Barnabas met with the other disciples on their return to Palestine and recounted their mission.

Relevance to the children's lives

Paul and Barnabas were very glad that they had learned about the good news of Jesus. They knew that all people needed to believe in him, and they were eager to tell people about him. Why do you think they wanted to teach other people? Why should people have wanted to listen to them? What should this teach us about our attitude to the word of God?

Worksheets

The crossword solution is:

Across: JUMPED; CITY; LYSTRA; FAITH; LAME, GOD, KINGDOM-OF-GOD, BIRTH, UP, DEAD, BULLS, STONED, Prayer. Down: MEN, EARTH, TORE, SYNAGOGUE, BARNABUS, GOOD-NEWS, KINDNESS, DERBE, PAUL, SEA.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, when we have the chance to tell other people about you and your son Jesus, give us the courage, the words and the wisdom, so that others may come to know and love you. Amen.

Memory verse

"The Lord has commanded, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth'" (Acts 13:47).