

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 14:8-18 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 14:8-18 ESV

8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. 11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." 18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

STRUCTURE

- I. **Healing: dead limbs receive life from the living God (8-10)**
 - a. The disabled man listens in faith (8-9a)
 - b. Paul heals in accordance with his faith (9b-10)
- II. **Idolatry: spiritually dead pagans offer vain worship to mortals (11-13)**
 - a. Pagans misinterpret the healing as a false incarnation (11-12)
 - b. The pagan priest responds to the healing with false worship (13)
- III. **Confrontation: good news of the living God proclaimed and repentance called for (14-17)**
 - a. The apostles lament and confront the idolatry (14)
 - b. The apostles proclaim the good news of repentance from death to life (15)
 - c. The apostles proclaim the good news of God's nearness in this new era (16)
 - d. The apostles proclaim the good news of God's nearness even before this era (17)
- IV. **Conclusion: pagans gonna pagan (18)**

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

In Iconium, the city was divided by the gospel, but at Lystra they almost uniformly rejected it. By earthly accounts, the apostles' ministry in Lystra had failed. Even the healing Christ performed resulted in idolatry, not repentance. Nevertheless, Luke includes this story in the highlight reel. God measures faithfulness not by our results but by our effort. Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel, and God saw that it was good.

The preaching of the good news marks a new era in human history, a theme Luke often revisits. Earlier, we observed how the apostles preached "the word of his grace" (14:3), which contrasted with the prior era, before "the grace of God appeared" in Jesus (Titus 2:11; cf. Jhn. 1:17). Related to this new age of grace, Jesus also inaugurates an era of *revelation*. "In past generations," Paul informs his listeners, God "allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways" (14:16). Later, with the Athenians, Paul will refer to the pre-Christian era as "times of ignorance [which] God overlooked" (17:30). We live in a different age: not an age of ignorance but an age of revelation—revelation of God's grace in Christ. For this reason, the apostles fan out to earth's four corners. They, and we, are God's means of revelation.

Throughout this section, the predominant theme emerges as a contrast between dead worship and the living God. As displayed below in the verse-by-verse commentary, the title "living God" almost always contrasts Yahweh with

lifeless idols of wood and stone. In this context, the living God imparts life to the dead limbs of a disabled man, but the pagans respond with “vain”—dead—worship (14:15), imagining that Paul and Barnabas are Greek gods in human form. Ironically, the apostles herald a Christ who is God, and who came to us in human form. The pagans spoke better than they knew. Luke preserves the irony to subtly reinforce his theme that the age of revelation has arrived, even if these pagans don’t get it. Through the apostles’ preaching, Christ came so close to these false worshipers that their ignorant lips approximated the good news.

Sadly, “approximating” the gospel is not enough. The living God only imparts life to those who renounce their dead works and trust in Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, who has “come down to us in the likeness of men” (14:11).

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.

—“Now at Lystra”:

- Lystra belonged, like Derbe and Iconium (from which they fled), to the “cities of Lycaonia” (14:7). Luke does not narrate what happened in Derbe but rather focuses on Lystra. Later, we will learn that the inhabitants spoke Lycaonian (14:11).
- Lystra was a sister city to Pisidian Antioch. It was like “Dallas-Fort Worth.” Of the two, Lystra was more “Fort Worth.” Some scholars label it as rustic, but others disagree, noting historical evidence of Lystra’s prosperity.

—Luke illustrates how helpless the man was to highlight his need for God’s power: he was “sitting”; he “could not use his feet”; he “was crippled from birth” and “had never walked.”

—His “sitting” emphasizes the consequences of his infirmity; his inability to “use his feet” emphasizes the extent of his infirmity; “was crippled from birth” highlights the duration of his infirmity; that he “had never walked” brings all these together.

—This verse (and those that immediately follow) reminds us of Acts 3. Observe the similar imagery and vocabulary:

- 3:2 says he was “lame” (Gk. *cholos*); 14:8 says “crippled” (Gk. *cholos*).
- 3:2 and 14:8 both peg the beginning of his disability: “from birth.”
- 3:2 pictures the disabled man at the Jewish temple; 14:13 pictures a procession toward the pagan temple.
- 3:4 says Peter “directed his gaze” (Gk. *atenizo*) at the disabled man; 14:9 depicts Paul “looking intently” at him (Gk. *atenizo*).
- 3:6 quotes Peter saying, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk!” 14:10 quotes Paul saying, “Stand upright on your feet.”
- 3:8 describes the man’s response: “walking” (Gk. *peripateo*) and “leaping” (Gk. *allomai*); 14:10 says he “sprang up” (Gk. *allomai*) and began “walking” (Gk. *peripateo*).

—Why does Luke want to compare Paul’s healing of the lame man with Peter’s?

- Like we saw in Paul’s long sermon, which resembled Peter’s, Luke wants to show that Paul and Peter did not preach two different gospels, nor did they represent differing representations of the Messiah. By showing their similarities, Luke thus shows that Jews and Gentiles received the same gospel and same Jesus, promoting unity in the church.
- Along those lines, Luke shows how Jesus occupies the centerpiece of Christian worship, replacing both Jewish *and* Gentile temples. The two peoples unite around the worship of Jesus, the chief cornerstone of our new temple.
- The theme of the Book of Acts is Jesus’s continued heavenly ministry through the Spirit-empowered church. By emphasizing parallels in Peter’s and Paul’s ministry, Luke offers another data point in that theme. It is not Peter, Paul, or any apostle, who expands the church by his own agency. May we not make much of mortals! Instead, King Jesus continues to minister from the right hand of God through Peter, Paul, you, and me.
 - People who foreground ministers of the gospel run afoul of Luke’s message throughout Acts. When the Lycaonians attempt to elevate Paul and Barnabas, these self-effacing, Christ-exalting apostles restrain them.

- The *ministry* of the church is not about the *ministers* of the church. It is about Jesus. May we never lose sight of this.
- The status of the men as “lame” or “crippled” highlights the resurrecting power of Jesus. The man had not been physically dead, but Jesus did give life to otherwise dead limbs.
- Schreiner (quoting Bede): “Just as that lame man whom Peter and John cured at the door of the temple prefigured salvation for the Jews, so too this sick Lycaonian prefigured the people of the Gentiles.”

9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, 10 said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking.

—“He listened to Paul speaking”:

- The sermon snippet in 14:15ff does not represent the totality of their preaching. Paul and Barnabas had been preaching the gospel continually (cf. 14:7). The speech in 14:15ff reflects a spontaneous response to the events unfolding.
- This statement suggests that the crippled man was actively “taking it all in.”

—“looking intently at him... loud voice”:

- See the parallel to Peter in Acts 3:4, observed above also.
- In Greek cultures, to gaze intently and state a loud pronouncement reminded them of legends about their gods. This partly explains their reaction in 14:11ff. See there.
- Schnabel: “In Greco-Roman texts as well as in Jewish literature, the stare and the loud voice are indicators of the action nor presence of the gods (or God) who mingle with human beings.”

—“seeing that he had faith to be made well”:

- Some have argued that since faith is invisible, Paul discerned in his spirit the presence of faith, providing us with an example of the spiritual gift, “discernment of spirits” (1 Cor. 12:10).
- That could be the case. However, we must also account for Luke’s comment about how the man “listened to Paul speaking.” Possibly, Paul saw the man’s faith in terms of his eager listening. You can almost picture the man nodding his head and even vocalizing agreement. If such was the case, one might argue that “seeing that he had faith” could be understood as “seeing the effects of his faith in the form of eager listening.”
- Perhaps we can affirm both answers. Paul observed the man’s eagerness to receive the gospel, at which point Paul’s gift of discernment kicked in, linking it to the man’s faith.
- “made well” is the normal Greek word for “saved” (Gk. *sozo*). The word can mean saved from sin, sickness, Satan, or circumstances. The context decides.
- Schnabel: “The man’s hope to be ‘saved’ should be understood in terms of an expectation to be cured. Since Luke’s readers know that Paul’s message connects faith with Jesus the Savior, with forgiveness of sins, and with eternal life (13:12, 39, 48), the faith of the lame man probably includes all of these.”

—“Stand upright on your feet”:

- Sometimes we pray for the sick to be healed (James 5:16); sometimes we command infirmities to disappear (Luke 4:38-39); sometimes we pronounce healing (as here).
- I generally practice the first two (praying for and commanding) but not the last (pronouncing). To do the last, I would need assurance in my spirit that God wanted me to pronounce the healing. I have not had that before.
- If we command an infirmity, we must be careful not to confuse this with commanding God to heal. God is God, and we are not. We obey His commands; not vice versa. Anything we command—a fever to go, a limb to be restored, a demon to leave—we do so in submission to and in cooperation with God’s authority (Matt. 17:19-20).

—“And he sprang up and began walking”:

- This reminds us of many Old Testament promises where the Messiah will heal the lame. By alluding to these, Luke emphasizes that Jesus (not Paul) performed the miracle (albeit, through Paul).
- Schreiner: “This word *hallomai* [English: “sprang up”] is the same one used in Acts 3:7 and alludes to Isa. 35:6, where the prophet predicts the lame will leap like the deer. Old Testament tradition includes the lame at the day of salvation. Jeremiah said God will gather his people from the remote

regions of the earth: "the blind and the lame will be with them" (Jer. 31:8). Micah 4:6-7 speaks similarly, "On that day... I will assemble the lame and gather the scattered..." Zephaniah 3:19 says, "I will save the lame and gather the outcasts..." Now not only the lame in Jerusalem are being healed but those in Lystra also. The Gentile lame man was under the domain and power of Satan; now he is Yahweh's priest."

11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"

—Paul spoke in a loud voice, pronouncing that Jesus healed the man. The pagans speak in a loud voice, pronouncing gospel truth—but—ironically. In their attempt to affirm idolatrous worship, they shout words that approximated the Christian gospel. Not "the gods" but rather God, in Christ, has "come down to us in the likeness of men!"

—What does Luke intend by preserving this irony?

- It highlights the depth of their blindness, which Paul will soon address (14:16). That these people could come so close to the gospel as to witness the power of Jesus and almost articulate its exact message—yet ironically missing it—shows how blind they are. Formerly, God had allowed the nations to go their own way, but now He has placed the gospel before their eyes, in front of their nose, and even in their mouth—and they still don't get it.
- It also highlights the newness of the era, inaugurated by Jesus. He no longer bears witness through creation alone (16:17) but through human messengers, empowered by the Spirit, who bring the gospel near to distant lands. The irony communicates this reality by placing (near) gospel truth on the lips of pagans. In Christ, good news has come near. The sun has set on an era of ignorance, eclipsing it with one of revelation.

—This reminds me of John 11:49-52: "*But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.'*" He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad."—here, the unbelieving high priest proclaimed the gospel even in his rejection of it, much like the Lycaonians approximated the gospel, even in their rejection of it.

—Globally, the earth has not yet caught up to its age. We live in the age of revelation, yet many nations still walk in darkness. Their souls pine for glad tidings. Christ modeled the church's mission: that we bring the gospel near by leaving our homes, our comforts, and our pleasures, sacrificing all for the call of God and the cry of the lost. The nations still walk in darkness because too many Christians stayed home and stayed comfortable. Not every Christian is called to be a long-term missionary, but all of us are called to sacrifice—our prayers, our finances, our advocacy, our energy, our time—for the gospel. Only when the church obeys the call of God, heeds the model of Christ, and hears the cry of the lost, will the earth catch up with the age in which we live: the age of revelation; the age of light; the age of glad tidings come near in Christ.

—In Acts 28, Paul will again be viewed as a god for surviving a viper bite (28:6).

—Those who move in the Spirit's power will be elevated by men. Those who receive acclaim must endeavor to defer all glory to Christ. One way of doing this is by saying unpopular things that need to be heard. Paul and Barnabas do so here.

12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

—Barnabas was older, making him more like Zeus, a father among the gods. Zeus specifically fathered Hermes, who became his messenger, which is why they linked him with Paul.

—Schnabel: "Zeus is the Sky Father, the highest god, the gatherer of clouds who sends rain and thunder and lightning, the god who presides over the dealings of the community, the savior, the god of the universe. Hermes is, as Zeus's son, the swift messenger sent by Zeus, the emissary (with staff in hand) who crosses the boundary between the living and the dead, and thus the god of transition and the mediator between the gods and humans."

—Of these Greek gods, Zeus more resembled God the Father and Hermes God the Son. These citizens of Lystra thus made a double mistake: (1) they thought Paul and Barnabas were Greek gods; (2) they

(essentially) thought God the Father and God the Son were Zeus and Hermes. In other words, they elevated Paul and Barnabas and downgraded the Father and Son.

—Manmade religion always makes this same mistake. True religion is God-centered, magnifying His triune glory, which expresses itself most perfectly in human weakness. Manmade religion is man-centered, magnifying the strength and holiness of man.

—One reason I love Christianity is the phrase, “so that no one may boast.” We believe that salvation comes entirely from God and not us. If I contributed a single good deed to my own salvation, I can be praised for that. Other religions view salvation as though we are lifting weights and only need someone (God or the gods) to “spot” us. Christianity says: “You don’t need someone to spot you. The bar is on your neck. Your face is blue and your body lifeless. You need God to pull the weight off and breathe new life into you.”

—One reason I believe in Christianity over other religions is that our God is the most glorious. He is the most glorious because He *saves us completely*. Jesus died on the Cross to pay our sin debt in full, saying, “It is finished.” Other religions require us to make sacrifices (like these pagans). If God makes the sacrifice, God gets the glory. If we make the sacrifice, we get the glory. The giver always gets the glory, and God is the greatest Giver! I believe that if God exists, He must be the most glorious Being in the Universe. Christianity alone extols Him as such.

—“oxen... sacrifice”: oxen would have represented a choice sacrifice. They were not cheap. Despite “approximating” the gospel (as shown earlier), this pagan priest displays his ignorance about the eternal priesthood of Jesus who became our once-for-all offering.

—“garlands”:

- Schnabel: “‘Garlands’ woven from twigs were worn on the head by people participating in the procession from the city to the temple, which often in Greek cities, was located outside the city walls.”
- From the Old Testament to the New, and all throughout church history, God’s people have publicly denounced false gods. It has become customary in seeker-sensitive churches to “warm people up” to the gospel by withholding the full counsel of God until people become insiders. This approach is novel. Pagans must be told to repent. We can build bridges through love and kindness but not through diluting the message.
- Jesus was crucified outside the city walls; pagan temples were located outside the city walls. Believers approach Jesus, bearing crosses of shame, outside the camp (cf. Heb. 13). Jesus is our new temple.

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out

—“But when the apostles”: as in 14:4, Luke identifies them as apostles. See discussion on my Study Guide that covers that verse.

—“tore their garments”: Jews tore their garments to express mourning over losses or outrage over blasphemy. The tearing of the garment displayed outwardly what the person felt inwardly—a tearing apart.

—Christians should feel torn apart by the blasphemies of this world. Paul and Barnabas do not respond by excusing their egregious sin on account of their false religion. No, they feel torn apart, and they denounce it openly.

—In the same way, Christians should feel torn apart by the blasphemies and immoralities of this world. In ancient Israel, God sealed for salvation those who “sigh and groan over all the abominations” committed in Jerusalem (Ezek. 9:4). Despite his shortcomings, God marked Lot for rescue because he was “greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked” which were “tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard” (2 Pet. 2:7-8).

—In a world gone crazy, we grow desensitized to the sex, rage, violence, and materialism. In a way, we do this on purpose. It’s easier to cauterize our hearts so we don’t have to feel it. But we can’t do this. We can’t excuse evil. To feel vexed and tormented by the wickedness of the world is a sign of spiritual life—and of future salvation (Ezek. 9; 2 Pet. 2; Rev. 7).

—“rushed out into the crowd, crying out”:

- Paul and Barnabas did not run away from the problem, cloistering away in their end-times bunker. They “rushed” into the problem and cried out against it. They confronted false worship. At times, preaching the gospel can become confrontational. Wisdom knows when to confront and when to flee to the next town (so to speak).

- Schnabel: "The reaction of the Lystrans can be understood in the context of local traditions. A legend connected with neighboring Phrygia relates that two local gods, perhaps Tarchunt and Runt (or Pappas and Men), wandered through the region as human beings. Nobody provided them with hospitality until Philemon and Baucis, an older couple, shared their supplies with the unrecognized gods. The gods rewarded the couple, making them priests in the temple of Zeus, eventually transforming them into sacred trees, while inflicting judgment on the other people. Several scholars suggest that Luke consciously alludes to this legend, which does not preclude the possibility that the citizens of Lystra, thinking of this myth, indeed reacted as Luke describes because they do not want to make the same mistake again."

15 "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them."

—"Men... we also are men, of like nature with you": Paul brings himself and Barnabas down to their level. His response contrasts with Herod, who receives the praise of men who fancied him a god—only to die as a mortal (Acts 12:23).

—"why are you doing these things... we bring you good news": they wanted to bring an offering to Paul and Barnabas; Paul and Barnabas wanted to bring them good news.

—"good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God...":

- The "good news" is not their need to repent but rather the "living God" who welcomes them into a friendship.
- The "living God" contrasts with the "vain things" they worshiped. Paul implies that these vain idolatries sap life from them and leave them empty, but the living God imparts life.
- Paul had a living illustration of this: a man with dead feet received life in them!
- Whatever we center our lives on, that is what we worship. If it is not the living God, it is a "vain thing." We who worship it become like it. If we worship empty things, our soul is filled with emptiness like a balloon with air. If we worship the living God, our whole being is filled with vibrancy like a lame man walking.
- 1 Pet. 1:18: "You know that you were redeemed from your *empty way of life* inherited from your ancestors."
- "that you should turn" is a way of talking about repentance. As it says in Acts 3:19, "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out..." To repent is to perform an inward about-face. It is the flip side of the coin, where the other side is labeled faith. Acts 20:21: "repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ."
- We cannot receive the benefits of salvation without turning from idols to the living God. Mere intellectual assent to a set of Christian doctrines will not suffice. One can worship money, food, and sex, even as he cites the Nicene Creed.
- The "living God" in the Old Testament:
 - [Deuteronomy 5:26 ESV] 26 For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the **living God** speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived?
 - [Joshua 3:10 ESV] 10 And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the **living God** is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.
 - [1 Samuel 17:36 ESV] 36 Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the **living God**."
 - [2 Kings 19:4, 16 ESV] 4 It may be that the LORD your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the **living God**, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left." ... 16 Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the **living God**.
 - [Hosea 1:10 ESV] 10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the **living God**."

- [Daniel 5:23 ESV] 23 but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And the vessels of his house have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives, and your concubines have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.
- [Hosea 4:15 ESV] 15 Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty. Enter not into Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-aven, and swear not, "**As the LORD lives.**"
- [Isaiah 37:4 ESV] 4 It may be that the LORD your God will hear the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the **living God**, and will rebuke the words that the LORD your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left."
- [Psalm 84:2 ESV] 2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the **living God**.
- New Testament examples:
 - [2 Corinthians 3:3 ESV] 3 And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the **living God**, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.
 - [2 Corinthians 6:16 ESV] 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the **living God**; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
 - [1 Thessalonians 1:9 ESV] 9 For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the **living and true God**,
 - [1 Timothy 3:15 ESV] 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the **living God**, a pillar and buttress of the truth.
 - [Hebrews 3:12 ESV] 12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the **living God**.
- Paul's employment of the term "living God" heeds the biblical pattern of contrasting Yahweh with lifeless idols of wood and stone. The title is fitting in this context, for the pagans seek to turn Paul and Barnabas into idols. It is also fitting because only the living God could animate the lifeless limbs of a lifelong disabled man.

—"who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them":

- This is a common way of describing God in Scripture. The heaven (sky/universe), earth, and sea constitute all the material creation.
 - Ex. 20:11: "For in six days, the LORD made heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them..."
 - Ps. 96:11: "Let the heaven be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it."
 - Ps. 146:7: "Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever."
 - Hag. 2:6: "For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land."
 - Acts 4:24: "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them..."
 - Rev. 14:7: "Worship him who made the heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."
- As Creator, the Living God gives life to all things. Idols created nothing and can therefore impart nothing to those who worship them. Whichever god we worship gives us what it has to offer. Idols impart emptiness and death; they are vain and lifeless. God imparts fullness and life; He is infinite and alive.
- On one level, Paul has already been preaching the gospel for some time. His message caused the crippled man to lean in. On another level, what Luke records is all we have, and what he records differs from other gospel presentations thus far in Acts. This time, his audience is not Jewish; it is pagan Gentiles. Furthermore, the context drives his presentation. They are actively committing idolatry and blasphemy. Paul can't respond by telling the full story of Israel as in times past. He jumps straight to the root issue: they worship created things rather than the Creator. These idol

worshippers must be told that there exists only one God, and He alone must be worshiped. Unless worshippers maintain the creature/Creator distinction, their worship blasphemes rather than honors God.

- I'm thinking back to the irony from earlier. When they said, "The gods have come down to us in human form," they didn't realize how close they had come to the truth that God the Son came down to them in human form. Paul's speech highlights a crucial distinction they were missing. Not only do we worship one God and not "the gods"; the God-man we worship is a different kind of human. They were soon to worship created human beings in Paul and Barnabas, but Jesus is uncreated. He is the eternally begotten Son who became flesh. To worship Him is not idolatry; it is the reason God made us.

16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

—Recently, Luke referred to "the word of his grace" (14:3), which highlights the new era Christ inaugurated in His life, death, and resurrection. He inaugurated an age of grace, replacing the age of law (cf. John 1:17; Titus 2:11). This verse also highlights the new era in which we live.

—We live in an era that differs from "past generations" when God "allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways." At the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11), humanity struck out for the third time, following its failure in the Garden (Gen. 3) and at the Flood (Gen. 6-8). God handed the nations over to their false gods (Deut. 32:8-9; cf. 4:19-20), adopting Israel for Himself, flooding her with truth and light. He chose Israel not out of favoritism but because the nations had already struck out and because He planned to extend His favor to the nations through Israel.

—When Israel failed to shine light upon the ignorant nations, Jesus became our True and Better Israel, the Light of the World, which God had intended Israel to be.

—When God "allowed the nations to walk in their own ways," it doesn't mean He never bore witness to them through human messengers. He sent them prophets like Isaiah, Jonah, and Jeremiah. He called them to salvation, and some of them received it. For the most part, however, Israel received a flood of light and the nations received a trickle. Now, Paul says, times have changed. Now the nations get flooded with good news.

—Schreiner: "In 17:30, Paul labels the past as 'times of ignorance,' but Paul now sees himself as standing at the turn of the ages."

17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

—Paul implicitly acknowledges that despite exceptions (i.e., Isaiah, Jonah, Jeremiah, and some others), the nations did not primarily receive human messengers of truth. Instead, God bore "witness" through creation.

—The very creation they worshiped bore witness to the Creator they failed to worship.

—Theologians have historically differentiated between general revelation and special revelation. God grants general revelation of His nature through creation; He grants special revelation of His nature through Scripture. In creation, God "pours forth speech" that declares His "glory" (Ps. 19:1-2). He bears witness to His "invisible attributes"—like "his eternal power and divine nature"—which are "clearly seen" through works of creation (Rom. 1:20).

—I love that. God's "invisible attributes" are "clearly seen." How do you see that which is invisible? With the "eyes of your heart" (Eph. 1:18).

—Those who cover their eyes to the revelation of God in creation are "without excuse" for their willful blindness (Rom. 1:20). Here is the full passage from Romans:

- *18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the*

dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. 28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

- It is not God's fault when idol worshipers refuse to worship the one true God. Those who resist God do not lack truth; they "suppress the truth." They cover their eyes to God's glory revealed in creation. God judges their darkened hearts by darkening their hearts even more. Three times, we read that "God gave them up" to ever-increasing creature-worship, expressed in its ultimate form: vile sexual practices. Godless sex is idol worship.

—Before, there had been no excuse for denying God. Now, there is even less of an excuse. In this new era, God has testified to the nations not only through creation but also through ambassadors of the gospel like Paul and Barnabas.

—"he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness":

- God bore testimony of His reality by nourishing their bodies with sustenance and their hearts with gladness.
- He is a good Father, not only because He testifies to His reality (He wants to be known) but also because of how He did so: by sustaining and satisfying them. Good dads want their kids to be sustained and nourished so they can survive. They also want them satisfied in life so they can thrive. In a special sense, God is the Father of all who believe; in a general sense, God is the Father of all (cf. Acts 17:28; Eph. 3:14-15).
- Zeus would have been viewed as the God of harvests, but what they attributed to Zeus belonged to God. He deserved the glory and gratitude of creation.
- The Scripture teaches that false gods are demons (Deut. 32:16-17; 1 Cor. 10:20-21). Therefore, they gave credit to the devil for what God did. No wonder the apostles tear their robes!
- I'm reminded of Ps. 104:13-15: *"From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart."* In context, these verses highlight God's mastery over the heavens, the earth, and the sea—all creation. Throughout the passage, including here, God not only masters creation; He cares for it. He is not a sovereign tyrant but a benevolent sovereign. He goes beyond mere sustenance, gladdening hearts and making faces shine.
- The resemblance of Acts 14:17 to Ps. 104:13-15 appears to be not just a helpful cross-reference but also an intentional allusion by Paul. Both speak of water that produces harvests of the earth, sustaining us with nourishment and satisfaction as a testimony to His fatherly goodness. Evangelistically, Paul points to the truth of Scripture without citing chapter and verse to a group of pagans who don't know Scripture even exists.
- When we share the gospel, we should pay attention to our audience. If the person does not know the Bible at all, we can quote biblical truths without necessarily citing the references. If the person is well-versed, like the Jews of Paul's day, we can (like Paul) adapt our approach.
- Stott: "The context within which he preached to the Jews in Antioch was Old Testament Scripture, its history, prophecies and law. But with the pagans in Lystra he focused not on a Scripture they did not know, but on the natural world around them, which they did know and could see."

- Schreiner comments on how the “Greco-Roman gods consistently came to destroy, but Yahweh heals and restores.” Then he cites H. Smith in a footnote, who adds this: “Whereas the gods of Olympus tirelessly pursued beautiful women, the God of Sinai watched over widows and orphans. While Mesopotamia’s Anu and Canaan’s El were pursuing their aloof ways, Yahweh speaks the name of Abraham, lifting his people out of slavery, and seeks out the lonely, heartsick, Jewish exiles in Babylon. God is a God of righteousness, whose lovingkindness is from everlasting to everlasting and whose tender mercies are in all his works.”

18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

—Despite preaching the gospel there for some time, performing a miracle, and resisting their gestures in the strongest manner, the pagans barely backed down.

—Given the historical background, they probably assumed that “Zeus” and “Hermes” were testing them by appearing to resist hospitality, much like when someone says, “Oh, you don’t have to do that...”

—On the surface, their evangelistic venture had failed miserably. Only one man that we know of came to Christ. The crowd not only rejected Paul’s message; they actively blasphemed.

—In God’s eyes, however, the apostles had not failed; they had been faithful. Faithfulness sometimes appears like a failure. Moses was “faithful in all God’s house” even though he failed to enter the Promised Land during his earthly life. God called Isaiah to preach “Until the cities lie waste without inhabitant...” because they refused to listen. Jeremiah preached until they imprisoned him. According to Jesus, true prophets are marked not by their acclaim but their rejection (Luke 6:22-25). By that mark, Jesus was a true prophet—despite His apparent failure.

—Unfaithfulness is not failing at some endeavor; it is failing to endeavor at all. Faithfulness, in contrast, endeavors to obey God even when it ends in apparent failure.

—Effort belongs to us, but results belong to God (1 Cor. 3:6-7).