

## THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

### Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

#### Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its Spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

##### E. Christ's Use Of The Apostle Paul To Spearhead Worldwide Outreach, Acts 13:4-28:31

##### 6. Christ's Use Of Paul To Strengthen Established Churches

(Acts 14:21-28)

###### I. Introduction

- A. From a lifelong exposure to the Lord's work as the son of missionaries to Africa and from four decades of ministry in local churches in six states, I am **convinced** that churches *worldwide* need *strengthening*.
- B. This need was met by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:21-28, providing timeless instruction on the subject:

###### II. Christ's Use Of Paul To Strengthen Established Churches, Acts 14:21-28.

- A. Paul and Barnabas worked hard to strengthen the churches they founded in their first missionary journey:
1. After Paul and Barnabas had left their sending Church of Antioch in Syria (Acts 13:1-4), their journey first to Cyprus, then north to Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13, 14), then east to Iconium and Lystra (Acts 13:51; 14:1, 4) followed by going further east to Derbe (Acts 14:20; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978 ed., map 13) left them only 160 miles west of Paul's hometown of Tarsus, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 392.
  2. It would have been 140 miles from there by land for them to return to their sending Church, *Ibid.*
  3. However, they turned around at Derbe to retrace their journey 600 miles back to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch before taking a ship back to the sending Church, Acts 14:21-26; *Ibid.*, Ryrie, map 13.
  4. This extensive retracing of their steps was done to edify the churches they had founded, Acts 14:22-23:
    - a. The apostles were said to have "confirmed the souls of the disciples" in Acts 14:22a KJV.
    - b. The Greek text shows the KJV's "confirmed" is translated from *epistarizo*, to "strengthen," cf. U. B. S. Greek N. T., 1966 ed., p. 473; Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Engl. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 300.
  5. Thus, the apostles' extensive effort to strengthen established churches reveals it was an important task!
- B. Thus, we study *how* the apostles strengthened these churches in Acts 14:22b-23 (as follows):
1. The strengthening activity of Acts 14:22a summarizes the actions of Acts 14:22b-23, so we view those actions in detail for insight into **HOW** to be used of God to **strengthen** local churches (as follows):
    - a. First, the apostles exhorted the disciples "to continue in the faith," Acts 14:22b: (1) the trauma of the repeat persecution the apostles faced in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium and Lystra (Acts 13:45, 50; 14:2, 5-6, 19) could easily unsettle new believers. (2) Thus, the apostles encouraged them to stay steadfast in their walk of faith and adherence to God's truth as Paul later directed Timothy, 2 Tim. 3:10-17.
    - b. Second, the apostles explained "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God," 14:22c: (1) Paul and Barnabas realized that new converts who had witnessed strong opposition to the Christian faith needed to know such conflict would continue, so they had to adjust to this fact for blessing. (2) The apostles thus directed believers to find in God's Word and the Spirit's enabling the insight and power to handle such trials as a way of life, Acts 14:22c with 2 Timothy 3:10-17.
    - c. Third, the apostles ordained elders in every church, praying and fasting to commend them to the Lord on whom they had trusted that they might continue this strengthening ministry exemplified by the apostles, Acts 14:23. Thus, there must always be a drive to delegate to qualified men the task of spiritually continuing the emphases described above for the welfare of local churches, 2 Tim. 2:1-2.
- C. Finally, the apostles returned to the sending Church from which they had been sent by God, and there they ministered to that Church for a long time, nurturing and being nurtured in return, Acts 13:24-28.

***Lesson:*** Paul and Barnabas were used of God to strengthen the churches they started by (1) urging them to (a) be steadfast in their walk and adherence to God's truths, and (b) to realize that spiritual trials are to be expected, and (c) to be handled by the Holy Spirit's enabling and Scripture insight. Then, (2) the apostles delegated to qualified men the task of promoting these directives in the churches.

***Application:*** Similarly, may WE today be used of God to strengthen our local churches by (1) seeing our leaders urge us to be steadfast in our walk and adherence to God's truths, (2) by seeing our leaders remind us that spiritual trials are the norm, and are to be met in the Spirit's power and Scripture insight, and (3) may we delegate to other qualified men the responsibility of promoting these directives!