# An Angry Crowd in Lystra



**Scripture Reference:** Acts 13:1-3; 14:8-20

**Suggested Theme:** Only God is worthy of worship. Even when everyone is against God and His ways, we can choose to worship and follow Him.

**Memory Verse:** “Come, let’s bow down and worship him. Let’s kneel before the Lord who made us.” Psalm 95:6, ICB

## Story Overview:

While on his first missionary journey, Paul taught people in Lystra about Jesus. He healed a man who had never been able to walk. At first, a frenzied crowd worshipped Paul and his travelling companion, Barnabas, as gods. When Paul corrected this, the crowd turned violent and stoned him. The crowd left Paul, thinking he was dead, but Paul miraculously stood up and walked back into Lystra.

## Background Study:

*Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts*

Gentiles had not been part of the Old Testament promises like God’s people, the Jews, had. Even though the first followers of Jesus were Jews, the Apostle Paul would make several missionary trips to share the Good News of Jesus with both Jews and Gentiles. Teaching Gentiles was the special task that Jesus had given Paul from the first day he had become a Christian.

When telling children about what happened to Paul and Barnabas in the city of Lystra, it is good to mention the context of the first missionary journey.




**The First Missionary Journey Begins (Acts 13:1-14:7)**


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The Antioch church prayed, and the Holy Spirit answered by choosing Paul and Barnabas to set out on this mission and special work. Setting sail from the port city of Seleucia, they set sail for Barnabas' home island of Cyprus. Many important events happened during this time.

- At Salamis they preached in the synagogues. Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, joined them in their work.
- Across the island, at Paphos, they caused a magician to go blind. When the governor witnessed this, he became a follower of Jesus.
- "Saul" was a Hebrew name. During this time, Saul was first referred to by his Roman name, "Paul." From this time forward, he would be known as "Paul".
- Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark sailed to Asia Minor to teach people. In Perga, John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. Much later, Paul and Barnabas would look back on John's Mark's actions and sharply disagree over them (Acts 15:37-40).
- Paul and Barnabas continued the journey, first stopping in Antioch in the Pisidia district. and then Iconium (modern-day Konya in Turkey). In both cases, the Jewish leaders tried to harm Paul and Barnabas.

**Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14:8-20):**

In Lystra, Paul healed a man who could not walk. The man might have been sitting by the street or in the market because no synagogue was mentioned. The crowd's response to the healing sent them into a frenzy where they worshipped Barnabas and Paul. They called them Zeus and Hermes, the names of their gods.

Amazingly, a priest of the nearby temple to Zeus even provided worshippers with bulls and wreaths so he and everyone else could use them to make sacrifices. According to the *NIV Study Bible (Zondervan Corporation, 1985)*, an ancient legend told about Zeus and Hermes once visiting the area and having no one but an old couple recognise them and show them hospitality. Perhaps the priest and the crowd did not want to make that same mistake.

What started as a small crowd became a mob out of control. When Paul and Barnabas realised they were about to be worshipped as gods, they entered the frenzied group and attempted to teach otherwise.

Another group then entered into the shouting. Angry Jews from Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium had followed Paul and stirred up the crowd even more. Instead of listening to Paul and Barnabas, people just began listening to all the rumours and shouting. All of this culminated in Paul being dragged out of town. He was stoned and left for dead.

After the crowd dispersed, only the local Christians were left gathered around Paul. Miraculously, Paul stood up and walked back into town.

**The Conclusion of the Journey (ACTS 14:21-28):**

After leaving Lystra, Paul and Barnabas went on to Derbe to continue teaching. The rest of the first missionary journey involved Paul and Barnabas retracing their steps. As they revisited each place, they helped strengthen the newly formed churches. They also appointed leadership in the churches so they could continue to grow.


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Finally, back in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas gathered the church together and reported all God had done on this journey.

## Way to Introduce the Story:

Provide a deck of cards and let the children help you build a "card house." As the cards are stacked higher, discuss how each depends on the other. If one falls, then they all fall. "Sometimes people are like cards. If one person does something—good or bad—then other people sometimes just follow along. They don't even think about what they are doing. They just go along with the rest of the people. In today's story a few people began doing bad things and then a few more until a whole crowd was doing something bad together."

## The Story:

Once, when the people in the church at Antioch were praying and worshipping God, they heard the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit told them to send Barnabas and Paul to be missionaries. Many people in other places needed missionaries to come to them and tell them the good news about Jesus.

To show that they agreed with the Holy Spirit's instructions, the leaders of the Antioch church placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul to bless them. Then, they sent them off on a ship for their first missionary journey.

The first stop on the journey was the island of Cyprus. Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, helped them but later left them.


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Some people on the island of Cyprus did not listen to Barnabas and Saul, and some got angry, but many others began believing in Jesus.

Saul had two names.

- SAUL was his Jewish name, and
- PAUL was his Roman name.

So, from this time onward, Saul became known as Paul.

From Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas left the island and sailed on a ship to the mainland. This part of the world was called “Asia Minor,” and there were many places to do missionary work.

Again, some people believed Paul and Barnabas’ words, and others did not. Some leaders became so angry that they made Paul and Barnabas leave their city. The same thing happened in the next place they went, Iconium. Some leaders in Iconium were so angry that they made a plan to mistreat them and stone them.

But Paul and Barnabas did not stop preaching about Jesus. They went to the city of Lystra and began talking about Jesus there. A man who could not walk overheard what they were saying and began to have faith.

By the power of Jesus, Paul healed the man. The man stood up and walked! Everyone was amazed.

But the problem was that people were excited about the wrong thing! Instead of glorifying God and Jesus, they began worshipping Paul and Barnabas because they believed they were gods. More and more people started worshipping Paul and Barnabas, just like they had worshipped the other idols in their city. The crowd even called them the names of their gods, Hermes and Zeus.

This was terrible! Paul and Barnabas tried telling the people to stop calling them gods. There is only one God! He made the world and everything in the world.

But the people did not stop and think. They just listened to what everyone else was saying.

If EVERYONE in a crowd is screaming and yelling and saying something is true, does that mean it is true? No! Because many people say something is true, it doesn’t make it accurate. An entire crowd can be wrong.

This crowd was wrong! Paul and Barnabas were not gods. There is only one true God. Paul and Barnabas were just men.

While all this was happening, some angry Jewish leaders from the other places Paul and Barnabas had visited came and joined the crowd. These men only made the problem worse. They kept talking and talking about how BAD Paul and Barnabas were.

Remember how the crowd of people started saying Paul and Barnabas were gods? Now, the crowd began believing the Jewish leaders and started shouting how BAD Paul and Barnabas were.

Now NO one but Paul and Barnabas wanted to follow Jesus. The crowd got angrier. They became so angry that they dragged Paul out of town and stoned him until they thought he was dead. After that, they just left him there.

But some people did not follow the crowd. They believed what Paul had been saying about Jesus. They thought Paul was dead and gathered around him.

At this time, something amazing happened. While they gathered, Paul stood up and walked into the city again.

Paul and Barnabas continued to teach people in other cities about Jesus. Many churches began because of the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas. When Paul and Barnabas later visited these churches, they appointed elders for them. Wise leaders would help the churches become stronger.

Finally, it was time to sail back home to Antioch. When they arrived, they gathered the church to tell them everything God had done through them on this First Missionary Journey. They were glad to be home but


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knew others needed to hear about Jesus. There would be other missionary journeys in the future.

Sometimes, no one wants to worship God. Sometimes, everyone thinks God is bad, and Jesus isn't really the son of God. But that doesn't make it true. We know that Jesus is our saviour and the true King of the world. Even when everyone is against God and His ways, we can choose to worship and follow Him.

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## Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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## Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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**Review:**

- What were the prophets and teachers from the church in Antioch doing before the Holy Spirit spoke to them? (Praying and fasting)
- Who chose Paul and Barnabas to go on their missionary trip? (The Holy Spirit)
- What did the prophets and teachers from the church in Antioch do before sending Paul and Barnabas on their mission? (fasted, prayed, and laid hands on Paul and Barnabas)
- What did the crowd do in Lystra after Paul healed a man who couldn't walk? (They thought he and Barnabas were gods and wanted to sacrifice to them)
- What is a miracle? (An event that can't happen without God and His power)
- When the Jews said bad things about Paul in Lystra, what did the crowd do? (They stoned Paul and dragged him out of town)
- After the crowd in Lystra stoned Paul and dragged him out of town, he was so beaten up that they thought he was dead and left him. What happened next? (Disciples surrounded Paul, and then he got up and walked into the city)
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about the Holy Spirit?
- What does this story show you about people?


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**Reflection:**

- How do you think Paul and Barnabas felt when the Holy Spirit chose them for His works (like mission work)?
- How do you think people in Lystra dressed or looked?
- Why do you think the crowds thought Paul and Barnabas were gods?
- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- Why do you think some of the Jews felt jealous that the Gentiles were hearing about Jesus and wanted to follow Him?
- When Paul told the lame man to stand up, he saw that the man had “faith to be healed.” Do people need faith to be healed? What is faith?
- The Lystran people saw God perform a miracle through Paul, heard the good news, and thought of them like gods. But when the Jews came to the crowd, they listened to them instead and decided to stone Paul. What do you think the Jews told the crowds? Why do you think the crowds changed their minds?
- Have you ever been in a large crowd or part of a large group? How do you feel about being part of that group? (Examples include parades, protests, concerts, school gatherings, etc.)
- Why is it hard to believe or do something different from everyone else, especially if you’re the only one different in a large group?
- Who or what can help us not feel alone when everyone around us is different or believes something different from us?

## Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

## Song Suggestions:

- Oh, Be Careful Song
- Shake the Devil Off Song
- I Can Be a Missionary
- I’m All Wrapped Up in Jesus
- Jesus Loves the Little Children of the World
- If You Love Jesus
- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Goodbye World Song
- This Little Light of Mine.
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.


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## Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

**Activities:**

- Trace Paul's first missionary journey on a map.
- Look up "riot" in a dictionary.
- Discuss things that "most" people do and talk about the dangers of following the crowd. God and you together are stronger than any group of people.
- Find out if your church supports missionaries and arrange for the children in your group to learn about them, correspond with them or even learn about the city or country where they work.
- Learn about Zeus and Hermes, and what the people believed about them.
- To begin a conversation about the dangers of following a crowd, line up dominoes. When one domino falls, the entire row falls over one by one.
- To review, you or the children can draw a large outline of Paul on a whiteboard or piece of paper (even drawing with a stick in the sand works fine if you are outside). Then, after you have taught the lesson, ask the children to think about what they have just learned from the Bible. Have them write descriptive words or draw pictures inside and around the outlined illustration of Paul. When you see what the children are writing or drawing, you may be surprised or encouraged by what insights they have picked up from the story. This is also a good opportunity to correct or add to anything you might not have covered as well as you could have when you were teaching.




- If you prefer, you can download and print the illustration of Paul provided here and then have the children write and draw on it for the review.
- Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

**Crafts:**


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- Make a relief map of Paul's Journeys featuring the place in today's story. If you are studying Paul's journeys over a few lessons, you could add more details to the map each time you learn about another stop on the journey. Instructions on how to make a relief map at https://www.weirdunsocializedhomeschoolers.com/step-by-step-to-making-salt-dough-map/
- Decorate a poster with the verses: *"Don't make friends with someone who easily gets angry. Don't spend time with someone who has a bad temper. If you do, you may learn to be like him. Then you will be in real danger."* *Proverbs 22:24-25, ICB*

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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## Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets-setting out from Antioch (Calvary Curriculum)
- Telling the story using Legos (adventuresinmommydom.org)
- Map of Paul's journey (deeperstudy.com)
- Review: Create a "passport" that covers Paul's life. Good visual ideas and activities. It could be split up to go with several lessons or taught all together as a review of previous lessons concerning Paul found (kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.co.nz)
- Additional Study: Archaeological information and a great slideshow of the route Paul would have taken (www.biblicalarchaeology.org)

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