

What is the significance of Lystra in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Lystra-in-the-Bible.html>

The city of Lystra is noteworthy for being the probable home of Timothy, Paul's young protégé (Acts 16:1). Lystra was located in Asia Minor in the area now known as Turkey. Lystra was about a day's journey (20 miles) from Iconium, another city Paul visited (Acts 14:1; 2 Timothy 3:11). Lystra was a military staging post linking Pisidian Antioch with Iconium and Derbe. Being a Roman colony from 6 BC, Lystra had a diverse population of Roman soldiers, Greeks, Jews, and native Lycaonians (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "Lystra").

Paul visited Lystra on his first and possibly second missionary journeys. At the time, Lystra was a pagan city filled with idolatry honoring the Greek gods and goddesses. A temple dedicated to Zeus was just outside the city. Paul's normal practice was to preach in the local synagogue first (Acts 14:1), but Lystra may have been the first city in which the apostles preached directly to Gentiles without beginning in the synagogues.

When Paul healed a crippled man in Lystra (Acts 14:8-13), the priest of Zeus brought bulls and wreaths to sacrifice to Paul, believing him to be an incarnation of the god Hermes. Paul and Barnabas pleaded with the crowd not to do such a thing, crying, "Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them" (Acts 14:15). Using all the force they could muster, the missionaries barely prevented the Lycaonians from offering the sacrifice (verse 18).

Unbelieving Jewish religious leaders had followed Paul from Antioch and Iconium, and in

Lystra they quickly turned the crowd against the apostles. The people who had lauded Paul as a god now stoned him and dragged him out of the city, believing he was dead. When his friends gathered around him, Paul miraculously stood up, brushed himself off, and went back into Lystra. Many scholars believe that this stoning episode in Lystra may be the occasion Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 where he alludes to being in paradise.

Many scholars believe the church in Lystra, being in south Galatia, was one of the churches to whom the letter to the Galatians was addressed. If that's the case, then the Christians in Lystra faced a theological crisis after Paul's departure. The truth of justification by faith rather than by human works was being denied by the Judaizers, legalistic Jews who insisted that Christians must keep the Mosaic Law—convert to Judaism first, they said, and then you are eligible to become a Christian. When Paul learned that this heresy was being taught to the Lycaonian and other Galatian churches, he composed an epistle to emphasize our liberty in Christ and to counter the perversion of the gospel that the Judaizers promoted.

The location of Lystra is thought to be by a hill near the modern village of Khatyn Serai. The site is confirmed by an inscription discovered in the ruins in 1885, according to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.