

# **The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0**

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**“Acts 14”**

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**With**

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## Acts 14

Acts 14 has several items of interest related to the ancient supernatural worldview of the New Testament writers. This episode will take us into Greco-Roman beliefs about the gods, some Pauline commentary on the Deuteronomy 32 worldview, and the possible context of Lystra for Paul's mystical experience (NDE?) in 2 Corinthians 12.

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 50, Acts 14. I'm your layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing this week?

**MSH:** Very good. How are you?

**TS:** I'm doing great. I'm ready for Acts 14.

**MSH:** Great. Alright, let's jump into Acts 14. I'm going to basically read about up through verse 18. It's roughly, I guess, half the passage, something like that. There are two things I want to talk about in that section then we'll finish up with something else. So Acts 14 starting in verse 1, we read,

Now at Iconium they [**MSH: Paul and Barnabus from chapter 13**] entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. [**MSH: We have full Gentiles present**] <sup>2</sup> But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. <sup>3</sup> So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. <sup>4</sup> But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. <sup>5</sup> When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, <sup>6</sup> they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, <sup>7</sup> and there they continued to preach the gospel. <sup>8</sup> Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup> He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, <sup>10</sup> said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. <sup>11</sup> 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!" <sup>12</sup> Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, <sup>15</sup> "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. <sup>16</sup> In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

**MSH:** There are a couple of things I want to focus on in here that I think listeners would find interesting. The first is this comment in verse 11, where the people see what Paul had done. They start shouting the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. Now that might sound a bit strange because when we think of the gods, the Greco-Roman gods, that's how we think of them. We think of them anthropomorphically. So why would they be yelling the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men? And it's because there were more than one conception in Greco-Roman religion of gods.

There were different kinds of gods. There were different kinds of manifestations and whatnot. I want to read to you from an essay I just actually read a week ago for LBD, which is the Lexham Bible Dictionary, and the entry is on gods. So I'm going to read a little bit from from the part about the Greco-Roman situation. So I'll begin here and I'll tell you when I'm done with the section here. But as far as the Greco-Roman gods, understanding Greek and hence the Roman conception of gods is difficult for the modern person steeped in Christian tradition in modern terminology about deity. The disconnect is even more severe than we would think of with Old Testament, the gods, the divine Council, and all that sort of thing. So what was it about this conception?

Well one scholar, David Owen, explains it this way. 'The Greek notion of deity contrasts sharply with traditional Jewish and Christian conceptions. For the Greeks, the gods were not transcendent and they were not passive, but rather imminent and active. They did not create the cosmos, which was thought to be eternal, but came into being after the cosmos. Consequently, gods, such as sun and moon and stars, were considered eternal, that's a term they actually used, while gods such as Zeus, Hera, and Poseidon, were considered immortals. While the Greek gods were thought to be more powerful than humans, both were subject to fate. Further, gods were sustained by ambrosia and nectar, usually inaccessible to mortals and ichore rather than blood that flowed in their veins.

Though considered very powerful and very wise, they were neither omnipotent nor omniscient. Human beings were considered mortal while the Greek gods were considered immortal. The scores of deities worshiped by various Greek cities replaced into a comprehensive genealogical relationship by Hesiod in his theogony.' So I'll stop with Owens quote there. But you get the point that even though we know the Greeks thought of their gods anthropomorphically. They had families. They had genealogical lineages from each other. You had gods cohabit and produce other gods. There's a lot of contrasts with the way we would think of as gods and even though the Greeks thought of them anthropomorphically, there was obviously still a distinction with mortal men.

When the gods showed up in physical form in classical Greek literature, Greek myths, whatnot, they did have physical form but it wasn't human. They weren't in human bodies. So this whole thing about the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men, it's really not saying that, hey, something totally new is going on here. This is not really incarnation. This is the likeness of men so it would probably be better translate it to something like, hey, the gods have shown up or the gods have appeared to us. The gods have come down to us. The likeness of men, that's the way they're going to appear anyway. There were other intermediate beings as well. I'll continue with Owens with my own entry here. 'Other aspects of the Greco-Roman conception of deity sound a little less foreign. Aside from eternal, Greek religion recognized three classes of deities.

There were the Olympians. Those are also the immortals that Owen just mentioned, such as Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Poseidon, again, the familiar cast of characters. Second, there were Chthonic gods. Chthonic is a word that means of the earth. These are deities associated with Earth or weather or agriculture, nature, the underworld, that sort of thing. And third, there were heroes. These were deities thought to have originally been mortal or least half mortal with one divine parent but who were later deified by the gods after they died. Roman religion also recognized three categories of deities. They were autonomous deities and they were often grouped in triads, groups of three, like Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, often were associated with each other.

There are reasons why these associations were created. A lot of times it is logical associations, depending on what the deity was known for or did. The second of the three categories would be anonymous divine beings who interfered with the lives of people, positively or negatively. And then third, there something in Latin called the Indigatamenta, which were teams of minor deities that each had a minor function either in assisting or hindering other deities in their relationships with humans, basically interfering with human life. Now, since Acts 14 refers to Zeus and Hermes, we know that Luke really isn't thinking of the Roman perspective of anonymous deities or some of these little sprite beings or whatever, that sort of interfere with your life.

The other references to Zeus and Hermes tell you that this is really, they're imagining that this is a visitation of these deities. In the likeness of men isn't a new part. The profound part for the people at Lister would be, hey, the god showed up here as opposed to somewhere else or some bigger city or to somebody famous. They visited us. So that sort of backdrop to what's going on here. Now I want to add one more thought here that I think is important. Since we're talking about Greco-Roman religion and specifically the classical gods of Greece and Rome here, back to my entry here, this is my last paragraph and I want to read it to you. And I think for those of you who are listening that have wondered, well, when Mike talks about the divine council stuff, why haven't we heard this before. There are lots of answers for that. There's biblical ignorance.

We filter the Bible through tradition and all that sort of stuff. But they're even historical reasons for this, and here we go. Listen to this quote. 'While the anthropomorphic element in Greco-Roman religion is familiar and important, the drift away from anthropomorphism that occurred in Greek concepts of deity even prior to the New Testament, this is when this began, the sixth and fifth centuries BC, that drift away is also significant. Plato played an important role in this process, whereby the gods were gradually stripped of human characteristics in favor of a henotheistic system of transcendent deities that were unknowable, and in effect, they were de-personalized, because of Plato's influence, how he sort of redefined what the gods were. This new approach also led to the casting aside of traditional mythological stories in favor of allegory.

This explains to a significant degree the later propensity, now catch this, the later propensity in early Christian thought, the early church fathers, to see the gods of ancient texts as having no reality contrary to the worldview of the more ancient readers and writers, including the elohim of the Hebrew Bible and the biblical writers. The view of the supernatural realm shared by many early Christian thinkers is therefore more Platonic than it is biblical. And, again, that's an important thought because we all know anyone who's studied the early church fathers knows that Plato was a huge big deal, a lot of what Augustine was interacting with and thinking and writing and others. I picked Augustine because he's the one everyone is familiar with it

seems. A lot of their theology was molded by Platonic thought, and it really comes out in this whole notion of the gods not being real or just being like impersonal forces or really just not real part of our lives, that kind of thing.

When you marry that to biblical condemnations of idolatry, it's very easy to slip into this view that all these gods in the Old Testament, they're really not real. There just idols. That is church father thinking. That is early Christian tradition, and that's what we've inherited, and that's another reason why when I'll show up, or write something, or say something on a podcast or go to an event and speak, people react to me like I've got two heads. It's so different from what they're used to hearing and that's because they've inherited an approach to those things. And that approach is more Platonic than it is biblical. So there are historical reasons for some of the stuff, too. Let's return to Acts 14. There's something in verse 16 and verse 17 I want to pick up on briefly. Luke writes, actually, this is Paul speaking so it's in the mouth of Paul.

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

<sup>17</sup>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.”

**MSH:** It's sort of this oblique reference to the fact that God had abandoned the nations. He's not checking up on them. He's not concerned with them. He's letting them live the way they want, but they're also his creations. So in general goodness and general providence, they benefit from the creation functioning the way it was supposed to function and all that sort of thing. So Luke kind of depicts Paul here a little bit using some of the arguments that Paul himself will use in Romans 1:19 to 21.

Again, that passage about how God can be known to the creation. Romans 1:19 says 'for what can be known about God is plain to them,' that is, the Gentile, the pagan, 'because God has shown it to them, 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 that they are without excuse.' Then he begins the talk about how the Gentiles dishonor God. They could learn some things about who the true God is from just nature but they proceed to dishonor that. But here in Acts 14, God more or less says, hey, God allowed the nations to walk in their own ways.

Now this, if you're familiar with the Divine Council worldview theology, the Old Testament, this is a byproduct of God's decision, back to Babel, to scatter the nations, to divide the nations up according to the number of the sons of God. Assign them, allot them to other gods and other gods to them, if we bring in Deuteronomy 4:19-20, along with Deuteronomy 32:8-9. Again, this is just the way the situation was. I want to look ahead a little bit to Acts 17 because Paul will comment on this situation again. I'm just going to read this. We'll hit this more when we get to Acts 17 but I want you to see that Paul is conscious of this Old Testament worldview, of this theology. Here in Acts 17, we read this. This is versus 24-27.

<sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,<sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all

mankind life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, [**MSH: A reference back to Adam. It's easy to see Adam there.**] having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

**MSH:** That sounds a little more like Noah and his sons from whom the nations come in Genesis 10. Those are the nations that were divided up, we get that. So Paul's saying he made from one man every nation of mankind to live all the Earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. Why? Why did he do that, or what was the outcome, or at least what should have been the outcome? Verse 27, 'that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him;' Well, the picture you get in Genesis 10 and 11 after the flood is that God isn't hiding anywhere.

He's not remote. He hasn't forsaken humanity. He's just brought them out of the flood. He's told them to disperse over the earth. He's reiterated the covenant, covenant language back in the Edenic scenery, the Edenic episode. He reiterates that to Noah and his sons and from them all these nations come. So we don't have God necessarily alienating humanity but he does that when he judges those people at Babel, when he determines their boundaries, when he divides up the nations and all that sort of thing. Then they are estranged from God. But even in that situation, Paul has the sense that they would still seek God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.

We know how that would work because of Deuteronomy 32:9, when Yahweh says Israel's my portion. Jacob is my inheritance. Because right after Babel, God calls Abraham and creates of him a nation who would be Israel, and when he makes the covenant with Abraham, he says in Genesis 12:3, through you all nations of the earth will be blessed. The door is cracked open that the other nations are under judgment, I've divided them up. They're scattered around. I've determined that this is the way it's going to be, but nevertheless, I want them to have a means by which to have this relationship restored. And initially that's going to be through you Abraham and your family. And then they are referred to as a kingdom of priests later on. There's this idea of being a testimony to the nations, and it works that way sometimes, like with Rahab. During the conquest, Rahab says, hey, we heard about what went on there. Now we know that your God is the God of all gods but nevertheless, we're here in this city and we're going to go to war. This is pointless because your God is so much greater, so please spare me when you come into the city.

We know that God's given you the city into your hand. They do learn things through God's reputation. And they're episodes like that in the Old Testament, where people get exposed to the true God through the Israelites or through a specific Israelite, and they repent. They turned. They say now I know that your God is the God of all gods. That's the way it was supposed to work. Now we don't get any huge movement in that direction until we get to the New Testament, and then it becomes offensive that God isn't waiting for them to look around and hear about Jesus and, yeah, I heard about this guy like from some other guy and he had a friend who had a friend and this thing happened 10 years ago, and I wonder what that was all about. It's not a passive thing. After the resurrection and ascension, we know what happens. We're in the book of Acts.

God calls people to go to the nations. Paul and Barnabas right here. It started in Acts 13 and it becomes an offensive posture. Go get them. Go tell them. Go to all the nations and extract the people that I have there who can be restored. The nations can be restored in this way back to a relationship with the true God. So there are glimpses of this in what goes on in the book of Acts. We'll hit Acts 17 again. We'll say more about it when we get to that point. Again, just so that you're aware that this stuff is always lurking around in the background, and I think it's especially interesting the way it's juxtaposed here with this whole thing about, hey, the gods have come down to us.

Wow, this is awesome. We're special. Why us? Why not some other big city or whatever? Again, if you match just the novelty of the people at Lystra thinking that the gods had really visited them, we heard the gods do this and here they are, but even this little strand of Greek thinking, because of the result of Plato, the gods just don't do this. In fact, we wonder if there really real. Are these just myth? Are the gods real? When Paul Barnabas show up at Lystra, and they do something spectacular like this, this is what the Gentiles are thinking. What else would they think? They're real. They're right here. And so Paul and Barnabas have to dissuade them from offering sacrifices.

It's like we're just men and we're actually here to tell you about the true God and about how to have a relationship with him. And in the past God more or less let you guys do your own thing because you were under judgment. We saw how it relates to Romans 1, and I like to refer to what happened at Babel as the Romans 1 event in the Old Testament. This is part of the reason why God's like whatever. I'm not going to approach you like you're my people anymore. You're under other gods now. We'll see how that works. This is your fate but I'm not going to entirely close the door.

And so Paul is aware of this and he sees what's going on. He's able to parse what's going on and trying to say, hey, look, the real God does want you to notice him, does want you know that he's doing things right here, that he is real, that he is not remote, and that's what we're here for. So that's the message they were preaching. If we continue on in Acts 14, let's just finish up. We'll finish up the chapter then there's just one particular thing I want to say something about but I'm going to tell you right now that what you're going to hear today is more or less a teaser for a future episode of the podcast. But let's just go back to verse 19 where we left off.

<sup>19</sup> But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. <sup>20</sup> But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. <sup>21</sup> When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. <sup>23</sup> And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. <sup>24</sup> Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. <sup>25</sup> And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, <sup>26</sup> and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had



been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.  
<sup>27</sup> And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. <sup>28</sup> And they remained no little time with the disciples.

**MSH:** That's the end of the chapter. That's going to lead into the Jerusalem Council when this whole Gentile thing leads into discussion, What I want to focus on here a little bit is this incident at Lystra. Some of you might be aware that Paul gets stoned here. They think he's dead. They drag him out of the city. But of course he comes to. He is not dead. There are some theorists, Bible teachers, Bible students, even a handful of scholars that have wondered whether this event is behind what we read in 2 Corinthians 12:1-7. Now I'm going to read that passage to you. 2 Corinthians 12:1-7, and it goes like this. This is when Paul talks about a visionary experience that he had. And he's defending his apostleship in the process of doing this. He says this, verse 1,

I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. <sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. <sup>3</sup> And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—<sup>4</sup> and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. <sup>5</sup> On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—<sup>6</sup> though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. <sup>7</sup> So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

**MSH:** Now, Paul refers in the third person to a man in Christ, and as you keep going through the chapter, the person reference begins to shift where he links this man in Christ to himself, which is why most scholars, I don't know if there's anybody, really, I guess there's some who disagree, have come across it once or twice, but most scholars recognize the Paul's talking about himself here and an experience he had. I'm certainly with the majority here so it's nothing new with me.

But there are people who have looked at this and wondered, well, was is a near-death experience? Is this an MDE that Paul had? And if it is, where would he have had it? That's what takes people back to Lystra because he was stoned there and thought to be dead. Now, again, lots of scholars have commented on this and have tried to situate either 2 Corinthians 12 with

Lystra or Lystra, does it work. Does the chronology work? Does it really conform to what we would call now is a near-death experience? Or does it refer to something else? There's a lot of discussion on this.

Ralph Martin, in his 2 Corinthians commentary, the Word Biblical commentary, says this. I want to quote a few things to you because I've already telegraphed, I'm setting up something that will come in a later episode. Martin says this about Paul's comment in 2 Corinthians 12:2 about I knew man in Christ who 14 years ago was caught up to the third heaven. So the 14 years is important. Martin says, 'the vividness with which Paul remembers this event is evident in that he can remember the time when it took place. The time of 14 years before the writing of this epistle or at least before the writing of chapters 10 to 13, again, 2 Corinthians, places the period about A.D. 44.

Whatever the date of Paul's experience, it was well before the founding of the Corinthian church, to whom he's now writing. What remains a mystery is to what event specifically Paul's referring. Now with the date of A.D. 44 in mind, it appears we can rule out every other visionary experience of Paul recorded in the New Testament.' I'm going to disagree with that and I'll tell you why in a little bit. His conversion on the Damascus road, an experience apparently Paul was more than willing to rehearse, at least from Acts 9, Acts 22, Acts 26, certainly took place long before A.D. 44. So we can dismiss that event from this. Now Martin says we can also dismiss the event of the trance Paul fell into, described in Acts 22:17- 21, for in this account, the Lord in a vision came to Paul.

Now I'm going to disagree with that as well in a few moments because there are definite connections between what Paul says in Acts 22 to what we see in 2 Corinthians 12 that Martin has missed and does not comment on. But, again, I'm getting a little ahead of myself here. So Martin says we can dismiss the event to the trance Paul fell into in Acts 22:17-21. Again, I'm going to disagree with that. We read nothing there of Paul being caught up to the Lord. That's true, but do we have to have every element between both chapters is going to be my question. Now events that surely later than A.D. 44, the vision of the Macedonian man, the vision that Paul had in Corinth in Acts 18, the period of 14 years found in Galatians 2:1 is probably only coincidental and has nothing to do with 2 Corinthians 12:2. I'm going to disagree with that, too. So I want you to see that short quotation from Martin that scholars have thought about this. And there is a difference of opinion.

Now, one suggestion for the occasion of the experience described in 2 Corinthians 12, this caught up to the third heaven thing, is that it transpired while Paul was in Antioch. Now we read that Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch that whole year, that's Acts 11:26. So given that stay in Antioch, we're dealing with the 14 years, the 44 A.D., and this comment about being in Antioch for a year, that would mean that the Lystra chronology, the time he gets to Lystra, would be a little late. It doesn't really work with 14 years ago. 14 years ago where Paul was at when he writes 2 Corinthians is just a little bit before he ever gets to Lystra. So staying a year in Antioch sort of pushes Lystra out of the picture. That would mean they're not related. Now, that is an issue because if that's the case, then 2 Corinthians 12 is not a near-death experience that Paul had at Lystra.

In fact if you're familiar with NDE's, there are a number of disconnects with modern and ancient near-death accounts that have a certain typology, a certain similarities of elements to them that really do not jive with 2 Corinthians 12. If that's the case, if this is not a near-death thing, if this is not something you can connect to Lystra, then Antioch sort of becomes that the

major focal point, because that does align to this A.D. 44 thing. And that's why, I think, that Martin is actually wrong, because, and I'll telegraph it this way and we're going to hit this we get Acts 22. Of we're talking about Antioch, it is best to identify 2 Corinthians 12 with the trace-vision Paul refers to in Acts 22. Now I'm going to read you that, just so you know what is being said there.

This is Acts 22:17, and this is when Paul, he's in Jerusalem. There's this huge uproar and people start beating him, and he gets rescued by the Roman tribune, and then he asked to speak to the people. Right before that, verse 17, when Paul is sort of rehearsing for the crowd again, his testimony, part of that is the Damascus road. But what he's going to say in verse 17 is after that event so we're not talking about Paul's Damascus road either. Here's what Paul says, Acts 22:17, 'when I had returned to Jerusalem,' remember, he gets driven out of Damascus. Right after his conversion, he's blinded.

He goes to Damascus. He meets Ananias. He gets healed. The scales fall from his eyes. He gets baptized, and then he has to escape after he preaches there for a few days, for a little while, he has to escape because people here in Damascus are plotting to kill them. So they let them out by rope. He runs away. He has a whole chronology where he goes after that, but eventually comes back to Jerusalem. He says in verse 17,

<sup>17</sup> "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance <sup>18</sup> and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'  
<sup>19</sup> And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. <sup>20</sup> And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.'  
<sup>21</sup> And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

**MSH:** Now that line tells you that Paul is referring to a visit in Jerusalem before his sort of official calling to get sent to the Gentiles. And we know, because we're going through the book of Acts, that happened in Acts 13. So how does this fit? Well, if you go to Galatians, Galatians has a couple of chronological comments about where Paul was at different times. Galatians 2:1 Paul says, again he's just relating part of his testimony, he says, 'then after 14 years,' there's that same reference, 14 years, 'I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas.'

We know from Acts 13 when Barnabas hears about the Gentiles being converted, he thinks it's great news. Remember what Acts 13 said in our last podcast? Barnabas, what did he do? He went to look for Saul. He went to Tarsus and found Saul, because it's like this is the perfect guy. We need help. This is amazing. He goes and he gets Saul Paul and the rest is history because then they get called, get sent, and picked up by the Spirit to go to the Gentiles. But he says, going back to Galatians 2:1,

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. <sup>2</sup> I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the

gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

**MSH:** So he tries to convince people that, hey, the Gentiles are being saved. You've heard this from Barnabas. Look at what happened with Cornelius. But the Lord had told him in the vision that he mentions in Acts 22, they're not going to really buy it yet. They're not quite there. And he even says here in Galatians,

<sup>3</sup> But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—<sup>5</sup> to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

**MSH:** He's having a little trouble here. It's because of false believers, false teachers, Judaizers, whatnot. So Paul alludes to the fact, here's the summary. Paul alludes to the fact in Galatians 2 that he had a vision, had some sort of revelation from the Lord prior to going, partnering up with Barnabas when the Holy Spirit selected them to be missionaries, apostles to the Gentiles. And what I'm going to suggest when we get to Acts 22 is that this event that Paul's referring to in that little recollecting of his testimony is what Paul is obliquely recalling and using as a credential for his own apostleship in 2 Corinthians 12. There's a lot to this. There's a whole body of literature about what scholars loosely refer to as Jewish mystical experience, or Jewish Merkava mysticism.

If Merkava was unfamiliar term, Merkava is a reference to the throne chariot of Ezekiel upon which God is sitting in Ezekiel's vision, his commissioning as a prophet. There's a whole body of tradition, literature, lots of stuff in circulation prior to the New Testament about visionary experiences, experiencing God and speculating what that was like. What did Ezekiel really see? What did this prophet really see? What really happened, that kind of thing, both before and frankly after the New Testament? But the stuff that is there, if we are conversant with that and then we go back to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12, you can make a really good argument that what Paul is saying is that his calling to be an apostle, although the Lord told him when he knocked him off his horse, that I have a purpose for you. I'm going to send you to the Gentiles. His real commissioning was this transcendent experience that he refers to in 2 Corinthians 12 so it's not a near-death experience, but it is an Isaiah 6 like event in his life where he sees the throne of God and he is commissioned to go to the Gentiles. And after having that revelation, he goes with Barnabas, Galatians 2:1, after 14 years I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas taking Titus along because of a revelation. So a lot of these things connect together and I think you'll find it fascinating when we get to Acts 22.

What, again, some of these traditions were that help us read Paul's accounting in 2 Corinthians 12 a little more intelligently. For those who have read the Myth that is True, the first draft, or even familiar with Divine Council stuff. What I've said, even to this point, should be familiar. It is a repetitive Scriptural pattern that the real people who were commissioned by God as prophets and apostles, prophet just being a spokesperson for God, the fundamental validation

point is a direct divine encounter that often involves in explicit detail a trip to the Divine Council, a trip to God's throne room where he and his heavenly host are and people are commissioned by them. Of course, God is the authority but they are commissioned with a mission on behalf of God's plan. It's as though the Council is taking a human being to enact the decrees of God.

This is what God's doing, whereas when you go back to Daniel 4, look at 1 Kings 22, God is using nonhuman agents to enact his decrees. It's not just nonhuman agents that have this experience or that helped carry out the will of what God has decreed. Human beings, this is why you have the experience. This is why it's cast in this way, again, a direct divine encounter is the point of validation for the true spokesperson for God in both Testaments. And so what my position is is that when what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12, that's what he is talking about. And we'll look at that when we get to Acts 22. But I don't want to say any more about it now. It's all prep. So that's all I have to discuss in Acts 14.

**TS:** Yeah, I'm surprised there's not more of a reaction from Paul coming back into Lystra after he's been stoned to death. The next day he's just strolling through and saying what's up. Weren't you just dead? I'm surprised there's not more language there covering that.

**MSH:** We really don't get anything so we don't know if there was or if there wasn't, but the impression you get, at the very least, let's put it this way, is he goes and he wants believers to see him. I'm not dead. They didn't kill me. You have to endure suffering. We're speaking the truth. I'm not afraid. I'm not going to recant. I'm back. It might have spooked whoever was after him. Maybe the people who did the stoning had gone back to Iconium and Antioch, we don't know. But even goes back there. I'm not saying necessarily he's like rubbing it in their face. He's not a bull in a china closet necessarily, but I think at the very least its like, I have the truth and I'm not going away.

**TS:** You'd think after hearing about Jesus' resurrection that here they're seeing a man who they thought was dead and now he's back. You think they would've been some similarities or people at least questioning that.

**MSH:** That is interesting because it could've very easily been interpreted. It's not like they can hook him up and test for brain waves or something.

**TS:** They stoned the guy, drug him out. He's dead and the next day he says, hey, here I am.

**MSH:** For all intents and purposes, he looks like a dead guy

**TS:** So in verse 11, they were speaking in Lycaonian. Is that a language or dialect of some sort?

**MSH:** It would have been a dialect. I don't know what family. I've never looked up to see if we have anything in native Lycaonian before. But where they're at would've been some Indo-European dialects, but that's all I can say on that.