



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Sermon Notes

### Paul's First Missionary Journey, Part 4

*Paul and Barnabas Declare the Greatness of God*

Acts 14:1-18

October 7, 2007

- I. **The Jews in Iconium Seek to Kill Paul and Barnabas**
- II. **The People of Lystra Seek to Worship Paul and Barnabas**
- III. **Paul and Barnabas Declare the Greatness of God**

- ❖ One of the main problems people have with the Bible is that they feel it is antiquated. We believe that it is an ancient text, written for an ancient people, living in an ancient world with ancient problems.
- ❖ Yet, one of the fundamental truths of the Scriptures, as well as human history, is that, as the writer of Ecclesiastes states, "There is nothing new under the sun."
- ❖ As Paul and Barnabas continue their travels in this first missionary journey, it is amazing how similar the problems they face are to our problems and difficulties today.
- ❖ Furthermore, as we study how that dealt with such difficulties, we, as modern believers, are strengthened and encouraged to deal with these same problems in our day.

#### I. **The Jews in Iconium Seek to Kill Paul and Barnabas**

- ❑ Luke opens this section, stating, in **Verse 1**, "In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks."
- ❑ Iconium laid about eighty [80] to ninety [90] miles to the southeast of Pisidian Antioch. According to John Polhill, "Streams from the mountains irrigated the level plains to the east of the city, making it a flourishing agricultural area in an otherwise arid region. Particularly noted for its orchards and woolen industry, it was an important commercial center, since

several major trade routes conjoined with the Via Sebaste [the main route that connected Ephesus with Syria and Mesopotamia] at Iconium. Located in the ancient region of Phrygia, it had been incorporated by the Romans into the province of Galatia in 25, B.C.’

- ❑ Iconium was also situated on a plateau at about 3,370 above sea level.
- ❑ Furthermore, it was a diverse city, much like our own culture today. The city was filled with Phrygians, Greeks, Jews, and Roman colonists.

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- ❑ Once again, Paul and Barnabas follow their proper missionary pattern: they first enter the synagogue and preach to the Jews.
  - Luke writes that Jews **and** Gentiles were present, though. For, he writes, ‘...they [Paul and Barnabas] entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and Greeks.’
  - Once again, the ‘manner’ in which they preached no doubt involved carefully explaining the Old Testament and demonstrating, indeed *proving*, how Jesus Christ alone fulfilled the promises contained within the Jewish Scriptures.
- ❑ Yet, just as it happened in Pisidian Antioch, Luke writes [**Verse 2**], ‘But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.’
  - The word that Luke uses for ‘disbelieved’ is from the Greek *apeitheo* [απειτηεω], and could accurately be translated ‘disobeyed.’ This is certainly consistent with the testimony of Scripture where ‘unbelief’ in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is synonymous with ‘disobedience’ [see John 3:36; Romans 2:8; 15:31; Ephesians 2:2; 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 4:17].
  - Yet, these Jews were not content simply to personally reject the gospel message. According to Luke, they not only were ‘disbelieving’, but they ‘stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.’
    - The word translated ‘embittered’ is the Greek *kakoo* [κακωω], which means literally ‘to poison.’
      - This reveals yet another truth concerning our fallen human nature. Rarely are we content to remain in our sin alone. There is something in the fallen man that always seeks to bring others along with us [look at Adam and Eve!...]...and this is certainly what the ‘unbelieving’ Jews did in Iconium.
      - Yet, even this ‘behind the scenes’ ‘poisoning’ of the ‘minds of the Gentiles’ by the unbelieving Jews had a purpose in God’s providential plan.

- Following his description of the actions of the unbelieving Jews, Luke writes, in **Verse 3**, ‘**Therefore** they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.’
  - The word ‘therefore’ is used by Luke in order to establish a logical linkage between the actions of the unbelieving Jews in **Verse 2** and the actions of the two missionaries in **Verse 3**.
    - In other words Paul and Barnabas were not intimidated or threatened by the actions of the unbelieving Jews. It did not cause them to retreat and become fearful.
    - Rather, Luke demonstrates that it is **precisely because of the actions of the unbelieving Jews** that the missionaries ‘spent a long time there speaking boldly...’
      - This bold proclamation of the Gospel in the face of opposition was a chief mark of apostolic preaching. Recall earlier the words of Peter and John to the Sanhedrin [who had warned the two men to stop preaching Christ]:

Acts 4:19-20: ‘But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’

- Not only this, Luke states that ‘they spent a long time there speaking boldly **with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace...**’
  - In other words, Paul and Barnabas spoke **boldly** because they were relying on the strength of the Lord. They no doubt realized that, given the degree of opposition in that city, they could not ‘fight’ it in their own strength. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas **spoke boldly with reliance upon the Lord...** Yet, ultimate it was the **LORD who was testifying to the word of His grace.**
  - In reality, it was the indwelling presence of the Lord [in Paul and Barnabas] who bore witness to the truth of the Gospel of grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - Not only this, but the Lord worked **through** Paul and Barnabas, ‘granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands’ **in order to authenticate the truth of the Gospel message which they proclaimed.**
  - As apostolic missionaries carrying the Gospel out from Jerusalem [Acts 1:8] for the first time, the Lord often used signs and wonders to

authenticate and confirm their identity as true messengers of the one true God. In other words, the signs and wonders were not intended to merely impress the people.

- Not only this, the signs and wonders likely served as a means of demonstrating the superiority of YHWH over the false, pagan gods of the people [much like the plagues did in Egypt, as well as the altar at Mt. Carmel (with Elijah and the prophets of Baal)].
- However, in spite of Paul and Barnabas's **bold** proclamation of the Gospel, Luke writes, in **Verse 4**, 'But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.'
  - It is often believed [and taught] that the sole purpose of the Gospel is to save. Unfortunately, if this is the case, then the Gospel often fails [since many people presented with the Gospel reject it].
  - However, the primary purpose of the Gospel is to **reveal God's glory**.
  - Further, God's glory [that is the summation or the totality of His attributes] includes not only mercy, but judgment...both love of righteousness and hatred of sin.
  - Therefore, when the Gospel is faithfully presented, **it will divide**. This act of 'dividing'; however, is nothing short of God's will and purpose. For, ultimately, it is only God, through the Gospel, who will separate the sheep from the goats; the 'clean' from the 'unclean'; the holy from the defiled and wicked. In short, the Gospel is TRUTH and wherever there is truth, falsehood is exposed.
  - Consequently, when we proclaim the Gospel, it should not surprise us when we face opposition and division. In fact, we should take comfort [assuming we preached the truth of the Gospel in love] knowing that the Gospel is accomplishing exactly what God intends. [Conversely, if we never face opposition (based on the substance of our message), we must reevaluate what we are proclaiming.] This is, once again, why Martin Luther stated, 'if my Gospel were received in peace, it would have been no gospel at all.'
  - [NOTE: the term *apostles* is used by Luke loosely here. Technically, only Paul was an apostle: one sent by Christ Himself; however, both Paul and Barnabas were apostles of the church in Antioch, that is, ones sent by that local body.]
- However, the Jews were not content with just dividing the city. Luke writes, in **Verse 5**, that 'an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them...'
  - Given the fact that the form of 'death' spoken of here was 'stoning', it is most likely that the unbelieving Jews were ultimately the ones behind this plot. The reason is because stoning was the 'prescribed' form of execution for anyone guilty of **blasphemy**.

- Luke continues, in **Verse 6**, stating, ‘they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region;’
  - As one scholar writes, ‘Paul and Barnabas were bold, but not foolish...The flight was an act of prudence, not cowardice.’
  - The proclamation of the Gospel in Iconium had accomplished its purpose there, and it was time to move on.
  - In fact, F.F. Bruce writes the following concerning the impact of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium:

‘[The impact of Paul] is reflected in the description of him preserved in the second-century *Acts of Paul* – a description so vigorous and unconventional that it must surely rest upon a good local tradition of what Paul looked like. One Onesiphorus, a resident in Iconium, set out to meet Paul, who is on his way to the city. ‘And he saw Paul approaching, a man small in size, with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, bald-headed, bowlegged, strongly built, full of grace, for at times he looked like a man, and at times he had the face of an angel.’

- When the two missionaries fled, Luke writes that they fled to the cities of Lycaonia. The two cities in this region mentioned by name are Lystra and Derbe.
  - Both Lystra and Derbe were also located in the Roman region of Galatia. Note: the regions of Galatian province were Phrygia, Pisidia, Lycaonia.
  - Lystra was located about eighteen [18] miles from Iconium. It was also the home of Timothy (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5).
  - Derbe was located some forty miles to the southeast of Lystra.
- Finally, in **Verse 7**, Luke writes, ‘and there they continued to preach the gospel.’
    - Paul and Barnabas were certainly relentless in their commitment to the preaching of the word. Nothing was going to stop them in this pursuit.

## II. The People of Lystra Seek to Worship Paul and Barnabas

- Once Paul and Barnabas arrived in Lystra, Luke wrote, in **Verses 8-10**, ‘...a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet.’ And he leaped up and began to walk.”
  - This miracle serves as one of the ‘signs and wonders’ performed through the hands of the apostles in order to authenticate the truth of the Gospel message which they preached.

- NOTE: This account parallels the similar account in Acts 9:32-35 where Peter healed Aeneas, and also in Acts 3:2-10 where Peter healed the lame man outside the Beautiful Gate at the temple.
- Luke describes this man's condition with the following three-fold description: (1) he had no strength in his feet; (2) he was lame from his mother's womb; and (3) he had never walked.
  - With this description, Luke establishes at least two significant points: (1) the man was in an utterly helpless situation; and (2) this man's healing will serve as a picture of salvation.
  - Once again, the man had **no strength...no ability** to walk. In fact, Luke emphasized that the man **had never walked**.
    - Such a description underscores to the reality of our condition apart from Christ. Prior to our regeneration, our conversion, our 'being born again,' we **did not have the ability to do anything that pleased God**. The only **ability** we possessed was the **ability to sin**.
    - We could **never walk with God**; for we always did that which was contrary to His character, nature, and revealed will.
    - Therefore, our conversion involved a change in nature...and a change in **ability** due to our change in nature.
  - Yet, not only did the man have no ability to walk, **he had been in that state of inability from his mother's womb**.
    - Several of the miracles performed in the New Testament involve the healing of individuals who had been lame since birth. This truth emphasized not only the hopelessness of their situation, but also represented our state prior to our rebirth.
    - Such, too, was our state prior to our conversion. We were born in sin. We were born dead in our trespasses and sin. As the psalmist stated, '...I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me' (Psalm 51:5).
- After describing the physical state of the man, Luke then writes [**Verse 9**], 'This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well,'
  - Notice the connection between **hearing** and **faith**. Faith always comes by hearing.

- No doubt Paul was preaching the good news of the gospel. It was the preaching of the gospel that God used as the instrument by which to heal this man – both physically and spiritually.
- John Polhill comments, ‘In this instance the lame man showed a glimmer of faith. Perhaps it was in response to Paul’s speaking; he may well have been bearing testimony to the gospel.’
- Then, Luke writes, **Verse 10**, ‘...Paul...said with a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet.’ And he leaped up and began to walk.’
  - The healing of the lame man was both **immediate** and **thorough**.
  - His healing had nothing to do with him or his ability [for he was unable to even walk]; however, through the work of another, he was not only able to walk, but he **leaped up**.

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- However, rather than worshipping the One to whom the miracle pointed, the people of Lystra attempted to worship the messengers: Paul and Barnabas.
- In **Verses 11-12**, Luke writes, ‘When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have become like men and have come down to us. And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.’
- The words of the people, in **Verse 11**, reflect a popular first century local legend:

‘About fifty years previously the Latin poet Ovid [died, A.D. 17] had narrated in his *Metamorphoses* an ancient local legend [traced back to Phrygia-Lycaonia]. The supreme God Jupiter (Zeus to the Greeks) and his son Mercury (Hermes) once visited the hill country of Phrygia, disguised as mortal men. In their incognito they sought hospitality but were rebuffed a thousand times. At last, however, they were offered lodging in a tiny cottage, thatched with straw and reeds from the marsh. Here lived an elderly peasant couple called Philemon and Baucis, who entertained them out of their poverty. Later the gods punished those who turned them away by destroying their homes by flood. However, the gods rewarded Philemon and Baucis by transforming their humble cottage into a magnificent temple, complete with gilded roof, where they served as priest and priestess. After their deaths, Philemon and Baucis were turned into two stately trees.’  
John Polhill

- Consequently, it makes good sense, then, why the locals praised Paul and Barnabas the way they did, as they, no doubt, did not want to repeat the mistakes of their forefathers [by mistreating the gods disguised as men].
- It is noteworthy that, in Greek mythology, Hermes was the son of Zeus. Thus, the Greeks worshipped Hermes as not only a god, but the son of a god. Yet, Paul and Barnabas were calling the Greeks **to turn away from the false son of a god to the TRUE Son of God!**

- ❑ It is interesting that the people thought Paul was Hermes and Barnabas, Zeus. The reason for this is likely because Hermes was the god of oratory and the inventor of speech, and Paul was the one speaking. Also, it is possible that Barnabas was called Zeus [who was the head of the Greek pantheon of gods] because he was more physically impressive and dignified in stature. This would be consistent with the words written in the *Acts of Paul* [referenced earlier].
- ❑ Note: archaeological evidence has also been discovered relatively recently that is consistent with the words of the people.
  - Two inscriptions were discovered in Sedasa, near Lystra in 1926 by W.M. Calder and W.H. Buckler. They date from the mid-200s. One of them reveals the dedication of a statue of Hermes to Zeus by Lycaonian men. The other speaks of ‘priests of Zeus.’
  - Further, a stone altar was discovered near Lystra which reveal that Zeus and Hermes were worship as local ‘patron’ gods. The stone was dedicated to the ‘Hearer of Prayer’ [a likely reference to Zeus].
- ❑ In **Verse 13**, Luke continues, stating, ‘The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.’
  - If Paul and Barnabas were in fact the gods in human form, then they deserved nothing less than the greatest sacrifices available.
  - Thus, the priest of Zeus Propolis (Zeus was the city of Lystra’s protector and his temple would have been at the city gates) brought bulls for sacrifice, each adorned with wooden wreaths and garland.
  - The acts of the people of Lystra stand in contrast to the Jews of Iconium; however, viewed together, the acts in both places provide examples of the two reactions which are all too common when the gospel is faithfully preached. At one extreme are those who hate the gospel message and, consequently, hate the messenger. On the other hand are those who, ultimately for self-centered reasons, seek to elevate the messenger or preacher to divine status. God stands equally against both.

<b>III. Paul and Barnabas Declare the Greatness of God</b>
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- ❑ It seems that Paul and Barnabas did not fully understand what was going on [as the people were speaking the Lycaonian language] until the priest from the temple of Zeus came out and tried to offer sacrifices to the two men.
- ❑ However, once the missionaries understood what was happening, Luke states, in **Verse 14**, ‘they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd...’



- In this Scriptures, the act of tearing ones clothes could be an act of: (a) mourning (Genesis 37:29, 34); (b) great distress (Joshua 7:6); or (c) protest because of blasphemy (Mark 14:63).
  - In this particular incident, the tearing of their robes by the missionary was certainly intended as an act of protest concerning the blasphemy of the pagans with the primary purpose of stopping the sacrifice.
  - The acts of Paul and Barnabas stand in direct contrast to the act of Herod Antipas (in Acts 12:22-23) who gladly received the honor, worship and praise due only to God.
- Then, after tearing their clothes, Paul and Barnabas began a sermon declaring the glory of the one true God. NOTE: this is the first sermon in the Book of Acts delivered to an exclusively pagan audience.
  - Because the audience is not Jewish, but completely pagan, the approach by Paul and Barnabas is not to prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The reason for this is that the audience, unlike the Jews, do not even acknowledge the authority of the Old Testament.
  - Therefore, Paul and Barnabas begin...in the beginning...establishing God, first, as the Creator of all things.
  - Luke records this sermon in three verses [**Verses 15-17**]: ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you 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. In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.’
    - Notice, as Paul and Barnabas begin their speech that the two do not simply **deny** what the people of Lystra believed; but, **affirmed** what they did believe.
    - Tragically, today, it seems that most Christians can say what the do not believe; but when pressed to clearly articulate what it is that they **do** believe, they are left struggling.

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- Paul and Barnabas open their sermon, stating, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God...’
  - The error of the people of Lystra was not that they were atheistic and denied the existence of god...they were very religious. Their problem was not insincerity...they were certainly sincere [though, sincerely wrong!]. It was not that they were apathetic about the supernatural...they were passionate.

Not only this, they were ‘good’ people, not seeking [at least initially!] to kill Paul and Barnabas.

- Their problem was that the **object of their worship** was false.
- In fact, the objects of their worship was ‘vain’...meaningless...dead!
- In contrast, Paul and Barnabas state their personal desire for the people of Lystra: ‘turn from their vain gods to the LIVING God!’
  - The first, and most basic, truth of Paul’s sermon is that there is **only ONE true God [Deuteronomy 6:4]**.
  - Also, unlike the gods of Lystra, the one true God is life! God not only gives life, He is life. He has life in Himself [John 1:4; 5:26]. He is eternal, self-existing, and self-sustaining. He is in need of nothing!
  - Furthermore, unlike God, Paul and Barnabas assert, ‘we are...of the same nature as you.’
    - Only God, because he is the eternal, self-existent One who Created out of nothing, is **essentially, fundamentally different in His nature** [consequently, He is **holy**].

‘The Greeks and later the Romans tried to build society upon their gods. But their gods were not big enough because they were finite, limited. Even all their gods put together were not infinite. Actually, the gods in Greek and Roman thinking were like men and women larger than life, but **not basically different from human men and women**...Their gods were amplified humanity, not divinity. Like the Greeks, the Romans had no infinite god...These gods depended on the society which had made them, and when this society collapsed the gods tumbled with it...’

Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*

- This underscores the foolishness of idolatry. **Any** other God, other than YHWH [the one true and living God], is a false god. Not only this, but all false gods are **CREATED** beings. They are creations of man [who is a created being himself]. These false gods had a beginning. They originated and were born in the minds of men. These gods are dependent upon men for their being and sustaining. As a result, they are limited to **how the human mind perceives them to be**.
- Yet, the God of the Scriptures is incomprehensible. He is so immense; He is so great, that we will never fully comprehend Him.
- Read **Isaiah 44:6-24; 46:5-7**.
- In the ‘body’ of his sermon, Paul makes several key points: (1) God is the CREATOR; (2) God is MERCIFUL; (3) God is GRACIOUSLY EVIDENT.

## 1. God is the Creator.

- THIS IS THE FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN GOD AND MAN. HE IS THE CREATOR; WE ARE HIS CREATION. HE IS ETERNAL; EVERYTHING ELSE WAS CREATED BY HIM OUT OF NOTHING.
- Paul is likely quoting from Psalm 146:6. In this Old Testament passage, the Psalmist uses a Hebrew *merismus*; that is, describing the totality of Creation by ‘ends’ or extremes. To say, in Hebrew poetry, that God created the ‘heavens and the earth’ is to say that God created **all things that have been created**. The only thing that is not created is God. Therefore, everything other than God was created by Him and for Him.
- Furthermore, the three-fold division of creation [heaven and earth and the sea...] is common throughout the Old Testament (Exodus 20:11; Acts 4:24; 17:24).
- God is not only the Creator of all things; but He created all things out of nothing. As a result, all things are dependent upon Him for their existence and sustenance.

## 2. God is Merciful.

- Next, Paul and Barnabas state, ‘In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways;’
- The idea here is that, although God had every right, as their Creator, to destroy the Gentiles, ‘in the generations gone by He permitted’ them to go their own way.
- Certainly, Paul and Barnabas imply that the reason God ‘permitted’ the Gentiles to go their own way was because they acted in ignorance.
- However, ignorance is no longer an excuse. God has revealed Himself in His Son; but He has also revealed Himself in His Creation.

## 3. God is Graciously Evident.

- Paul’s final point is quite clear: ‘...and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.’
  - In other words, despite the Gentiles’ rejection of their Creator, **He still provided for them; He still blessed them; He still revealed Himself to them through His Creation.**
  - This is certainly evidence of God’s ‘general’ grace: He makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

- This idea, of God’s divine providential blessings, would not have been foreign to the people of Lystra. They believed that such blessings were from the hands of the gods. Yet, Paul’s point is clear: the blessings come from the **One true and living God**.
- Finally, Luke concludes, in **Verse 18**, stating, ‘Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.’
  - It is quite amazing that, after declaring the glory of the one true, eternal, and infinite God, the people of Lystra still wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas.
- ❖ I, personally, often wonder, ‘Why would people be more willing to follow a god that is not only created, not only false, but weak, impotent, and flawed?’ I have come to realize that the reason is quite simple: in our fallen, sinful, human nature we want a god that we can understand fully. We want a god that is more like us. It is this kind of god that we are comfortable with. Not only this, such a belief sees ourselves closer to god, less dependent upon him, and more in control of our own lives.
- ❖ Consequently, the God of the Scriptures is simply too immense for the fallen, human mind to grasp. He does not ‘make sense’ to us. This is why when we accurately declare the glory of God; the vast majority of people will reject Him. The reason is because He is simply too great!
- ❖ Tragically, such beliefs have infiltrated the church as well. If we cannot understand why God would act in a way that the Scriptures state that He does, rather than accepting Him as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures, we attempt to ‘redefine’ Him in a way that ‘makes sense.’ It is this type of logic that often leads us to say, ‘**My** God would never \_\_\_\_\_.’
- ❖ This week on the Oprah Winfrey Show. In this particular episode, her guest was Hallie Berry. One of the reasons Oprah apparently had Berry on her show was that the actress is now pregnant. Yet, Berry is not married to father of the child. At one point in the interview, Oprah asked Berry, ‘Do you have any plans for marriage?’ To which Berry replied, ‘No, not at all. **My boyfriend and I have decided to redefine what marriage is.**’ Immediately, Oprah, as well as the entire audience, acted as though that was the most beautiful, most profound, most heart-warming statement they had ever heard.
- ❖ Yet, this is what we do with God. If we do not like how He is [internal and infinite]; how He has revealed Himself in Scripture, we [even as professing believers] feel as though we have the freedom to **redefine who God is in a manner that we are most comfortable with**. We attempt to change god and conform Him into our image, as opposed to understanding that He conforms us into His.
- ❖ In fact, this is exactly what the Greeks did in the days of Paul and Barnabas. In the Greek pantheon even Zeus was like man. This is why he was easier to follow. He even had shortcomings. He was promiscuous. He was ‘morally’ flawed. Yet, this is exactly what made him easier to understand...easier to relate to, because he was just like us, only bigger.
- ❖ When given the opportunity to embrace an eternally infinite God or a weak, finite god, fallen man will embrace the weak ‘god’ 100% of the time. Recall the success of movements such

as those spawned by *The Divinci Code*. What these movements prove is quite clear: the world is more comfortable with a flawed and imperfect 'Jesus' than the divine Christ.

- Yet, we worship a god that is beyond all human comprehension!
- As the 19<sup>th</sup> Century hymn writer Matthew Bridges stated in his classic hymn, *Crown Him with Many Crowns*, God is 'ineffably sublime.' In other words He is not only ineffable; that is, indescribable...incomprehensible. But, He is sublime; or, exalted, majestic or grand. In other words, **only the God of the Scriptures is INDESCRIBABLY EXALTED! He is exalted higher than our minds can even comprehend!**

***Crown Him With Many Crowns*** [5<sup>th</sup> Stanza]

Crown Him the Lord of years,  
The Potentate of time,  
Creator of the rolling spheres,  
Ineffably sublime.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
For Thou has died for me;  
Thy praise shall never never fail  
Throughout eternity.