

Pastor's Papers | Ronald H. Gann
Bible/Apologetics

Paul's First Missionary Journey

A Survey Of The Life & Ministry Of The Apostle Paul (Part 3)
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The grisly horror that was World War II is indisputably the defining event of the twentieth century. Never before had eastern civilization faced such peril as it did in the years between 1939 and 1945 when Adolf Hitler pushed across Europe. Although its climax saw the ‘forces for democracy’ valiantly rise above totalitarianism, the sequel to 1914’s ‘The War to end all Wars’ bankrupted mankind’s claim to moral enlightenment. The wide-reaching war, which involved sixty-one nations and over a hundred million troops, resulted in the slaughter of over sixty million people worldwide.

The Nazi occupation of Poland in 1939 had implications that reached far beyond its borders—indeed, the fate of the western hemisphere hung in the balance. Winston Churchill cautioned that if Hitler were to succeed in his quest for European supremacy, “Then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we know and care for, will sink into the abyss of a New Dark Age, made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science.”¹

By 1941, the daunting challenge of stopping the German tyrant’s formidable regime rested on the shoulders of two dignitaries committed to the elimination of fascism: Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain and President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States. These men forged a personal and national coalition in an attempt to salvage a world that was being held hostage by tyranny. Beyond their political association, the two bureaucrats formed a deep friendship seldom seen between heads of state.

The world’s seven continents watched the drama unfold as the Axis of eastern powers—Germany, Japan, and Italy—joined together against the Allied forces in their bid for world domination. With a global cast of characters that included Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Joseph Goebbels, Mao Zedong, Joseph Stalin, Emperor Hirohito, Generals Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower, and George Patton, together with Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, the theater of war was primed for immortal legends and renowned alliances to be born.

On September 1, 1939, the Third Reich invaded Poland. Two days later, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and France retaliated by declaring war on the Nazis, initiating a six-year naval offensive known as the Battle of the Atlantic (1939–1945). South Africa and Canada followed suit a week later, showing their solidarity to the west. Owing to Germany’s invasion of the U.S.S.R., a cautious Soviet Union had no choice but to also align itself with the Allied forces in 1941.

A steady barrage of German air bombardment throughout Europe betrayed Hitler’s overtures for peace. Indeed, it was not long before Great Britain began to feel

the strain of the war. Following the total collapse of France on June 25, 1940, Britain stood despondently isolated against her foes. “Never,” Churchill admitted, after the British army was forced to evacuate from Dunkirk, “has a nation been so naked.”

Great Britain had no substantial allies to lean on and, for much of 1940, lay under the threat of German invasion. Churchill knew that for the British to succeed in fending off the unilateral occupation of the United Kingdom, they had to enlist the United States, a nation that Japan’s Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto would later call “a sleeping giant.”

One year earlier, just prior to becoming Prime Minister and serving as British First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill had begun a long-term correspondence with the American President that developed into a close working friendship. It was Churchill’s hope to draw upon his camaraderie with Roosevelt and cultivate a unified stance against the Axis threat.

In July of 1940, the newly elected Prime Minister requested President Roosevelt’s support after sustaining heavy arsenal losses in a ten-day conflict with Germany. At that time, the U.S. military was rated only eighteenth in terms of world military size—it trailed not only Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy, and Japan, but also Holland, Spain, and Romania. Short of going to war, Roosevelt felt it essential to support his friend with a “great arsenal of democracy.”² He responded to Churchill’s appeal by agreeing to exchange fifty American destroyers in return for exercisable leases on British bases.

Neutrality had been the initial American response to the outbreak of war in Europe. It had adopted an isolationist policy in military affairs ever since the Paris Peace Conference put an end to hostilities in the First Great War. Still, it contributed weapons and implemented economic sanctions as the principal means of assisting its besieged ally across the English Channel. More specifically, in the summer of 1941, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands applied an oil embargo against Japan, threatening its ability to fight at sea or in the air alongside Germany and Italy. A resolute Japan, however, was unmoved by the western embargo.

On December 7, 1941, Japan launched simultaneous surprise attacks against the United States, Thailand, and on the British territories of Malaya and Hong Kong. A Japanese carrier fleet, hosting Mitsubishi Zero fighter planes, launched a preemptive air assault on Pearl Harbor, aiming to cripple the U.S. Pacific Fleet before it could join the Allied forces. If successful, it would enable Japan to seize the oil fields in the Dutch East Indies. Along with 2,403 American fatalities and 1,178 casualties, the unexpected raid on Hawaii destroyed most of the American aircraft based there, successfully debilitating the Pacific fleet. It was a day, according to President Roosevelt, “which would live in infamy.”

The bombing of the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii by the Japanese brought the United States into the war. Speaking by telephone to Prime Minister Churchill on the day of the attack, President Roosevelt lamented, “We’re all in the same boat now.”³

American and British strategists, together with a newly aligned Soviet Union,⁴ agreed to concentrate their combined resources on defeating Germany, the more formidable threat. Roosevelt and Churchill, together with Premier Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union, rallied their nations and their militaries.

Finally, with Allied victories in the critical battles of Midway, Iwo Jima, Normandy, Guadalcanal, the Bulge, and Berlin, the defeat of the Axis powers was

imminent. British and American forces landed in North Africa in November of 1942, proceeded to Sicily and the Italian mainland in 1943, and liberated Rome on June 4, 1944. Two days later, D-Day, Allied forces landed in Normandy. Paris was liberated on August 24, and by September, American units had crossed the German border.

By April, Soviet army divisions had encircled the German army in Berlin. The Germans sustained four hundred and fifty thousand casualties, including the capture of one hundred and seventy thousand Nazi prisoners. With no substantial ally to turn to for rescue, Adolf Hitler and his staff secluded themselves in the Führerbunker, a concrete dugout beneath the Chancellery. It was there that on April 30, 1945, the German chancellor committed suicide, along with his bride, Eva Braun. The Germans finally surrendered on May 8, 1945.

The war against Japan came to a swift and decisive end three months later in August of 1945, when President Harry Truman, Roosevelt's successor, ordered nuclear bombs to be dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nearly two hundred thousand civilians were killed, and the imperial government of Japan was toppled. With the victory over the Axis powers absolute, Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt became celebrated icons whose friendship is forever immortalized as the benchmark for international relations between heads of state.

Whatever their disagreements, Churchill greatly admired President Roosevelt's staunch support of Great Britain during the war, despite the United States initial detachment at the height of Europe's desperation. The two aristocrats shared a common bond that went beyond the politics around them. Each was an ambitious diplomat who possessed an insatiable appetite for politics, and each courageously battled severe handicaps: Roosevelt a progressive paralysis from polio; Churchill a debilitating childhood stammer followed by lifelong bouts of depression. *Newsweek Magazine* Managing Editor Jon Meacham adds, "Born eight years and an ocean apart, sons of rich American mothers, they loved tobacco, strong drink, history, the sea, battleships, hymns, pageantry, patriotic poetry, high office, and hearing themselves talk."⁵

Churchill sent his first communiqué to Roosevelt in 1939. Their friendship developed over time, and led to 113 personal visits between them. "Meeting Franklin Roosevelt was like opening your first bottle of champagne," a debonair Churchill later reminisced. "Knowing him was like drinking it."

As World War II progressed and America entered the conflict, Churchill and his entourage spent weeks at a time living in close quarters with Roosevelt at the White House, where their fondness for one another deepened. Meacham notes that there was something extraordinarily intimate in the bond between the two world leaders during that turbulent time. They would stroll in and out of each other's rooms as though they were two schoolboys occupying adjacent dorm rooms, staying up late to talk, drink brandy, and smoke cigars.⁶

Between September 11, 1939, and April 11, 1945, the two friends carried on a correspondence that produced nearly two thousand letters, equally personal and political in tone. They often met in person secretly. By the war's end, it became customary for Roosevelt and Churchill to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's together and, on occasion, with each other's family.

Mary Ann Evans (1819–1880), the English novelist, once said, "Perhaps the most delightful friendships are those in which there is much agreement, much disputation,

and yet more personal liking.”⁷ No statement better expresses the heartfelt friendship between the world’s two most powerful men in the early decades of the twentieth century. From 1941—when they exchanged their first handshake aboard the HMS Prince of Wales—until Roosevelt’s death in 1945, Roosevelt and Churchill maintained a close friendship that transcended any disparity between them. Rallied behind a common cause, Roosevelt set the tone for their friendship in a cable sent to the Prime Minister shortly following their first policy meeting: “It is fun to be in the same decade with you,” wrote the President.

Churchill would later write of Roosevelt, “I felt I was in contact with a very great man who was also a warm-hearted friend and the foremost champion of the high causes which we served.”⁸ On one private occasion, the Prime Minister confessed to an associate: “If anything happened to that man, I couldn’t stand it. He is the truest friend; he has the farthest vision.”⁹

When President Roosevelt passed away on April 12, 1945, the stoic Churchill did not attend his funeral, as widely expected, or deliver the eulogy he was so qualified to do. Churchill, a man emboldened by strength and intellect who, as President John F. Kennedy once said, “mobilized the English language and sent it into battle,”¹⁰ elected instead to stay home in seclusion. Only later was it publicly revealed that Churchill had been emotionally overcome with Roosevelt’s passing.

Despite the strength he so often commanded on occasions of desperation, Winston Churchill could not summon the strength to attend the President’s funeral. His closest cabinet members would later describe the fraught leader as too forlorn to bid a final goodbye to his American friend. The loss of his compatriot in both politics and war crushed the British leader; it was a blow from which he would not soon recover. For he had said, just one day prior to Roosevelt’s death, “He is the greatest man I have ever known.”¹¹ Their cultivated friendship during times of national peril was the bedrock for the salvation of democracy.

The prophet Amos rhetorically asked, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3). It is only appropriate, then, that Paul and Barnabas, two fleet-footed men called by God into missionary service, would agree to ‘walk together’ in friendship throughout the Mediterranean world in, as Churchill eventually put it, the high causes which they served. As Churchill and Roosevelt teamed up against tyranny, these men teamed up to form a cohesive union to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world largely adverse to it. In doing so, their acquaintanceship blossomed into friendship. They spared no personal sacrifice for one another as they stood shoulder-to-shoulder introducing the eastern world to the gospel.

Paul & Barnabas

After investing a decade in Tarsus successfully evangelizing Gentiles, Paul was paid an unexpected visit by Barnabas, who had been installed as the new pastor of the church in Antioch. Presumably, it had been years since the two men last saw each other in Jerusalem; thus, they had much to catch up on. Yet Barnabas’s purpose in traveling to Tarsus proved to be more than a friendly reunion.

Barnabas was a recognized leader in the early church and a man with impeccable Jewish credentials. He was Cyprian by birth, descended from the priestly tribe of Levi, and had earned a reputation as a gentle and loving minister of the gospel. Luke, the historian of Acts, describes him in Acts 11:24 as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith” who was gifted enough to bring “a great number of people ... to the Lord.”

Barnabas, originally named Joseph, was one of the first converts after Pentecost to sell his possessions and donate the proceeds to the apostles’ expanding ministry among Jerusalem’s poor (Acts 4:36–37). His generosity earned him the name *Barnabas*, meaning “Son of Encouragement” (v. 36). In the years that followed, Barnabas was promoted in rank to a *secondary apostle*¹² and commissioned to lead an evangelistic campaign in the city of Antioch (Acts 11:19–22).

As a result of Barnabas’s talents and the Spirit’s empowerment, Gentile conversions increased in Antioch, resulting in the formation of a vigorous church. With his newfound success, Barnabas requested that Paul join him in tending to the young church there. Paul eagerly accepted his friend’s invitation. The two men would spend the next twelve months at Antioch, nurturing their alliance as well as the church.

When their year-long ministry in Syria drew to a close, Paul and Barnabas felt compelled to return to Jerusalem and deliver a relief offering for the famine-stricken church (cf. Acts 11:25–30). Moreover, given that eleven years had elapsed since their last conference with the apostles, they hoped to reach an understanding concerning their roles in the Church’s ministry. Little can be ascertained from Scripture about the particulars of their meeting, except that an apparent consensus was reached that the Jerusalem leaders would concentrate on evangelizing their fellow Jews, while Barnabas and Paul would continue ministering to and among the Gentiles.

Not long after Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, a directive from the Holy Spirit was issued through the Antiochian prophets and teachers: “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). By divine call, the two men were instructed to prepare themselves for missionary service. The nature of their work was simply to preach the gospel, bringing men and women into a saving relationship with Christ (Acts 16:31; 20:21), delivering them from Satan’s power (Acts 26:18), invoking the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6), and establishing their converts in indigenous churches. With their directive divinely determined, the elders at Antioch “fasted and prayed ... [and] placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:3).

The Great Commission

Although exporting God’s redemptive message abroad is a missiological commission made famous by Christ in the closing chapters of the gospel, its mandate is not without precedent. The standard for missionary outreach in the New Testament finds its roots in the Old Testament. It was Israel’s Great Commission that they coexist among the nations, but not live like them (2 Kings 17:15b), with the ultimate objective to draw Gentiles to God.

Israel was the mirror by which God reflected His image to the nations and the means by which He implored foreigners to come to Him. As a consecrated people, the

Israelites were given standing orders to disassociate themselves, ethically and ceremonially, from the pagan cultures around them. Instead, they were to live lives of virtue and holiness (Lev. 18–19). Their distinctive lifestyles were to be a matter of provocation among observing nations, eliciting interest in the God whom they served (Deut. 4:6–8). Interwoven in the very fabric of Israel’s election was her summons to “Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (1 Chron. 16:23).

Israel’s divorce from the secular world did not abrogate her responsibility to serve as “a kingdom of priests” (Exod. 19:6)—that is, as mediatory agents—to alien sojourners. Indeed, they were custom-built to be “a light to the Gentiles” (Isa. 49:6 cf. 42:6), and the vehicle by which God displayed His glorious wonders on the world’s stage in testimony to Himself. To the Hebrew spies who scouted the Promised Land, the pagan prostitute, Rahab, assented: “We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for [Israel] when you came out of Egypt. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of [Israel], for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (Josh. 2:9–11). Likewise, both Nehemiah and Jeremiah acknowledged:

You saw the suffering of our forefathers in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land ... You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day ... You performed miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt and have continued them to this day, both in Israel and among all mankind, and have gained the renown that is still yours (Neh. 9:9–10; Jer. 32:20).

It was God’s intention that His chosen people be the recipients and guardians of His special revelation (Heb. 1:1–3), and the channel through which the future Redeemer would enter the stream of human history (Isa. 49:6). To reach the lost was the principal reason God called Abraham, so that through the influence of his descendants, particularly the redeeming work of the Messiah, “all the peoples on earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Repeated five times in Genesis alone (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14), this key declaration is the foundation of Israel’s outreach, inasmuch as it denotes the redemptive plan of God.

In tribute to Jehovah, King Solomon constructed the House of the Lord, the temple, to centralize Hebrew worship in Israel. It served not only as a reminder of God’s perpetual presence amongst the Israelites but was also the home of the Ark of the Covenant. Often equated with the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World for its “great magnificence and fame and splendor,” the majestic landmark instilled awe “in the sight of the nations” (1 Chron. 22:5). Frequently overlooked by the Jews in later generations, however, was its intended purpose as a visual beacon call to *all* men *everywhere* to come to God (cf. 1 Kings 8:42–43). The appeal of the temple’s architecture and furnishings was a missionary tool meant to summon foreigners abroad to unite with the house of Israel for the worship of God.

Although Israel’s missionary mandate under the Old Covenant was principally *reactive* in nature (that is, Israel was to accommodate those Gentiles drawn to God by

the nation's holy influence), in a few isolated occurrences God *proactively* sent Israel into the mission field.¹³ For example, God directed the prophet Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you" (Jonah 2:1). With judgment and wrath as their overarching message, God commissioned the canonical prophets to preach to foreign powers outside the boundaries of Israel and Judah.¹⁴ Even the Pharisees, misguided as they were in their application of the Law, were commended by Jesus for their willingness to "travel over land and sea to win a single convert" (Matt. 23:15).

With the institution of the New Covenant on the night of his betrayal (Luke 22:20 cf. Jer. 31:31–34), Jesus himself ushered in a different methodology for evangelism, namely, a *proactive commission* as opposed to *reactive missions*. Whereas in times past the idiosyncratic practices of the Hebrews—in particular their ceremonies and observances—and the promotion of the temple were the bait by which the reprobate were lured to godliness, it was the apostles' assignment to go into the world and propel the gospel forward. Popularized as the Great Commission,¹⁵ Jesus set forth the missionary paradigm for his Church nearly three weeks after his resurrection:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:16–20).

Christ added a caveat to his Great Commission as to the authority by which the Church was to carry out its mission: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Not long after this episode, the apostles Philip, John, and Peter evangelized the townships in Judea and Samaria with tremendous success (Acts 8:4–8, 25; 9:40–43) and earned their stripes, as it were, as "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19).

Paul and Barnabas would follow the disciples' lead and take the gospel to where Christ's name had not yet been preached. The two missionaries were undoubtedly aware that their mission was an extension of the Lord's mission: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18, KJV). To introduce the uninformed and to convert the idolatrous to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ was their privilege.

The Great Commission was one of the last recorded directives of the Savior to his disciples. Paul and Barnabas, together with the church in Antioch, understood the significance of this charge some twenty years later. It was Paul who rhetorically asked, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:14–15).

Jesus came into the world to manifest God's glory, "the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father" (John 1:14), and "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb. 1:3). Just as the incarnate Lord came into the world with the highest purpose of glorifying the Father, so Paul and Barnabas set out to seek and to save that which was lost (cf. Luke 19:10) for the glory of Christ. With this enterprise in view, the two ambassadors for Jesus Christ girded themselves as soldiers under command in the Great Commission.

Seleucia, Salamis, & Paphos

Commissioned by their home church, Paul and Barnabas along with Barnabas's cousin, John Mark (Col. 4:10), embarked on a wide-reaching evangelical crusade throughout the Roman territories of Cyprus, Pisidia, Galatia, and Lycaonia. Beginning in Seleucia, the port of Antioch, to the town of Salamis on the island of Cyprus, they tirelessly "proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues" (Acts 13:5). With assistance from John Mark (who would later pen the gospel of Mark), they soon moved westward across the island of Cyprus to Paphos, the seat of the Roman provincial government.

Located nearly a hundred miles from Salamis at the western end of the isle, Paphos was the administrative headquarters of Roman rule in the first century. In addition to its opulence, the coastal town was the epicenter of Aphrodite cult worship. The locals proudly hailed Aphrodite as the prevailing deity in the east, convinced she was born from the sea on the town's shoreline. As an expression of their worship, devotees ritually copulated with temple prostitutes situated around the sanctuary. Their cultic promiscuity inspired the rabid expansion of sexual misconduct in neighboring townships—something which Paul and Barnabas presumably protested as they made their way through the island.

The two men wasted no time in carrying out their charge in Paphos. So winning was their preaching earlier in Seleucia and Salamis that rumor of their anointing had reached Paphos long before they ever stepped foot in the province, including all the way to the seat of the proconsul, Sergius Paullus.

Paullus, the Roman governor of Cyprus, was "an intelligent man" (Acts 13:7) whose interest in Paul and Barnabas had more to do with safeguarding the peace than with their religious anecdotes or sophisticated magic tricks. To ensure they did not preach sedition against the empire or cause disruption within the Jewish community, the proconsul sent for Barnabas and Paul with the instruction that they present their message to the court.

Within the proconsul's royal counsel was a Jewish sorcerer named Elymas—also called Bar-Jesus. In Elymas, the two missionaries faced not only the threat of witchcraft but also Jewish opposition. Elymas sought to protect his sway over Paullus by casting aspersions on Paul and Barnabas. Luke records with simplicity: "But Elymas the sorcerer ... opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith" (Acts 13:8).

While divination and witchcraft were officially banned in Judaism (Deut. 18:9–11), some Jews still practiced it, either under the guise of Jewish orthodoxy or as

renegades (Luke 11:19; Acts 19:13–16). As a practitioner of sorcery, Elymas believed that enlightenment of the soul did not rest with the sovereign God of the Jews or in the preposterous whimsies of Christians who venerated a resurrected Messiah. Instead, he believed the supernatural was ascertained through astrological channels. Elymas the sorcerer was as formidable a threat to Paul and the gospel as Simon the Sorcerer was for Peter (cf. Acts 8:9–25).

Standing before the throne of the Roman governor, Paul formally presented his message to the court, much to the chagrin of the false prophet. It is doubtless that Elymas interrupted the proceedings repeatedly, heckling the apostle in his attempt to dissuade the proconsul from faith. His shenanigans proved frustrating, compelling the apostle to openly denounce the warlock as a prodigy of Satan. The censure was quickly followed by a sensational display of God’s judgment on Elymas in the form of blindness:

“You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun” (Acts 13:10–11).

The curse inflicted upon Elymas stunned the court. The miraculous display moved the Roman proconsul to faith in Christ, marking his conversion as the first in the upper echelons of Roman culture. As a result, the missionaries were granted full access to the strategic precincts of the city and were allowed to preach the gospel unhindered. In doing so, Paul and Barnabas achieved an impressive wave of conversions during the remainder of their stay in the coastal town.

Perga, Pisidian Antioch, & Iconium

From Paphos, the two evangelists, as well as Barnabas’s cousin, traveled by ship to Perga in the province of Pamphylia and onward to Pisidian Antioch. While in Perga, John Mark conspicuously abandoned the two missionaries for reasons Luke does not disclose (Acts 13:13). Notwithstanding the setback to their morale, the two men rebounded from Mark’s defection and continued to make their way north.

Situated thirty-six hundred feet above sea level and a hundred miles north of Perga on a lake-studded plateau, Pisidian Antioch served as the crossroads between municipalities throughout southern Galatia. Its population exceeded fifty thousand at the time of Paul and Barnabas’s visit, and consisted of a rich amalgamation of Greek, Roman, Oriental, and Phrygian traditions, including a sizable Jewish contingent. The idol Men-Askaelos (a deity of the poor and sickly who was thought to exercise mystic powers derived from the crescent moon) was the revered god among local devotees, as was the popular Cybele (a Phrygian goddess whose worship was imported from western Asia).

In Pisidia of Antioch, as in Seleucia, Salamis, Paphos, and Perga, the apostle Paul and Barnabas began their evangelical activity with the Jews. Paul spoke in the

synagogues on two consecutive Sabbath days—a privilege accorded to him as a traveling teacher. Although the response to his preaching on the first Saturday was greeted with booming acceptance from Jew and Gentile alike, he faced entrenched resistance the following Sabbath from the more devout Jews of the city. According to Luke, his opponents were incensed over the uproar caused by the strong reception to the evangelists' preaching and the fact that “almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord” (Acts 13:44).

Inflamed with jealousy, the Jews of Pisidian Antioch spewed abusive rhetoric at Paul. They “incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city” (Acts 13:50) to harass the missionaries. Paul countered their assault by lambasting their refusal to be the first, as was their privilege as Jews, to know the reward of eternal life. “We had to speak the word of God to you first,” he warned them forcefully. “Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles” (v. 46). In a gesture meant to emphasize the recaltrance of the city, Paul and Barnabas literally dusted the sand of Pisidian Antioch from their sandals (cf. Matt. 10:14).

The two missionaries traveled next to the city of Iconium. There Paul, while arguing in the synagogue as was his custom when evangelizing a new city, experienced considerable success. Many Jews and Gentiles were intrigued by the gospel and desired to hear more. But opposition soon arose from within the Jewish community, culminating in plans to stone the two missionaries. Since the city was controlled by Greek jurisprudence with little meddling from Iconian Jews, the resistance did not pose the same immediate threat as it had in Pisidian Antioch. Paul and Barnabas apparently found Iconium hospitable enough for lodging, despite the growing threats against them.

Iconium was home to native Phrygians, Jews, Greeks, and colonists from Rome and was located eighty miles southeast of Pisidian Antioch. An ancient settlement that had been transformed by the Greeks into a city-state municipality decades earlier, Iconium eventually evolved into a cultural melting pot within the Galatian province. It was in Iconium that God confirmed the veracity of Paul and Barnabas's preaching by associated miracles.

God intended for His supernatural acts to take center stage among the Iconians—apparently more so than any other region recorded in Acts—for two purposes: first, the “miraculous signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3) validated Paul and Barnabas's *authority* as apostles,¹⁶ and, therefore, their commission to preach the gospel. Second, although the miracles are not individually featured in Luke's reporting, it presupposes that God was divinely bearing witness to the evangelists' *message*. The writer of Hebrews speaks to the purpose of such paranormal acts:

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Heb. 2:3–4).

In his essay entitled *The Cessation of the Charismata*, Benjamin B. Warfield, the principal of Princeton Seminary from 1887 to 1921—and arguably the greatest theologian in the university's history—editorialized on the nature of apostolic miracles.

Warfield put forth the case that miracles are a rarity, even by biblical standards, and are never to be misconstrued as normative in ecclesiastical practices. While God can and certainly will act whenever He chooses, the supernatural violation of natural law—as was the case in Iconium—should not be viewed as commonplace in the Church or as a matter of right among the prayerful. Instead, the infrequency of such phenomena is assigned *only* to specific revelatory periods in the Bible (such as during the Mosaic and Apostolic ages) with the express purpose of substantiating the truth of special revelation:

Miracles do not appear on the page of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the Apostolic Church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic age in revelation ...¹⁷

In spite of the persuasiveness of their preaching and the corroboration of miracles that accompanied Paul and Barnabas’s ministry, dissenters attempted to poison public opinion against them. As it had at Pisidian Antioch, the apostles’ preaching gradually polarized the city. The very notion of a *crucified* Messiah who failed to liberate Israel *politically* was an offense to Jewish Iconians, despite the conclusive teaching of the missionaries. The earlier threats to mistreat them soon escalated, compelling Paul and Barnabas to depart for Lystra without delay.

Lystra, Derbe, & Attalia

Lystra was a Roman colony made up mostly of uneducated Lycaonians and retired military veterans. Although little is known about the city and its origins, the wealth of its Roman veterans made it one of the more fortified cities in eastern Galatia. Notwithstanding the city’s entrenched beliefs in Greek mythology and superstition, Paul was able to convincingly preach the gospel in the marketplace. (That Paul began his ministry in the public square suggests that either no synagogue existed or the city was home to very few Jews).

On one occasion, as Paul spoke in the public square, a crippled man—“lame from birth” (Acts 14:8)—sat at his feet, listening attentively. Having compassion for the man, Paul accepted his faith and commanded him by apostolic authority to “Stand up on your feet” (v. 9). At once, the crippled man “jumped up and began to walk” (v. 10). The miracle seized the people of Lystra and pandemonium ensued. In their native tongue, they cried out to the missionaries in adulation, mistaking Barnabas for the incarnate Zeus and Paul as his messenger, Hermes. Even the priest from the temple of Zeus, having been moved by the spectacular wonder, ascribed divinity to them.

In the fully developed Olympian pantheon, Hermes was regarded as the god of transit who possessed a formidable knowledge of travel and a talent for thievery. It was believed that the pagan deity exercised dominion over those who journeyed across

borders, whether geographical, artistic, spiritual or intellectual. To that end, his mythological duties also included escorting deceased spirits into the afterlife and piloting them through the precincts of Hades.

Originally depicted as a bearded idol of considerable age, the conventional Hermes had undergone a spiritual makeover by the time Paul and Barnabas arrived in Lystra. The Greeks credited the Olympian god for having invented racing competitions and other sporting contests, including boxing. Predictably, marble statuettes depicting Hermes with a muscular trunk were situated throughout Grecian stadiums and gymnasiums, elevating him from an elderly transportation god to the youthful patron of athletes.

Zeus was regarded as the exemplary deity in Greek mythology who sat enthroned on Mount Olympus, ruling over the sky and thunder. Symbolized by the thunderbolt, eagle, bull, and the oak, he is celebrated in pagan folklore for his erotic trysts. His many rendezvous resulted in famous offspring, most notably Apollo, Artemis (the God of the Ephesians), Hermes, Hercules, and Ares. Aside from his notorious philandering, Zeus was believed to punish all those who displeased him with lightning bolts.

There were some ungodly rites practiced in the backwoods of Arcadia (located in Greece across the Aegean Sea from Galatia) relating to the worship of Zeus. These practices placed the missionaries in jeopardy. Its mythology was connected with certain sects whose bizarre rituals included cannibalism. According to Plato, one primitive Grecian group gathered on a mountain once every eight years to offer a partial human sacrifice to Zeus. In their offering was a morsel of human entrails intermingled with animal bowels. A devotee who devoured the carnage was believed to transform into a wolf.¹⁸

The two evangelists were in a predicament in Lystra, impaired by the barriers of culture and language. Having done God's handiwork by healing the paraplegic, they loathed becoming the objects of the city's misplaced worship. Such sacrilege brought dishonor to both the missionaries and the Lord. But the limitations of an interpreter (v. 11) made it virtually impossible to frustrate the growing frenzy. Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas refused to allow Greek paganism to pervert the glory of the one true God responsible for the providential miracle.

Not realizing that they were blaspheming the miraculous, the throng of pagans continued their shouts, "The gods have come down to us in human form" (v. 11b). Aghast, the apostle Paul rushed into the harried mob and rebuked them:

"Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless [idols] to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them" (Acts 14:15–16).

Paul's reproach dampened the crowd's ecstasy. However, it was not until incorrigible Jews—who had stalked the missionaries from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium—riled the crowd further that the missionaries found themselves in peril. Paul's rebuke was interpreted and then translated as a defamation of Zeus and Hermes. The Lycaonians accosted the apostle, forcibly expelling him from the public square. Outside the city gate, the Lycaonians armed themselves with craggy rocks and stoned the apostle

until he lost consciousness. They left Paul's battered body to rot, "thinking he was dead" (v. 19b cf. 2 Cor. 11:25).

Some theologians hypothesize that the stoning in Lystra actually killed the apostle, albeit momentarily. Their conjecture is derived from cryptic statements found elsewhere in Paul's epistles, which suggest that at his time of death he supernaturally transferred to the heavens. Although the apostle was unsure as to the nature of the episode—"whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know" (2 Cor. 12:2)—what he could say with certainty was that he experienced a breathtaking vision of paradise. Intimated in his rapture was the apostle's firsthand account of the heavenly hosts where he certainly received further revelations from the Lord. Indeed, in his testimony to the Corinthians fourteen years later, he admitted to having heard "inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell" (2 Cor. 12:5).

Left for dead, Paul miraculously regained consciousness by the grace of God. Luke is silent as to how the drama of Paul's astonishing recovery unfolded, but he notes that the obstinate and courageous apostle did not seek safety outside the province but, instead, immediately "got up and went back into the city" (Acts 14:20). Undeterred by his detractors, the gallant apostle presumably continued to preach in the name of Jesus despite the threat of further injury.

Paul and Barnabas left Lystra the next day with bruised bodies and frustrated spirits. After a brief stint at Derbe, they retraced their steps through the provinces, revisiting their upstart churches until they reached Pisidian Antioch once again. The duo traveled through Pisidia, the northernmost region of the Roman province of Galatia, appointing elders in each of the regions. It was around this time that Paul is believed to have become seriously ill. In fact, years later he wrote to his Galatian readers, "As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you" (Gal. 4:13).

Neither Luke in Acts nor Paul in his later epistles disclose the nature of the apostle's ailment. What is theorized by higher biblical criticism as most likely an eye problem (cf. Gal. 4:15) may also be understood as malaria. Moreover, given the physical abuse he sustained earlier in Lystra, it is possible that, in spite of his phenomenal recovery from the stoning, he may have still required medical attention.

Perhaps another explanation is plausible, given the inference Paul makes in his second letter to the church in Corinth. So that Paul would not become prideful from his unique exposure to supernatural revelation, it is common knowledge that God permitted a perpetual affliction to harass the apostle as a reminder of his weakness:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassing great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:7).

This unexplained suffering may have indeed contributed to the circumstances that brought Paul to previously unvisited areas in Galatia. Despite repeatedly petitioning God for its removal (2 Cor. 12:8), Paul learned from his illness the lesson that would permeate his life: divine power is best displayed against the backdrop of human

weakness (2 Cor. 4:7) so that God alone is praised (2 Cor. 10:17). Rather than removing the problem, God gave him the grace and strength to persevere.

It is speculation, at best, that suggests that Paul's "thorn in my flesh" from 2 Corinthians 12:7 is the specific "illness" he refers to in Galatians 4:13. Regardless of the nature of his ailment, Paul applauded the Galatians for their hospitality: "Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, if I were Christ Jesus himself" (Gal. 4:14).

Not long after regaining his health, Paul and Barnabas "returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith" (Acts 14:21b–22). They proclaimed the gospel also in Perga (where Mark had abandoned them earlier) and in the port city of Attalia. From there, they eventually returned by ship to Syria.

Their missionary journey ended where it had begun two years earlier, at Antioch of Syria. Almost certainly moved in spirit by the safe return of their delegates, the elders greeted them with a showing of hospitality and love. At once, Paul and Barnabas "gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27).

Testifying before their brethren regarding the massive proliferation of the gospel throughout Galatia, Phrygia, Lycaonia, and Cyprus and relating the string of events that comprised their journey, Paul and Barnabas spared no details in telling the miraculous, tumultuous, frightful, arduous, commemorative, and rewarding journey that they shared together under the protective umbrella of the Holy Spirit. Beginning with Paul's encounter with the Jewish sorcerer in Paphos before the Roman proconsul, Mark's abandonment in Perga, the healing of the Lycaonian paraplegic, his stoning in Lystra, and concluding with the signs and wonders performed in Iconium and Paul's sudden illness in Galatia, they recounted for their home church all that God had done *through* them, *for* them, and—most significantly—*in* them as they traveled the road on the Great Commission.

Similar to Roosevelt and Churchill's relationship, one which grew out of adversity, the Scriptures are not silent on the evolution of friendships forged through fire. From Jonathan and David, two friends who "became one in spirit" (1 Sam. 18:1), to Abraham and Lot (Gen. 14:14–16), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16–17), and Daniel and his loyalist cohorts, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 2:49), the Bible is unambiguous: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17).

These biblical relationships, presumably lifelong in nature, were nurtured through times of extreme anxiety and uncertainty. Whether forged from a life spent as a fugitive in fear of a king's jealous sword; the inexplicable loss of one's husband and sons; government persecution for refusing to obey idolatrous laws; or while wedged in the crossfire of God's wrath upon a city; "true yokefellow" (Php. 4:3, KJV) are borne from the ashes of disparity (Prov. 17:17 cf. Eccl. 4:10). As forming as it was between Roosevelt and Churchill during the heat of an epic war, so it was between the apostle Paul and Barnabas in the pangs of ministry. After traversing a decadent Mediterranean world for

the cause of Christ, two godly missionaries—the apostle Paul and Barnabas—cemented their friendship.

—Ronald H. Gann

¹ Cited at www.jinxmagazine.com

² Cited www.americanrhetoric.com.

³ Meacham, John. *In the Footsteps of Giants*, Readers Digest, April 2004.

⁴ The U.S.S.R. had rescinded its neutral relationship with the Axis powers on account of Hitler's surprise attack and invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941

⁵ Meacham, Readers Digest, April 2004.

⁶ Meacham, Readers Digest, April 2004.

⁷ Cited at www.quotationspage.com.

⁸ Cited at www.archives.gov.

⁹ Cited www.feri.org

¹⁰ New York Times, January 24, 1965, Sir Winston Churchill Obituary; "*Churchill Dies at 90 at Home in London.*"

¹¹ Cited www.feri.org.

¹² A secondary apostle or an apostle of the 'secondary class' was a general billet prescribed by the local church to its missionaries who were sent abroad. They were distinguished, however, from the apostolic office conferred to the Twelve, including the apostles James and Paul.

¹³ Two fundamentally different views of missions in the Old Testament are at issue here. The two views are known among theologians as 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' witnessing. The former view understands Israel to have a passive, Zion-centered view of missions. It is, one could say, 'come-and-see' witnessing. The latter view understands Israel to have an aggressive missionary mandate, an outward-moving mission that one could term 'go-and-tell' witnessing.

¹⁴ The prophets Obadiah and Nahum preached to the nations of Edom and Nineveh, respectively.

¹⁵ One school of thought among orthodox Christians upholds that the Great Commission was fulfilled in the first century. Proponents of this view cite the following texts as proof: "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere" (Mark 16:20); "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23); and ". . . and the preaching of Jesus Christ . . . has been made known to all the nations" (Rom. 16:25, 26, NASB).

¹⁶ MacArthur notes, "In what sense was Barnabas an apostle? He obviously was not an apostle in the same sense as the Twelve and Paul. They were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ and were personally called by Him. Barnabas qualified on neither count. He was commissioned not by Jesus Christ directly, but by the church (cf. 2 Cor. 8:19). He was therefore an apostle only in the general sense of the word. Because of that, it is best to translate 'apostles' [in Acts 14:4] here not as an official title but as 'messengers' (cf. 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:5);" (MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 31–28*, [Moody Press, 1996], 47).

¹⁷ Warfield, Benjamin B. *Counterfeit Miracles*, Banner of Truth (December 1996).

¹⁸ Cited at www.wikipedia.org.