

^{13:1} Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul^a. ² While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting^b, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them^c.”
³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away^d.

^a 13:1 **Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.** The word “church” can speak of the universal body of followers of Christ, but here and in most of Acts it refers to local congregations of believers. Evidence that it is God’s plan to work through the local church is here in Acts, in all of Paul’s epistles and in the exhortations Jesus gave to the seven churches of Asia in John’s Revelation. Antioch had a sacred assembly of saints and that assembly gathered for worship, instruction, fellowship, mutual accountability and world evangelism.

The original here contains the same conjunction in two places, separating Barnabas, Simeon and Lucius from Manaen and Saul. Luke may have meant to imply that the first three were considered “prophets” and Manaen and Saul “teachers.” The identity of Lucius is likely not the author of Acts, since he inserts “we” where he appears in the narrative (starting in 16:10). Lucius may have been the son of the man who bore Jesus’ cross (Matthew 27:32). Based on the word translated here “brought up with,” Manaen may have been a foster brother or classmate of Herod Antipas. This shows that the gospel had likely been spreading even to the ruling class.

^b 13:2 **While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting.** The word “ministering” could mean that the primary function of these men was to lead the saints in worship. The apostles asked the church to put forward deacons so they could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). There is really no distinction between that and “ministering to the Lord and fasting.”

Fasting is commonly setting aside food for a time for the purpose of prayer. It is not a means to hold God hostage to our wishes but a means to take our flesh captive and make it submissive to God’s wishes. Fasting is a reminder of human weakness, a freeing up of time and a means of humbling ourselves so we are ready to pray. Fasting is a good practice during times of crisis, occasions for mourning over sin and at times of great decision. That was certainly the position of the church in Antioch at this watershed ministry moment.

In this text the fast must have already been declared for a specified period of time. Rather than two fasts (one before and one after the Spirit’s commission), there was likely only one that ended after the Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul.

^c 13:2 **the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”** This was not an urge or subjective feelings that sent these men to their mission. The Holy Spirit evidently spoke audibly with specific instructions.

^d 13:3 **Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.** The laying on of hands in this text, rather than an imparting of any special powers, was the acknowledgement of the church of what the Holy Spirit had already done. Aside from the work of the Holy Spirit given through the hands of Jesus and the apostles (Luke 4:40; Acts 28:8), the laying on of hands in Scripture is an identification. To lay the hand or hands on an animal sacrifice was to identify with the animal, to symbolically declare the animal a representative to take the punishment the man or nation deserved (Leviticus 4:15; 16:21). People brought children to Jesus so he would lay his hands on them and pray (Matthew 19:13, 15). He used the children as an illustration of what people in his kingdom are like, identifying with them by the laying on of hands. In Acts 8:17 the apostles identified with new believers and placed hands on them, resulting in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Ananias placed his hands on the newly converted Saul, not just for healing, but as a testimony that the persecutor was now identified with the disciples of Christ (Saul was immediately baptized, Acts 9:17-19). Paul warned Timothy not to “be hasty in the laying on of hands” regarding the ordination of elders. He implied that a wrong choice would make Timothy “share in the sins of others.”

⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus^a. ⁵ When they reached Salamis, they *began* to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper^b. ⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence^c. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith^d. ⁹ But Saul, who was also *known as Paul*, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him^e, ¹⁰ and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? ¹¹ Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who

The church at Antioch in effect was going with Barnabas and Saul on their journey. They were not freelance missionaries, but men under the authority of others (note their later returns to Antioch to report, Acts 14:26; 15:22; 18:22). It has been said that local churches, not denominations, should send missionaries. Here one could argue that the local church which sent out Barnabas and Saul (note who is mentioned first) only recognized what God had already done.

^a 13:4 **So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.** Cyprus is a small (about 130 miles long), mountainous island rising to over 4000 feet in elevation at the center. It is roughly 100 miles from the Seleucia, the seaport from which Paul and Barnabas sailed. This was home for Barnabas (Acts 4:36).

^b 13:5 **When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.** Salamis was both a city and a region on the southern coast of the island. The settlement was home to a number of Jewish synagogues. Barnabas would have been instrumental in getting an audience in those synagogues.

This became the pattern for every stop on every missionary journey. The Jews in synagogues or places of prayer always received the gospel first. In so doing, God’s messengers could establish common ground with those who believed the Scriptures. The Jews usually rejected the gospel and God’s messengers were forced to “take it to the streets.”

^c 13:6-7 **When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence.** This may have been a very short tour. The gospel was headed for the mainland of Asia, but Jesus had some sheep on this island to bring into His fold.

Luke identifies Bar-Jesus (*Son of Joshua* or *Son of Salvation*) as a false prophet. Also known by his Greek name Elymas, he plays into this story as an example of the importance God places on getting His message where it needs to go. He also serves as a warning to those who would stand in the way of the message.

^d 13:8 **But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.** Elymas perceived that he was about to lose some business. Saul should not be declared anything other than righteously indignant here. He merely reflected the attitude of the Lord Jesus toward anyone who would dare turn a vulnerable person from the truth (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2). It is not “judgmental” to expose as evil those individuals or groups who attempt to lure away Jesus’ “little ones.”

^e 13:9 **But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him.** From here to the end of the New Testament, Saul (a Jewish name) is known as Paul (a Roman name). God had called Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles, so he went by a name to adapt to that culture. Some have suggested that he took the name of the first gentile convert of his ministry, but it is more likely that, being a Roman citizen, Paul was given both names after he was born (Acts 22:28).

would lead him by the hand^a. ¹²Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord^{b, c}.

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^a 13:10-11 **You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time. And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.** Deceit and fraud have marked the devil since the garden of Eden. This Judgment should be seen as a mercy. He was blinded rather than killed (like Ananias and Sapphira) and that blindness was only temporary. God had done the same thing to the men who wished to attack Lot's heavenly visitors (Genesis 19) and to a Syrian army attacking Israel (2 Kings 6).

^b 13:12 **Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.** It was not the judgment on Elymas that caused the proconsul to believe. God had simply used an event to demonstrate the resurrection power of Jesus. The gospel is a reality to be believed.

^c 13:1-12 This text is not simply about how Paul got started in ministry. It is about God's plan to save His people. It is about the Spirit's work in getting the gospel into the Roman world. Note the marks of the people through whom the Holy Spirit did His work:

1. A team approach to ministry. There were a number of gifted men in leadership who were willing to share the work. The men were more interested in service than titles.
2. A priority on worship. The church leadership had evidently proclaimed a fast to discern God's voice on ministry matters. It was in the midst of fasting, prayer and worship that they heard the Spirit's voice. Today we should approach understanding God's completed revelation (the Bible) with the same seriousness.
3. A willingness to leave behind unnecessary hindrances. A name like Saul might have gotten in the way of a Jew seeking to minister to Romans. Our task today is not to make ourselves look attractive to a lost world, but to eliminate things that might get in the way of God's message.
4. A passion to make God's message plain. Both in the sharing of the gospel everywhere they went and in the vehement defense of a man interested in hearing it, Paul and Barnabas sought to communicate Truth. We ought to become experts at seeking every opportunity to plant gospel seeds.