

# THE FIRST MISSIONARIES, BARNABAS AND PAUL: THE MOST CHALLENGING CALL EVER GIVEN ACTS 13:01–03

## *Introduction*

This passage begins the most daring and challenging step ever taken by any organization in the history of the world. The Christian church launched forth, making a deliberate effort to carry the gospel to the whole world. It commissioned its first two missionaries for the deliberate purpose of going to meet the world's desperate need for Christ.

- I. They were members of a great church, a church that reached out to all (v. 1).
- II. They were noted as gifted (v. 1).
- III. They were called while worshipping and fasting (v. 2).
- IV. They received a specific call: they were “set apart” by the Holy Spirit (v. 2).
- V. They bathed their mission in prayer and fasting (v. 3).
- VI. They were commissioned by the church (v. 3).

## **I. Acts 13:01 *The Church at Antioch***

The first missionaries were members of a great church, a church that reached out to all. The greatness of the Antioch church is seen in two facts.

1. The Antioch church was God's choice to become the mission and evangelistic centre of the world. God was now ready to send His Word to the whole world. The first three phases of the *great commission* had been launched. The disciples of Christ had borne and left a witness in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria. Now it was time for a witness to go into all the world, reaching out even to the uttermost part (Acts 1:8).

But note a significant fact, a fact that stands as a warning to every church: God had to choose some church other than the Jerusalem church to launch the worldwide mission. The Jerusalem church was too narrow and traditional to do the job (see note, *Salvation vs. Ritual*, Acts 15:1-3). Too many of its members (Jews) were too prejudiced and held too many feelings against the rest of the world (Gentiles). They refused to freely and whole-heartedly commit themselves to world missions and evangelism. They refused to repent of their *exclusiveness and their traditional, formal approach to God*. God had to bypass the Jerusalem church and raise up another church to become the centre of His mission upon earth.

Note what this means, for it is a warning to every believer. Some leaders other than the Jewish leaders had to be chosen to launch God's purposes on earth. The Jewish leaders had proven too slow in launching out in the full liberty and freedom of God's Spirit.

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They, too, had waited too long to repent of their sins. God was ready to move out into the world and the leaders in Jerusalem were not ready. God had no choice but to raise up other leaders who would commit their lives fully to the gospel and to carry the gospel to the whole world in an uninhibited and free spirit.

2. The Antioch church was diverse, a church that reached out to everyone. This is clearly seen in the men mentioned.
  - a. Barnabas: he was a wealthy Cyprian, a man born and reared on the island of Cyprus. (See note, Acts 4:36-37.)
  - b. Simeon or Niger: the name “Niger” means black, referring to the complexion of his skin. He was probably from Africa. The name is also a Roman name which shows that he moved about in Roman society. Some commentators suggest he was the Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross for Jesus (see Mk. 15:21).
  - c. Lucius of Cyrene: he was probably one of the poor persecuted believers who had fled to Antioch for safety. If so, he was one of the founders of this great church. When he arrived in Antioch, he and the others began to share Christ immediately (see Acts 11:19-20).
  - d. Manaen: he was of the higher class of society, being a foster brother to Herod Antipas. This is the Herod who had tried Jesus and murdered John the Baptist.
  - e. Saul of Tarsus: he was one of the religionists of society. He is mentioned last as though he was considered least important among the leaders. However, Saul’s deep love for the Lord and his driving commitment to the Lord’s cause would soon lead God to use Saul beyond imagination.

The point is this: these men, with their diversity of backgrounds and social standings, show just how much the church at Antioch reached out to everyone throughout the community. It reached out to all classes of people, all needs, all nationalities and races. No one was excluded: everyone was invited to Christ and welcomed into the fellowship and ministry of the church. The church at Antioch was a ministering church, a great outreach church, just the kind of church God needed to launch and support the first missionaries to the world.

**Mat 22:9** *‘Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’*

**Mat 28:19-20** *“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.”*

**Rom 10:12-13** *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

*Acts 1:8* “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.”

**Rom 12:5-8** *So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.*

**1 Tim 2:4** *Who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

## **II. Acts 13:01 Missionaries with Spiritual Gifts**

The first missionaries were gifted with the very special gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1. They were gifted as prophets (see *Prophets*, Acts 11:27; *Prophecy*, Mt.1:22; *Prophecy*, 1 Cor 14:3).
2. They were gifted as teachers (see *Teachers*, Acts 13:1; *Preaching*, pt. 3, Acts 11:19-30).

### ACTS 13:01 TEACHING, TEACHERS

Teaching is a high calling, one of the greatest of callings. Teaching is ranked second only to the spiritual gifts of apostle and prophet (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). Every apostle and prophet and pastor has the gift of teaching, but not every teacher is an apostle or prophet or pastor. The gift of teaching bears one of the largest responsibilities given by God; therefore, the teacher will be required to give a strict account to God for his faithfulness in using his gift (see note, *Teachers*, Jas 3:1).

The spiritual gift of teaching is the gift of understanding and communicating the Word of God, of edifying believers in the truths of God’s Word. It involves understanding, interpreting, arranging and communicating the Word of God. The gift of teaching is given to the believer who commits his life to the Word of God, to sharing its glorious truths with God’s people.

**2 Tim 2:15** *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

**2 Tim 3:16** *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

**Acts 17:11** *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

*Acts 20:32* “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

*1 Pet 2:2-3* Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. □

### III. *Acts 13:02 Ministers, Men of Prayer and Fasting*

The first missionaries were called while worshipping and fasting. This is critical to see.

1. The chosen men were faithful in their ministry *right where they were*. They were not waiting to serve when they reached the fields of the world; they were serving right then and there, right where they were. They did not overlook nor turn away from needs around them, in their own community. They were the Lord’s, His followers, and as such they were commanded to minister even as He had ministered — right where they were (Jn. 20:21; Mt. 20:28).

*Col 3:23-24* Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

*Rom 14:18* Because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

It was because of their faithfulness where they were that God *knew* He could trust these men to do greater things for Him.

**Thought 1.** God calls those who are faithful where they are.

*1 Cor 4:2* Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

*1 Cor 6:20* You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

*1 Cor 15:58* Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

*1 Pet 4:10* Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.

2. The men chosen were men of prayer and fasting. Apparently they had come together to discuss the matter of world evangelism and were fasting and praying over the matter. The point is clear: God can use only those who sense the desperate needs of the world, sense the needs so deeply that they will set food and everything else aside in order to seek God’s face.

**Thought 1.** How desperately God needs men and women who will fill the gap as these men did. What a tragedy! Generation after generation has rolled in upon the other and the world is still unreached. Where are those...

- who will be faithful in ministering right where they are?
- who will be so concerned they will set food and everything else aside for prayer?

**Luke 18:1** *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*

**John 16:24** *Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*

**Eph 6:18** *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

**1 Th 5:17** *Pray continually.*

#### **IV. Acts 13:02 Called by the Holy Spirit**

The first missionaries received a specific call. The call came from the Holy Spirit: they were to be set apart for “the work” chosen by God. Note several facts that are critical for every believer and minister of the gospel.

1. It is the Holy Spirit that calls the believer to serve God. Paul and Barnabas were not called...
  - By the church
  - By the other leaders
  - by their own determination

The words of Christ were as true for Paul and Barnabas as they were for the first apostles and for us today:

**John 15:16** *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”*

Now note: the Holy Spirit was not calling Paul and Barnabas to a life of witness. Every believer is called to be a witness for God. The Holy Spirit was calling the men to a specific task, to a lifetime commitment to ministry. The two men were never again to be lay believers, but were to give their lives to serving God as full-time worldwide evangelists or missionaries.

2. The call of the Holy Spirit comes at a specific time. There is a definite time when the Holy Spirit speaks to the believer’s heart and mind, and the voice and will of God are unmistakable.
3. The call of the Holy Spirit is for the believer to be His, to be possessed by God’s Spirit. The called believer is *separated to belong* to the Holy Spirit: to allow the Spirit to live and move and have His being within the believer’s body; to be possessed, infilled and guided by the Spirit; to be controlled completely by the Spirit; to be completely surrendered to the Spirit’s will and use.

4. The call of the Holy Spirit involves “work” — the work He has chosen for the believer to do. The believer is...
  - “set apart...for the work,” to do the work of the ministry.
  - “to prepare God’s people for works of services so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12).

#### **V. Acts 13:03 Prayer and Fasting**

The first missionaries bathed their mission in prayer and fasting. They did not launch out immediately. The *new call* was too momentous. The face of God had to be sought...

- for a deep sense of His presence and power.
- for the direction of His will.
- for the praise of His name.

(See notes, pt. 2, Acts 13:2; *Fasting*, Mt. 6:16-18.)

#### **VI. Acts 13:03 Commissioning by the Church**

The first missionaries were commissioned by the church. Note two points.

1. This was apparently an official meeting of the church called for the specific purpose of commissioning Saul and Barnabas.
2. The church was not calling and setting these two men apart. It was the Holy Spirit who had called and set these two men apart to the ministry. The church was...
  - acknowledging the Holy Spirit’s call by the laying on of hands. (See *Laying on of Hands*, Acts 6:6.)
  - committing its support and prayers to the two God-sent men.
  - obeying the Holy Spirit’s leadership and allowing the men to be *separated* from the Antioch church.

However, note that the church was called upon to *acknowledge and commission* these men to the work of God (v. 2).

**Acts 6:6** *They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

**1 Tim 4:14** *Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.*

**1 Tim 5:22** *Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.*

**2 Tim 1:6** *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ■*