



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
LEWISVILLE

Session 13

Sending the Sent

Summary and Goal

As the church in Antioch continued to flourish, the calling to go into the world was received, confirmed, and obeyed. This obedience resulted in the missionary endeavors of Saul, who would be known as Paul, and Barnabas.

Main Passages

Acts 13:1-4

Session Outline

1. The Leadership Multiplied (Acts 13:1)
2. The Call Received (Acts 13:2)
3. The Call Confirmed and Obeyed (Acts 13:3-4)

Theological Theme

As the church in Antioch grew and developed new leaders, God called those leaders out for new endeavors.

Christ Connection

Just as God the Father sent God the Son from the eternal glories of heaven to fulfill His redemptive calling, God the Holy Spirit sends God's people out to spread the good news.

Missional Application

At its heart, the church is a sent people. That means as believers continually grow in Christ, they can be certain God will call them out to join Him in His redemptive work in communities, countries, and continents.

Historical Context of Acts

Purpose

The Book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

Author

The Book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Setting

The date of composition of the Book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30–31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

Special Features

The Book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

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Condensed Leader Guide

Sending the Sent

Introduction

- ❓ How would you explain what it means to be called by God for ministry? Who do you think that applies to?
- ❓ How have you discerned if God was calling you to something? How big a role have other believers played in your discernment?

Luke chronicled the circumstances surrounding the launch of Paul's first missionary journey. The number of leaders with the ability to teach had increased considerably since Barnabas arrived in Antioch. With everything growing and developing in Antioch, one might think that the leadership should just keep at what they were doing. To the contrary, in the midst of the healthy development in Antioch, God called out Saul and Barnabas to be sent to fulfill His work in other places.

1. The Multiplication of Leadership (Acts 13:1)

As the work in Antioch progressed, so too did the mantle of leadership. When Barnabas was originally dispatched by the leadership in Jerusalem to investigate the salvation phenomenon in Antioch, he was the only teacher and disciple-maker of new converts. However, after bringing Saul in from Tarsus to help, Barnabas and Saul continued to multiply the leadership of the congregation as its rapid growth demanded.

- ❓ Why do you think growth in the number of teachers/leaders in Antioch was important for the congregation's health?
- ❓ What effect do you think it had on the church in Antioch to see new teachers arise from their own ranks? How did this display the impact of the gospel in their midst?

2. The Call Received (Acts 13:2)

The prophets and teachers were leading the congregation accordingly in worship and fasting when the Holy Spirit spoke to them about sending out Saul and Barnabas. The details regarding what form their new ministry work would take were extremely vague. The only clear thing clear was they were to go.

- ❓ What were the people in the church at Antioch doing when God told them who to send out? Why is it important to hear from God, both corporately and individually? How do you make time for both in your weekly schedule?
- ❓ How do you respond (or have you responded) when God calls someone dear to you to a new work?
- ❓ Given the deep connection between Barnabas and Saul and the believers in Antioch, what effect do you think God's command to send out Barnabas and Saul had on the congregation's response?

3. The Call Confirmed and Obeyed (Acts 13:3-4)

Having heard from the Holy Spirit, the congregation continued to fast and pray, then laid hands on their beloved leaders. The dynamic by which the Holy Spirit saw fit to confirm the call was a cooperative experience between the congregation and the men being sent. Sadly, the role of the congregation in discerning the Holy Spirit's call on a person is often not as prominent in the modern church as it was in the first century.

- ❓ Describe a time when God prompted you toward a new challenge in serving Him. How did the confirmation of other believers encourage or inform your decision?
- ❓ In light of the example for the church in Antioch, why do you think it is important for church members to remain attuned to the moving of the Holy Spirit? Who might need your encouragement to follow the Spirit in faithfulness?

Conclusion

- ❓ All of us, whether we serve on a church staff or not, are ministers of the gospel. How do you feel about this truth?
- ❓ How are you currently fostering biblical community with others who would allow you the credibility to offer encouragement and confirmation to them? What are the best ways you've found for creating such community?
- ❓ What gives you the greatest sense of pause or concern when you think about God calling you to go? How can you begin to address those concerns so that you are freed to be faithful to His leading?



Expanded Leader Guide

Sending the Sent

Introduction

- ❓ How would you explain what it means to be called by God for ministry? Who do you think that applies to?
- ❓ How have you discerned if God was calling you to something? How big a role have other believers played in your discernment?

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1. The Multiplication of Leadership (Acts 13:1)

As the work in Antioch progressed, so too did the mantle of leadership. When Barnabas was originally dispatched by the leadership in Jerusalem to investigate the salvation phenomenon in Antioch, he was the only teacher and disciple-maker of new converts. However, after bringing Saul in from Tarsus to help, Barnabas and Saul continued to multiply the leadership of the congregation as its rapid growth demanded.

The designation as prophets and teachers likely was a reference to their overall leadership of the congregation rather than a description of particular offices. Had the offices been different in nature, Luke's care in preserving detail would have likely resulted in not only an explanation of the difference between the offices, but also a delineation between which of the men fulfilled which role. As none of that appears in the text, the

greater possibility is that the “prophets and teachers” was descriptive of function. “Prophet” referred to speaking forth what God had already made known, while “teacher” referred to the mentoring function of the role.

- ❓ Why do you think growth in the number of teachers/leaders in Antioch was important for the congregation's health?

- ❓ What effect do you think it had on the church in Antioch to see new teachers arise from their own ranks? How did this display the impact of the gospel in their midst?


The list of men reflects the cosmopolitan nature of the city of Antioch. By this time in the Book of Acts, the reader is quite familiar with who Barnabas and Saul were. Luke introduced the other three men in part to demonstrate the diversity among leaders. Simeon's name was Hebrew, but his surname was Latin. Manaen was a close relation to Herod Antipas, who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist and the trial of Jesus. Lucius the Cyrene was from Cyprus and possibly one of the initial evangelists to spread the gospel to Antioch in the first place. Each of the men being identified as leaders communicated unity across ethnic and cultural barriers under the banner of the grace of Jesus Christ.


2. The Call Received (Acts 13:2)

- ❓ What were the people in the church at Antioch doing when God told them who to send out? Why is it important to hear from God, both corporately and individually? How do you make time for both in your weekly schedule?

The prophets and teachers were leading the congregation accordingly in worship and fasting when the Holy Spirit spoke to them about sending out Saul and Barnabas. There are many things in this moment that need to be observed. First, the sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's prompting occurred during “ministering to the Lord and fasting.” Ministering to the Lord referred to worshipping God according to the spiritual gifting that He had given them. Therefore, the believers, led by the previously mentioned prophets and teachers, were in a posture of worship before the Lord that included fasting.

Second, the Holy Spirit spoke to the congregation, but the manner in which He did so is uncertain. The likelihood is that He confirmed within the spirits of those in the congregation what He had already placed in the hearts of Saul and Barnabas. The verbal tense, “I have called them,” indicates that the Holy Spirit had already prompted Saul and Barnabas. Third, what the Holy Spirit confirmed for the congregation was simply that Saul and Barnabas must be sent out. The details regarding what form their new ministry work would take were extremely vague. This was similar to Abram’s call in Genesis 12 in which God told Abram to leave the place of his father’s household and go to the land that God would show him. The only clear thing clear was they were to go.

-  How do you respond (or have you responded) when God calls someone dear to you to a new work?

-  Given the deep connection between Barnabas and Saul and the believers in Antioch, what effect do you think God’s command to send out Barnabas and Saul had on the congregation’s response?


It was no small thing that those the Holy Spirit told the congregation to set apart were their most beloved teachers. Up to this point, Luke had chronicled how the congregation flourished under the leadership of Barnabas and Saul, so there can be no doubt that the two men meant a great deal to the believers. Notice that the call to send Barnabas and Saul did not come only to Barnabas and Saul. Rather, the believers in the congregation experienced the prompting of the Holy Spirit as well. This happened because they were also a part of Saul and Barnabas being sent out.


3. The Call Confirmed and Obeyed (Acts 13:3-4)

Having heard from the Holy Spirit, the congregation continued to fast and pray, then laid hands on their beloved leaders. The dynamic by which the Holy Spirit saw fit to confirm the call was a cooperative experience between the congregation and the men being sent. Sadly, the role of the congregation in discerning the Holy Spirit’s call on a person is often not as prominent in the modern church as it was in the first century.

The call and confirmation of the congregation prevented two extremes. First, it protected Saul and Barnabas from the individualism in which a person claims personal guidance from the Spirit with no reference to the church. Second, it prevents the institutionalization of the church in which the leadership is solely responsible for decisions with no consideration of the Spirit's leading of the individual.

What resulted was an agreement about what the Holy Spirit was doing in Saul and Barnabas. The church also understood their role in sending Saul and Barnabas. There is no indication whatsoever from Luke that Saul and Barnabas were voluntarily leaving, looking for a new challenge, or anything of the like. As deeply invested as the men had been in the church at Antioch, the blessing of the church for the new work God had for them was a pastorally tender ministry of the Holy Spirit as Saul and Barnabas prepared to leave those they loved.

-  Describe a time when God prompted you toward a new challenge in serving Him. How did the confirmation of other believers encourage or inform your decision?

-  In light of the example for the church in Antioch, why do you think it is important for church members to remain attuned to the moving of the Holy Spirit? Who might need your encouragement to follow the Spirit in faithfulness?

In light of the church confirming what the Holy Spirit had already spoken into their own hearts, Saul and Barnabas departed from Antioch. What lay just on the other side of obedience would ultimately come to be known as Paul's first missionary journey. Churches were planted, persecution endured, and the gospel of Jesus Christ went forward into places it would not have otherwise gone. The faithfulness of Saul and Barnabas, as well as the congregation in Antioch, literally changed the world.

Interestingly, at the conclusion of the first missionary journey, Saul and Barnabas returned to Antioch. There was accountability and support from the church in Antioch that was inherent because of their commissioning of the evangelists. The partnership between Paul and Antioch was not a mere formality or ritual acknowledgment. Rather, the church served as a home base for Paul's church planting ministry and evangelism to the Gentiles.

Conclusion

- ❓ All of us, whether we serve on a church staff or not, are ministers of the gospel. How do you feel about this truth?
- ❓ How are you currently fostering biblical community with others who would allow you the credibility to offer encouragement and confirmation to them? What are the best ways you've found for creating such community?
- ❓ What gives you the greatest sense of pause or concern when you think about God calling you to go? How can you begin to address those concerns so that you are freed to be faithful to His leading?

Prayer of Response

Pray by name for lost people known by members of the group, and pray for the opportunity to develop those relationships further. As you close, ask God to help you all become better ministers of His gospel and to be disciples committed to connecting people to Jesus through service.

Family Discussion

Family Discussion Questions for Children

- *Who has helped you understand your role in serving the church?*
- *How do you feel about that? Is serving and sharing the gospel something you can do right now? Why or why not?*

Family Discussion Questions for Teens

- *What gets in the way of you living the kind of sent life we see in Acts 13?*
- *The church at Antioch was able to sense what the Holy Spirit was doing because they were close to Him. How do you take care of your own soul so you can hear and see when God is working?*

For Next Week

Memorize

As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”
—Acts 13:2

Extended Commentary

Acts 13:1-4

13:1. Luke begins by telling us about the leadership resources of the Antioch congregation. Five men are named, and two spiritual gifts come into focus—prophecy and teaching. We should not be surprised to see Barnabas named first, since he was apparently serving as “senior pastor” in the Antioch congregation.

We know nothing of Simon Niger except that his first name was Jewish and his other name Latin rather than Greek. Since Niger means “dark-complexioned” (or black), some have speculated that he may have come from African descent. Some believe he may have been the Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23:26) who carried Jesus’ cross and whose sons Alexandria and Rufus were Christians in the church at Rome (Mark 15:21; cf. Rom. 16:13).

Much speculation surrounds Lucius of Cyrene, but the point is that we have no further information than what appears here. Luke tells us that Manaen had been brought up with Herod and uses the word *syntrophos* (indicating a foster brother or intimate friend) referring to Herod Antipas. Saul we know as a regenerated persecutor, now the chief teacher of the Antioch church.

Today we would call these men “missionary candidates.” Is there a distinction in this group between prophets and teachers? Some suggest that the Greek text allows for this, but the more simple reading of the verse seems to indicate in general that all five possessed and used these gifts. It is not impossible, and perhaps even probable, that they all had the opportunity to at least see and hear Jesus in his earthly ministry. Perhaps none of them were believers until after the resurrection, but the Son of God, whose message they would now proclaim, would have been known to them as eyewitnesses.

13:2. Pronouns are crucial throughout these early verses of our chapter. Does the word they refer to the five candidates or to the entire congregation? There is no way to fix that conclusion grammatically, but we certainly understand the Holy Spirit speaks to the entire congregation when he calls for two of the five candidates to be selected for the mission. The word called, transliterated *proskaleo*, clearly indicates a divine call.

Notice the climate in the congregation—worship and fasting. Not frantic activity with programs burning out everybody in the congregation. In an attitude of worship and fasting they understood the Spirit to select missionaries for God’s work. An interesting little word, so common in the Greek language and in English as well, yet in this case designating the missionary effort as a whole. It appears in the same context again in 14:26 at the conclusion of this first journey.

During this process of selection no one in the Antioch church, including the candidates, knew what lay ahead. We read these verses in the light of the entire chapter, and we know exactly where God’s will intends to take them. They offered themselves to the Lord for

whatever he wished and wherever he wished to send them. This verse strongly emphasizes call at two points—the Holy Spirit sets the candidates apart and announces that God has called them for a special work.

13:3. The congregation continued fasting. Here Luke introduces praying (though surely they had been doing this all along). They commissioned the chosen two with the laying on of hands and sent them off, an interesting word (*apelysan*) which means “to release them from their duties” at Antioch. What a joyous passage. Willing workers released by a worshiping congregation through a wise procedure. No apostles were present—the sending of the first missionaries was a people project.

In verse 3 we have less problem with the antecedent of they. Clearly by now Luke is talking about the entire congregation (a strong likelihood throughout both verses 2 and 3), for the candidates would hardly lay hands on themselves. This missionary commissioning service demonstrates a planned and orderly congregational project and shows that, to a large extent, early missions was a lay movement. Luke makes it plain throughout the rest of Acts that Barnabas and Saul always felt themselves under the authority of the congregation at Antioch which had commissioned (not ordained) them for this specific missionary project.

One can hardly overemphasize the significance of lay leaders, congregational involvement, and ministry teams throughout Acts. The church is not, and never has been, buildings, programs, and property. God’s church consists of people, and the emphasis always falls on them in Luke’s record.

13:4. Seleucia lies north and a bit west of Antioch, a sixteen-mile journey on foot. There the new missionaries boarded a boat and sailed for Cyprus, Barnabas’ home island. Though Luke does not tell us, we can safely assume that the Antioch congregation continued to pray for the missionaries and to thank God for selecting them, even though they had lost the two most prominent members of their pastoral staff.

As we leave the Antioch church along with Barnabas and Saul, let’s take a quick glance ahead 350 years. After the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70, Antioch became the world center of Christianity. By a.d. 400, one hundred thousand Christians lived in that city.

We may also assume that the church provided whatever they needed to at least begin this project. Cyprus was not untouched with the gospel (11:19), and Barnabas certainly had appropriate connection there to get the ministry started. The island was a senatorial, not an imperial, province since it remained under the leadership of a proconsul (v. 7) rather than a governor like Pilate.

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