***We Are All “Set Apart”***

**Summer 2022, Acts 13:1-5 June 19, 20212**

***While 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.”  
So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*Acts 13:2-3**

**The Great Commission to Pentecost to breakout: What we’ve learned so far in Acts**

*7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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.”*

Acts 1:8

*37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

*38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

*40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

Acts 2:37-41

19 *Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

Acts 11:19-21

1. Read Acts watching for what the Holy Spirit is doing

2. Read Acts with geography in mind – the story is getting closer and closer to us!

3. Read Acts watching how God works in the lives of the key personalities: Peter, Barnabas, Saul

**The mission movement begins**

*In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While 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.” 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

*4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. 5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.*

Acts 13:1-5

1. Start where God has led you (remember Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 11:19-21)

2. Worship, fasting and prayer (see Acts 2:42-47) are practices of a church ready for mission

3. Equipping churches have multiple “prophets and teachers” (and diversity helps!)

4. Effective churches reach out first to where and who you know

**Three important thoughts for Anacortes**

1) For mission, the church starts locally (and is supported universally)

*25 When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*

Acts 12:25 (see Keller’s fifth “practice” of missional churches)

2) Listening corporately to God is so important

*28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . .*

Acts 15:28

3) “Set apart” means God has a plan and we have a job (even when “letting them go” is hard)

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God . . . .*

Romans 1:1

**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon has fewer sermons on Acts available than I would hope at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r\_ac.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r_ac.htm) *.* His “Gospel Missions” sermon is at [*http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols1-3/chs76.pdf*](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols1-3/chs76.pdf)

Tim Keller has said much on the topic of mission. See “5 Practices” at [*https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/*](https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/)and [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gospel-culture-and-mission-an-interview-with-tim-keller/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/gospel-culture-and-mission-an-interview-with-tim-keller/)

I really appreciate J.C. Ryle’s essay on conversion in Acts: *https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*[*https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*](https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle)

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )  
His Acts series is at [*https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts*](https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts)His sermons on this text are at   
<https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13> and   
<https://bible.org/seriespage/17-first-gentile-church-acts-1119-1225>

John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984). For this passage, I also like Kistemaker’s commentary (Baker Book House, 1990).

Harry Boer, *That My House May Be Filled* (Eerdmans, 1957)



# 5 Practices of a Missional Church

### Tim Keller at [*https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/*](https://brave.is/5-practices-of-a-missional-church-tim-keller/)

In the West, for nearly a thousand years, the relationship of European Christian churches to the broader culture was a relationship known as Christendom. The institutions of society “Christianized” people and stigmatized non-Christian belief and behavior.

British missionary, Lesslie Newbigin, went to India [in 1936]. When he returned to England, some thirty years later, he discovered that the Western church now found itself in a non-Christian society, but it had not adapted to its new situation. While most traditional evangelical churches can win the temperamentally conventional and conservative to Christ, American author Michael Wolff notes that this market is shrinking. If evangelical churches settle the decline in numbers, with the remaining Christian body not becoming missional, they will decline and die. This has instituted an even greater need for “missional” churches, which adopt the following practices:

**1. Speak in the vernacular**

In Christendom, technical biblical terms are well known inside and outside of the church. In a missional church, however, these terms must be explained.

The missional church:

* avoids “tribal” language, stylized prayer language, and evangelical jargon that seeks to set a spiritual tone.
* avoids “we-they” language, disdainful jokes that mock people of different politics and beliefs
* avoids sentimental, pompous, “inspirational” talk
* avoids talking as if non-believers were not present

**2. Enter and retell the culture’s stories with the Gospel**

In Christendom, it is possible to simply exhort Christianized people to do what they know they should. There is little or no real engagement, listening, or persuasion. Often, along with exhortation, there is a heavy reliance on guilt to motivate behavior change.

In a missional church, preaching and communication always assume skeptics are present and consequently engages their stories. To enter the culture’s stories mean showing sympathy towards and deeply acquainting with literature, music, theatre, and other arts expressing the existing hopes, dreams, heroic narratives and fears. To retell the culture’s stories is to show how only in Christ can we have freedom without slavery and embrace-of-the-other without injustice.

**3. Theologically train laypeople for public life and vocation**

In a missional church, laypeople need theological education to “think Christianly” about everything and work with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know three things: (a) which cultural practices manifest common grace and are to be embraced, (b) which practices are antithetical to the Gospel and must be rejected, and (c) which practices can be adapted/revised.

Christians will have to use the Gospel to demonstrate true, biblical love and tolerance in the public square towards those with whom we deeply differ. This tolerance should equal or exceed that which groups with opposing views show towards Christians. The charge of intolerance is perhaps the main “defeater” of the Gospel in the non-Christian West.

**4. Create Christian community that is countercultural and counterintuitive**

In Christendom, “fellowship” is basically just a set of nurturing relationships, support, and accountability.

In a missional church, however, Christian community must go beyond that to embody a counterculture, showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money, and power.

* *In sex*. We avoid both the secular society’s idolization of sex and traditional society’s fear of sex. We also exhibit love rather than hostility or fear toward those whose sexual life-patterns are different from ours.
* *In money*. We promote a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the immigrant, and the economically and physically weak.
* *In power*. We are committed to power sharing and relationship building among races and classes that are alienated outside of the body of Christ. A missional church must be deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice and deeply and practically committed to evangelism and conversion.

**5. Practice Christian unity as much as possible on the local level**

It is very important that we do not spend time bashing and criticizing other kinds of churches. That criticism simply plays into the common “defeater” that Christians are all intolerant. While we align ourselves in denominations that share many of our distinctives, at the local level we should cooperate with, reach out to, and support the other congregations and churches in our area. This will raise many thorny issues, of course, but our bias should be in the direction of cooperation.

# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

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**GOSPEL MISSIONS, NO. 76**

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, APRIL 27, 1856**

***BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON***

**AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK**

**ON BEHALF OF THE BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY**

***“And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.”***

***Acts 13:49***

I SHALL not confine myself to the text. It being an old custom to take texts when we preach, I have

taken one, but I shall address you, at large, upon a subject which I am sure will occupy your attention,

and has done for many days and years past—the subject of Gospel missions. We feel persuaded that all

of you are of one mind in this matter, that it is the absolute duty as well as the eminent privilege of the

church to proclaim the Gospel to the world. We do not conceive that God will do His own work without

instruments, but that, as He has always employed means in the work of the regeneration of this world,

He will still continue to do the same, and that it becomes the church to do its utmost to spread the truth

wherever it can reach the ear of man.

We have not two opinions on that point. Some churches may have, but we have not. Our doctrines,

although they are supposed to lead to apathy and sloth, have always proved themselves to be eminently

practical. The fathers of the missions were all zealous lovers of the doctrines of the grace of God, and

we believe, the great supporters of missionary enterprise, if it is to be successful, must always come

from those who hold God’s truth firmly and boldly, and yet have fire and zeal with it, and desire to

spread it everywhere.

But there is a point on which we have great division of opinion and that is as to the reason why we

have had so little success in our missionary labors. There may be some who say the success has been

proportionate to the agency and that we could not have been more successful. I am far from being of

their opinion and I do not think they themselves would express it on their knees before Almighty God.

We have not been successful to the extent we might have expected, certainly not to an apostolic

extent, certainly with nothing like the success of Paul or Peter, or even of those eminent men who have

preceded us in modern times, and who were able to evangelize whole countries, turning thousands to

God.

Now, what is the reason for this? Perhaps we may turn our eyes on high and think we find that

reason in the sovereignty of God, which has withholden His Spirit and has not poured out His grace as

aforetime. I shall be prepared to grant all men may say on that point, for I believe in the ordination of

everything by Almighty God. I believe in a present God in our defeats as well as in our successes—a

God as well in the motionless air as in the careering tempest, a God of ebbs as well as a God of floods.

But still we must look at home for the cause.

When Zion travails, she brings forth children. When Zion is in earnest, God is in earnest about His

work. When Zion is prayerful, God blesses her. We must not, therefore, arbitrarily look for the cause of

our failure in the will of God, but we must also see what is the difference between ourselves and the men

of apostolic times, and what it is that renders our success so trifling in comparison with the tremendous

results of apostolic preaching. I think I shall be able to show one or two reasons why our holy faith is not

so prosperous as it was then.

In the first place, *we have not apostolic men*. In the second place, *they do not set about their work in*

*an apostolic style*. In the third place, *we have not apostolic churches to back them up*. And in the fourth

place, *we have not the apostolic influence of the Holy Ghost* in the measure which they had it in ancient

times.

**I.** First, WE HAVE FEW APOSTOLIC MEN IN THESE TIMES.

I will not say we have none. Here and there we may have one or two, but unhappily their names are

never heard. They do not start out before the world and are not noted as preachers of God’s truth. We

had a Williams once, a true apostle, who went from island to island, not counting his life dear unto him.

But Williams is called to his reward.

We had a Knibb, who, toiled for his Master with seraphic earnestness and was not ashamed to call an

oppressed slave his brother. But Knibb, too, has entered into his rest. We have one or two still

remaining, precious and treasured names. We love them fervently and our prayers shall always rise to

heaven on their behalf. We always say, in our prayers, “God bless such men as Moffat! God bless those

who are earnestly toiling and successfully laboring.”

But cast your eyes around and where can we find many such men? They are all good men. We find

no fault with them. They are better than we. We ourselves shrink into nothingness compared with them.

But we must still say of them that they are less than their fathers. They differ from the mighty apostles in

many respects, which we think even they would not be slow to own.

I am not speaking of missionaries only, but of ministers too, for I take it we have as much to mourn

over in regard to the spread of the Gospel in England as in foreign lands, and much to regret the lack of

men filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

In the first place, we have not men with *apostolic zeal*. Converted in a most singular way, by a direct

interposition from heaven, Paul, from that time forward, became an earnest man. He had always been

earnest, in his sin and in his persecutions. But after he heard that voice from heaven, “Saul, Saul, why

persecutest thou me?” and had received the mighty office of an apostle, and had been sent forth a chosen

vessel to the Gentiles, you can scarcely conceive the deep, the awful earnestness which he manifested.

Whether he ate, or drank, or whatsoever he did, he did all for the glory of his God. He never wasted

an hour. He was employing his time either in ministering with his own hands unto his necessities, or else

lifting those hands in the synagogue, on Mars-Hill, or anywhere where he could command the attention

of the multitude.

His zeal was so earnest and so burning that he could not (as we unfortunately do) restrain himself

within a little sphere, but he preached the Word everywhere. It was not enough for him to have it handed

down that he was the apostle of Pisidia, but he must go also to Pamphylia. It was not enough that he

should be the great preacher of Pamphylia and Pisidia, but he must also go to Attalia. And when he had

preached throughout all Asia, he must needs take a ship to Greece and preach there also.

I believe not once only did Paul hear in his dream the men of Macedonia saying, “Come over and

help us,” but every day and hour he heard the cry in his ears from multitudes of souls, “Paul, Paul, come

over and help us.” He could not restrain himself from preaching. “Woe is unto me” he said, “if I preach

not the Gospel. God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ.”

Oh! if you could have seen Paul preach, you would not have gone away as you do from some of us,

with half a conviction that we do not mean what we say. His eyes preached a sermon without his lips,

and his lips preached it, not in a cold and frigid manner, but every word fell with an overwhelming

power upon the hearts of his hearers.

He preached with power, because he was in downright earnest. You had a conviction, when you saw

him, that he was a man who felt he had a work to do and must do it, and could not contain himself

unless he did do it. He was the kind of preacher whom you would expect to see walk down the pulpit

stairs straight into his coffin, and then stand before his God, ready for his last account.

Where are the men like that man? I confess I cannot claim that privilege and I seldom hear a solitary

sermon which comes up to the mark in earnest, deep, passionate longing for the souls of men.

We have no eyes now like the eyes of the Savior, which could weep over Jerusalem. We have few

voices like that earnest impassioned voice which seemed perpetually to cry, “Come unto me, and I will

give you rest.” “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her

chickens under her wings, but you would not.”

If ministers of the Gospel were more hearty in their work of preaching, if, instead of giving lectures

and devoting a large part of their time to literary and political pursuits, they would preach the Word of

God, and preach it as if they were pleading for their own lives, ah! then, my brethren, we might expect

great success. But we cannot expect it while we go about our work in a half-hearted way, and have not

that zeal, that earnestness, that deep purpose which characterized those men of old.

Then again, I take it we have not men in our days who can preach like Paul—*as to their faith*. What

did Paul do? He went to Philippi—did he know a soul there? Not one. He had his Master’s truth and he

believed in the power of it. He was unattended and devoid of pomp, or show, or parade. He did not go to

a pulpit with a soft cushion in it to address a respectable congregation, but he walked through the streets

and began to preach to the people. He went to Corinth, to Athens, alone, single-handed, to tell the people

the Gospel of the blessed God. Why? Because he had faith in the Gospel and believed it would save

souls and hurl down idols from their thrones. He had no doubt about the power of the Gospel.

But nowadays, my brethren, we have not faith in the Gospel we preach. How many there are who

preach a Gospel, which they are afraid will not save souls, and therefore, they add little bits of their own

to it in order, as they think, to win men to Christ! We have known men who believed Calvinistic

doctrines, but who preached Calvinism in the morning and Arminianism in the evening, because they

were afraid God’s Gospel would not convert sinners, so they would manufacture one of their own.

I hold that a man who does not believe God’s Gospel is able to save men’s souls, does not believe it

at all. If God’s truth will not save men’s souls, man’s lies cannot. If God’s truth will not turn men to

repentance, I am sure there is nothing in this world that can.

When we believe the Gospel to be powerful, then we shall see it is powerful. If I walk into this pulpit

and say, “I know what I preach is true,” the world says I am an egotist. “The young man is dogmatical.”

Ay, and the young man means to be. He glories in it, he keeps it to himself as one of his peculiar titles,

for he does most firmly believe what he preaches.

God forbid that I should ever come tottering up the pulpit stairs to teach anything I was not quite

sure of, something which I hoped might save sinners, but of which I was not exactly certain. When I

have faith in my doctrines, those doctrines will prevail, for confidence is the winner of the palm. He who

has courage enough to grasp the standard, and hold it up, will be sure enough to find followers.

He who says, “I know,” and asserts it boldly in his Master’s name, without disputing, will not be

long before he will find men who will listen to what he says and who will say, “This man speaks with

authority, and not as the Scribes and Pharisees.” That is one reason why we do not succeed—we have

not faith in the Gospel.

We send educated men to India in order to confound the learned Brahmins. Nonsense! Let the

Brahmins say what they like, have we any business to dispute with them? “Oh, but they are so

intellectual and so clever.” What have we to do with that? We are not to seek to be clever in order to

meet them.

Leave the men of the world to combat their metaphysical errors. We have merely to say, “This is

truth, he that believes it shall be saved and he that denies it shall be damned.” We have no right to come

down from the high ground of divine authoritative testimony, and until we maintain that ground, and

come out as we ought to do, girded with the belt of divinity—preaching not what *may* be true, but

asserting that which God has most certainly revealed—we shall not see success.

We want a deeper faith in our Gospel. We need to be quite sure of what we preach. Brethren, I take

it we have not the faith of our fathers. I feel myself a poor driveling thing in point of faith. Why,

methought sometimes I could believe anything. But now a little difficultly comes before me, I am timid

and I fear. It is when I preach with unbelief in my heart that I preach unsuccessfully.

But when I preach with faith and can say, “I know my God has said, that in the selfsame hour He

will give me what I shall preach, and careless of man’s esteem, I preach what I believe to be true,” then

it is that God rewards faith and crowns it with His own crown.

Again, we have not enough *self-*denial, and that is one reason why we do not prosper. Far be it from

me to say aught against the self-denial of those worthy brothers who have left their country to cross the

stormy deep and preach the Word. We hold them to be men who are to be had in honor. But still I ask,

where is the self-denial of the apostles nowadays?

I think one of the greatest disgraces that ever was cast upon the church in these days was that last

mission to Ireland. Men went over to Ireland, but like men who have valor’s better part, brave bold men,

they came back again, which is about all we can say of the matter. Why do they not go there again?

Why, they say the Irish “hooted” them. Now, don’t you think you see Paul taking a microscope out

of his pocket and looking at the little man who should say to him, “I shall not go there to preach because

the Irish hooted me”? “What!” he says, “is this a preacher?—what a small edition of a minister he must

be, to be sure!” “Oh! but they threw stones at us, you have no idea how badly they treated us!” Just tell

that to the apostle Paul. I am sure you would be ashamed to do so.

“Oh! but in some places the police interfered and said that we should only create a riot.” What would

Paul have said to that? *The police interfering*! I did not know that we had any right to care about

governments. Our business is to preach the Word, and if we must be put in the stocks, there let us lie.

There would come no hurt of it at last.

“Oh! but they might have killed some of us.” That is just it. Where is that zeal which counted not its

life dear so that it might win Christ? I believe that the killing of a few of our ministers would have

prospered Christianity. However we might mourn over it, and none more than myself, I say the murder

of a dozen of them would have been no greater ground for grief than the slaughter of our men by

hundreds in a successful fight for hearths and homes. I would count my own blood most profitably shed

in so holy a struggle.

How did the Gospel prosper aforetime? Were there not some who laid down their lives for it, and did

not others walk to victory over their slain bodies, and must it not be so now? If we are to start back

because we are afraid of being killed, heaven knows when the Gospel is to spread over the world—we

do not.

What have other missionaries done? Have they not braved death in its direst forms and preached the

Word amid countless dangers? My brethren, we say again, we find no fault, for we, ourselves, might err

in the same manner. But we are sure we are therein not like Paul. He went to a place where they stoned

him with stones and dragged him out as dead. Did he say, “Now for the future I will not go where they

will ill-treat me?” No, for he says, “Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was

I beaten with rods, thrice I suffered shipwreck.” I am sure we have not the self-denial of the apostles.

We are mere carpet-knights and Hyde-Park warriors.

When I go to my own house and think how comfortable and happy I am, I say to myself, “How little

I do for my Master! I am ashamed that I cannot deny myself for His truth and go everywhere preaching

His Word.” I look with pity upon people who say, “Do not preach so often. You will kill yourself.” O

my God! What would Paul have said to such a thing as that? “Take care of your constitution, you are

rash, you are enthusiastic.”

When I compare myself with one of those men of old, I say, “Oh that men should be found calling

themselves Christians, who seek to stop our work of faith and labor of love, for the sake of a little

consideration about the ‘constitution,’ which gets all the stronger for preaching God’s Word.”

But I hear someone whispering, “You ought to make a little allowance.” My dear friend, I make all

allowance. I am not finding fault with those brethren, they are a good sort of people. We are “all

honorable men.” But I will only say that in comparison with Paul, we are less than nothing and vanity,

little insignificant Lilliputian creatures, who can hardly be seen in comparison with those gigantic men

of old.

One of my hearers may perhaps hint that this is not the sole cause, and he observes, “I think you

ought to make excuse, for ministers now cannot work miracles.” Well, I have considered that too, and

certainly it is a drawback, but I take it not a very great one. For if it had been, God would not have

allowed it to exist. He gave that gift to the church in its infancy, but now it needs it no longer.

We make a mistake in attributing too much to miracles. What was one of them? Wherever the

apostles went, they could speak the language of the people. Well, in the time it would have taken Paul to

walk from here to Hindustan, we could learn Hindustani, and we go over in a very little time by the

means of travelling that are now provided, so that is no great gain there.

Then again, in order to make the Gospel known amongst the people, it was necessary that miracles

should be worked, so that everyone might talk about it. But now there is a printing press to aid us. What

I say today, within six months will be read across the Alleghenies. And so with other ministers, what

they say and what they do can soon be printed off and distributed everywhere. So they have facilities for

making ourselves known which are not much behind the power of miracles. Again, we have a great

advantage over the apostles.

Wherever they went, they were persecuted and sometimes put to death. But now, although

occasionally we hear of the massacre of a missionary, the occurrence is rare enough. The slaughter of an

Englishman anywhere would provoke a fleet of men-of-war to visit the offense with chastisement. The

world respects an Englishman wherever he goes. He has the stamp of the great Caesar upon him. He is

the true cosmopolite—the citizen of the world.

That could not be said of the poor despised Jews. There might be some respect paid to Paul, for he

was a Roman citizen, but there would be none paid to the rest. We cannot be put to death now without a

noise being made. The murder of two or three ministers in Ireland would provoke a tumult through the

country. The government would have to interpose, the orderly of the land would be up in arms, and then

we might preach with an armed constabulary around us, and so go through the land, provoking the

priests, startling anti-christ, and driving superstition to its dens forever.

**II.** In the second place, WE DO NOT GO ABOUT OUR WORK IN AN APOSTOLIC STYLE.

How is that? Why, in the first place, there is a general complaint that there is *not enough* preaching

by ministers and missionaries. They sit down interpreting, establishing schools, and doing this, that, and

the other. We have nothing to find fault with in this, but that is not the labor to which they should devote

themselves. Their office is preaching and if they preached more, they might hope for more success.

The missionary Chamberlain preached once at a certain place and years afterwards disciples were

found there from that one sermon. Williams preached wherever he went and God blessed him. Moffat

preached wherever he went and his labors were owned.

Now we have our churches, our printing presses, about which a great deal of money is spent. This is

doing good, but it is not doing *the good*. We are not using the means which God has ordained and we

cannot therefore expect to prosper. Some say there is too much preaching nowadays in England. Well, it

is the tendency of the times to decry preaching, but it is “the foolishness of preaching” which is to

change the world.

It is not for men to say, “If you preached less, you might study more.” Study is required well

enough, if you have a settled church, but the apostles needed no study. I apprehend, but they stood up

and delivered out the simple cardinal truths of religion, not taking one text, but going through the whole

catalog of truth. So I think, in itinerant evangelical labors, we are not bound to dwell on one subject, for

then we need to study, but we shall find it profitable to deal out the whole truth wherever we go. Thus

we should always find words to hand and truths ever ready to teach the people.

In the next place, I conceive that a great mistake has been made in not *affirming the divinity of our*

*mission*, and standing fast by the truth, as being a revelation not to be proved by men, but to be believed.

Always holding out this, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be

damned.”

I am often grieved when I read of our missionaries holding disputes with the Brahmins, and it is

sometimes said that the missionary has beaten the Brahmin because he kept his temper, and so the

Gospel had gained great honor by the dispute. I take it that the Gospel was lowered by the controversy.

I think the missionary should say, “I am come to tell you something which the One God of heaven

and earth has said, and I tell you before I announce it, that if you believe it you shall be saved and if not,

you shall be damned. I am come to tell you that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became flesh, to die for

poor unworthy man, that through His mediation, and death, and suffering, the people of God might be

delivered. Now, if you will listen to me, you shall hear the Word of God. If you do not, I shake the dust

off my feet against you and go somewhere else.”

Look at the history of every imposture. It shows us that the claim of authority insures a degree of

progress. How did Mohammed come to have so strong a religion in his time? He was all alone and he

went into the marketplace and said, “I have received a revelation from heaven.” It was a lie, but he

persuaded men to believe it. He said, “I have a revelation from heaven.” People looked at his face, they

saw that he looked upon them earnestly, as believing what he said, and some five or six of them joined

him.

Did he prove what he said? Not he. “You must,” he said, “believe what I say, or there is no paradise

for you.” There is a power in that kind of thing, and wherever he went his statement was believed, not

on the ground of reasoning, but on his authority, which he declared to be from Allah. And in a century

after he first proclaimed his imposture, a thousand sabres had flashed from a thousand sheaths, and his

word had been proclaimed through Africa, Turkey, Asia, and even in Spain. The man claimed

authority—he claimed divinity, therefore he had power.

Take again the increase of Mormonism. What has been its strength? Simply this—the assertion of

power from heaven. That claim is made and the people believe it, and now they have missionaries in

almost every country of the habitable globe, and the book of Mormon is translated into many languages.

Though there never could be a delusion more transparent, or a counterfeit less skillful, and more lying

upon the very surface, yet this simple pretension to power has been the means of carrying power with it.

Now, my brethren, *we have power*. We *are* God’s ministers. We preach *God’s* truth. The great Judge

of heaven and earth has told us the truth and what have we to do to dispute with worms of the dust? Why

should we tremble and fear them? Let us stand out and say, “We are the servants of the living God. We

tell you what God has told us, and we warn you, if you reject our testimony, it shall be better for Tyre

and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.” If the people cast that away, we have done our work.

We have nothing to do with making men believe. Ours is to testify of Christ everywhere, to preach and

to proclaim the Gospel to all men.

But there is one passage in the Bible which seems to militate against what I have said, if the common

translation be true—the passage which says that Paul “disputed in the school of one Tyrannus.” But this

is better rendered in English, he “dialoged in the school of one Tyrannus.” Albert Barnes says that

“disputed is not a happy translation,” for there is no such idea conveyed by the word.

Jesus, when He preached, “dialoged.” When the man came and said to Him, “Master, what shall I do

to inherit eternal life?” He “dialoged” with him. When another said unto Him, “Speak, Lord, unto my

brother, that he divide with me the inheritance,” Christ did not dispute with him, but He “dialoged.” His

usual style was to address the people, and but rarely to dispute with men.

We might give up all the books that have been written in defense of Christianity if we would but

preach Christ, if instead of defending the outposts, we were to say, “God will take care of them,” and

were at once to make a sortie on the enemy, then by God’s Holy Spirit we should carry everything

before us. O, church of God! believe yourself invincible and you are invincible. But stay to tremble and fear, and you are undone. Lift up your head and say, “I am God’s daughter, I am Christ’s bride.” Do not stop to prove it, but affirm it. March through the land, and kings and princes shall bow down before you,

because you have taken your ancient prowess and assumed your ancient glory.

I have one more remark to make here with regard to the style in which we go to work. I fear that we

have not enough of the divine method of *itinerancy*. Paul was a great itinerant, he preached in one place

and there were twelve converted there. He made a church at once. He did not stop till he had five

hundred. But when he had twelve, he went off to another place.

A holy woman takes him in, she has a son and daughter. They are saved and baptized—there is

another church. Then he goes on. Wherever he goes, the people believe and are baptized. Wherever he

meets a family who believe, he or his companion baptizes all the house, and goes about his way still

forming churches and appointing elders over them.

We, nowadays, go and settle in a place, make a station of it, and work around it by little and little,

and think that is the way to succeed. No, no! Ravage a continent. Attempt great things and great things

shall be done. But they say if you just pass over a place it will be forgotten like the summer shower,

which moistens all, but satisfies none.

Yes, but you do not know how many of God’s elect may be there. You have no business to stop in

one place, go straight on. God’s elect are everywhere. I protest if I could not itinerate this country of

England. I could not bear to preach. If I preached *here* always, many of you would become Gospel

hardened.

I love to go ranging here, there, and everywhere. *My* highest ambition is this, that I may be found

going through the entire land, as well as holding my headquarters in one position. I do hold that

itinerancy is God’s great plan. There should be fixed ministers and pastors, but those who are like

apostles should itinerate far more than they do.

**III.** But I have a third thing to say which will strike home to some of us, that is, that WE HAVE

NOT APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

Oh! had you seen an apostolic church, what a different thing it would appear to one of our churches!

As different, I had almost said, as light from darkness, as different as the shallow bed of the brook that is

dried by summer is from the mighty rolling river, ever full, ever deep and clear, and ever rushing into

the sea.

Now, where is our *prayerfulness* compared with theirs? I trust that we know something of the power

of prayer here, but I do not think we pray like they did. “They broke bread from house to house and did

eat their meat with singleness of heart, giving glory to God.” There was not a member of the church, as a

rule, who was half-hearted. They gave their souls wholly to God. And when Ananias and Sapphira

divided the price, they were struck with death for their sin.

Oh! if we prayed as deeply and as earnestly as they did, we should have as much success. Any

measure of success we may have had here has been entirely owing under God to your prayers. And

wherever I have gone, I have boasted that I have a praying people. Let other ministers have as prayerful

a people. Let missionaries have as many prayers from the church, and all things being equal, God will

bless them and there will be greater prosperity than ever.

We have not the apostolic mode of *liberality*. In the apostles’ days, they gave all their substance. It

was not *demanded* of them then and it is not now. No one thinks of asking such a thing, still we have run

to the other extreme and many give nothing at all. Men who have thousands and tens of thousands are so

eternally considerate of their families, albeit they *are* provided for, that they give nothing more than the

servant girl who sits next to them.

It is a common saying, that members of Christian churches do not give in proportion to their wealth.

We give because it is genteel and respectable. A great many of us give, I hope, because we love the

cause of God. But many of us say, “There is a poor bricklayer, working hard all the week and only

earning just enough to keep his wife and family, he will give a shilling.

Now I have so many pounds a week—I am a rich man—what shall I give? why I will give half-acrown.”

Another says, “I will give ten shillings this morning.” Now, if they measured their wealth in

comparison with his, they would see that he gives all he has left above his maintenance, while they give

comparatively nothing.

My brethren, we are not half-Christians, that is the reason why we have not half success. We are

Christianized, but I question whether we are thoroughly so. The Spirit of God has not entered into us to

give us that life, and fire, and soul, which they had in these ancient times.

**IV.** But lastly, as the result of the other things which have gone before, and perhaps partly as the

cause of them too, WE HAVE NOT THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THAT MEASURE WHICH ATTENDED

THE APOSTLES.

I see no reason whatever, why, this morning, if God willed it, I should not stand up and preach a

sermon which should be the means of converting every soul in the place. I see no reason why I should

not, tomorrow, preach a sermon which should be the means of the salvation of all who heard it, if God

the Spirit were poured out. The Word is able to convert, just as extensively as God the Spirit pleases to

apply it.

And I can see no reason why, if converts come in by ones and twos now, there should not be a time

when hundreds and thousands shall come to God. The same sermon which God blesses to ten if He

pleased He could bless to a hundred. I know not but that in the latter days, when Christ shall come and

shall begin to take the kingdom to Himself, every minister of God shall be as successful as Peter on the

day of Pentecost.

I am sure the Holy Spirit is able to make the Word successful, and the reason why we do not prosper

is that we have not the Holy Spirit attending us with might and energy as they had then. My brethren, if

we had the Holy Spirit upon our ministry, it would signify very little about our talent. Men might be

poor and uneducated, their words might be broken and ungrammatical, there might be no polished

periods of Hall, or glorious thunders of Chalmers, but if there were the might of the Spirit attending

them, the humblest evangelists would be more successful than the most pompous of divines, or the most

eloquent of preachers.

It is extraordinary *grace*, not talent, that wins the day, extraordinary spiritual power, not

extraordinary mental power. Mental power may fill a chapel, but spiritual power fills the church. Mental

power may gather a congregation, spiritual power will save souls. We want spiritual power.

Oh! we know some before whom we shrink into nothing as to talent, but who have no spiritual

power, and when they speak they have not the Holy Spirit with them. But we know others, simplehearted

worthy men who speak their country dialect, and who stand up to preach in their country place,

and the Spirit of God clothes every word with power. Hearts are broken, souls are saved, and sinners are

born again. Spirit of the living God! we want *You*. You are the life, the soul. You are the source of Your

people’s success. Without You they can do nothing. With You they can do everything.

Thus I have tried to show you what I conceive to be the causes of our partial non-success. And now

permit me, with all earnestness, to plead with you on behalf of Christ and Christ’s Holy Gospel, that you

would stir yourselves up to renewed efforts for the spread of His truth, and to more earnest prayers that

His kingdom may come and His will be done on earth even as it is in heaven.

Ah! my friends, could I show you the tens of thousands of spirits who are now walking in outer

darkness. Could I take you to the gloomy chamber of hell and show you myriads upon myriads of

heathen souls in unutterable torture, not having heard the Word, but being justly condemned for their

sins, methinks you could ask yourselves, “Did I do anything to save these unhappy myriads? They have

been damned and can I say I am clear of their blood?” Oh! God of mercy, if these skirts are clear of my

fellow creatures’ blood, I shall have eternal reason to bless You in heaven.

Oh! church of Christ! You have great reason to ask yourself whether you are quite clean in this

matter. You say too often, you sons of God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” You are too much like Cain.

You do not ask yourselves whether God will require your fellow creatures’ blood at your hands. Oh!

there is a truth which says, “If the watchman warns them not, they shall perish, but their blood will he

require at the watchman’s hands.”

Ah! there ought to be more of us who are preaching to the heathen and yet, perhaps, we are indolent

and doing little or nothing. There are many of you, yea all of you, who ought to be doing far more than

you are for evangelical purposes and the spread of Christ’s Gospel. Oh! put this question to your hearts,

“Shall I be able to say to the damned spirit if he meets me in hell, ‘Sinner, I did all I could for you’”? I

am afraid some will have to say, “No, I did not. It is true I might have done more. I might have labored

more, even though I might have been unsuccessful, but I did not do it.”

Ah! my dear friends, I believe there is great reason for some of us to suspect whether we believe our

religion at all. An infidel once met a Christian and said, “I know you do not believe your religion.”

“Why?” asked the Christian. “Because,” said the other, “for years you have passed me on my way to my

house of business. You believe, do you not, there is a hell into which men’s spirits are cast?” “Yes, I

do,” said the Christian. “And you believe that unless I believe in Christ, I must be sent there?” “Yes.”

“You do not, I am sure, because if you did you would be a most inhuman wretch to pass me, day by day,

and never tell me about it or warn me of it.” I do hold that there are some Christians who are verily

guilty in this matter. God will forgive them, the blood of Christ can even wash that out, but they are

guilty.

Did you ever think of the tremendous value of a single soul? My hearers, if there were but one man

in Siberia unsaved, and all the world were saved besides, if God should move our minds, it would be

worthwhile for all the people in England to go after that one soul. Did you ever think of the value of a

soul?

Ah! you have not heard the howls and yells of hell. You have not heard the mighty songs and

hosannas of the glorified. You have no notion of what eternity is or else you would know the value of a

soul. You who have been broken by conviction, humbled by the Spirit and led to cry for mercy through

the covenant Jesus, you know something of what a soul’s value is, but many of my hearers do not. Could

we preach carelessly, could we pray coldly, if we knew what a precious thing it is about which we are

concerned? No, surely we should be doubly in earnest that God would please to save sinners.

I am sure the present state of affairs cannot go on long, we are doing next to nothing. Christianity is

at a low ebb. People think it will never be much better, that it is clear impossible to do wonders in these

days. Are we in a worse condition than the Roman Catholic nations were when one man, a Luther,

preached? Then God can find a Luther now. We are not in a much worse state than when Whitefield

began to preach and yet God can find His Whitefields now.

It is a delusion to suppose that we cannot succeed as they did. God helping us we will. God helping

us by His Spirit, we will see greater things than this, at any rate, we will never let God’s church rest if

we do not see it prosper, but we will enter our earnest hearty protest against the coldness and the

lethargy of the times, and as long as this our tongue shall move in our mouth, we will protest against the

laxity and false doctrine so rampant throughout the churches, and then that happy double reformation—a

reformation in doctrine and Spirit, will be brought about together.

Then God knows but what we shall say, “Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their

windows,” and ere long the shout of Christ shall be heard. He, Himself, shall descend from heaven. And

we shall hear it said and sung, “Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaicwords. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.\_\_

# The First Missionaries (Acts 13:1-13)

 Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13*](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13)

1 Now there were these prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen (a close friend of Herod the tetrarch from childhood) and Saul. 2 While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off. 4 So Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

5 When they arrived in Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. (Now they also had John as their assistant.) 6 When they had crossed over the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. The proconsul summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But the magician Elymas (for that is the way his name is translated) opposed them, trying to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul (also known as Paul), filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at him 10 and said, “You who are full of all deceit and all wrongdoing, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness – will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? 11 Now look, the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind, unable to see the sun for a time!” Immediately mistiness and darkness came over him, and he went around seeking people to lead him by the hand. 12 Then when the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, because he was greatly astounded at the teaching about the Lord.

13 Then Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, but John left them and returned to Jerusalem ([Acts 13:1-13](javascript:%7b%7d)).[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P10_2578)

### Introduction

A number of years ago two friends and I were going to travel together to India, where we would minister together. One friend was black, the other was blind. We were all together at a church just before we left this country. A friend introduced us as, “the good, the bad, and the ugly.” My friend Willie’s wife immediately called out, “My Willie is good!” Before I could respond, my friend Craig called out, “I’d rather be ugly than bad!” Some might have thought we were a pretty motley crew, but in the light of our text, I think we were just the right blend of culture and experience.

For some parents, the conception of a child has come as a complete surprise. The birth of the church at Antioch came as a complete surprise to the church in Jerusalem.

19 Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews. 20 But there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene among them who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks too, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. 21 The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 A report about them came to the attention of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts ([Acts 11:19-23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

New though this church may have been, it was showing encouraging signs of growth and maturity. Already there were five gifted men, capable of teaching the saints. This group of gifted men made it possible for the church at Antioch to send out the first foreign missionaries to the Gentiles. And how appropriate, because the salvation of Gentiles at Antioch was the result of certain unnamed saints who fled from Jerusalem, but who did not restrict their witness to Jews. Now this church would become the launching pad for missionary outreach that would result in many (predominantly) Gentile churches. Our text describes the first missionary journey.

I have to confess that I experienced something of a letdown as I was preparing for this message. It didn’t take me long to realize that after the miraculous events of chapter 12, this next chapter in Acts seemed a bit more ordinary. Chapter 12 begins with Luke’s description of the miraculous deliverance of Peter from death at the hand of Herod, and it ends with the amazing account of the death of Herod. How can you top stories like this? I will share the resolution of my inner turmoil at the end of this lesson.

### Setting Apart Barnabas and Saul [Acts 13:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d)

1 Now there were these prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen (a close friend of Herod the tetrarch from childhood) and Saul. 2 While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off [released them]. 4 So Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus ([Acts 13:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Let us begin by noting the plurality of gifted teachers in the church at Antioch.* From the time of its birth, Barnabas and (shortly after) Saul were teaching the new believers. There were probably other leaders who had initially come to Antioch with the good news of the gospel. But now, not much later, we find that there are five gifted men who are capable of teaching and leading the church. Unlike some churches today, this church was not dependent upon one man. In the providence of God, there were enough gifted men in leadership to send two of them away without harm to the mother church.

Here is the ideal for any church. Leadership by a plurality of gifted and godly men is definitely the ideal, and it paves the way for real church growth, the kind of growth that results from sending out missionaries and planting new churches. Plurality of leadership and gift is one of the things I have always appreciated about our church. It does not depend on any one man, and it has the stability of a number of very gifted teachers. We have been privileged to send out a number of missionaries[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P21_7800) to various parts of the world.

*Let us also note the diversity of the leaders in the church.*It is impossible to know all that we would like about these five men, but it is generally accepted that these men reflect racial, cultural, and socio-economic diversity. Barnabas was a Hellenistic Jew; in fact, he was a Levite. He was born in Cyprus ([Acts 4:36](javascript:%7b%7d)). Barnabas was well-respected by the Hebraic Jewish apostles ([Acts 9:27; 11:22-24](javascript:%7b%7d)). Simeon, who was called Niger, seems to have been a Black believer:

Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon ( **called “ the black man”**), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul ([Acts 13:1](javascript:%7b%7d), New Living Translation, emphasis mine).

There was also Lucius of Cyrene. We should remember that it was men from Cyprus and Cyrene who first brought the gospel to Antioch ([Acts 11:20](javascript:%7b%7d)). Perhaps Lucius was one of these men. Manaen (the Greek form of a Hebrew name) was likely a Hellenistic Jew. But Luke wants us to know that he grew up with Herod Antipas, the one who killed John the Baptist and before whom our Lord stood trial. One would have to say that he was a part of the upper levels of society. And then there was Saul from Tarsus in Cilicia, who had been trained at the feet of Gamaliel ([Acts 22:3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

These five leaders in the church at Antioch represented a broad racial, cultural and socio-economic range. This diversity gave the church great strength. It was also the occasion for their unity to testify to the power and presence of our Lord in their midst. Having diversity among the leaders made it easy for the church at Antioch to have great diversity as well.

Many mega churches today grow because of their homogeneous makeup. “Birds of a feather flock together,” we say, and it tends to be true. But the church should reflect a broad range of diversity. It is our unity in the midst of diversity which demonstrates the power of the gospel (see [Ephesians 2:11-22](javascript:%7b%7d)). Diversity, not only in leadership but also in the congregation is something I greatly desire to see. I am grateful that God seems to be granting diversity to us as a church.

### Prophets and Teachers

Luke tells us that there were both prophets and teachers in the church (verse 1). The grammar of this verse may very well distinguish the first three men as prophets, from the last two men who are teachers.[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P29_10408) Prophets are listed first, teachers are referred to second (or last). Barnabas is listed first; Saul is listed last. One can hardly doubt that the order of reference is significant, especially since the order of naming Barnabas and Saul will reverse in our text.

We know from what we have already been told about Barnabas[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P31_11002) that he was highly regarded by the apostles. When news of the new church at Antioch reached the apostles, they sent Barnabas. Barnabas then sought out Saul and brought him to Antioch to help in the ministry. As I was reflecting on this text, the thought occurred to me that I could think of Saul as an apprentice to Barnabas. That is a very hard thing to imagine, but I believe it to be true to some degree.

We should not be surprised. Joshua was a helper to Moses, as Elisha was to Elijah. Timothy was a helper to Paul before he was sent out on his own.[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P33_11585) It was a number of years after Saul’s conversion that he became known as an apostle (indeed, the change occurs in our text). Can you even imagine Saul giving his first message and watching the saints whisper to one another, “I’d rather hear Barnabas any day.”?

My point is that Paul did not “start at the top.” He served where God led him, and in His own good time, God advanced him to greater responsibilities and authority. One of the things that gives me great joy is to watch the younger generation develop and mature in their ministry. This morning a young woman played for the offertory, and she did very well. In the years to come, she will do even better. Saul was still in his developing years when he went to Antioch to minister there. And develop he did! Thank God for a church that facilitated that development.

*While they were serving the Lord and fasting.* The term rendered **“serving”** is interesting. It is this Greek term that is used to depict the ministry performed by the Old Testament priests (see [Exodus 28:35, 43; 29:30](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [Hebrews 10:11](javascript:%7b%7d)). I think this is significant because here we see Gentile ministry that is described by the Old Testament term for priestly ministry. This reminds me of Peter’s words in 1 Peter:

4 So as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but chosen and priceless in God’s sight, 5 you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it says in scripture, “Look, I lay in Zion a stone, a chosen and priceless cornerstone, and whoever believes in him will never be put to shame.” 7 So you who believe see his value, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, 8 and a stumbling-stone and a rock to trip over. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light ([1 Peter 2:4-9](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

I am likewise fascinated by the way Luke has linked **“serving the Lord”** with **“fasting.”** It was **“while they were serving the Lord and fasting”** that the Holy Spirit spoke to the church to set these two men apart. Almost every commentator and preacher I have ever heard or read has dealt with fasting here as though it were somehow in competition with serving the Lord. One approach is to view **“serving the Lord”** as a synonym for prayer. Thus, they were praying and fasting. I find this explanation unsatisfactory. If Luke meant that they were praying and fasting, why didn’t he just say so, as he will do in [Acts 13:3](javascript:%7b%7d)? Another is to view **“serving the Lord and fasting”** as two separate activities – two things going on simultaneously.

We should probably begin with a brief definition of fasting:

Fasting is the setting aside of normal appetites or activities for the purpose of pursuing things of greater spiritual importance.

Thus, fasting is giving up something good and acceptable in order to pursue something even better. As I have observed elsewhere in relation to [Isaiah 58:13-14](javascript:%7b%7d),[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P41_14847) keeping the Sabbath is a form of fasting. One sets aside the pursuit of personal pleasure for taking delight in the Lord. In [1 Corinthians 7:5](javascript:%7b%7d), we find yet another unexpected form of fasting:

5 Do not deprive each other, except by mutual agreement for a specified time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then resume your relationship, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control ([1 Corinthians 7:5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The sexual fasting of a husband and wife is for the purpose of undistracted prayer, but it is to be for a limited time.

*Finally, there is the most common form of fasting – the foregoing of eating – almost always for the purpose of facilitating prayer*.[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P45_15627)

Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off ([Acts 13:3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When they had appointed elders for them in the various churches, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the protection of the Lord in whom they had believed ([Acts 14:23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

My point is that fasting is not done in isolation, but in conjunction with something else. It seems to be generally accepted that the fasting of the five men named (or of the entire church)[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P49_16191) was prompted by some sense of need or urgency. We are told that **“they”** felt some need for direction or divine guidance, and so they fasted. Some would say that **“serving”** was prayer.

It would seem that the nearest antecedent to **“they”** in verse 2 would be the five men who were just named. I would further take it that these five men were **“serving the Lord”** by exercising their gifts and functions in the church. I would suggest that it is at least possible that the fasting was that of the five men, and that it was related to their ministry. In other words, they devoted themselves to serving the Lord as they fasted. Fasting here, then, is related to service, rather than to prayer. Prayer was no doubt a part of their service because we recall that the apostles purposed to devote themselves to **“prayer and the ministry of the Word”** ([Acts 6:4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

My point for pressing this understanding of fasting here is that God spoke to these men while they were consumed in their ministry. Further, it seems likely that the Spirit of God spoke through one of the three men identified as prophets (verse 1). So what’s the difference? I think that Luke is telling us that God revealed His will for Barnabas and Saul while they (the other three) were fully engaged in ministry. I don’t think they were setting aside their ministry to fast, but they were fasting to facilitate their service. There is a time for waiting, but in my experience, this is necessary after God has revealed His will, and not before. For example, God revealed to Abram that he and Sarai would have a son ([Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-6](javascript:%7b%7d)). Abram and Sarai had to wait 25 years for that son, but they did not need to wait to know that they would have a son. In fact, Abram first had to obey God by leaving his homeland and going to Canaan before God revealed that a son was to be born.

Too many Christians seem to think that they should sit on the sidelines of life and wait for God to tell them what to do. God has told us most of what we are to do in His Word. When special guidance is required, He will supply that as well, but this usually comes while we are busily engaged in ministry. This was the case when Paul and his team had set out on the second missionary journey ([Acts 15:40](javascript:%7b%7d)—16:10). A few Christians may be working when they should be waiting, but many more seem to be waiting when they should be working.

Let me press my point further. The Spirit of God did not say as much as we might have expected:

While they were serving 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](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The Spirit did not specify where Barnabas and Saul were to go, nor did He indicate precisely what their ministry would be. It was simply **“the work to which I have called them.”** How, then, were they or the church to know what that ministry would be? This is not as difficult as it may seem. *First*, God told Paul about his future ministry when he was saved:

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, because this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” ([Acts 9:15-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Secondly*, the ministry to which God had called Barnabas and Saul is that which they had already been doing, together:

23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, 24 because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a significant number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught a significant number of people. Now it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians ([Acts 11:23-26](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The ministry to which they were called was a ministry they were already doing. They were simply led to do it in other places. Not only had they been doing this ministry, but they had obviously been doing it exceedingly well. That is obvious by the growth and maturity of the church, and by the leaders that were named.

*Third*, the guidance of the Holy Spirit came not to Barnabas or Saul alone, or even to the two of them. The Spirit’s guidance came to the church and through the leading men in the church. In a way, we could say that neither Barnabas nor Saul had a dominant hand in the process by which they were designated and sent forth. It was the Holy Spirit and the church that played the most dominant roles:

2 While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off. 4 So Barnabas and Saul, sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus ([Acts 13:2-4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

### Review and Application

Let me pause for a moment to review what we’ve seen and to reinforce what the Spirit of God is teaching us here about divine guidance.

*First, God’s guidance came to those who were actively engaged in ministry.*If we wish to know God’s will, let us begin by doing what He has commanded in His Word.

*Second, God’s guidance was revealed, in part, through the ministry in which they were already engaged.* The **“ministry to which He had called them”** was, in effect, “the ministry to which He had already called them.” They knew what they were to do in the future because they were already doing it, and doing it well.

*Third, God’s guidance extended the ministry of those who were doing their present ministry well.*Sometimes it would seem that some consider full-time Christian ministry because they are not doing well in their present service and are frustrated because of this. They seek to find success elsewhere because they feel they are failing at what they are doing. My sense is that God promotes those who are doing well at what He has already given them to do (see [Matthew 25:14-30](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 16:1-13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Fourth, God’s guidance was not merely individual, but it came about through the church.*Our culture is so competitive and individualistic that we think God speaks only to us. I’ve heard stories about preachers who were fired by the church board and who have responded, “God hasn’t revealed that to me.” (He will, when the paycheck stops.) Why do we think that God speaks and guides personally, apart from the wisdom and guidance of mature and godly church leaders? God’s guidance for Barnabas and Saul came to the church and through the church.

*Fifth, God’s guidance was only for the next step, not for the entire future.* God guides us on a “need to know” basis. He does not unfold the entire plan before us, for our approval; He reveals the next step for us. Our obedience to that next step will open the door to further guidance, as it is required. For example, the Spirit instructed the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul, but before the chapter is over it will be **“Paul and his companions”** ([Acts 13:1](javascript:%7b%7d)). God didn’t reveal this transition ahead of time, but only in time. We also know that Paul and Barnabas will split up into two missionary teams ([Acts 15:36-41](javascript:%7b%7d)). In addition, Paul and Silas and the others will need further specific guidance when they reach Mysia ([Acts 16:6-10](javascript:%7b%7d)). These things will be revealed in the proper time. For now, the church, along with Barnabas and Saul, knows all that is necessary for them to be obedient to the divine call.

After a season of fasting and prayer, the church sent off [10](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P70_23912)these two beloved leaders. The laying on of their hands conveys identification between the sending church and those being sent. Thus, when the first missionary journey is completed, they will return to the church with a full report and then remain on there for some time ([Acts 14:27-28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Having said this, it is important to take note of the fact that this laying on of hands did not imply the same kind of regular financial support we are familiar with today. In [1 Corinthians 9:1-23](javascript:%7b%7d), Paul says that he and Barnabas set aside their right to be supported by those to whom they ministered, so that the gospel might be more effectively proclaimed. There were all kinds of “religious missionaries” who sold their gospel at a price. Paul wanted none of this. The gospel was the message of free grace, and he wanted his preaching to be free as well.

Paul did accept support from others, but this was very rare, and only from the church at Philippi. We find reference to this giving in [Acts 18](javascript:%7b%7d) and [Philippians 4](javascript:%7b%7d):

1 After this Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to depart from Rome. Paul approached them, 3 and because he worked at the same trade, he stayed with them and worked with them (for they were tentmakers by trade). 4 He addressed both Jews and Greeks in the synagogue every Sabbath, attempting to persuade them. 5 Now when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul became wholly absorbed with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ ([Acts 18:1-5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

14 Nevertheless, you did well to share with me in my trouble. 15 And as you Philippians know, at the beginning of my gospel ministry, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in this matter of giving and receiving except you alone. 16 For even in Thessalonica on more than one occasion you sent something for my need ([Philippians 4:14-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Paul was what is sometimes called a “tentmaking” missionary. In his case, he literally made tents for a living ([Acts 18:3](javascript:%7b%7d)). He was determined not to be a burden on those to whom he ministered. Instead, Paul worked himself so that he could give to those in need:

33 “I have desired no one’s silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine provided for my needs and the needs of those who were with me. 35 By all these things, I have shown you that by working in this way we must help the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” ([Acts 20:33-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This is not to condemn those who are legitimately supported in their ministry, but only to suggest that there are other ways to be a missionary besides the classical models with which we are familiar. In fact, modern missions may be forced to return to the “tentmaker” model as more and more countries are closing their doors to traditional missionaries. While traditional missionaries may be rejected, those who come with highly valuable skills will be welcomed, in spite of their commitment to Jesus Christ.

The church “released” Barnabas and Saul, but it was the Spirit who **“sent them out”** ([Acts 13:4](javascript:%7b%7d)). Since Antioch was not a port city, these two traveled to Seleucia, a port about 16 miles to the west. There they boarded a ship and sailed for Cyprus. It was a logical choice for their first destination. Barnabas was born there, and it was on their way to other target cities. Since some of those who started the church in Antioch were from Cyprus, they may have had contacts there.[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P79_27815)

A Sample Ministry in Cyprus  
[Acts 13:5-12](javascript:%7b%7d)

5 When they arrived in Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. (Now they also had John as their assistant.) 6 When they had crossed over the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. The proconsul summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But the magician Elymas (for that is the way his name is translated) opposed them, trying to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul (also known as Paul), filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at him 10 and said, “You who are full of all deceit and all wrongdoing, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness – will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? 11 Now look, the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind, unable to see the sun for a time!” Immediately mistiness and darkness came over him, and he went around seeking people to lead him by the hand. 12 Then when the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, because he was greatly astounded at the teaching about the Lord ([Acts 13:5-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Salamas was an influential city on the eastern side of Cyprus. When they arrived there, Barnabas and Saul went to the Jewish synagogues where they began to proclaim the Word. There was good reason for doing this. In the first place, Paul (and Barnabas) were committed to the principle of preaching **“to the Jew first, and then to the Gentiles”** (see [Romans 1:16](javascript:%7b%7d)). Another practical reason is that this is where both Jews and Gentile God-fearers congregated. It is apparent that visitors like Barnabas and Saul were invited to share a message with those gathered (see [Acts 13:15](javascript:%7b%7d)), something Paul would never pass up.

It is right at this point that Luke chooses to inform his reader that John Mark accompanied Barnabas and Saul on this missionary journey ([Acts 13:5](javascript:%7b%7d)). We should recall that Mark was the cousin of Barnabas ([Colossians 4:10](javascript:%7b%7d)). This reference to Mark’s involvement in this missionary journey will pave the way for Luke’s comment in verse 13 that John Mark forsook them at Perga in Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem. Mark’s desertion here will be the occasion for a strong disagreement between Barnabas and Paul, and as a result, they will divide into two missionary teams ([Acts 15:36-41](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When Barnabas and Saul passed through the island of Cyprus and came to the city of Paphos, they encountered two very interesting men; one a Jew, the other a Gentile. The Jew was a false prophet named Elymas, or Bar-Jesus,[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P85_30587) the latter of which means **“the son of Jesus.”** Jesus was a common name at the time so we dare not read too much into this name. On the other hand, his familiar name seems like a most interesting coincidence.

Elymas is also identified as a magician or sorcerer (verse 6). I had to ask myself, “Just how could a Jew become a magician (or sorcerer)?” Then I remembered the story of the seven sons of Sceva in [Acts 19](javascript:%7b%7d):

13 But some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were possessed by evil spirits, saying, “I sternly warn you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.” 14 (Now seven sons of a man named Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were doing this.) 15 But the evil spirit replied to them, “I know about Jesus and I am acquainted with Paul, but who are you?” 16 Then the man who was possessed by the evil spirit jumped on them and beat them all into submission. He prevailed against them so that they fled from that house naked and wounded. 17 This became known to all who lived in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks; fear came over them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised. 18 Many of those who had believed came forward, confessing and making their deeds known. 19 Large numbers of those who had practiced magic collected their books and burned them up in the presence of everyone. When the value of the books was added up, it was found to total fifty thousand silver coins ([Acts 19:13-19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

These seven sons of Sceva were Jewish. Their father was a high priest! They attempted to exorcise demons from people by naming the **“Jesus whom Paul preaches”** ([Acts 19:13](javascript:%7b%7d)). The demons knew Jesus all too well, and Paul also, but they did not know these Jewish exorcists. And thus these seven sons were overpowered and badly beaten by the demons.

There are three things about this incident that interest me most. *First*, these seven men were Jews. They seem to be only an example of what a larger group of Jewish exorcists are doing. *Second*, it would appear that they were seeking to earn a living (or more) by casting out demons in the name and power of someone they did not know. *Third*, the saints in Ephesus who heard of this were deeply impressed. A very large group responded by forsaking the practice of magic and burning their books on the subject ([Acts 19:18-19](javascript:%7b%7d)). They understood that what these sons of Sceva were doing was practicing magic.

I think I can understand why some Jews were attracted (addicted?) to magic. Their religion had become a legalistic system of works: “If I do this, this, and this, God will do that.” That, my friend, is magic. Magic is man’s attempt to manipulate God to produce a desired outcome. Unfortunately, Christians are subject to the same malady: “If I pray this prayer (for example, ‘the prayer of Jabez’), then I can be assured of success or prosperity.” Or, “If I will send a gift of $10 to this ministry, God will reward me ten fold.”

Elymas had some kind of relationship with Sergius Paulus, the Gentile proconsul[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P92_33659) in Salamas. Sergius Paulus seems to have been influenced by Elymas, and he seemed to stick close to this political official. I am inclined to think that this Gentile official believed that true religion must be Jewish. Think of being able to worship and serve just one God, rather than a whole pantheon of gods. But then Barnabas and Saul arrived in town, and the proconsul summoned Barnabas and Saul, so that he could hear the Word of God from them. Elymas strongly opposed this meeting. Luke is very clear that Elymas intended to keep Sergius Paulus from the faith ([Acts 13:8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Suddenly and unexpectedly, Paul rises to the occasion. Notice the change of name that takes place in [Acts 13:9](javascript:%7b%7d). Also note Luke’s indication that Paul was **“filled with the Holy Spirit”** (verse 9). Paul is not acting on his own initiative; he is being prompted by the Holy Spirit. Paul seems to be able to look into the very soul of this man and to size him up spiritually – and it isn’t a pretty picture. Paul has some very strong words of indictment against Elymas. Notice the accusations. Elymas is …

… a man who is **“full of deceit and wrongdoing”**

… a **“son of the devil”**

… the **“enemy of all righteousness”**

… **“making crooked the straight paths of the Lord”**

How strange it must have felt for Paul to cast a temporary spell of blindness upon Elymas. We cannot help but think of Saul’s three-day blindness. Paul’s blindness seemed to be a merciful thing, giving him time to reflect on his opposition to the gospel, and to consider repentance. Perhaps God was being merciful to Elymas as well.

Here is the irony – the man who sought to keep the proconsul from the faith actually becomes an instrument by which God brings the proconsul to faith:

Then when the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, because he was greatly astounded at the teaching about the Lord ([Acts 13:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I am not surprised to read that some actually question the genuineness of the proconsul’s faith. I am both surprised and disappointed that any conservative evangelical scholar would give such a suggestion a moment’s thought. Think about it for a minute. Luke has given Elymas more attention than the proconsul. He has indicated to the reader that Elymas sought to keep the proconsul from the faith. Paul strongly rebukes Elymas and then casts a spell of blindness on him. The proconsul is amazed and is said to come to faith. Are we, for even a moment, to suppose that Elymas succeeded, but the gospel did not? Surely the proconsul came to faith, in spite of Elymas’ best efforts to prevent it, and through the opposition of Elymas.

A Change in Leadership  
[Acts 13:13](javascript:%7b%7d)

Then Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia, but John left them and returned to Jerusalem ([Acts 13:13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The first thing we observe from this verse is that Paul is now perceived as the leader of this missionary team. It is my opinion that Barnabas saw this as well and, like John the Baptist ([John 3:30](javascript:%7b%7d)) and even our Lord ([Philippians 2:3-8](javascript:%7b%7d)), did not grasp for the preeminence once possessed.

The second function of this verse is to report to the reader that John Mark went AWOL (absent without leave). When they reached Perga in Pamphylia, John Mark left Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem. We are not told why Mark did this, but it is clear that Paul saw this departure as abandoning his post. In [Acts 15:36-41](javascript:%7b%7d), Paul and Barnabas will disagree so strongly about whether or not to give John Mark a second chance on the second missionary journey that they will part ways (thus forming two missionary teams).

It does appear that the gospel is not preached in Perga at this time, but that Paul and Barnabas merely pass by (or pass through) Perga without proclaiming the gospel. It is only on their return trip that the gospel is preached in Perga:

And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia ([Acts 14:25](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The ministry at Cyprus has ended, and the ministry in Asia Minor begins.

### Conclusion

The sending out of Barnabas and Saul is the beginning of a new era in the carrying out of the Great Commission. Now the gospel is headed for the **“farthest parts of the earth”** ([Acts 1:8](javascript:%7b%7d)). Missionaries are not providentially thrust out by a wave of persecution ([Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d)); two missionaries are sent out by the Holy Spirit through the church at Antioch. Here is “missions” as we have yet to see it in the gospels or Acts. From this point on, we see very little of Peter or the other apostles in Jerusalem.[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P111_38851) Paul is the dominant personality throughout the remainder of the Book of Acts. The gospel is now on its way to Rome.

The sending forth of Paul and Barnabas (as we now have it) is instructive to the church today regarding the sending out of missionaries. I have suggested some possible areas of application above. This text also instructs us regarding how we may know the will of God. It is not exhaustive, but it is suggestive.

Of all the events that took place on the island of Cyprus, why does Luke choose this one incident in Salamas (concerning Elymas and Sergius) to report to his readers? I believe there are at least two reasons why Luke included this story. *First,*I believe that Paul’s confrontation of Elymas was a dramatic turning point in Paul’s ministry. It was at Paphos that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit and took the lead in rebuking Elymas. And that is why the very next verse (13) begins, **“Then Paul and his companions … .”** From here on out, it will be Paul who will be named first.[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P114_39915) We can therefore see that God has sovereignly elevated Paul from that of being an assistant to Barnabas to becoming the dominant leader.

*Secondly*, I believe Luke uses Elymas as a prototype of the Jewish opposition that is to come. Luke makes a point of telling us that Elymas is a Jew. He is a Jew who strongly opposes Sergius Paulus hearing and embracing the gospel. In this case, the reasons for the behavior of Elymas may be self-serving. He seems to have had significant influence with the Gentile proconsul, and this would have been lost if Sergius Paulus embraced the gospel. But whatever the reason, Elymas, a Jew, resisted the conversion of Sergius Paulus, a Gentile. But his resistance was not effective. Because of the judicial blinding of Elymas, Sergius Paulus comes to faith. So, too, the resistance of the Jews to Paul’s preaching of the gospel does not succeed. Indeed, Jewish resistance opens the door to the preaching of the gospel (see [Romans 11:25-32](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Let’s come back to the matter of the “letdown” I experienced when I left the dramatic events of chapter 12 behind and moved to our text. Chapter 12 did have some rather spectacular events – the dramatic deliverance of Peter from prison and from the jaws of death; and, the death of Herod. It reminds us of the story of Mordecai and Haman in the Book of Esther. Haman plots to execute Mordecai, but Mordecai is exalted, and Haman is hung on his own gallows.

Our text in [Acts 13](javascript:%7b%7d) does have a bit of drama – Paul casts a spell of blindness on Elymas, the Jewish magician who opposes the gospel. But it is not as spectacular as the events of chapter 12. Rather than comparing these two chapters in terms of their spectacularity, let us consider them in the light of their long-term results. Peter was dramatically spared, but he and his ministry definitely fade from this point on in the Book of Acts. Herod died, and he was not successful in dealing with Christianity as an illegal sect. This did have long-term effects, but they don’t appear to be dramatic at this point.

Now let us consider the sending forth of Barnabas and Saul in chapter 13. The Holy Spirit was instrumental in this new venture, but Luke is deliberate in his avoidance of the spectacular aspects of His role in thrusting forth a new missionary movement. And yet the results are spectacular. The gospel now goes deliberately and purposefully to the Gentiles. Many Gentiles come to faith and numerous churches are planted. The gospel goes from Antioch to Rome. This is spectacular, or if we wish to avoid that word, the events of our text are significant. Beyond this, a man who once traveled to various foreign countries to oppose the gospel is now traveling from country to country preaching that same gospel he once opposed.

Here is a lesson to be learned: We dare not gauge the significance of a life or of a ministry by its spectacularity. I am reminded of the story of Elijah in [1 Kings 17-19](javascript:%7b%7d). Elijah has a dramatic confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in chapter 18. They seek to gain the attention of their “god” but nothing happens. Elijah prays, and fire dramatically descends from heaven, consuming not only the sacrifice and the wood, but the rocks and water in the surrounding trench. Elijah then prays, and rain will soon follow – after 3 ½ years of drought (see also [James 5:17-18](javascript:%7b%7d)). And yet when Jezebel threatens Elijah, he flees. He leaves his servant behind and goes into the wilderness to die. God then meets with Elijah on Mount Horeb. He does not speak through the strong wind, the earthquake, or the fire; instead He speaks through a still, small, voice.

The lesson is quite obvious: Don’t always look for God in the spectacular. God was going to accomplish His work, but it would be through others than Elijah. It would be through Elisha, Hazael, and Jehu. Hazael and Jehu were hardly pious men. We should not gauge the significance of what God is doing by the “spectacularity” of the events.

By the way, this principle also applies to spiritual gifts. Some people in Corinth tended to equate spirituality and significance in terms of the practice of certain spectacular gifts. The apostle Paul made it clear that the more important gifts may not be the spectacular ones:

18 But as a matter of fact, God has placed each of the members in the body just as he decided. 19 If they were all the same member, where would the body be? 20 So now there are many members, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” nor in turn can the head say to the foot, “I do not need you.” 22 On the contrary, those members that seem to be weaker are essential, 23 and those members we consider less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our unpresentable members are clothed with dignity, 24 but our presentable members do not need this. Instead, God has blended together the body, giving greater honor to the lesser member, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but the members may have mutual concern for one another ([1 Corinthians 12:18-25](javascript:%7b%7d)).

If I understand Paul correctly, he is saying that the least important gifts have the compensation of having more pizzazz than the more important gifts. Think about this in terms of the body. The most important organs in my body are those which are not visible – organs like my heart, liver, and kidneys. I can live with my arms or legs cut off. I can live with my eyes put out. I can live without my hearing. But I cannot live without my heart, liver, or kidneys. Let us beware of pursuing the spectacular on the false premise that significance and success are measured in terms of the dramatic.

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[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P21_7801) I use the term “missionaries” broadly because some have gone out as tentmakers, earning a living by some skill and then using their employment and location as an opportunity to proclaim and promote the gospel.

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P29_10409) The great Greek scholar, Dr. A. T. Robertson (now deceased), wrote: “The double use of *te* here makes three prophets (Barnabas, Symeon, Lucius) and two teachers (Manaen and Saul).” A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (electronic version in BibleWorks 6).

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P31_11003) See [Acts 4:36-37; 11:19-30](javascript:%7b%7d).

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P33_11586) See, for example, [1 Timothy 1:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d).

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/18-first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P41_14848) See “A Christmas Message in an Unexpected Text,” [/article/christmas-message-unexpected-text-fasting-and-incarnation-isaiah-58-61-matthew-2-philippians](https://bible.org/article/christmas-message-unexpected-text-fasting-and-incarnation-isaiah-58-61-matthew-2-philippians) .

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P45_15628) See [2 Samuel 12:16](javascript:%7b%7d); [Ezra 8:23](javascript:%7b%7d); [Nehemiah 1:4](javascript:%7b%7d); [Daniel 9:3](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 2:37; 5:33](javascript:%7b%7d); [Acts 13:3; 14:23](javascript:%7b%7d).

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P49_16192) The **“they”** in verse 2 is not clarified, so that it could refer either to the five leaders named or to the entire church.

[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P70_23913) The term rendered “sent off” could just as easily be translated “released.” I think that this may better express the emotional bond that existed between these men and the church at Antioch. Remember Paul’s sorrowful parting from the elders at Ephesus ([Acts 20:36-38](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P79_27816) This observation thanks to Ray Stedman, who taught on this passage some years ago:

<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/0432.html>.

[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P85_30588) Note that Elymas or Bar-Jesus gets more attention from Luke than does Sergius Paulus.

[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P92_33660) A. T. Robertson writes, “Luke used to be sharply criticized for applying this term to Sergius Paulus on the ground that Cyprus was a province under the appointment of the emperor with the title of propraetor and not under the control of the senate with the title of proconsul. That was true B.C. 30, but five years later it was changed to proconsul by Augustus and put under the control of the Senate. Two inscriptions have been found with the date A.D. 51 and 52 with the names of proconsuls of Cyprus and one is in the Cesnola Collection, an inscription found at Soli with the name of Paulus as Proconsul, undoubtedly this very man, though no date occurs.” A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament.*

[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P111_38852) We do see them briefly in [Acts 15](javascript:%7b%7d), and again in [Acts 21](javascript:%7b%7d).

[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/first-missionaries-acts-131-13" \l "P114_39916) There are only a couple of exceptions to this ([Acts 14:14; 15:12, 25](javascript:%7b%7d)).