

Acts 13:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/acts/acts-13/acts-131-3/>

The prophets and teachers of the church of Antioch are urged by the Spirit to send Barnabas and Saul (Paul) on a missionary journey. They obey, commissioning the pair after prayer and fasting.

Over the next two chapters, Luke, the author of Acts, chronicles the first missionary journey into the western world. Chapter 13 ended with Barnabas and Saul (later known as Paul, the Greek version of his name) departing from Jerusalem to return to Antioch in Syria ([See Map](#)), bringing John Mark with them:

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.”
(Acts 12:25)

A church of mostly Gentile Greek believers had been founded in Antioch (in Syria) within the previous two years (Acts 11:20-21) and Barnabas and Saul had served as teachers there for the past year (Acts 11:25-26). Having delivered financial aid to the church in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Saul (Paul) settle back into their ministry roles at the church of Antioch. But the Holy Spirit will reveal to them and other believers a new task which God has prepared for them:

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul (v. 1).

In the *church* in Antioch are *prophets and teachers*, which include *Barnabas and Saul*, but are not limited to them alone. Over the past year, other Antiochian believers have discovered their spiritual gifts and callings (Romans 12:4–8), some of whom were raised up to be *prophets*, who, just as in the Old Testament, were chosen to deliver messages of truth from God.

The messages usually focus on calling God’s people to live righteously, according to God’s (good) design; prophets help sort out what is true and guide us to make wise choices. Occasionally, and especially in the Book of Acts when the gospel was first spreading, prophets received more direct commands from God through the Spirit. *Teachers* were those who were gifted and chosen to instruct us about God’s already-stated word (the Scriptures) so we can understand it and renew our mind.

We might think of *prophets* as emphasizing call to action, challenging people to follow God’s ways. We might think of *teachers* having a greater emphasis on acquiring knowledge of God’s ways in order to inform a true perspective that will lead to a renewed mind (Romans 12:1-2). Both have the same aim to equip and exhort God’s children to grow in their faith and walk in God’s ways, the ways of life.

Since these men in this passage are called *prophets and teachers* infers that they played both roles. We can reasonably observe that Paul serves both functions in his writings. He often teaches, opening up the Hebrew Scriptures and teaching/explaining what God has revealed

through him (Romans 10:5-21, for example). But Paul also prophetically exhorts, challenging his followers to action in following God by faith (Galatians 3:1, for example).

Luke names some of these *prophets and teachers* in Antioch: *Simeon*, *Lucius*, and *Manaen*. Luke also provides a detail about each man: *Simeon* has a nickname; he *was called Niger*. *Niger* is a Latin word for “black,” which seems to mean that *Simeon* was dark-skinned, possibly of African descent.

Regarding *Lucius*, we are told where he grew up: *Cyrene*. *Cyrene* was also the place of origin of Simon of Cyrene, the man who helped Jesus carry the cross to the site of His crucifixion (Luke 23:26). *Cyrene* was a city in modern-day Libya, on the north African coast of the Mediterranean Sea; it was an ancient Greek colony, where many dispersed Jews lived in the first century.

The third man, *Manaen*, *had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch*. *Herod Antipas the tetrarch* was one of the sons of Herod the Great. When Herod the Great died, Rome divided his kingdom into four regions (per Herod’s written will), and *Herod the tetrarch* was given authority over Galilee and Perea.

Tetrarch means “ruler of a fourth part.” *Herod the tetrarch* was the same Herod who ordered John the Baptizer’s execution, and to whom Pilate sent Jesus during His trial (Mark 6:27, Luke 23:7). That this Antiochian believer *Manean* was *brought up with Herod* may mean he grew up in Rome where *Herod the tetrarch* was educated. Perhaps he was a Roman, or a Jew who once served in Herod’s court.

These three men show the great variety in the church at Antioch—men from all over the Roman world, united in Christ, sharing the same calling as *prophets* or *teachers*, in addition to *Barnabas and Saul*.

Luke probably includes these details because the intent of his writings is to accurately record the acts of the Apostles so that his reader, Theophilus (“friend of God”) would know them. It seems likely that the “friend of God” Luke has in mind is any believer in Jesus seeking to know the truth of God’s ways.

Luke declares his mission statement at the beginning of his gospel account, that he has “investigated everything carefully from the beginning” so that his reader “may know the exact truth about the things” which were being taught (Luke 1:1-4). Luke’s writings are detail-oriented.

By including the details about these men, Luke is showing the results of what he has carefully investigated, so that his reader would know “the exact truth” of the things accomplished. Barnabas and Saul (Paul) were commissioned on their first missionary journey by other God-fearing, God-seeking prophets who believed in Jesus and served His mission. Luke will later join Paul’s mission team. He likely wrote Acts as a part of validating Paul as a true apostle and his gospel as an authentic message from God.

While Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (v. 2).

That they were *ministering to the Lord and fasting* indicates that they were praying and seeking God's will. God gives an answer to their seeking. God the *Holy Spirit* tells them to put together a team composed of *Barnabas and Saul*, who were to be *set apart* for this task.

The task was *the work which* the Spirit has *called them* to. And while this *work* is not specified here, based upon their subsequent journey, the *Holy Spirit* seems to have told them to go west into the Roman empire to teach the good news of Jesus the Messiah. This would be a continuation of the ministry God had called Paul to in Acts 9 (Acts 9:15-16).

Then, when this group of prophets and teachers *had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on* Barnabas and Saul, *they sent them away* (v. 3).

The group was faithful to the call. That they *sent them away* after a time of fasting and prayer infers that the saints in Antioch considered themselves to be a part of the mission, and supported the missionaries from the "home base." We will see Saul (Paul) and Barnabas return to "home base" at the end of this trip (Acts 14:26).

Biblical Text

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