

Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius the Libyan, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. They then, having been sent out by the Holy Spirit went . .

Acts 13, 1-4

Barnabas was a Levite, a Cypriot by birth, Simeon means black and he was probably of African origin. Lucius was from Libya in North Africa. Manaen, Herod's foster brother, must have been Europeanized because Herod was politically related to the Romans. It was the Lord's sovereign doing that the foster brother of Herod, John the Baptist's murderer became one of the leading members in the church. Saul is a Jew born in Tarsus, taught by Gamaliel.

The five prophets and teachers recorded here are composed of Jews and Gentiles, each having a different background, education, and status which indicates that the church is composed of all races and classes of people regardless of their background, and that the spiritual gifts and functions given to the Body of Christ are not based on natural status.

These five worshipped and fasted before the Lord rather than conferring with men and organizing, later they fasted and prayed before sending rather than discussed and decided. Three men sent two others who went out in a great step taken by the Lord for the spread of the gospel of His kingdom to the world, from Antioch in Syria:

- 1. Without the organizing of a mission.**
- 2. Without the raising of funds.**
- 3. Without human ordination (decision or approval).**
- 4. Without any human plan or method, (they went and made a start.)**

It was initiated by five faithful and seeking members of the Body of Christ, who gave the Head of the Body an opportunity through their ministering and fasting to set them apart by His Spirit to carry out His great commission to spread His kingdom for the establishing of His church in the Gentile world through the preaching of His gospel.

This major step had nothing to do with the church in Jerusalem organizationally, and it was not under the authority and direction of Peter and the other eleven apostles in Jerusalem. It was begun solely and purely from a Gentile centre, far away from the atmosphere, influence and practice of the church in Jerusalem. **It was absolutely a move by the Spirit who coordinated faithful, seeking members of the Body of Christ on the earth with the Head in the heaven.** This was not a religious movement with a human schedule, it was an entirely new purified start in the Lord's move on the earth.

The laying on of hands denotes identification, signifying that they who laid their hands were one with those on whom they laid hands. By this they declared to all that they were one with the sent ones in their going to carry out the Lord's great commission. Barnabas and Saul were sent by the other three but the next verse says that they were sent out by the Spirit. This proves that the three were one with the Spirit and the Lord honoured their sending as His.

From Watchman Nee, Notes on Acts 13, Recovery Version.