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Introduction

Fifty years ago, Dr. Harold Cook, newly retired long tenured and esteemed Professor of Missions at Moody Bible Institute, wrote an article published in the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Fall, 1975) that raised eyebrows in mission circles. That article, entitled, “Who Really Sent the First Missionaries,” (Cook 1975, 233-239) was written by Cook as a corrective to the then current thinking about the central role of the local church in the missionary sending process. After citing various authors who were advocating for a stronger church-based sending of missionaries, Cook stated:

These men are deeply concerned that the local church assume a more active role in the carrying out of the church’s mission. But this hardly justifies reading into the New Testament text what is not actually there. Nor does it justify treating a New Testament church as if it were structurally similar to one of our free churches of the twentieth century (ibid., 234).

Cook’s premise was that although the local church is important in sending missionaries, at Antioch it was neither central nor supreme. He concluded his article by asserting:

Our only contention in this article is that it is wrong to claim that the organized church is the one agency prescribed in the New Testament for the sending of missionaries. On the contrary, the one indispensable is the sending by the Holy Spirit. If the church acts in accord with the Holy Spirit, well and good. But if not, the Spirit will still send forth his missionaries, whether individually, as in the early centuries, or through independent societies, as in more recent years (ibid., 239).

The tension is obvious: the belief, on the one hand, that local churches are the prime and only valid sending agency of missionaries versus the belief that individuals, called by the Holy Spirit, exert the right to go on mission either through para-church agencies or, if need be, on their own whether a local congregation validates their going or not.

This entire discussion is based (and solely referenced in Cook's article) on Acts 13:1-4, in conjunction with Acts 14:27. The Acts 13 passage describes how the local believers at Antioch sent out Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey. No other New Testament church fits that pattern, nor is there any other passages that references the sending of missionaries.

The passage itself is rather brief. Here is how it is stated in the New International Version:

1 Now 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.

It is the purpose of this article to critically examine the Acts 13:1-4 passage by way of four primary considerations to determine who really sent these first missionaries.

The Consideration of the Church's Involvement

Was the local body of believers at Antioch involved in the sending of the first missionaries, or were the five prophets and teachers who are mentioned the only ones involved? If it was solely the five prophets and teachers, were they in an authoritative position to act on behalf of the entire church? In his article, Cook stated:

It was only these prophets and teachers who were involved. Some would contend that the church was involved by implication since these were the leaders in the church. But this is pure presumption. There is absolutely no indication in the text that these men were acting on behalf of the church. Nor did their ministry in the church necessarily qualify them to act for the church. They are not named as elders or bishops of the church (ibid., 234).

To the contrary, a mission executive writing at the same time asserted:

In the New Testament the missionary evangelism we see was indissolubly connected with the churches. For all his apostolic authority, Paul was sent forth by the church (God's people in local, visible, congregational life and in associational relationship with the congregations) and equally important, he felt himself answerable to the church (Rees 1974, 23).

With these two opposing views in tension, it demands to be investigated whether the church really was involved and if so, to what extent.

In the previous quotation Cook states these five prophets and teachers were not acting on behalf of the church, nor did their ministry in the church qualifies them to act for the church since they were not the bishops or elders of the church. A close investigation into the language of the text and into the history of that period is necessary before such a statement should be accepted.

The Grammar

In Acts 13:1 there are two prepositions used for the prophets and teachers mentioned. They are *en* and *kata*. The preposition *en* indicates location. This preposition merely states the location is within the bounds marked by the word with which it occurs (Robertson 1914, 605). This word is "Antioch" in the locative case. Thus, these five prophets and teachers were located within the city of Antioch, ministering there.

If the prophets and teachers were also in or part of the church at Antioch, it would be expected that the same preposition *en* or even *eis* would be used to indicate that fact. But to the contrary, Luke used a different preposition, *kata*. This preposition has "down" as its basic root meaning. In this passage it is used in the accusative case and has the horizontal aspect of "down along" (ibid., 608). Thus, it would be easy for one to hastily conclude that the different prepositions used by Luke indicate these five men were in the city of Antioch but only worked alongside the church. In other words, they were outsiders who were ministering at the church at this specific time.

But a study of the usage of *kata* used by Luke shows this opinion to be troublesome. A. T. Robertson commenting on the usage of *kata* in Acts 13:1 stated that here it has a rather ambiguous usage. But when it is compared with other usages by Luke such as Acts 26:3, 17:28 and 18:25, it is observed that Luke used *kata* as an idiom common to the literary *Koine* to show location or sphere (ibid.).

Thus, this use of *kata* by Luke is a mark of his literary style. He used two different prepositions in Acts 13:1 for literary variation. Thus, it cannot be definitively proven from the grammar that these five men were not part of the church at Antioch.

The Historical Context

A study of the history of this time, which generally is accepted as A.D. 45-46, reveals the Church was still in its infant stage in terms of church organization. In some geographical areas, including Syria, it was also in a transitional stage. Therefore, it needs to be determined what the role of the prophets and teachers were at that time. Does the nomenclature "prophets" and "teachers" indicate their function only, or do they also indicate authoritative position in the local church?

William Barclay states that prophets were not attached to any one church. These men were wandering preachers who took the Word to their fellowmen. The teachers, on the other hand, were within the local church and had the duty to instruct those who came to Christ (Barclay 1953, 104). Thus, it seems he does not believe they were in any authoritative position in the church. Fenton Hort, commenting on the government of the church of Antioch states:

Strange to say, we hear nothing about Elders. Since we know that the Ecclesia of Jerusalem had long had Elders, and St. Paul on returning from his first journey in Asia Minor had appointed Elders for each local Ecclesia, it is hardly credible that they were wanting at Antioch, to say nothing of the influence of the precedent of the great Jewish population. . . Evidently at this time the general body of disciples at Antioch must have taken at least a large share in the acts of the Christian community (Hort 1898, 90-91).

Hort also adds that Barnabas, Saul, and the others probably exercised considerable moral authority. Yet this authority was temporary and informal (*ibid.*). There is, however, substantial evidence from a very important early document, *The Didache*, that in the early churches of Syria prophets and teachers were the leaders of some churches (*Didache* 1903, 9). Thus, their designation includes both function and authoritative position. It appears that Burnett Streeter is correct in stating:

The five persons named are mentioned as if they were in charge of the church, and no other officers are mentioned. The occasion was an important one; the step taken is evidently conceived of as being a corporate act of the church, and the representative agents in this act are styled "prophets and teachers." Clearly, whatever other officers the church at Antioch may have had, prophet and teacher are titles borne by those of chief importance (Streeter 1929, 9).

Thus, it can be concluded that even if the entire church at Antioch was not involved in the sending of these missionaries, the prophets and teachers were in a position to represent that church. Their position in the church qualified them to act on behalf of and for the entire church.

The Entire Church

However, that being stated, there has been some debate as to whether the entire church at Antioch and not just the five prophets and teachers were involved in the sending. Newman and Nida commenting on Acts 13:3 state that: “It is not clear to whom *they* and *their* refer. Once again, the pronoun may refer to the remaining three men in the group of five, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen, or to the entire congregation at Antioch . . .” (Newman 1972, 245).

There are some who agree with Cook's view that only the prophets and teachers were involved in the sending. Yet most Biblical expositors believe the entire church at Antioch was involved in this commissioning. This is borne out by the fuller context of the church's role. There are three other passages which speak either of these first missionaries' return to or subsequent departure from the church at Antioch. It is expedient to examine these passages to find the true relationship of these missionaries to the church.

Acts 14:26-28

This passage gives the account of the first missionary conference. After Paul and Barnabas had returned to their home church, they took the initiative to gather the church together and report to them what had transpired (14:27). The fact that they felt the need to report to the entire church and not just the three other prophets and teachers is overwhelming evidence that the entire church was involved in their commissioning mentioned in Acts 13.

F. F. Bruce commenting on this gathering states that the church had more than a natural interest in the stories of Paul and Barnabas. They shared the responsibility of their missionary service, for it was with the blessing and fellowship of the whole church that the two apostles had been sent forth. Therefore, they felt obligated to report to the entire church (Bruce 1954, 297).

Hort similarly states this verse confirms that the entire church was involved in the original sending. He states that there is no distinction between the "mouthpieces of the Divine command" (Acts 13:2), and those who are to execute it. The Ecclesia

commissioned and dismissed Barnabas and Saul, so on their return, they gathered the Ecclesia together (14:27) and reported what had befallen them (Hort 1898, 64). Sir William Ramsay takes the matter a step further by noting:

The Church of Antioch sent them forth, releasing them from their duties there. The Church of Antioch received them again on their return (14:26). It was thereby marked out as the Mother-Church of the Pauline congregations; and it ranks henceforth as more truly the directing and moving power in the Universal Church than Jerusalem was (Ramsay 1959, 14).

It can be concluded that this passage makes clear what the grammar of 13:1-3 does not. Namely, the entire church was involved in the commissioning of these first missionaries, assembled in 13:3 to separate Barnabas and Saul for the new outreach to the Gentiles.

Acts 15:39-40

Barnabas and Paul planned to leave a second time to evangelize new areas. But, this time, because of a disagreement between the two, they each took a new partner and went separate ways. Yet, only Paul's team was "committed by the brethren." What did that committal entail?

The word in Greek *paradidomi* is a compound. Para has the root meaning of "beside," and this holds true when it is in composition (Dane 1946, 108). The verb *didomi* means "to give" or "to give over." In this passage *paradidomi* is used in the sense of "to commend or leave to" (Buchsel 1964, 172). It literally means "to commend to God's providence and care" (Newman 1972, 285).

In Acts 14:26 *paradidomi* is used to refer back to the actions of the church in 13:1-3 when it delivered the two missionaries to the Holy Spirit for the work in regions beyond (Eddleman 1974, 201). Therefore, it is best to conclude that the church again held a public service, as in Acts 13:3, of fasting, praying, laying on hands, and dismissing these two missionaries for the work.

Lenski rightly states: "Luke is speaking of a public service at which Paul and Silas were dismissed for their journey." (Lenski 1934, 630). The entire church once again was involved because the word "brethren" is used. Throughout the Book of Acts "brethren" is used to include the entire church at Antioch (cf. 15:1,32,33) (Hort 1898, 91). Since the entire church was included the second time in the commissioning of its missionaries, it is logical to conclude they were included the first time as well. This is conclusive evidence that the entire church was involved in the Acts 13:3 sending.

Acts 18:22-23

In this passage, Paul now has completed his second missionary journey. It has been four years since his original commission as one of the first missionaries. On his return home there is no record of his reporting to the church nor of them commending him when he left on his third journey.

Lenski, and others feel these events did transpire and that he reknit the bonds of friendship as he "spent some time there." This, of course, is arguing from silence. It appears that Paul had gradually become independent of the Antioch church. Church historian Kenneth Latourette has stated, "We must first think of him as at first sent out by the church of Antioch, but later as largely and perhaps entirely independent of it" (Latourette 1970, 79). This loosening relationship probably resulted for two reasons.

First, as time passed by, Paul became less familiar with the people who made up the church and they became less familiar with him. New converts who came into the church didn't know Paul. Many members who were part of the church at the time of Acts 13 were no longer there at the time of Acts 18. This was due to the transitory and mobile society of the Roman Empire in which many people were up rooted (ibid., 10-11).

Second, we know that Paul was by no means the only missionary of the Apostolic Age. Antioch was becoming a center from which more and more missionaries radiated (ibid., 80). Thus, Paul instead of being only one of two missionaries of the church, was now probably one of several. Therefore, the ties between him and the church were not as strong as at first. The evidence indicates that although Paul was sent out by the church at Antioch, he gradually became independent of the church over the passing of time.

Conclusion to this consideration

Although the text of Acts 13:1-3 is ambiguous as to whether the entire church sent the first missionaries or the remaining three prophets and teachers, an examination of other related texts shows strong evidence that the entire church at Antioch had to have been involved. But even if this conclusion is not accepted, there is evidence from early church history that the prophets and teachers were the early authoritative leaders in many churches of Syria. This authoritative position gave them the right to act on behalf of the church. In either case, the church was involved. Evidence is wanting that would support the view that the church was not nor could not have been involved in Barnabas and Saul's sending.

The Consideration of the two words “sent”

In the English text the word “sent” is used two times as follows:

- 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...

In English the passage seems to indicate that both the church and the Holy Spirit sent the first missionaries. However, Luke is very careful to use two different Greek words translated in our English texts as "sent." A study of these two words is necessary to determine precisely the roles of the church at Antioch and the Holy Spirit in the sending of the missionaries.

The root verb *apoluó*

This verb is used in verse three of the church's activity (*apelysan* - active, indicative, aorist, 3rd person). Although it is translated "sent" in our English texts, it has a better and more accurate meaning. The word is a compound verb consisting of two parts. The preposition *apo* attached to the basic root *lu* along with the personal ending *ó*. A proper understanding of Acts 13:1-4 depends upon an exact definition of this word used for the church's sending. The root meaning and original significance of the word is "off or away from." It always implies separation and is therefore only used with the ablative case, serving to make clearer the case idea of source or separation (Robertson 575).

The root *lu* has as its basic meaning "to loose." The verb *luó* has as its primary meaning "to loosen, set free or untie." In the New Testament the word has as its object: sandals (Acts 7:33), prisoners (Acts 22: 30), one wrapped up (Jn. 11:44), an ass (Mk. 11: 20), seals (Rev. 5:2), and a latchet (Mk. 1:7). It is also used figuratively of the tongue being unloosed (Mk. 7:35) (Buchsel 1964, 335).

In an extensive study of the verb *apoluó* throughout the New Testament never has this writer found the word used in the sense of authoritative sending of individuals on a mission or with a task to perform. Nor will the etymology of the word allow for this kind of a definition. Rather, as Otto Procksch has stated, the best translation of the word is "to release" (Procksch 1964, 328). Bringing all the evidence to bare, it becomes clear that the best translation of *apoluó* found in relation to the action of the church at Antioch is that they “released” or “dismissed” Barnabas and Saul for missionary service. Looking at its use in another way, Ralph Winter makes the comment, “Paul was ‘sent off’ not ‘sent out’ by the Antioch congregation. He may have reported back to it

but did not take orders from it. His mission band (sodality) had all the autonomy and authority of a ‘traveling congregation.’” (Winter 2009, 244-253).

The participle *ekpempthentes*

The second word translated “sent” is the participle used in Acts 13:4 of the Holy Spirit’s involvement. In order that there be no ambiguity in the minds of his readers as to who the ultimate sending authority was, Luke uses the participle *ekpempthentes*. The word is a compound verb consisting of two parts. It is comprised of the preposition *ek* attached to the verb *pempo*. A careful study of the word shows a clear distinction between it and *apoluó*.

First is an examination of the preposition *ek*. The root meaning and original significance of this preposition is “out of” or “from within.” It stands in contrast with the preposition *en*. The preposition *ek* only occurs in the ablative case. In compounds it follows the root idea of the word closely, meaning “out of,” or “away” (Robertson 596).

Next, is a look at the root word *pempo*, with the basic meaning “to send.” It is used in the Septuagint and the New Testament, of the sending of things or individuals. Quite frequently in the New Testament it is also used to send something to someone. The idea of a person moving from one place to another, which is inherent in “sending,” can retreat into the background so that *pempo* takes on the meaning “commission,” or “appoint” (Bauer 1932, 647). Luke could have used the stronger Greek word for sending, *apostello*, but choose not to. Grammatically, it would have been the better word to use. But, either for stylistic reasons or because he many times used the two verbs synonymously, he chose to use *pempo* here.

The combination *ekpempo* used here is important to note. This is identified as a nominative, plural, masculine, *orist*, passive participle. The passive voice denotes the subject (here the two missionaries) as receiving the action. Dana and Mantey state, “when the original agent which produces the action signified in the passive is expressed, the regular construction is in with the ablative” (Dana 161). This is exactly the construction found in Acts 13:4. The construction is *ekpempthentes* (passive) + *hypo* (by) + *Hagiou* (Holy) *Pneumatos* (Spirit) – the direct agent.

According to the statement of Dana and Mantey, this construction indicates that the Holy Spirit was the original agent. Therefore, the grammar shows the Holy Spirit was the direct or immediate agent who sent these missionaries. Newman and Nida commenting on the construction state, “The dependent phrase having been sent by the

Holy Spirit may need to be expressed as a separate clause in an active form, ‘the Holy Spirit had sent them.’” (Newman 246).

Conclusion to this consideration

Compiling these grammatical observations together, it becomes evident that although the church had a real part in the commissioning of these missionaries, it was not the ultimate or direct sending authority (as Cook noted). The Holy Spirit acted in the role as the immediate sending authority. The church was called upon to act only in a mediate capacity of "dismissing" these two missionaries. These two agents worked together. The Holy Spirit directly called and sent the missionaries. But to validate this sending among men, He used the church as the mediate, visible channel to “dismiss” them on mission.

The Consideration of the Imposition of Hands

3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

In Acts 13:3 it states that Barnabas and Saul had hands placed upon them by either the other three prophets and teachers or by representatives of the church. In either case, whichever it was, the leadership was involved in a ritual of placing their hands on them. To help clarify the role of the church in the sending, it is helpful to determine what this laying on of hands signified.

The Old Testament Background

The imposition of hands is not an innovation of the New Testament Church. As a rite it clearly had its roots in the Old Testament. The meaning of this rite is dependent upon the context in which it is found.

In Association with Blessing

Genesis 48:14-20 is the account of Jacob blessing his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The imposition of hands was not intended to transfer power from Jacob to his grandsons. It was merely a simple act of blessing associated with the rite of benediction (Leupold 1971, 1152).

In Association with Punishment

In Leviticus 24:14, a blasphemer of God had the hands of all those who heard him imposed on his head before he was stoned. The act likely symbolized that the witnesses were throwing off from themselves the blasphemy which they had heard and returning it upon the head of the blasphemer for him to expiate (Keil and Delitzsch 1975, 454).

In Association with Sacrificial Procedures

The Mosaic law prescribed worshippers who brought burnt and sin offerings to God for sacrifice, to impose their hands upon the animal victim before it was killed (Ex. 29:10; Lev. 1:4; 4:4, 24, 29, 33; 8:14; Num. 8:10, 12). This symbolic act not only consecrated the victim for its special task, but also signified that it was dying as a substitute for the offeror. This action was to expiate the offeror (ibid., 286).

In Association with Ordination Rites

Two ordination rites are recorded in the Old Testament at which time there was the imposition of hands. In Numbers the Levites were ordained to serve as the priests for Israel. These men were set apart for a professional ministry to God, to do the work of the tabernacle. A second instance was the ordination of Joshua by Moses as his successor (Num. 27:18-19; Dt. 34:9). In this ceremony, Joshua was commissioned to his new task. The imposition of hands was done in the sight of the entire congregation of Israel so that all might hearken to and trust Joshua's guidance after Moses died (ibid., 215).

The Meaning in Acts 13:3

The Greek word used for the imposition of hands in Acts 13:3 is an aorist participle *epithentes*. It is a compound from the verb *tithemi* with the preposition *epi*'. *Epi* has as its basic meaning "upon." In composition this root meaning is maintained (Dana 106). The verb *tithemi* means "to put, place or lay" (Bauer 823). In the New Testament this combination is used forty times.

Both William Ramsay and Harold Cook believe that by the imposition of hands in Acts 13, Saul and Barnabas were merely being "blessed" for the work to which they had been called (ibid.). Just as Jesus blessed the children and Jacob blessed his grandsons, these missionaries were blessed by the church.

However, although blessing was involved, it seems that in this case the imposition of hands entailed much more than a mere blessing. It can be demonstrated that this rite is tied to the Old Testament tradition. John Calvin states:

The apostles retained the ceremony which was practiced among the Jews in accordance with the ancient custom of the Law, just as they retained kneeling and similar rites that are useful for the cultivation of piety (Calvin 1965, 355).

Ernest Best sees many parallels between the commissioning in Acts 13 of these missionaries and the commissioning in Numbers 8 of the Levites. Both cases begin with a divine origin; God approaching Moses, the Holy Spirit moving the leaders at Antioch. In both instances the imposition of hands took place. In both accounts the men are set apart to a "professional ministry"- to do in a systematic way what was previously done haphazardly (Best 347- 48). These parallels give convincing evidence that more than mere blessing was being communicated to Barnabas and Saul by the imposition of hands.

Conclusion to this consideration

It can be concluded that the concepts of identification, representation, and substitution are involved in the imposition of hands in Acts 13:3, as they also were in the Old Testament rite. Thus, missiologist George Peters weighs in by stating:

The rite speaks of authentication, identification, and a creation of a representative by delegation. By this rite the church is publicly authenticating the call of God; she is constituting a rightful and responsible representative, and she is declaring her identification with the representative in his call and ministry. In the person of the ordained individual, the Church by substitution goes forth into the ministry (Peters 1972, 221).

There remains the question as to who specifically laid their hands on the first missionaries. Was it the entire church body, or representatives of the church including the other three prophets and teachers, or only the three prophets and teachers? The answer to this question cannot be determined from the text or the context. Nor does any other Scripture shed light on this question. Therefore, the answer can only be one of speculation with no conclusive evidence. But whether all the members of the church itself or representatives of the body in the presence of the church performed this act, the church as a body was involved (Hort 64).

The Consideration “Set apart for me”

A final and I believe conclusive argument which gives evidence that the Holy Spirit and the church cooperated together in the sending of the first missionaries is found in the command, "Set apart for me," in verse two. This command will be considered from two vantage points: the Holy Spirit's and the prophets and teachers.

The Holy Spirit

The word *aphorizate* in the Greek is identified as an aorist, active imperative from *aphorizo*. It is best translated "separate unto me," being in the dative case (Eddleman 175). This was a direct command by the Holy Spirit given through one of the five prophets and teachers just previously named. Since this command originated with and came directly from the Holy Spirit, He should be considered the direct and immediate agent who called and sent these first missionaries. The Spirit made the revelation, selected the ones who were to go on mission, and assigned them to their work (Hackett 1858, 205).

The Prophets and Teachers

The recipients of the command are not explicitly stated in the text since a nominative is not written. Yet it is most natural grammatically to take the five prophets and teachers previously mentioned as the recipients. But since these men were the official leaders of the church, they were in such a position that it might be said the command came to the whole church. These men were representatives of the entire body.

By giving the command to these men, the Holy Spirit was calling the church into cooperation with him in the sending of these two missionaries. The Holy Spirit could have said, "I have separated," showing that He alone was sending these men. But instead, He chose the church as the visible and mediate instrument for sending them forth (Reynolds 1907, 104). The verb contains the idea of both selection and consecration. The purpose of the fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands is clearly indicated in the context; for what they did was what they were told to do. This was the method they used of separating them (McGarvey 1892, 4).

By way of this short command, it can be recognized that there were two sending agents: the Holy Spirit who called the missionaries directly, along with the church, which was called alongside to be the visible, indirect sending agent.

Summary and Final Conclusion

So, who really sent the first missionaries? Some, like Cook, contend that the Holy Spirit solely sent them, while others believe it was primarily the local church at Antioch. It is this writer's belief that these two views are opposite extreme interpretations of this passage. Therefore a more balanced position is needed. This study has shown that both views are partially correct, but at the same time, both are in the main incorrect.

Bringing all four of these considerations to bear, it can be concluded that the Holy Spirit was the direct and immediate agent who ultimately called and commissioned Barnabas and Saul to their cross-cultural mission. But he also called the church alongside in cooperation with himself as the outward, visible instrument for the sending. Thus, the church functioned as the indirect and mediate sending agent whereby people could see in a concrete way the call by the Holy Spirit to mission was authentic.

A Probable Reconstruction of the Historical event

By means of this grammatical, exegetical, and historical study, the actual events of Acts 13:1-4 appears to have transpired in the following manner:

On a certain day as the leaders of the church at Antioch, who were called prophets and teachers, were meeting together, they were seeking the Holy Spirit's direction concerning the future of the church. Since it was an important meeting, they were engaged in worshipping and fasting. During this solemn meeting the Holy Spirit spoke through one of the prophets the command to separate two of their members, specifically Barnabas and Saul, for a new outreach in which the two most likely previously expressed an interest.

Shortly afterwards these leaders assembled the entire congregation and made known to all the direct call and command of the Holy Spirit. During this corporate meeting the members fasted and prayed, then watched as some of their representatives placed hands upon Barnabas and Saul as a sign of their identification with the sending of the two. Thus, the church fulfilled the command of the Holy Spirit by commissioning the two by this meaningful act. Subsequently, Barnabas and Saul departed the city and began their new cross-cultural outreach as bonified representatives of the Antiochian church.

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