

Acts 12:25-13:12

Acts 12

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

If you recall Barnabas and Saul went to Jerusalem with a gift from the Antioch church. Here is a quick reminder from Acts 11;

(Acts 11:29 The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.)

Barnabas and Saul were in Jerusalem bringing the gift from the Antioch Church. Now they return to Antioch to continue the work in this amazing church plant.

Luke now gives us some background on what we would call the Elder Team. After a year of training this church is about to explode with growth and with an outreach effort to take the world for Christ. So who is leading this church and why is this significant?

13:1 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.

FIRST AND LAST

We are given a list of the Elders. A Greek would often write a list in a certain order which automatically highlights two things

Barnabas is mentioned first. The person listed first is the person with the most influence. In our culture we normally mention the pastor first when we talk about a specific church. So we get that idea.

The second highlight in Greek writing is the person listed last. In a list of persons the one listed first is the most influential. And then the one listed last is the second most influential person. Saul is mentioned last in this list. Thus we know that Saul is the second most influential person in this church. Barnabas took the lead from the beginning.

Remember, Barnabas was closely associated with the Apostles in Jerusalem. When Saul became a Christ follower it was Barnabas that brought Saul into the company of the Apostles. Barnabas vouched for the fact that Saul was no longer persecuting Christians. He was preaching Christ. So because of Barnabas Saul was connected with and had the blessing of the apostles. And then Barnabas invited Saul into

church leadership at Antioch. Barnabas mentored Saul both before and during their ministry at Antioch.

Beginning later in this chapter Saul takes a front seat and will always be mentioned first. You can see this beginning in verse 13 and verse 42. Saul needed a Barnabas in order to grow into the full maturity of his faith and spiritual gifts.

PROPHETS AND TEACHERS

Verse 1 tells us that it was prophets and teachers that were leading the Antioch Church. This fits right in with what Ephesians chapter 4 tells us about church leadership.

First it tells us what type of spiritual gifts that leaders of the church will have. And then it gives the primary purpose of that leadership team.

Ephesians 4:11&12 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

So among the gifts that the primary leadership team of a church will have are apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor/teachers. We don't have apostles in the sense mentioned in this passage.

So my understanding is that when you select elders you should select those whom are gifted in evangelism and in

deep spiritual discernment like the gift of prophecy, and in shepherd teachers who preach and teach the word of God.

The evangelists will keep the church from growing cold to the lost. Those with prophetic gift will call us back to prayer and spiritual discernment. And pastor/teachers will help us to be able to handle the word of truth.

Do you have gifts of spiritual discernment? Do you have a passion and practice of evangelism? Are you able to handle the word of truth and help others to grow? If so, then perhaps God will equip you and release you to help provide elder leadership for this church.

What is the primary purpose of those with passion and skill for evangelism, spiritual discernment and prophecy and teaching the word of God?

12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

PROPHETS AND TEACHERS

Prophets and pastor/teachers were leading the church in Antioch. The goal of their leadership was to focus on

growing each Christian mature in their faith so that each one would have the maturity to use his or her spiritual gifts.

REACHING THE WORLD FROM ANTIOCH

So Antioch becomes the primary epicenter from which the church reaches all areas of the known world. But it would have never become a sending church for missions had it not focused its efforts on growing and equipping the believers. If there is not a focus on growing people in the faith, then there is no Saul, and no Barnabas and no Timothy and no Mark who was with Saul and Barnabas and eventually wrote one of the gospels.

Without serious training and empowering and releasing strategies there is no way the world gets evangelized because there would have been no one to send. But Antioch had people ready to send. God will only grow and sustain your ministry to the level that you have equipped your people to be sent into the mission field and sent to ministry to others inside the church.

These leadership team was a diverse group.

THE DIVERSE MAKE UP OF LEADERSHIP

Barnabas was Jewish and was a part of the Jerusalem church before being sent to Antioch to plant and grow this church. Jerusalem sent its best people to the mission field.

Saul was a Roman citizen. He grew up in Greek Tarsus. But he was also trained by the most famous Jewish scholar in that time. Each time he visited a synagogue he would get invited to speak because he was trained by Gamiliel.

Simon was dark skinned and probably hailed from North Africa.

Lucius was probably from Cyrene. If so he was with the group who in Acts 11 dared to go to the Greek speaking population of Antioch. It was boldness like that displayed in Lucius that sparked the work of the Spirit when thousands came to Christ.

Manaen ironically was a member of very high rank in Herod's court. He grew up in the house of Herod the Great. There are people of high rank that need to be won to Christ. This is the guy that can welcome those of high rank into church to serve Christ and serve one another in humility.

So they were gathered together in Antioch.

2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, ...

The New American Standard says they were **ministering to the Lord**. Do you see worship as ministering to the Lord? Many people just mouth the words. But it is easy to forget that the Lord inhabits the praises of His people.

Some are analyzing the words. Others are mouthing the words but their thoughts drift in every direction. Have you ever considered that the song you sing is an act of ministering to the Lord? If so, then you are not singing to a screen. You are not thinking about those around you and what you will look like or sound like. You are ministering to God Himself. What a privilege we have and what a privilege we allow to pass by so often.

Part of ministering to the Lord involves a deep focus on God in prayer. Fasting is when you either don't care about food because you are focusing on God for an extended period of time. Or when you intentionally set aside food and anything that might interrupt your prayer time. And then you seek Him with all your heart.

And when you seek Him with all your heart you will find Him. You will be filled with the Spirit of God. And the God sightings will begin.

So what happened when they were ministering to the Lord in worship and with extended prayer? God spoke and they heard God speak.

(vs 2 continued)...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.

So who is it that set aside Barnabas and Saul? It was the Holy Spirit. And how did they find out who was called to be set apart? They went to God and listened to Him. They used their spiritual discernment which was available because they ministered to the Lord and they prayed until they were able to discern the will of the Holy Spirit.

So the way that we make decision in God's church is to first, discern His will. If we don't take the time to discern God's will then all we have is a collection of opinions and defending our decisions and preferences. God gets to think up the ministry. And our job is to discern what God thought up. This is accomplished through ministering to the Lord in worship and prayer.

So the Holy Spirit chose a mission field for Barnabas and Saul. And it was discerned by the whole elders and probably the whole church. What comes next?

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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.

6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.”

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 When the proconsul saw what had happened,

he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.