

**GOD'S WILL REVEALED THROUGH
WORSHIPPING, FASTING AND PRAYING!
ACTS CH13:1-3**

ILLUSTRATION

According to John Stott "Luke has reached a decisive turning point in his narrative. In keeping with the risen Lord's prophecy (1:8), witness has been borne to him in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria; now the horizon broadens to the ends of the earth. The two deacon evangelists have prepared the way – Stephen by his teaching and his martyrdom, Philip by his bold evangelization of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian. So have the two major conversions which Luke has documented, that of Saul, who was also commissioned as the apostle to the Gentiles, and that of Cornelius through the instrumentality of the apostle Peter. Unnamed evangelists have also preached the Gospel to Hellenists in Antioch. But all the time the action has been limited to the Palestine and Syrian mainland. Nobody has yet caught the vision of taking the good news to the nations overseas, although indeed Cyprus has been mentioned in 11:19. Now at last, however, that momentous step is to be taken" (John Stott, Commentary on Acts page 215).

CHURCH LEADERS! V1

Barnabas - Ch4:36 – His name means – son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus! Ch4:37 – He sold a field and laid the money at the feet of the apostles! Ch9:27 – Stuck up for Paul in front of the early Church! (Galatians Ch1:18) Ch11:24 – A good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith! Ch11:25-26 – Found Paul and took him to Antioch! Ch13:1-6 – Sent out by the Antioch Church! Ch13:46 – Speaking boldly with Paul! Ch14:4+14 – He has apostolic gifting! Ch15:36-39 – Had a huge disagreement with the apostle Paul over John Mark! Colossians Ch4:10 – A cousin of John Mark! 1st Corinthians Ch9:6 – Like Paul, never took the rights of an apostle! Galatians Ch2:9-14 – Gentile missionary work, but easily misled! Whenever the apostle Paul mentions Barnabas, it is always with words of sympathy and respect!

Was Barnabas an apostle? John Stott says "On the one hand there were the apostles of Christ, personally appointed by him to be witnesses of the resurrection, who included the twelve, Paul and probably James (Acts Ch1:21; 1st Cor Ch9:1; 1st Cor Ch15:7-9; Acts Ch10:41). There is no evidence that Barnabas belonged to this group. On the other hand, there were the apostles of the churches (2nd Cor Ch8:23) sent out by a Church or Churches on particular missions, as Epaphroditus was an apostle or messenger of the Philippian Church. So too Paul and Barnabas were both apostles of the Church of Syrian Antioch, sent out by them, whereas only Paul was also an apostle of Christ" (Cited in John Stott, Commentary on Acts, page 229). So, I would like to suggest that Barnabas was not an eye-witness to the resurrection of Christ, and therefore not an apostle of Christ.

Simeon, also called Niger – Simeon, a Hebrew name, but also called Niger, meaning black, who was presumably black and is thought to be "Simon of Cyrene" who carried the cross for Jesus – Matthew Ch27:32, Mark Ch15:21 + Luke Ch23:26. And the father of Alexander and Rufus Romans Ch16:13.

Lucius of Cyrene – It is believed he was from North Africa.

Manaen - A lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, meaning he was probably brought up with him, perhaps within the same family! That is, **Herod Antipas (ruled 4 B.C.- A.D. 39)** Jesus called him "the Fox" (Luke 13:32). Received a quarter of his father's territory (Galilee and Perea). Divorced his first wife and married Herodias, the wife of his brother

(who was yet a different “Herod”). Killed John the Baptist. Pontius Pilate sent Jesus to see this Herod as part of Jesus’ trial since this Herod was visiting Jerusalem at the time Jesus was sentenced to death. Did you know that Pilate and Herod Antipas became friends that day (Luke 23:12)? - Matt Ch14:1, 3, 6. Mark Ch6:14, 16-18, 20-22. Mark Ch8:15. Luke Ch3:1, 19. Luke Ch8:3. Luke Ch9:7, 9. Luke Ch13:31. Luke Ch23:7, 8, 11-12, 15. Acts Ch4:27. Acts Ch13:1.

Saul - Saul (his Jewish name), is Paul (his gentile name) from Ch13:9. There are three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts, the first is in **Ch9:1-19a**, the second in **Ch22:1-16**, and the third in **Ch26:12-18**, Luke employs such repetitions only when he considers something to be extraordinarily important! Along with more details of what happened can be found in **Acts Ch9:27; 1st Cor Ch9:1, Ch15:8-10; Gal Ch1:15-16; 1st Timothy Ch1:15-16**. In these verses Paul says **he has seen Jesus, was commissioned to be an apostle for Jesus, that Jesus set him apart before his birth, and that he received mercy from Jesus as the chief or worst of all sinners!**

What is most obvious from Luke's recordings, is the five men's rich ethnic diversity and in places of leadership!

CHURCH LEADERS BEING LED! V2

The Holy Spirit said “.....”

Luke clearly wants us to see a connection between worship, prayer, and fasting on the one hand, and the decisive guidance of the Holy Spirit on the other. I would suggest that this teaches us the value of worshipping, fasting and praying **in the earnest pursuit of God's will for our lives and the life of our Church.**

So what is fasting? When and Why does God want us to fast?

Fasting is the voluntary decision to go without food for a specific period of time whilst using that time to pray to God about specific things, these could relate to past or present sin, where you have confessed and repented over that sin, but are showing God, how serious you are. It could be that you are seeking the Lord about specific things and choosing to go without food until those requests are answered. **To fast and to humble ourselves before God are virtually equivalent terms (Psalm 35:13, Isa Ch58:3-7).**

JESUS not only taught His disciples about the need to fast, but fasted himself, Matthew Ch4:1-2, and Luke records for us that after this period of fasting and temptation, JESUS returned to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” (Luke Ch4:14).

But didn't Jesus not want His disciples to fast? Whilst John the Baptist was in Prison and before King Herod had him beheaded, John's disciples approached Jesus and in their question regarding fasting in Matthew Ch9:14-17, sadly aligned themselves with the Pharisees! Jesus had already aligned the Pharisees with the generation of Hosea's time (Matt Ch9:13) who had forgotten the love for God and true worship of Him. Here, Jesus, is confronted with a question regarding “fasting”. In reality, however, there was no justification for the question raised by John the Baptist's disciples. Had John's disciples been better students of Scripture, they would have known that the only fast derived from the Law of God was the one on the day of atonement (Lev Ch16:29 + Ch23:27), around 1400B.C. and according to the teaching of Isaiah around 720B.C. (Ch58:6-7), it was not a literal fast, but one of love, both vertical and horizontal, which God demanded!

Jesus taught on fasting in Matthew Ch6:16-18, but in Matthew Ch9:14-17, he uses the illustration of a Wedding to drive home His answer to the question. The guests of the bridegroom fasting while the feast is going on, how absurd! Jesus is exposing why it would be inappropriate for the disciples of the Lord to mourn, while their master is performing works of mercy and while words of life and beauty are dropping from lips, how utterly incongruous (out of place, inappropriate) - Matthew Ch9:14-17 Mark Ch2:18-22 + Luke Ch5:33-39!

So, JESUS' disciples did not initially fast – Matt Ch9:14 + Luke Ch5:33, and the reason being was that JESUS was still with them. However, we see that after His departure His disciples practised fasting – Acts 13:2 + 14:23. JESUS expects us to fast, because in fasting we truly reveal who we are trying to please and why! ***This side of eternity fasting is there for us to voluntarily deny our bodies physical food, and to seek God through prayer, for spiritual purposes.***

CHURCH LEADERS LAYING ON HANDS AND LEAVING! V3

The fasting, praying and laying on of hands, represents a setting apart, a separating and sending out. The action by the other leaders expressed both seeking a blessing from God (praying and laying on of hands) and an identification with others (sending out), as Barnabas and Saul leave the Church in Antioch Syria, to go overseas to spread the Good News!

APPLICATION

Let's think about fasting on a Wednesday morning and Wednesday lunchtime for the whole of July to pray about:

1. Church Leadership!
2. Church Membership!
3. Church Ministries!

DO YOU FAST?

YES

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.
- 17.
- 18.
- 19.
- 20.

NO