

SOUTHWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Commission Narratives in Acts: An Exegesis of Acts 13:1-3

A SEMINAR PAPER SUBMITTED TO:

DR. LORIN L. CRANFORD

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE SEMINAR

NEW TESTAMENT CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

By

CLAY HAM

LEWISVILLE, TEXAS

FEBRUARY 24, 1997

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INTRODUCTION

According to R. Alan Culpepper, the primary focus of Acts 13-19 relates to the book's interest in "proclaiming to gentile churches how the Gentiles had come to receive salvation."¹ The book itself advances this motif along several perspectives. Theologically, Acts preserves the connection between Judaism and gentile Christianity. Politically, Acts defends Christianity before the Roman empire as a legitimate religion. Ecclesiastically, Acts reminds the various churches of their common origin.

Furthermore, these chapters describe the emergence of Paul, whom the Lord chooses as apostle to the Gentiles. Acts 13:1-3 relates this selection in the form of a commission narrative. A commissioning occurs when someone experiences a divine encounter and receives direction to assume a specific task for the commissioner.² Acts also highlights this first missionary journey of Paul with echoes of the beginning of Jesus' ministry and also the apostles'. Jesus, the

¹R. Alan Culpepper, "Paul's Mission to the Gentile World: Acts 13-19," Review and Expositor 71 (Fall 1974): 487. For discussion of the issues relating to authorship, date, recipients, and composition of Acts, see D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, An Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 181-213; Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Downers Grove: IVP, 1970), 336-385.

The form of this seminar paper follows Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 6th ed., rev. John Grossman and Alice Bennett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). It was produced with Corel WordPerfect Ver. 7.0, Corel Corporation, Ontario, Canada, 1996, and printed on an HP LaserJet 5L Printer, Hewlett-Packard Company, Boise, ID, 1995.

²Lorin L. Cranford, Exegeting the New Testament: A Seminar Working Model with Expanded Research Bibliography, 2nd rev. ed. (Ft. Worth: Scripta, 1991), 64.

apostles, and Paul each pray, are lead by the Spirit, preach, use scripture, encounter opposition, include the Gentiles, and heal a lame man.³ “The mission journey of Paul and Barnabas, like the missions of Jesus and the apostles, is born out of searching and alertness of prayer and is empowered by the Spirit.”⁴

The purpose of the paper is to consider part of Acts which describes the antecedents to the first missionary journey. In particular, this paper discusses the commission narrative as a sub-genre within the book of Acts. It also examines Acts 13:1-3, which narrates how the church in Antioch sends off Barnabas and Saul at the direction of the Holy Spirit.

³Robert C. Tannehill, The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, vol. 2, The Acts of the Apostles (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 160. See Luke 4:21-5:26; Acts 1:14-4:3; 13:1-14:10.

⁴Ibid., 161.

CHAPTER 1

THE COMMISSION NARRATIVE AS GENRE

The Form and Function of a Commission Narrative

In “Commissioning Stories in Luke-Acts: A Study of Their Antecedents, Form and Content,” Benjamin J. Hubbard has identified seven formal elements for the sub-genre of commission narrative.⁵

1. The “introduction” details the circumstances of the commission.
2. The “confrontation” describes the appearance of the commissioner (usually God or his messenger) before the one receiving the commission.
3. The “reaction” records the way in which the one receiving the commission responds to the commissioner (usually with an expression of fear or unworthiness).
4. The “commission” directs the one receiving the commission to begin a specific task for the commissioner.
5. The “protest” records any objections or resistance which the one receiving the commission has about the commissioned task.⁶
6. The “reassurance” answers these objections and provides the one receiving the commission confidence to carry out the task.
7. The “conclusion” marks an end to the commission and usually states that the one

⁵Benjamin J. Hubbard, “Commissioning Stories in Luke-Acts: A Study of Their Antecedents, Form and Content,” *Semeia*, no. 8 (1977): 104-105.

⁶Hubbard (“Commissioning Stories,” 105) indicates that the reaction and protest appear with less frequency than the other seven elements.

receiving the commission begins the assignment.

The literary form, according to Hubbard, has its antecedents in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient near eastern literature.⁷ He lists twenty-seven passages in the Hebrew Bible which usually include at least five (and sometimes all seven) of the formal elements.⁸ Josh. 1:1-11 illustrates well the typical form.⁹

1. Introduction: Moses dies (Josh. 1:1a).
2. Confrontation: Yahweh speaks to Joshua (Josh. 1:1b).
3. Commission: Yahweh directs Joshua to lead the Israelites across the Jordan (Josh. 1:2).
4. Reassurance: Yahweh promises victory and his presence with Joshua (Josh. 1:3-9).
5. Conclusion: Joshua begins preparations for crossing the Jordan (Josh. 1:10-11).

Terence Y. Mullins advances the discussion of commission narratives in his response to Hubbard.¹⁰ Accepting Hubbard's analysis as a beginning point, Mullins argues for the need to

⁷Ibid., 106-114.

⁸Ibid., 107.

⁹The reader may also want to compare Hubbard's analysis of several examples from ancient near eastern literature, e.g., Utnapishtim's commission to build the ark in Epic of Gilgamesh, Thut-mose's commission by Harmakhis to be King of Egypt, and the legend of King Keret. These may be found in James B. Pritchard, ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 93, 143-146, 449. Hubbard ("Commissioning Stories," 114) concludes his comparative analysis by stating, "It is thus clear that there exists a phenomenological resemblance in the way that ancient near eastern peoples understood their relationship with the holy. For these people the experience of the holy is usually connected with a call to service and with corresponding blessings."

¹⁰Terence Y. Mullins, "New Testament Commission Forms, Especially in Luke-Acts," Journal of Biblical Literature 95 (1976): 603-614.

examine the function of each formal element.¹¹ On occasion, his description of function differs little from Hubbard's delineation of form. For example, Mullins sees the function of the introduction as presenting the occasion of the commission.¹² At other points, his explanations help. The confrontation "exhibits the authority of the commissioner," while the reaction shows "the degree of unreadiness of the person to be commissioned."¹³ The commission makes the one receiving the commission "the agent of the commissioner for the accomplishing of the commissioner's will," and the reassurance eliminates any remaining resistance.¹⁴

Besides describing the function of each formal element, Mullins puts forward six themes from his analysis of the commissions in Luke and Acts: an identification of time or place, a command to rise, a vision or dream, a voice, an angel, and fear.¹⁵ These themes often recur in the commission stories. In a second article, Hubbard reduces Mullins's proposal of the six themes to three.¹⁶ This reduction sees two of Mullins's themes as not being distinct from two of the formal elements: (1) the introduction usually identifies the time or place of the commission; and (2) the reference to fear falls under the reaction. Hubbard doubts that the presence of an angel in the commission scene denotes an objective experience, while a voice or vision denotes a

¹¹Ibid., 605.

¹²Ibid., 607.

¹³Ibid., 607-608.

¹⁴Ibid., 608-609.

¹⁵Ibid., 610.

¹⁶Benjamin J. Hubbard, "The Role of Commissioning Accounts in Acts," in Perspectives on Luke-Acts, Perspectives in Religious Studies, ed. Charles H. Talbert, no. 5 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 191-194.

subjective one.¹⁷ The commissions in Acts sometimes do not distinguish the function of a vision or an angel.¹⁸ The other three themes occur with some frequency in Acts, though they do not appear as often as the five elements of the commission form.¹⁹

The Illustration and Interpretation of a Commission Narrative

These three studies accentuate the abundance of the commission form in the New Testament, and especially in Luke and Acts.²⁰ Hubbard lists twenty-seven times that the form appears in the Old Testament and twenty-five times that it appears in the New Testament.²¹ Mullins lists thirty-seven instances of the form in the New Testament.²² Whether Hubbard or Mullins has the more accurate counting for the New Testament, the important inference for this study recognizes that most of the New Testament examples occur in Luke and Acts. Furthermore, Acts includes more commission stories than any other book in the Bible!²³ Consequently, Hubbard calls Acts “the epiphanic book par excellence.”²⁴

¹⁷Ibid., 192.

¹⁸Cf. Acts 10:3; 27:23.

¹⁹Hubbard, “Role of Commissioning Accounts,” 193-194.

²⁰Ibid., 189-191; idem, “Commissioning Stories,” 122; and Mullins, “New Testament Commission Forms,” 605-606.

²¹Hubbard, “Commissioning Stories,” 107, 122.

²²Mullins, “New Testament Commission Forms,” 605-606.

²³Hubbard (“Commissioning Stories,” 122) counts 16 of 25 with 12 in Acts; Mullins (“New Testament Commission Forms,” 605-606) counts 27 of 37 with 17 in Acts. However, Hubbard (“Role of Commissioning Accounts,” 190) later lists 19 in Acts. See “Appendix 4” for a listing of these accounts and their formal elements.

²⁴Hubbard, “Commissioning Stories,” 122.

Acts 9:1-9 contains the first account of Saul's conversion. As a commission narrative, the passage displays the typical form.²⁵

1. Introduction: Saul travels to Damascus to arrest followers of the Way (9:1-3a).
2. Confrontation: A bright light flashes around Saul, and Jesus asks why Saul is persecuting him (9:3b, 4b-5).
3. Commission: Jesus tells Saul to go into Damascus (9:6a).
4. Reassurance: Saul will receive further instruction in the city (9:6b).
5. Conclusion: A blinded Saul is led into the city and remains for three days (9:8-9).

Likewise, Acts 13:1-3, which is the focus of this paper, contains the five elements of the commission narrative as it recounts how Barnabas and Saul are appointed for the first missionary journey.

1. Introduction: Five prophets and teachers are worshiping the Lord with the church at Antioch (13:1-2a).
2. Confrontation: The Holy Spirit speaks (13:2a).
3. Commission: The Holy Spirit directs the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul (13:2b).
4. Reassurance: The Holy Spirit has already called them to this work (13:2c).
5. Conclusion: The church lays hands on them and sends them off (13:3).

The commission narrative serves to appoint someone to a divinely-instigated task.²⁶

The narration of these commissions allows the writer of Acts to illustrate clearly constant divine guidance. "They occur at decisive places throughout the narrative in such a way that God's hand

²⁵Acts 9:1-9 also includes Saul's reaction; he falls to the ground (9:7).

²⁶Hubbard ("Commissioning Stories," 114) writes, "The vision of the divine is connected with entry into God's service in some way."

is continually seen as making possible each new step in the missionary program of the book.

Acts is a success story made possible by divine intervention.”²⁷

How should the interpreter approach a commission narrative? Does this special genre require additional efforts to understand it? Lorin Cranford’s Exegeting the New Testament addresses these issues in “Appendix E: Guidelines for Exegeting Kleine Gattungen.”²⁸ The guidelines clearly betray a reliance upon both Hubbard and Mullins. This seminar member recommends only a revision of the wording in the third instruction. The guidelines are reproduced here in part to aid the seminar in evaluating this suggestion.

- a. Identify the nature of the divine-human/apocalyptic encounter.
- b. Identify the essential formal and thematic elements in the account.
- c. Utilize the elements identified above to determine the significance of the movement of the divine plan or of divine guidance as graphically illustrated in these divine-human and [sic] commissioning narratives.

The third instruction might better read:

- c. Determine how the commission narrative depicts divine guidance in relation to the entire book of Acts.

²⁷Hubbard, “Role of Commissioning Accounts,” 198.

²⁸Cranford, Exegeting the New Testament, 64.

CHAPTER 2

THE COMMISSION NARRATIVE IN ACTS 13:1-3

¹Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who is called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²But 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.” ³Then, after they fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

Context of Acts 13:1-3

Several episodes in the book of Acts anticipate Acts 13:1-3. After his resurrection, Jesus announces that the apostles will be his witnesses beyond Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.¹ Along with several others, Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, sells a field to provide for the needs of the believers; the apostles call him Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement.”² After Saul consents to Stephen’s death and arrests some of the believers, he obtains authority to arrest others in Damascus.³ While on his way there, a bright light blinds Saul.⁴ The Lord sends Ananias to tell Saul that he has been chosen for a ministry with the Gentiles.⁵ Saul begins preaching in the

¹Acts 1:8.

²Acts 4:36-37.

³Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2.

⁴Acts 9:3-9.

⁵Acts 9:10-19; cf. Rom. 11:13; 15:16; Gal. 1:16; 2:7-8.

synagogues in Damascus but later leaves the city when some Jews conspire to kill him.⁶ He then goes to Jerusalem, where he meets Barnabas.⁷ When some Grecian Jews there plot to kill him, Saul returns to his hometown, Tarsus.⁸

While Saul changes from persecutor to preacher, the Lord initiates this ministry to the Gentiles through Philip, Peter, and the church in Antioch. Philip follows the prompting of the Spirit and explains the scripture to the Ethiopian eunuch.⁹ Peter sees a vision three times and brings the gospel to Cornelius the centurion.¹⁰ Some of those who leave Jerusalem after Stephen's death begin to tell Greeks in Antioch the good news about Jesus.¹¹

When news of the growing church in Antioch reaches Jerusalem, the Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to Antioch; he brings Saul from Tarsus to help with the church in Antioch.¹² After a prophet named Agabus warns about a famine, the Christians in Antioch send Barnabas and Saul with a gift to help the believers in Judea.¹³ Barnabas and Saul return to Antioch, and they bring John Mark with them.¹⁴

⁶Acts 9:20-25.

⁷Acts 9:26-28.

⁸Acts 9:29-30.

⁹Acts 8:26-40.

¹⁰Acts 10:1-11:18.

¹¹Acts 11:19-21.

¹²Acts 11:22-26.

¹³Acts 11:27-30.

¹⁴Acts 12:25.

Following Acts 13:1-3, Barnabas and Saul, along with John Mark, leave Antioch on a missionary journey to several towns in Cyprus and Asia Minor.¹⁵ Saul begins to use his Roman name Paul at the outset of the Gentile mission, and from this point on, he becomes the central character of Acts.¹⁶ He causes Elymas the sorcerer to become blind; he preaches in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch; and the people of Lystra stone him.¹⁷ Yet, both Paul and Barnabas work as “apostles.”¹⁸ They return to Antioch and report to the church about how God has “opened a door of faith for the Gentiles.”¹⁹

While this discussion suggests how Acts 13:1-3 corresponds with the preceding and succeeding contexts, it also relates the passage with the general context of the entire book. The passage does come immediately before the emergence of Paul as the central character of the book; however, Barnabas receives more prominent attention within these three verses. The passage presumably presents the beginning of the Gentile mission, although they have already

¹⁵These towns include Seleucia, Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Pisidia, Pamphylia, and Attalia. Acts 13:4-14:26.

¹⁶Acts 13:9, 13.

¹⁷Acts 13:8-12, 16-48; 14:19.

¹⁸Acts 14:4, 14. Although the 26 times the word *apostoloi* appears in Acts, it usually refers to the twelve (minus Judas) in the church at Jerusalem. Cf. Acts 1:2, 26; 2:37, 42, 43; 4:33, 35, 36, 37; 5:2, 12, 18, 29, 40; 6:6; 8:1, 14, 18; 9:27; 11:1; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4. It appears only 1 time in the singular in Acts 1:25, designating Judas’s apostolic ministry.

¹⁹Acts 14:27. All scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted. The author has translated all citations from Acts 13:1-3 from Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

been evangelized!²⁰ And, Paul and Barnabas first go to the Jews!²¹ One could argue that Acts 13:1-3 signifies the movement of Christianity into the Roman empire according to the design of Acts 1:8; yet, the gospel has already gone beyond Judea and Samaria.²² If Acts 13:1-3 refers only to the first missionary journey, one may ask why the other two journeys do not follow similar ceremonies.

Considering these insufficient explanations, Ernest Best suggests that “the incident represents the first deliberate and professional missionary activity.”²³ The church does not expand beyond Jerusalem until the persecution after the death of Stephen. Even then, no one plans the spread of the gospel; it is “the incidental result of outside circumstances and haphazard.”²⁴ Since Acts 12 contains no missionary activity, Acts 13:1 connects with Acts 11:19, where the spread of the gospel results from persecution. Therefore, the writer includes Acts 13:1-3 as part of his major theme — how the gospel reaches the Gentiles — and not simply as part of the comparatively minor theme — how full-time missionary work begins.²⁵

²⁰Acts 10-11.

²¹Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1. This pattern of going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles continues through the other missionary journeys. See Acts 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8.

²²The Ethiopian (by inference) takes the gospel back with him to Africa (Acts 8:26-40), and the scattered disciples tell the message to Jews in Cyprus and Cyrene and to Greeks in Antioch (Acts 11:19-20).

²³Ernest Best, “Acts 13:1-3,” Journal of Theological Studies 11 (Oct. 1960): 345.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*, 346. Tannehill, Narrative Unity, 159, agrees: “In chapter 13 the narrator shows how an intentional mission to new areas is launched by Paul and Barnabas, reaching out to both Jews and Gentiles.”

Exegesis of Acts 13:1-3

Acts 13:1-3 contains three main statements. The church in Antioch has five prophets and teachers (1).²⁶ The Holy Spirit tells them to set apart Barnabas and Saul (2). The church sends off Barnabas and Saul (3).

Rudolf Pesch labels the account “eine kurze Bestallungserzählung.”²⁷ It has five elements of the commission form. In the introduction, five prophets and teachers are worshipping the Lord with the church at Antioch. In the confrontation, the Holy Spirit speaks. In the commission, the Holy Spirit directs the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul. In the reassurance, the Holy Spirit has already called them to this work. In the conclusion, the church lays hands on them and sends them off.

The Church in Antioch Has Five Prophets and Teachers (1)

Antioch of Syria becomes a significant city for the spread of Christianity beyond the borders of Palestine and into the Roman empire.²⁸ Nicolaus, one of the seven Hellenist leaders in the Jerusalem church, comes from Antioch. After the martyrdom of Stephen, believers from

²⁶Numbers in parentheses refer to the main clause statements as indicated in “Appendix 1: Block Diagram of Acts 13:1-3.”

²⁷Rudolf Pesch, Die Apostelgeschichte, vol. 2, Apg 13-28, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, ed. Josef Blank, Rudolf Schnackenburg, Eduard Schweizer, and Ulrich Wilckens, no. 5 (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1986), 15. Tannehill (Narrative Unity, 159) also calls the passage a “commissioning scene.”

²⁸See Acts 6:5; 11:19-21; 13:1; 14:26; 15:22-23, 30, 35; 18:22. For more information on the city of Antioch, see John R. McRay, “Antioch on the Orontes,” in Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, ed. Gerald Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 23-25.

Jerusalem flee to Antioch and preach to the Greeks. The church there sends Barnabas and Saul on the first missionary journey and hears their report of the Gentiles' reception of the gospel. The Jerusalem church sends notice to Antioch of the decision regarding four requirements for Gentiles in the church. Paul and Barnabas continue to teach and preach there, and later Paul returns to Antioch after his second missionary journey.

The church in Antioch has five prophets and teachers.²⁹ Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, becomes one of the first leaders in Antioch, after he arrives from the Jerusalem church.³⁰ Unfortunately, "über Simon, Lukos und Mehahen wissen wir sonst nichts."³¹ Simon, a Greek

²⁹ Ekklesia indicates "the Christians living and meeting in a particular place." Lothar Coenen, "Church, Synagogue," in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 1:303. See Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:22; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23; 15:41; 16:5.

F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 250, suggest the translation "in the local church" for kata thn ousan ekklesian. Kata may designate a place. See Acts 2:46; 5:42; 8:1; 11:1; 15:23; 27:5. The participle ousan is used with the predicate to further define ekklesian. The articular participle of eimi occurs in Acts 5:17; 11:1, 22; 13:1; 14:13; 16:3; 20:34; 28:17; sometimes it seems redundant. Hsan de introduces various groups of people in Acts 2:5; 11:20; 13:1; 19:7, 14; 20:8; 23:13. Information on word usage was obtained using GRAMCORD Greek New Testament for Windows with Bible Companion, ver. 1.2m (Vancouver, WA: GRAMCORD Institute, 1996).

NA27 lists two uncials and the majority text as reading t ine", i.e., "there were some prophets and teachers," but the external evidence significantly favors the reading in the text.

Te appears in Acts 151 of 215 times. Kurt Aland, ed., Vollständige Konkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament, vol. 2, Spezialübersichten (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), 272. Cf. Acts 1:13; 2:9-11 where "te kai, or simple kai, form pairs which are asyndetic among themselves." Blass, Greek Grammar, 230.

³⁰ Acts 4:26; 11:22. Barnabas does not appear in Acts after 15:39., but see Gal. 2:1, 9, 13; Col. 4:10. For a discussion of his association with Paul, see F. F. Bruce, The Pauline Circle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 15-22.

³¹ Walter Schmithals, Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas, Züricher Bibelkommentare, ed. Hans Heinrich Schmid and Siegfried Schulz (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982), 119.

form of the Semitic “Simeon,” probably has received his Jewish name from an African family of Jewish proselytes; his surname means “dark.”³² He is not the Cyrenian mentioned in Luke 23:26. Lucius, however, comes from Cyrene. Perhaps, he comes from Cyrene to Antioch with others who preach to the Greeks about Jesus.³³ The conjecture that Luke refers to himself is improbable, “since he carefully preserves his anonymity throughout the book.”³⁴ The narrator describes Manean as *Hrwdou tou tetraarcou suntrofo*. Although the hapax legomenon *suntrofo* remains difficult, it likely means a companion from one’s youth.³⁵ Saul comes from Tarsus in Cilicia; he appears last and by his Jewish name.³⁶

³²Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 17. Stephen Benko and John J. O’Rourke, *The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1971), 116, assert that Simon is “the only clear example of racial diversification” in early Christianity. The author follows the typical style for surnames, joining them with the name using a present participle. Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 2:43. Cf. Acts 1:23; 10:5, 18, 32; 11:13; 13:1; 15:22.

³³Acts 11:20.

³⁴John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1990), 216.

³⁵Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 17; Schmithals, *Apostelgeschichte*, 120. James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 615, also illustrate a widespread use as “intimate friend.” Cf. 2 Macc. 9:29.

Herod Antipas appears in Matt. 14:1; Luke 3:29; 9:7; Acts 13:1. *Tetraarch* refers to “a ruler with rank and authority lower than that of a king and one who ruled only with the approval of Roman authorities.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:481.

³⁶Acts 9:11; 22:3; cf. Phil. 3:4-6. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 395, suggests that Barnabas and Saul are not mentioned together “in order that their future association may appear founded solely on the direction of the Spirit.”

In Acts, the first appellation *profhtai* usually refers to a particular Old Testament prophet or to the part of Old Testament written by prophets.³⁷ Four times, however, it denotes certain people within the early church: a group from the Jerusalem church, including Agabus; these five men from Antioch, including Barnabas and Saul; and Judas and Silas, who took the Jerusalem decree to Antioch.³⁸ In the New Testament, *profhth* names “one who proclaims inspired utterance on behalf of God.”³⁹

The other designation *didaskalo* appears only here in Acts. In the gospels, the people frequently address Jesus as *Didaskale*.⁴⁰ In Acts and the epistles, it names “one who provides instruction” for the church.⁴¹ As such, it stands as the “third charismatic office” in the early church behind apostles and prophets.⁴²

These two identifications occur together in Acts only in Acts 13:1. Elsewhere, they appear together in 1 Cor. 12:28-29 and Eph. 4:11. The two words also appear together in Didache 15:1-2: “Therefore appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men

³⁷References to specific prophets include Acts 2:16, 30; 3:23; 7:37; 8:28, 30, 34; 13:20; 28:25. References to part of the Old Testament scripture include Acts 3:18, 21, 24, 25; 7:42, 48, 52; 10:43; 13:15, 27, 40; 15:15; 24:14; 26:22, 27; 28:23.

³⁸Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10. Perhaps, the four daughters of Philip should also be included in this listing, for they are said to have prophesied in Acts 21:9.

³⁹Louw, Greek-English Lexicon, 1:543.

⁴⁰Luke 3:12; 7:40; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7. The word appears only 2 times in the LXX: Est. 6:1 and 2 Macc. 1:10.

⁴¹Louw, Greek-English Lexicon, 1:416. See Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 1:11; James 3:1.

⁴²Klaus Wegenast, “*didaskalo*,” in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:768.

who are humble and not avaricious and true and approved, for they too carry out for you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. You must not, therefore, despise them, for they are your honored men, along with the prophets and teachers.”⁴³ E. Earle Ellis does not see a clear distinction between them in the book of Acts.⁴⁴ “There is a certain ambiguity and fluidity in the designation of ministries.”⁴⁵ Both roles share a focus on the exposition of scripture. Since Saul receives his commission as a prophet and a teacher, this passage provides a background to the next scene where he speaks as a prophet filled with the Spirit and as a teacher in the synagogue.⁴⁶

The Holy Spirit Tells Them to Set Apart Barnabas and Saul (2)

The whole church at Antioch is worshiping the Lord and fasting. While the passage does not mention the presence of the congregation, it probably presupposes it, since “they” are serving the Lord and not the “church.” This accords with other occasions in Acts when a church

⁴³Citations from the Apostolic Fathers are taken from Michael W. Holmes, ed., The Apostolic Fathers, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

⁴⁴Some texts, however, seem to distinguish between their functions, e.g., Rom 12:6-7 and 1 Cor. 14:6, 26. In this regard, Everett F. Harrison, Interpreting Acts: The Expanding Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 214, tries to distinguish between the two roles. A prophet speaks “in reponse to a distinct moving of the Spirit, providing edification, exhortation, and consolation,” while a teacher presumably has “a more sustained ministry, making use of the Old Testament and the traditions of the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus as handed down in the church.”

⁴⁵E. Earle Ellis, “The Role of the Christian Prophet in Acts,” in Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 140. The same holds for distinctions between prophet and apostle in Acts. Ellis (Ibid., 141) asks, “Is there any activity ascribed to the Christian prophet that is not also true of those named apostle? Apparently there is none.” He (Ibid., 142) concludes then that “the ministries of the apostle and the prophet in Acts may be compared to two concentric circles, in which the circle of the prophet’s activity is somewhat smaller.”

⁴⁶Acts 13:4-48.

makes decisions, e.g., Acts 6:2, 5; 15:22. Also, when Paul and Barnabas return from their journey in Acts 14:27, they report to the entire church.⁴⁷

The church's activity includes worship and fasting. The LXX uses *leitourgew* "almost exclusively for the service of priests and Levites in the temple."⁴⁸ In the Acts 13:2, however, the meaning becomes spiritualized and applies to worship in prayer.⁴⁹ *Nhsteuw* means "to go without food for a set time as a religious duty."⁵⁰ The New Testament connects prayer and fasting in Luke 2:23; Acts 13:3; 14:23. In this context, the two actions describe the church's preparation to receive revelation from the Spirit.⁵¹

While the church is worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit tells them to set apart Barnabas and Saul. The phrase *eipen to pneuma to agion* probably means that one of the prophets speaks the Spirit's direction to the church. "Luke says nothing of this human agency in order to allow as direct an effect as possible to the Spirit's command."⁵² In this way, the Spirit

⁴⁷Schmithals (*Apostelgeschichte*, 120), however, sees only the group of five prophets and teachers involved in fasting and prayer.

⁴⁸Klaus Hess, "leitourgew," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:551. See Exod. 28:35, 43; 29:30; 30:20; 39:1.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 3:552. The verb appears only in Acts 13:2; Rom. 15:27; Heb. 10:11. Did. 15:1 uses *leitourgew* to refer to the ministry of the prophets and teachers.

⁵⁰Louw, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:541. Didache 7:4 requires fasting in preparation for baptism.

⁵¹Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 17. Haenchen (*Acts*, 395-396) adds: "By fasting one withdraws in the highest degree from the influence of the world and makes oneself receptive to commands from heaven."

⁵²*Ibid.*, 396.

directs them to set apart Barnabas and Saul.⁵³ This commission makes clear Saul's call in Acts 9:15 and anticipates their work as apostles in Acts 13:4-14:28 — a work to which the Spirit has already called them.⁵⁴

The Church Sends Off Barnabas and Saul (3)

Then, the church returns to fasting and praying.⁵⁵ They also lay hands on Barnabas and Saul. In the Old Testament *epitiqhmi* refers to either an act of sacrifice or an act of blessing.⁵⁶ In the New Testament it appears in the contexts of healing, commission, and baptism.⁵⁷ A striking similarity exists between Acts 13:2-3 and Num. 8:10-11, where the Levites are set apart for a professional ministry.⁵⁸ "Likewise Paul and Barnabas are set apart to a professional

⁵³ *Aforisate* means "to set aside a person for a particular task or function." Louw, Greek-English Lexicon, 1:483. See Matt. 13:49; 25:32; Luke 6:22; Acts 19:9; Rom. 1:1; 2 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 1:15; 2:12. *Dh* emphasizes the verb. Cf. Matt. 13:23; Luke 2:15; Acts 15:36; 1 Cor. 6:20. *Moi* is a dative of advantage. Relating to the expression *ton Barnaban kai Saulon*, Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 277, comments: "Always in the NT, whenever proper names are in the equation, distinct individuals are in view. . . . Yet at the same time they are united under one article for the purposes at hand." Cf. Matt. 17:1; Mark 15:47; John 11:19.

⁵⁴ *Ergon* indicates the task of evangelism and mission. See Acts 14:26; 15:38. The relative pronoun *o* follows the case for the object of either *ei* "or" or *pro* "for". *Proskaleomai* refers to a divine "call to a special task or office." Louw, Greek-English Lexicon, 1:424. See Acts 16:10. The perfect tense indicates that the divine decision has preceded its disclosure to the church.

⁵⁵ *D* adds *pante* "after" after *proseuxamenoi*. The interpretation is correct, even if the reading is not.

⁵⁶ See Lev. 16:21; Num. 27:18.

⁵⁷ See Luke 13:13; Acts 6:6; 8:17.

⁵⁸ The passages share several words in common: *aforizw*, *ergon*, *epitiqhmi*, and *cei r*.

ministry to do for the Church what it can no longer do for itself.”⁵⁹ By that, the church recognizes their divine call, identifies with its two representatives, and makes them into “their extended selves.”⁶⁰ At last, the church sends them off.⁶¹

⁵⁹Best, “Acts 13:1-3,” 348.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Pesch (*Apostelgeschichte*, 18), comments about the unexpressed subject: Das “Subjekt der Aussendung ist (wie in 2) die ganze Gemeinde.” *Apōluw* means “to cause someone to depart for a particular purpose.” Louw, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1:191. Cf. Acts 15:30, 33; *pempw* in Acts 15:22; Phil. 2:19; and *apostellw* in Mark 11:1; 1 Cor. 1:17. E, nearly all Latin versions, and the whole Syriac tradition make explicit the direct object *autou*; it may be inferred from context since Greek tends toward an economic use of the personal pronouns. James H. Moulton, ed. *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908-1976), 3:38-39.

CONCLUSION

The paper has presented an introduction to commission narrative as a sub-genre within the book of Acts. It has also offered an exegesis of Acts 13:1-3, which narrates how the church in Antioch sends off Barnabas and Saul at the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The account develops the perspective of divine guidance, which is present throughout the book of Acts. In this regard, the commission narrative highlights the divine initiative behind the church's deliberate expansion into regions beyond Judea and Samaria. It tells how the church "ordains" Barnabas and Saul as apostles.¹ The church attentive to divine direction prays, for the church makes all important decisions with prayer.² Moreover, prayer embraces "an ideal position to receive a commission from God or his messenger."³

¹Pesch, Apostelgeschichte, 18. See Acts 14:4, 14.

²See Acts 1:14, 24-25, 6:6; 9:11; 10:9, 30; 11:5; 13:2; 22:17.

³Hubbard, "Role of Commissioning Accounts," 193.

APPENDIX 1

BLOCK DIAGRAM OF ACTS 13:1-3

1 δε
 1 *Ἦσαν . . . προφηται και διδασκαλοι*
 εν Αντιοχει α
 κατα τη ν ου σαν ε κκλησι αν
 ο
 τε
 Βαρναβα ς
 και
 Συμεω ν
 ο καλου μενος Νι γερ
 και
 Λου κιος
 ο Κυρηναι ος ,
 τε
 Μαναη ν
 Ἡρω δου του τετραα ρχου
 συ ντροφος
 και
 Σαυ λος .

2 δε
 λειτουργου ντων αυ τω ν τω κυρι ω
 και
 νηστευο ντων
 2 *ει πεν το πνευ μα το α γιον·*
 Α Αφορι σατε δη μοι το ν Βαρναβα ν
 και
 Σαυ λον
 ει ς το ε ργον
 ο προσκε κλημαι αυ του ς .

3 το τε
 νηστευσαντες
 και
 προσευξαμενοι
 και
3 επιθεντες τα ς χειρας αυτοις
 απελυσαν.

APPENDIX 3

SEMANTIC DIAGRAM OF ACTS 13:1-3

Clause	Connective	Sentence Function	Verb Analysis	Subject	Other Links
1	de	Declarative	Imperfect 3 rd Pl	[autoi]	Barnaba" kai Saulo"
2	de	Declarative	Aorist 3 rd Sg	to pneuma	Barnaban kai Saulon
3	tote	Declarative	Aorist 3 rd Sg	[autoi]	nhsteuw autoi"

+)))))) 1 The Church had five prophets and teachers.
 *
 *
 /)))))) 2 The Holy Spirit spoke to them.
 *
 *
 .)))))) 3 The Church sent off Barnabas and Saul.

APPENDIX 4

EXEGETICAL OUTLINE OF ACTS 13:1-3

- A. The church in Antioch has five prophets and teachers.
- B. The Holy Spirit tells them to set apart Barnabas and Saul.
- C. The church sends off Barnabas and Saul.

APPENDIX 5

COMMISSIONING ACCOUNTS IN ACTS⁴

	Introduction	Confrontation	Commission	Reassurance	Conclusion
1:1-14	1-2,9	3-5,10	7-8	11	12-14
5:17-21a	17-18	19	20	(19-20)	21a
8:26-30	27b-28	26a,29a	26b,29b	(39)	27a,30
9:1-9	1-3a	3b,4b-5	6a	6b	8-9
9:10-19	10a	10b	11-12	15-16	17-19
10:1-8	1-2	3	5-6	4b	7-8
10:9-23	9-10a	10b-12	13,15-16	20b	21-23
10:30-33	30a	30b	32	31	33
11:4-12	4-5a	5b-6	7	9	10-12
12:6-12	6	7a	7b-8	11	12
13:1-3	1-2a	2a	2b	(2c)	3
16:8-10	8	9a	9b	(10b)	10a
18:7-11	7-8	9a	9b	10	11
22:6-11	6a	6b,7b-9	10a-b	(10c)	11
22:12-16	12	13	14-15	(15)	16
22:17-21	17	18a	18b,21	21	--

⁴This listing appears in Hubbard, "Role of Commissioning Accounts," 191. Hubbard also includes the reaction and protest which appear in less the half the accounts. The parentheses placed around the verse numbers means that the element is present only implicitly.

	Introduction	Confrontation	Commission	Reassurance	Conclusion
23:11	11a	11b	11a	11c	--
26:12-20	12	13,14b-15	15-18	(17a)	19-20
27:21-26	21-23a	23b	24b	24a	25-26

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