

Antioch as a Church Planting Community: Revisiting Barnabas and Paul's Departure in Acts 13:1–4

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Abstract

The church of Antioch is commonly taken as a model of a missional community as it supposedly sent Barnabas and Paul on their church planting endeavour (Acts 13:1–4). A close reading of the relevant texts shows that this may be a misreading of the available data. Barnabas and Paul are sent by the Spirit, not Antioch, and, as is common in Acts and the New Testament, apostleship is by divine calling, not institutional decision-making and strategising. The verb *ἀπολύω* is never used in “missional” sending contexts. Additionally, Paul never links his apostleship with Antioch. Furthermore, the common reading downplays and veils important theological patterns in Acts.

Key Terms

Acts 13:1–4; Antioch; apostle; church planting; mission; Paul; Barnabas; Holy Spirit

1 Introduction

In Acts 13:1–4, the life of what seems to be a thriving community in Antioch¹ suddenly takes a new direction when the Spirit steps in to send Barnabas and Paul away for an unspecified endeavour. So begins what is often termed Barnabas and Paul's first missionary journey. So also begins what many, with various points of emphasis, consider to be the foremost example and model of church planting in the NT: a community that sends some of its core people to found new daughter communities elsewhere.

¹ In the NT Antioch is mentioned only in Acts 11:19–27; 13:1–4; 14:26; 15:22–35; 18:22; and Gal 2:11. The other mentions of Antioch refer to Ἀντιόχεια τὴν Πισιδίαν (Acts 13:14; 14:19, 21; 2 Tim 3:11).

Thus, according to Pope John Paul II's 1990 Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* “A typical example [of a missionary community] is the local church at Antioch which, after being evangelized, becomes an evangelizing community which sends missionaries to others (cf. Acts 13:2–3)” (Ioannes Paulus PP II. 1990, §61; see also §27). Similarly, according to the Edinburgh 2010 document (2010):

It was in Antioch that the first missionary band came into being after the resurrection (Acts 13:1–3). The local church was growing among different people groups. When this local church wanted to move beyond its own borders, they prayed and the Holy Spirit told them to send out a *missionary team* of Paul and Barnabas. (p. 121; emphasis added)²

This perspective is commonly found in more technical works too. In his massive opus on the early mission, for example, Schnabel (2002, 1457) describes the Antioch community as “a church that was conscious of a missionary responsibility, willing to free leading preachers and teachers of the congregation to start missionary work in distant regions.” According to Witherington (1998, 390), “it is Luke’s intent to portray this missionary journey as being the inaugural efforts by a church at planned evangelism of Gentiles as well as Jews, indeed the first planned efforts at overseas missions.” This is a perspective with a long pedigree, reflected in numerous commentaries (Barrett 1994, 610; Bovon 1993, 52; Johnson 1992, 225–226; 2020, 57).³ Whether this influenced the common translation of ἀπολύω in Acts 13:3 as “to send away”⁴ or results from such a translation, the conclusion many draw is that Barnabas and Paul are Antioch’s envoys and that said sending would explain the title of “apostles” in Acts 14:4, 14. Even if many non-English translations opt for a less directive “to let go,”⁵ it does not seem to make much difference in

² Examples of this approach in the missiological literature could be multiplied at length. In his classic study, Bosch (1991, 43) states that “[t]hrough the ministry of Paul and Barnabas the Antioch church became a community with a concern for people they have never met—people living on Cyprus, the mainland of Asia Minor, and elsewhere. They decided to send missionaries there . . . and went ahead and commissioned their two most gifted and experienced leaders to go (Acts 13:1f.).”

³ Barrett (1994, 610) does add “provided that it is recognized that, in Paul’s own conviction, he became an apostle at the time of his conversion (though he may not have understood at once the full meaning of his vocation).”

⁴ This is the choice of most English translations. See, e.g., “they sent them away” (KJV, NKJV, ASV); “they sent them off” (ESV, NIV, NRSV).

⁵ For example: “laissèrent partir” (Segond révisée; Genève1979); “li lasciarono partire” (Nuova Riveduta 1994); “li congedarono” (Conferenza Episcopale Italiana 2008); “ließen sie gehen”

the way the episode is pictured. Marguerat (2015, 24), for example, refers several times to Barnabas and Paul as being “sent” by Antioch and to the latter as organising their mission journey.⁶ Rius-Camps (1984, 37) even goes so far as to say that the mission entrusted to the church of Jerusalem is now entrusted to the church of Antioch.⁷

A closer examination of Barnabas and Paul’s relationship with Antioch in Acts, the rest of the NT and the early church shows that this reading of the text is a distortion of the available information and that it downplays and veils important theological patterns in Acts.

2 Antioch in Acts

2.1 *Acts 6–9*

The first time we hear of Antioch on the Orontes in Acts is as the place of origin of Nicolas (6:3), one of the seven and a proselyte from Antioch and the only one whose geographical origin is indicated. This may be an anticipation of a return to Antioch later in the narrative (11:19–20). His background might help explain why some travelled to Antioch after Stephen’s death (11:19). Nicolas might have had a readily available network of relatives, friends and acquaintances who might have been interested in the new faith in Christ or would at least welcome those early faith refugees. All in all, whatever the reason for the mention of Nicolas’s origin, it does at least create a textual connection between Jerusalem and Antioch, between Acts 6 and 13.

Although Antioch is not mentioned in Acts 9:19–30, therein are sown the seeds of a relationship and of a ministry that will be crucial for the city later. Taking the initiative, Barnabas brings Paul to the apostles,⁸ evokes the Lord’s encounter with Paul and his speaking with assurance in Damascus, just as the apostles had seen the Lord and spoken about him with assurance before (2:29; 4:13, 29, 31). This text introduces Barnabas

(Luther 1912); “los despidieron” (Reina-Valera Antigua 2015); “ließ sie ziehen” (Neue Genfer Übersetzung 2000).

⁶ “Paul’s missionary strategy . . . is a strategy of the Church of Antioch guided by the Spirit. Divine calling comes first, the Church ratifies it” (Marguerat 2015, 24; see several similar statements in 26–28). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

⁷ “What the primary activity of the Christian ‘community’ in Antioch must be is very clear for the Holy Spirit, but the church—represented by Barnabas and Paul—will be discovering it as the mission progresses . . .” (Rius-Camps 1984, 37). So too Butticaz (2010, 237, 242) who says that “the missionary hub now moves to Antioch” and Antioch becomes “a future missionary hub.”

⁸ This is the second mention of the apostles and Barnabas (Acts 4:33–37) and the last mention of the apostles as the deciding authority in Jerusalem. From then on, the elders will join them in making decisions.

and Paul as a duo and Paul as a witness to the risen Christ who preached in his name (9:27), thereby authenticating his apostleship (22:14–18; 26:16). The parallels between Paul’s experience in Damascus and Jerusalem also forecast continuity in Paul’s ministry and a future pattern of having to flee after preaching.

In Acts 11:19–20, the text resumes the thread left in Acts 8:4 and adds that those who reached Antioch also spoke to the “Hellenists,” just like Paul had tried to do in Jerusalem (9:27–30).⁹ It is in Antioch that we encounter the first organised church outside of Jerusalem—unfortunately, with precious few details provided.¹⁰ Having heard about the reception of the gospel in Antioch and despite having had no involvement in the events there, the church in Jerusalem dispatches (ἐξαποστέλλω, cf. Acts 8:14)¹¹ Barnabas to travel (διελθεῖν)¹² to Antioch. This is the first time the ἐκκλησία τῆς οὐσῆς ἐν Ἱερουσαλή and not the apostles is the subject of a corporate act in the narration. Barrett (1994, 552; emphasis added) suggests that the verb διέρχομαι might mean “*to pass through on a tour of investigation or inspection.*” Similarly, Marguerat (2007, 412) sees in its use an indication that Barnabas is “mandated ‘to travel all the way to Antioch’ during a missionary tour.” Such readings would indicate a “missional” vision by the church in Jerusalem. But the use of the verb in 11:19, 22 and elsewhere does not warrant such readings. The verb commonly denotes passing through an area without any connotations of purpose (e.g., 8:4, 40; 9:32, 38; 10:38; 11:19). No other contextual information informs the reader as to what happened during Barnabas’s journey or its goal.

Later on Barnabas travels to Tarsus to look for Paul (ἀναζήτεω, 11:25; cf. Luke 2:44). After 9:27, this is the second time Barnabas seems to be taking the initiative to give Paul’s life another direction. Eventually, Barnabas and Paul come to Antioch to help a church that neither they nor the Jerusalem church started and stay and teach there for a year (11:26).¹³

⁹ Much has been written for the reason of this shift to the Hellenists. For a recent presentation of several options see Riesner (2018) who thinks that the link is Jesus’s traditions and his turn to the nations after he faced persecution from the Jews. A similar process would be at play here.

¹⁰ For the different chronological reconstructions of these events, I send the reader back to commentaries and monographs. This episode is also mentioned in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* II.1.8; II.3.3–4.

¹¹ Mark 16:8; Luke 1:53; 20:10–11; Acts 7:12; 9:30; 11:22; 12:11; 13:26; 17:14; 22:21; Gal 4:4, 6. With Acts 9:30 (Paul), 12:11 (angel); 17:14; 22:21 (Paul), these are the only uses in Acts to refer to sending someone.

¹² The verb is omitted in several manuscripts (𝔓⁷⁴, Χ, Α, Β, 81, 1739).

¹³ Except for Acts 9:31, this is the first use of the word ἐκκλησία for a Christian assembly outside of Jerusalem. It is used again in the context of the Antiochian Christians in 13:1; 14:27; 15:3. Notice the unusual construction with the dative 11:26: “Barnabas and Paul were gathered with

While Barnabas and Paul are in Antioch, prophets of which Agabus is the only one named,¹⁴ travel down from Jerusalem to announce an impending famine in Judea (11:27–30). Consequently, to help the believers there, the Christians of Antioch send money to the elders in Jerusalem (11:30), their first mention in Acts,¹⁵ through Barnabas¹⁶ and Paul. It is therefore *after the Spirit's intervention* that Antioch takes the initiative to send relief. Furthermore, what is sent is money, not Barnabas and Paul themselves. Since neither Barnabas nor Paul was originally from the church of Antioch and since Barnabas came from Jerusalem, this is not to be seen as Antioch sending down its own people.

2.2 *Acts 13:1–4*

After the narration of the events in Acts 12, the text turns back to Antioch, where Barnabas and Paul have returned. But this return will be brief in terms of the storyline, only four verses. The focus of the text is clearly not the Antiochian church, but Barnabas and Paul's incipient mission.

For our purpose, only some of the details of the text need explanation.¹⁷ We know that some prophets had gone from Jerusalem to Antioch (11:27). While the five teachers¹⁸ and prophets of the church in Antioch are serving and fasting, the Spirit asks for Barnabas and Paul to be set apart for the work to which he has called them (*εἰς τὸ ἔργον*, cf. 14:26; 15:36–38). After the Spirit's instruction to Philip in 8:29 and to Peter in 10:19 (see also 11:12), this is the third direct speech by the Spirit in Acts.¹⁹ How and through whom the Spirit speaks is not said. It has for long been commonly suggested that he does so through a prophet;²⁰ this may be the case, but we simply do not know.

One question that needs to be raised is who the Spirit is talking to and who the subject of the verbs in 13:2–3 is: the whole assembly, as is

the church" (*συναγθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ*), as if to distinguish them from the church. This is the only such use of the verb in the NT. See also in very different contexts 2 Clem. 4.5 and Mart. Pol. 18.3.

¹⁴ In Acts 21:11 Agabus appears again in a context where Paul is present.

¹⁵ If money was entrusted to the apostles earlier (4:35), it is now given to the elders (11:30), as sign of the structural evolution of the Jerusalem church. So also Marguerat (2015, 412, 418).

¹⁶ After Acts 4:36–37, this is the second time that Barnabas is involved in contributing to financial help to the believers in Jerusalem (see Tannehill 1986, 148).

¹⁷ For the parallels with Acts 2 see Dionne (2011, 10).

¹⁸ This is the only mention of teachers in Acts but the verb *διδάσκω* itself is often used (1:1; 4:2, 18; 5:21, 25, 28, 42; 11:26; 15:1, 35; 18:11, 25; 20:20; 21:21, 28; 28:31). On the teachers here see Falcetta (2020, 53–59) who thinks that Antioch is the origin of the function of teachers in the church as well as of the name of the function itself.

¹⁹ Contrast this with the evil spirit's direct speech in Acts 19:15.

²⁰ Already Chrysostom, *Hom. Act. xxvii.*

assumed by the majority of commentators; the five just mentioned; or the five in 13:2 (Barnabas and Saul included) and then only Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen in 13:3 (see Dupont 1984, 166)?²¹ If the Spirit were to address the whole community, this would be the only case of a global corporate address by the Spirit in Acts (Gaventa 1982, 190). It is indeed not clear at all that the whole community is concerned in vv. 2–3 (Clark 2001, 144 n. 131). The fact that Barnabas and Paul report to the community in 14:27 does not necessarily imply a direct role of the community in 13:2–3. The circumstances and setting are altogether different (Barrett 1994, 607).²² Furthermore, why mention the five if it is not to make them the subject of v. 2? The *λειτουργ-* vocabulary seems to favour a restriction to the five. In the LXX, the vocabulary is not usually used for an assembly but for a select number of people (Rius-Camps 1984, 35). The only exceptions seem to be Lev 24:14 and Num 8:10. The vocabulary in *λειτουργ-* is rare in the NT.²³ Should the whole church be serving in Acts 13:2, this would be the only case where the vocabulary is not used for a specific individual or group of individuals but for a whole community. One could argue that the five were ministering and fasting but that the Spirit spoke to the whole assembly, but this seems a cumbersome way to read the text. It is much simpler to read v. 2 as “while these [the five just mentioned in v. 1] were serving and fasting the Spirit told them . . .” Practically speaking, it is also hard to imagine the whole assembly laying their hands on Barnabas and Paul in v. 3 (Barrett 1994, 604; Bowers 1991, 102 n. 1; Clark 2001, 144 n. 131; Conzelmann, 1987, 99). In Acts 6:6, the praying and laying of hands is done by the apostles. In Acts 14:23 Barnabas and Paul are the ones laying hands, praying and fasting.

Some have introduced a causal relationship between the serving and fasting and the Spirit’s sending Barnabas and Paul, as if the church of Antioch was aware of a duty to mission and was trying to figure out how to meet its obligation. Fasting would be a way to wait for God’s revelation and direction. Thus, according to Tannehill (1986, 161), “[t]he mission

²¹ Dionne (2011, 28–29) notices that the restricted reading is often found among German commentators. According to Marguerat (2015, 23) *αὐτῶν* refers naturally to the five of v. 1 but can also be a reference to the whole church.

²² According to Dionne (2011, 28–29), the ecclesiastical context of 14:26–28 and the *ὅτε* of v. 1 support reading “among who” in v. 1 and this would be strengthened by the support of the Western text reading *ἐν οἷς* in Codex Bezae and the Vulgate, which imply that there were other teachers and prophets than those mentioned. Codex Bezae 1 (6th–7th cent.) reinforces this with the addition of *ἵνα καί*. In my opinion, this does not affect that the plural, the vocabulary and the context seem to apply to the five.

²³ Luke 1:23; Acts 13:2; Rom 13:6; 15:16, 27; 2 Cor 9:12; Phil 2:17, 25, 30; Heb 1:7, 14; 8:2, 6; 9:21; 10:11.

journey of Paul and Barnabas, like the missions of Jesus and the apostles, is born out of the searching and alertness of prayer and is empowered by the Spirit.”²⁴ Given that many decisions are made in Acts without fasting and that in previous episodes the apostles and the church in Jerusalem are reacting to the expansion of the word, not planning it (8:14; 10:17, 21, 28, 34; 11:1, 18, 22), this is surely reading much into the only mention of the verb in Acts (see also *νεστεία* in 14:23 and 27:9). Fasting and serving might simply have been a common practice in the community. It is probably wiser to conclude with Witherington (1998, 393) that “it is not possible to determine from this elliptical remark whether the leaders were simply given to fervency in their devotions or were seeking some specific guidance on a matter through intense worship and fasting.”

Barnabas and Paul are thus to be set apart (Acts 13:2). With Luke 6:22 and Acts 19:9, this is the only use of ἀφορίζω in Luke-Acts. Using the same verb, Paul will refer to himself as having been set apart for the gospel (Rom 1:1), since before his birth (Gal 1:15). Paul and Barnabas are the only ones “set apart” for a missionary work in the NT. The use of this verb combined with the verb προσκαλέω indicates that Barnabas and Paul’s mission is specific to them and is not expected of the three others mentioned in Antioch or of the whole church. The use of the pronoun *μοι*²⁵ and the agency of the Spirit (“I have called them”) reflects the thread in Acts, obvious already in Acts 1, that the initial impetus and agency for mission in Acts come from the Spirit, God or Jesus and not initially from the will, agency or planning of individuals or organised bodies, not even from the church.

The work for which Barnabas and Paul are set apart is not defined. Just as Paul was not told what to do when he was called on his way to Damascus but had to discover it progressively (Acts 9:6, 16; 22:10), so it is here. The same εἰς τὸ ἔργον joined with the aorist ὁ ἐπλήρωσαν in the recapitulation of 14:26 will confirm *post eventum* that the work in question was the events in chs. 13–14, so will be their use in 15:38 to look back on Mark’s departure in 13:13. From previous events in Acts and in line with Acts 1:8, the reader may conjecture that in 13:2 Barnabas and Paul’s work

²⁴ Tannehill’s parallels in Luke 3–4 and Acts 1–2 do not warrant the causal relationship he draws between Jesus’s and the apostles’ praying. In neither case is fasting nor the Spirit leading them into mission mentioned. See also Conzelmann (1987, 99); Pesch (1986, 17); Wall (2002, 189, 201). The addition of *πάντες* in D suggests a reading where the whole community was fasting and praying.

²⁵ The use of *μοι* “adds to the emphasis on the divine nature of Barnabas’ and Paul’s commission, and indicates the continuity of this mission with that of the Twelve” (Clark, 2001, 144). So also Dionne (2011, 32).

will have to do with preaching the word, but we simply cannot assume that the five and the church of Antioch knew that mission, evangelism and church planting lay ahead. After all, both Barnabas and Paul had already accomplished many things in Acts, yet none of these involved travelling purposely to another place to preach the gospel where it had not yet been preached and certainly not to start a local Christian community. All that the five know is that the Spirit wants to send Barnabas and Paul for a work yet to be determined and for which Antioch's input and vision, if any, seem entirely unasked for and irrelevant. From their past relationship with them, the church would not be able to foresee that the Spirit's calling would involve founding new communities.

Is there any significance to the verb and the tense used for the Spirit's calling? The verb *προσκαλέω* is common in the NT. It is used several times in the context of a call to mission (Matt 10:1; 15:32; Mark 6:7; Acts 16:10). In many cases the call is made orally. Marguerat (2015, 23) suggests that Acts 2:39 and 16:10 indicate that the verb is used "to evoke a divine vocation." But the verb is often used in contexts which have little to do with a divine vocation (e.g., Matt 18:2; Mark 15:44; Acts 5:40; 13:7; 23:17; 23:23; Jas 5:14). The context determines the content and modality of the call, not the verb itself. Should we see a reference to a previous call in the use of the perfect *προσκέκληματι*? Again, Marguerat (2015, 23) thinks so: "the church of Antioch is called to ratify a vocation previously decided by God." Whether an initial call was made previously, when and how, we do not know.

After hearing the Spirit's call, they, the three besides Paul and Barnabas probably, fast, pray²⁶ and lay their hands on Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:3).²⁷ Incidentally, the reference to fasting here indicates that one must not necessarily interpret fasting in v. 1 as a decision-making practice. In v. 1 no decision-making process is hinted at and in v. 3 the fasting is *post eventum*. In Acts 14:23 the fasting and praying also occurs *after* the selection of elders. The mention of the laying on of hands in 13:3 is not surprising and does not necessarily imply direct and active agency by the church of Antioch.²⁸ It parallels the events of Acts 6:1–7. In Acts 6:6 the

²⁶ For other references to fasting and praying see Luke 2:37; 5:33; Acts 13:3; 14:23; Pol. *Phil.* 7.2; 2 Clem. 16.4; Did. 8.1–2.

²⁷ Chrysostom already restricts the subject of v. 3 to Lucius and Manaen without mentioning Simeon; see *Hom. Act. xxvii*.

²⁸ "By the laying of hands, the Church appoints them as its official representatives charged with fulfilling, in its name, the new mission intended for them by the Spirit. It is therefore as 'emissaries' of the community of Antioch that Paul and Barnabas reach Iconium" (Flichy 2009, 46). She does not mention that in v. 4 it is by the Spirit that Barnabas and Paul are said to be sent.

apostles also prayed and laid their hands on people chosen for a task but not by the apostles themselves. In Acts 13 Barnabas and Paul are also chosen for a task, but not by those who laid their hands upon them. Whatever the exact details of the fast, prayer and laying on of hands, it is hard not to see here some kind of an official acceptance, confirmation, and recommendation by the church of Barnabas and Paul for their work, as 14:26 makes more explicit. But nothing warrants the conclusion that v. 3 is a way for Luke to indicate that the church is commissioning and sending Barnabas and Paul as its representatives and missionaries.

Crucial here for a theology of mission in Acts is that the three, or by now the church with them, let Barnabas and Paul go (*ἀπέλυσαν*) and that the author of Acts never uses the vocabulary of sending for missionary work with Antioch as its subject.²⁹ The verb used in 13:3 is neither *ἀποστέλλω* nor *πέμπω*, nor any of their cognates, which are used elsewhere in Acts for sending (e.g., Acts 11:29–30; 13:4), but *ἀπολύω*. The verb is frequent in the NT and in Acts in particular.³⁰ A look at its use shows that it is never used for a simple “sending,” and certainly not for sending on a missionary journey, unless, of course, such would be the case here. Often, as is the case with *λύω*, it is used in contexts of deliverance from a bond, often from jail (Acts 3:13; 4:21, 23; 5:40; 16:35; 17:9; 26:32; 28:18), as is also the case in the LXX (Prochsch 1967, 328–335), or of leaving a place where one has temporarily been staying (Acts 15:30, 33 [see below]; 19:40; 23:22; 28:25) and need not or should not stay anymore.

Barnabas and Paul had not originally come from Antioch but from Jerusalem and Tarsus. Rightfully, many prefer to opt for the verb “to let go”³¹ or “to dismiss” (Clark 2001, 145) rather than “to send,” thereby avoiding the idea of a direct Antiochian agency in the sending process. What Antioch does is to release Barnabas and Paul, to let them go for a work they have no preview of, which they have not planned and whose contours the church does not know and therefore can neither organise nor strategise. The following verse and narration make this clear.

Similarly, according to Keener (2012, 1995), the church “now fasts and prays more for Barnabas and Saul before sending them on for their enormous task (13:3).” But at this stage neither the church nor Barnabas and Paul know what their task is to be or that it will be “enormous.”

²⁹ Some manuscripts add *οὐτούς*: E lat sy; Lcf. It matters little. The context makes it clear that it is Barnabas and Paul that are let go.

³⁰ Out of sixty-six uses in the NT, fifteen are in Acts: 3:13; 4:21, 23; 5:40; 13:3; 15:30, 33; 16:35–36; 17:9; 19:40; 23:22; 26:32; 28:18, 25. See also *λύω* + *ἀπό* in Luke 13:15–16; 1 Cor 7:27.

³¹ See footnote 5.

That Barnabas and Paul are sent by the Spirit and not by the church of Antioch is made explicit in v. 4. Here again Luke does not use a verb of the *ἀποστ-* root but of the *πέμπ-* root: ἐκπέμπω.³² The verb is found only here and in 17:10 in Acts.³³ But the cognate *πέμπω* is, of course, quite frequent in the NT.³⁴ With the exception of the help sent in Acts 11:29–30, *πέμπω* is always used for sending people in Luke-Acts.³⁵ We will shortly come back to this.

2.3 *Acts 14:4, 14*

In Acts 14:4, 14 Barnabas and Paul are suddenly called “apostles,” a term reserved for the Twelve elsewhere in Acts.³⁶ Numerous suggestions have been offered by commentators to explain this abrupt use of the word, of which only a few can be mentioned here: this would be a reference to their being sent by Antioch so that their apostleship would date to that sending; Luke’s uncritical use of his sources on 13:1–4; a reflection of Paul’s claim to be on the same level as the Twelve; a different meaning of the term than when used for the Twelve, etcetera. A word should be said about this last explanation.

Many see in Luke’s use of ἀπόστολος a different meaning than when referring to the Twelve, because Paul and Barnabas do not fit the criteria for apostleship set in Acts 1:21–25 (e.g., Harnack 1908, 324; Holladay 2016, 283; Marguerat 2015, 61 n. 12). But the criteria set forth in 1:21–22 are not those needed to be an apostle first, in this case to replace Judas as one of the Twelve, but a witness of the resurrection (1:21). It is when Matthias is chosen by the Lord that he will be able to join the mission of apostleship (ἀπόστολή, Acts 1:25; Rom 1:5; 1 Cor 9:2; Gal 2:8). In this context, apostleship and being a witness are intertwined, but distinct. If we do not hear about Barnabas’s apostleship anymore (but see 1 Cor 9:6), we learn from Acts 22:15, 21 that Paul too was to be

³² Barrett (1994, 610, 601) remarks that the author does not use “ἀποστέλλειν, which would unmistakably have called to mind the nouns ἀπόστολος . . .” but still calls Barnabas and Paul Antioch’s apostles.

³³ See also in the LXX, Gen 24:54, 56, 59; 1 Sam 20:20; 24:20; 2 Sam 19:32; 1 Esd 4:44; Prov 17:11; Bar 4:23. The contexts are about letting people go who had been detained one way or the other in a place.

³⁴ It is used about eighty times. See also ἀναπέμπω in Luke 23:7, 11, 15; Acts 25:21; μεταπέμπω in Acts 10:5, 22, 29; 11:13; 20:1; 24:24–26; 25:3; and προπέμπω in Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5.

³⁵ Luke 4:26; 7:6, 10, 19; 15:15; 16:24, 27; 20:11–13; Acts 10:5, 32–33; 15:22, 25; 19:31; 20:17; 23:30; 25:25, 27.

³⁶ Clark (1998, 184–185) thinks that the parallel between 14:3–4; 1:8 and 5:12 (signs and wonders done by their hands) and the allusion to Isa 49:6 in Acts 13:47 shows that for Luke, Barnabas and Paul play a role similar to the Twelve.

considered a witness (*μάρτυς*) because of his seeing the Lord, who was sending him (*ἐξαποστέλλω*). This is repeated in Acts 26:16–17 (*μάρτυς*, *ἀποστέλλω*). Paul was a witness of what he had seen and heard (26:15), just like the Twelve (4:20). Paul may not have been with the Lord from the beginning, but he saw the risen Lord and was sent by him, just as the Twelve were. As is clear from 1 Cor 1:17; 4:9, 9:1–5; 15:9; Gal 1:17; 2:8, Paul does not see himself as a different kind of apostle than the Twelve.³⁷ Furthermore, Paul is probably the closest to fulfil the programmatic prediction of Acts 1:8. The Spirit also intervened in his life and made him a witness to the ends of the earth. Any other view runs against Paul's own perspective on his apostleship but also waters it down.³⁸

To explain this shift to *ἀπόστολος* in Acts 14:4, 14, one might also consider the fact that in 13:4 Barnabas and Paul are said to be sent (*πέμπω*) by the Spirit (Clark 2001, 143–144).³⁹ In Acts 15:22–25 Paul, Barnabas, Jude and Silas are sent (*πέμπω*) to Antioch but then *ἀποστέλλω* is used for the same sending in 15:27, a good indication of the often synonymous meaning of the two verbs.⁴⁰ Similarly, in John 13:16 the one who is sent (*ἀπόστολος*) is not greater than the one who sent him (*πέμπω*) and in John 20:21 Jesus was sent by the father (*ἀποστέλλω*) and sends (*πέμπω*) the apostles (*καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ πέμπω ὑμᾶς*), where some manuscripts read *ἀποστέλλω* instead of *πέμπω*.⁴¹ The reason for the use of the substantive *ἀπόστολος* in Acts 14:4, 14 to refer to people who have been sent (*πέμπω*) may also be the lack of a cognate adjective or substantive of the verb *πέμπω* in the NT.

³⁷ See also 1 Clem. 47.1.

³⁸ So too Schneider (1982, 115). “Neither Paul nor Barnabas is an apostle merely ‘in the general and relatively unimportant sense’ of a missionary sent out by the church at Antioch” (Clark 2001, 147). So also Keener (2012, 2125): “The use of the term ‘apostles’ here [Acts 14:4] probably reminds Luke’s audience that these were God’s commissioned agents analogous to the Twelve (cf. Luke 11:49), an idea well suited to the way Luke parallels various characters.”

³⁹ See also Clark (2001, 143–144). Among the many examples of such neglect, in addition to Flichy (2009), one could mention Marguerat (2015, 27–28; emphasis added) who, though he repeatedly evokes Barnabas and Paul being “sent” by Antioch, has little to say about the verb used except that it is the Spirit who “sends out (*ἐκ-πέμπω, to send out of*).” Despite the size of his commentary, Keener does not discuss “letting go” and does not contrast *ἀπολύω* and *πέμπω*. In both cases he simply uses the verb “to send” without any discussion (2012, 1995–1996). According to Stenschke (2010, 66–78, 75), in Acts 14:4 and 14:14 “[s]ince neither man fulfills the criteria of Acts 1:21f. for apostles, apostle should here be understood in the sense of ‘envoy’: Paul and Barnabas were apostles but in a sense different from that in which Peter and John were apostles.” Not only is this hard to justify from a linguistic perspective, but Stenschke (2010, 74, 76) makes no mention of the Spirit “sending” in 13:4 and evokes only a “prompting” by the Spirit.

⁴⁰ On this see Rengstorf (1964, 403–406, 421–422), without necessarily accepting his hypothetical *πλώ* lineage.

⁴¹ Ι2a, D*, L, 050, 33.

That the word ἀπόστολος does not refer to being sent by Antioch is confirmed by the fact that the substantive and the verb ἀποστέλλω are almost never explicitly used in the NT and the early Christian literature for someone sent by a community, and certainly not in order to evangelise or preach to unbelievers. The only people sent by a church where the vocabulary -στελλ- is used in the NT are, using the cognate verb, Peter and John in Acts 8:14 where they are sent to Samaria; Barnabas who in Acts 11:22 is sent by Jerusalem to Antioch; Barnabas, Saul, Judas and Silas in Acts 15:27 where they are sent from Jerusalem to Antioch; and, using the substantive, Epaphroditus in Phil 2:25 and people sent to Paul in 2 Cor 8:23. Only Acts 8:14 could be argued as having an “evangelistic” context. As to πέμπω and its cognates, they are used to refer to churches sending someone only in Acts 15:3 (προπέμπω), 15:22 (πέμπω) and in 1 Cor 16:6 (προπέμπω) to accompany Paul (cf. 2 Cor 1:16). In none of these is the vocabulary used in a context of a local church sending someone for mission work. Most often it is God, Jesus or the Spirit who sends people to preach, not the church.⁴² In Acts 15:22, 25, Paul is sent (πέμπω) with others to Antioch by Jerusalem but he is sent to preach by the Spirit in 13:4 (πέμπω) and by Jesus in 22:21; 26:17 (ἀποστέλλω). Except for these last two references, no verb of the -στελλ- root is used for sending people on a mission work in Acts. In his letters Paul never evokes being sent by a church. He is Jesus’s ἀπόστολος (1 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1), by the will of God (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1). The vocabulary is equally not used in the Apostolic Fathers to refer to someone sent by a church for mission work. Interestingly, in the only NT text outside of Acts to mention Antioch, Paul adds the only negative addition to his apostolic self-presentation. He is an apostle according to Jesus and God, *not* according to people (Gal 1:1), a distinction on which Paul insists throughout Gal 1–2.

In conclusion, Barnabas and Paul being called apostles in Acts 14:4, 14 should most likely be understood as being sent by the Spirit (Acts 13:4), not by the church of Antioch. In this sense, they are as much apostles of the Lord as the Twelve.

⁴² So also Gaventa (1982, 414–416). Similarly Jacob (1998, 341–342) states that “There is no reference of a sending out with the church as the subject because neither the prophets nor the church know why the two are set apart. It is not the church, but the Spirit, v. 4, that sets the task ahead and sends the missionaries.”

2.4 *Acts 14:26–28*

At the end of their first journey together, Barnabas and Paul return to Antioch “ὅθεν ἡσαν παραδεδομένοι τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὸ ἔργον ὁ ἐπλήρωσαν” (14:26; see also 15:40). Some see in the verb *παραδίδωμι* an indication of Antioch’s commissioning or support of the apostles (Wall 2002, 200–201; Conzelmann 1987, 112). But this is giving the verb an institutional meaning that it does not have elsewhere. It is usually found in contexts of negative, hostile circumstances (Acts 3:13; 6:14 for Jesus; 7:42; 8:3; 12:4). Once again, the author of Acts does not directly say that they had been sent by Antioch but uses a verb usually found in contexts of deliverance from a bond. One would be hard pressed to justify translating Acts 14:26 by resorting to the “sending” vocabulary.⁴³ Whether directly or through circumstances, God does the sending for mission in Acts, not the church. Notice too Luke’s use of words: *εἰς τὸ ἔργον ὁ ἐπλήρωσαν*. This seems to echo the *εἰς τὸ ἔργον* of 13:2, 41 (so also Holladay 2016, 292; Marguerat 2015, 79; Pesch 1986, 65). This repetition brackets Barnabas and Paul’s first journey. They have not just accomplished a work of evangelism; they have fulfilled (*πληρώω*) the work for which the Spirit had called and sent them, not an assignment for which Antioch would have mandated them.⁴⁴

Still, even if they were not sent by Antioch, upon their return there, they gather the church and announce all that God had done with them (see Malone 1991, 133–135) and how he opened the door to the gentiles (14:27; see also 10:38; 11:21; 15:3, 4, 12; 21:19). As mentioned before, the fact that they narrate their experience to the church does not mean that it originally sent them for that purpose in 13:2–3. Barnabas and Paul are said to be the initiators of the gathering in Acts 14:27. They are the subjects of the active participle *συναγαγόντες*. They are not called to give a report of their work. Interestingly, no mention is made of any leadership in the community. We are still not better informed about the structure and operation of the church of Antioch. It simply does not seem to matter much for the author of Acts.

⁴³ Against Marguerat (2015, 79) who says that “[t]he community sent, the Spirit propelled, divine grace protected.”

⁴⁴ Schneider (1982, 167 n. 35) remarks that “[t]he *ἔργον* is not the mission to the Gentiles as such, which is not yet completed, but, as verse 27 makes clear the breakthrough of the mission to the Gentiles.” But this is not necessarily so. Schneider does not comment on the use of *πληρώω*. Furthermore, this is the only work for which both Barnabas and Paul were sent. The word *ἔργον* will not be used to describe Paul’s work afterwards. His next venture will be carried out without Barnabas and on his own initiative (Acts 15:36).

2.5 *Acts 15:1–35*

While Barnabas and Paul are in Antioch, a controversy arises that could have an impact beyond the city (see 15:23). The church of Antioch appoints Barnabas, Paul and a few other people accompanied by the church (15:3) to go (ἔταξαν ἀναβαίνειν) to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to inquire about their stance on the issue. Again, Luke blurs the church's involvement by using a passive construction without any subject. Who decides to appoint Barnabas and Paul (the whole church, the leaders?) and how, is not said. Barnabas and Paul's journey shows that Antioch does not consider itself a community independent of Jerusalem and that in Jerusalem resides the authority to adjudicate doctrinal issues, even though Jerusalem had not planted the church in Antioch.

Once the doctrinal issue is adjudicated, the church of Jerusalem decides to send (πέμπω) Barnabas, Paul, Silas and Judas, the latter two called “prophets,” to Antioch. With the addition of ἐκπέμπω in Acts 13:4; Acts 15:22, 25 are the only two verses where the verb πέμπω is used in connection with Paul.

After a while, the believers in Antioch decide to let Silas and Judas go back to those who had sent them. Of note here is the use of ἀποστέλλω for the original sending from Jerusalem, but of ἀπολύω for Silas and Judas being released by Antioch, as was the case in 13:3 for Barnabas and Paul. Here again, Antioch is giving people who were not originally from its midst leave to go, in this case back to those who had originally sent them. Eventually, Silas prefers to remain in Antioch (15:33). This strengthens the fact that seeing Antioch as “sending” Barnabas and Paul in 13:3 is a misreading of the data and the situation.

2.6 *Acts 15:36–40*

A few days later, Paul wants to go back to visit the brothers in the cities visited during the first journey (15:36). Here again, the journey will begin and end in Antioch (15:36–18:22). Following a disagreement with Barnabas, the former collaborators go their separate ways and Paul journeys with Silas (15:39). Whether Antioch has a mediatory role in Paul and Barnabas's dispute is not said. While Paul and Silas leave “recommended to the grace of God” by the church, we do not hear

anymore of Barnabas; we do not even know whether he and Mark too left commended to the grace of God.⁴⁵

Once again, Luke seems to avoid giving an active direct role to Antioch. The same verb and expression used in 14:26 are found in 15:40 (παραδοθεὶς τῇ χάριτι τοῦ κυρίου ὑπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν). As was the case for Barnabas and Paul's first journey, the initiative for this journey does not rest with the church but with Paul. As a result, again, Antioch does not send Paul but lets him go. Furthermore, the second journey does not start as an “evangelistic” or “church planting” endeavour and does not entail visiting churches but people. Initially, Paul's goal does not seem to be to plant more churches but to visit his new converts. It is through the Spirit's intervention in Acts 16 that this will change.

2.7 *Acts 18:22–23*

After his departure from Ephesus, Paul visits Jerusalem, then travels to Antioch where he stays for a while. Why Paul goes back to Antioch, Luke does not say.

After a while, Paul embarks on yet another journey, travelling through Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen the disciples (18:23). There is no mention of any involvement of the church of Antioch in this new journey, nor is any initiative and impetus for Paul's journey given to the church. As was the case with the previous journey (15:36), Paul's goal is not to plant new churches but to visit believers, except that in this case there is no rerouting of Paul's journey by God as was the case in Acts 16. During this expedition, mostly dedicated to Ephesus, no new ground is broken for the gospel, no seeds are sown in a new city. This is a pastoral endeavour, not a church planting journey.

Except for Gal 2, this is the last time that Antioch is mentioned in Acts or in the NT for that matter.

3 Antioch in the Epistles

Whatever the exact chronological reconstruction between the narration of Acts and Galatians, what matters for this study is that despite all the biographical elements mentioned in Gal 1–2, no mention is made of any active role of Antioch in Paul's ministry or link between them. As previously mentioned, the interesting point is that Paul makes sure in his

⁴⁵ Notice the insertion of εἰς ὁ ἐπέμφθησαν in Ψ¹²⁷, D and w in 15:38 after τὸ ἔργον, which hints back to 13:4.

salutation to mention that his apostleship derives not from people but from God the Father through Jesus (Gal 1:1). Elsewhere in Paul's letters, no hint is given of any important role of Antioch in Paul's long years of ministry. The only church whose support Paul explicitly mentions is Philippi (Phil 4:15–16; 2 Cor 11:9).

Indeed, no mention is ever made in Paul's epistles of Barnabas or himself being sent by a church. Even when Paul defends his apostleship in 1 and 2 Corinthians he never alludes to being sent by Antioch or any other church for that matter. Oakes (2020) concludes:

It is noticeable, both in Acts and in his letters, how little Paul seems to operate as the fieldworker of any church, notably the church at Antioch. In marked contrast to modern missionary practice, Paul the apostle is not responsible to a sending church. The Jerusalem leaders have some sort of an originating and authoritative role in his thinking, but Paul certainly does not act as though he is a fieldworker answerable to them. It seems unlikely that Paul saw himself as an extension of any group. (pp. 131–132)

In short, though Paul often mentions his apostleship and its origin, he never attributes it to Antioch or any other church. From Paul's point of view, as far as ministry and church planting are concerned, being sent or mandated by another local church seems irrelevant, even theologically misdirected. The sending of Epaphroditus by the Philippians does not contradict this. He was sent to help and support Paul in his need, not to help “planting churches” (Phil 2:25–30). Whether Antioch or other churches supported Paul before he was in Macedonia, we simply do not know, but it is strange that Antioch is never mentioned as an example or encouragement for what the mission of the church is supposed to be.

If Antioch had any active role in Paul's ministry or in any of the early Christian missionaries' ministry, we simply would not be able to establish this from Paul's letters or from the NT. If Antioch did play a role, it did not seem to be of much importance for Paul's view of ministry and apostleship. Rather, Paul is adamant to stress that his apostleship does not issue from being sent by a local community, but by God.

4 Antioch in the Early Christian Literature

Just as is the case in the NT, for whatever reason, Antioch receives scant mention in the early Christian literature (*Ign. Phld.* 10.1; *Smyrn.* 11.1; *Pol.* 7.1). Though Paul is mentioned several times in the Apostolic Fathers

(1 Clem. 5.5; 47.1; Ign. *Eph.* 12.2; *Rom.* 4.3; Pol. *Phil.* 3.2; 9.1; Papias, Trad. 2.1), his apostleship and ministry are never linked to Antioch. As a matter of fact, the word ἀπόστολος, mostly used for the Twelve and Paul (also Philip in Papias, Trad. 3.9 and false apostles in Did. 11.1–6), is never used to refer to someone sent by a church in the Apostolic Fathers. Nor is the cognate verb used for sending someone on a mission.⁴⁶

Antioch is often mentioned by Eusebius, but nothing is said of any sending of Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey or of being involved with them or having been involved in any church planting. Barnabas is rarely mentioned in Eusebius. When he is mentioned in relationship with Antioch and Paul, no active role in his ministry by Antioch is evoked (*Hist. eccl.* II.3.3–4; II.8.2). As to Paul, who is often mentioned by Eusebius, he too is never said to be sent by Antioch or to have anything to do with them for his ministry.

Unfortunately, for whatever reason, none of the early Christian texts establish a link between Antioch and Paul. Therefore, they do not help us to decide whether or not Antioch had any missional strategy or was instrumental in Paul and Barnabas's ministry.

5 Conclusion: Antioch as a Missional Model?

Antioch is often presented as a missional church aware of its responsibility, a pioneering community which strategises its call to plant churches, and a model to be followed. As we have seen, this is an unwarranted reading of the data available. Furthermore, it downplays or even contradicts theological patterns in Acts and in the NT.

Though Luke knows the vocabulary of sending, neither Antioch nor Jerusalem are the subjects of verbs of sending people for evangelism and mission work, except in the cases of Peter and John in Acts 8:14 and Barnabas in Acts 11:22. What is remarkable is how passive a role Antioch is given in Acts. Neither Jerusalem nor Antioch seems to have any proactive mission strategy. Antioch is not the active subject of verbs in 11:27–30; 14:24–28 and 18:22–23. In 13:1–3 the Spirit takes the initiative to send Barnabas and Paul, not the church. Nothing in the text indicates that Antioch's leaders were serving and fasting to receive missionary direction. Antioch's only active role is to send aid to Jerusalem (Acts 11:29–30) and Paul, Barnabas with a few others to the Council of Jerusalem (15:2–3). Elsewhere, the church's role is to *release* Barnabas,

⁴⁶ For ἀποστέλλω in the Apostolic Fathers see 1 Clem. 65.1; Ign. *Smyrn.* 12.1; Barn. 3.3; 14.9; Herm. 23.4; 25.2, 5; 49.1; 68.2; 71.3; Diogn. 7.2; 10.2; 11.3.

Paul, Silas, and Judas (13.3; 14:26; 15:33). All in all, we learn almost nothing about the church of Antioch from the book of Acts. “Antioch will remain without a clear face, its only perceived usefulness is as a turntable: the apostles get there and then leave in several directions” (Cazeaux 2008, 186).

Making Antioch a sending church and giving it any control or active role in church planting in Acts runs counter to the book’s patterns. The spread of the word in Acts is not due to any church’s strategy or initiative but to the Spirit and, secondarily, to individuals. Luke insists in presenting God as the director of His story. Apostles in Acts, and in the rest of the NT for that matter, are God’s apostles only. Depicting Antioch as model of church planting is missing the point of Luke’s narration, which is concerned with the growth of the word by God’s initiative and by his sending individuals, not with strategies of mission and church planting by the church.

Furthermore, making Antioch a missionary church finds little support in the available data in the rest of NT and in the early Christian literature and is often advanced without paying full attention to what is explicit in the text, as is often the case with $\alpha\piολύω$ in Acts 13:3. This should not be construed as an argument from silence.⁴⁷ It is not argued here that Antioch had no missional role in the early church whatsoever. Whether it did or not, we simply cannot say from the available data. For whatever reason, if Luke and the early Christian authors were aware of any active and directive missional role by Antioch, they chose not to mention it. What matters is what Luke *did* report: that the impetus for mission and church planting in Acts, when it occurs, comes from God. If a model for church planting by a mother church is to be found in Acts, one must look elsewhere than in Antioch. There are, of course, many implications to the

⁴⁷ The argument from silence, usually considered a weak argument, and often linked to the argument from ignorance (see McGrew 2014, 217), is notoriously difficult to handle. We often do not know whether an author knew about facts and data we think should be mentioned and, should the author be aware of them, why he or she chose not to mention them. On the other hand, there are cases where the nonexistence of events or theories is the logical explanation for a silence and where the burden of proof might rest with those who affirm such existence. Indeed, if the consensus is on the actuality of an event despite the silence of the tradition, it is often because of the availability of other sources of information (McGrew 2014, 224). In the case of Antioch, we have no such evidence but we do have explicit evidence that attributes sending Barnabas and Paul by the Spirit and making Paul the Lord’s apostle. Each argument must be evaluated on its own merits. “Accordingly, historians must continue to rely on their hunches, on their subjective estimations of likelihood” (Lange 1966, 301; see also McGrew 2014, 225).

reading defended there. Their development and discussion are for another place.⁴⁸

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⁴⁸ On this see Ochsenmeier (2003, 2012). I wish to thank *Neotestamentica*'s independent reviewers for their comments on a first version of this article.

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