

Lesson 20 & 21 Addendum on Acts: Fasting (Chapter 13) and Angels (Chapter 12)

THAT'S A GOOD QUESTION

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QUESTION:

From Kentucky: "Please explain the meaning of laying on hands before sending out preachers (not connected with spiritual gifts) as mentioned in Acts 13:2, 3. Should this be practiced today along with fasting?"

REPLY:

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:13).

General Introductory Remarks

Our querist has limited and defined the area of his interrogative, but a few general thoughts may be in order. The laying on of hands is a natural and symbolic act which indicates the conferring of a gift, a charge, or blessing. At least, this is the case in the Old Testament. The laying on of hands was used in the consecration of men and the dedication of things to Divine service (Ex. 29:10; Lev. 1:4; 3:8; Num. 8:9-11; 27:15-23; Deut. 34:9). In the New Testament, hands were laid on some (1) by the apostles when the Holy Spirit was imparted (Acts 6:6, 8; 8:17, 18; 19:6; Cf. Rom. 1:11), (2) when healing was effected (Acts 9:12; 28:8), and (3) in recommending men to a special service, function, or work (Acts 13:1-4; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22). The first two numbered items are not accomplished today because: (A) There are no living apostles, and (B) no miracles of healing are being worked as these contemplated in the passages cited. But what about the action of Acts 13?

Acts 13:1-4 And Laying On Of Hands

Acts 13:1-4 was a special mission for a limited duration. In Acts 13, hands were not laid on Barnabas and Paul (1) to confirm or appoint them as preachers, (2) to install them as apostles of the Lord, nor (3) to give them a spiritual gift. They simply agreed to separate them according to the Spirit's direction. The word "separate" is from *aphorizo*. Thayer says it means "to appoint, set apart, one for some purpose." Thus, saints in Antioch appointed and set apart Barnabas and Paul for a certain work or service. The brethren were only to separate and recommend. The "work" which they were called unto was their work, not the work of the Antioch disciples. The labor was limited; it was a specific task confined to a certain time. Later, we read that they "sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled" (Acts 14:26). They were called by the Holy Spirit. They were separated by the brethren. They completed or "fulfilled" their work.

The laying on of hands preceded the sending away. It, along with prayer and fasting, solemnly symbolized the recommendation for the work. The Holy Spirit did not say, "fast, pray, and lay hands on Barnabas and Saul." He said, "Separate . . . Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." An appointment to a position or an office was not made as may be indicated in 1 Timothy 5:22. Rather, Barnabas and Saul were recommended to God for the work.

This laying on of hands involved their mission, not the miraculous. For this reason, Luke calls them apostles, those set apart and sent (Acts 14:14). The laying on of hands did not confer apostleship in the sense Paul was an apostle of Christ. (1) Paul was then an apostle of the Lord. (2) As an apostle of Jesus, Paul needed nothing these brethren could have given him (Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 11:5; 12:12). (3) Paul's apostleship was not of man. Galatians 1:1, 11, 12, 16, 17, denies that such an event as Acts 13 made him an apostle. (4) The brethren in Antioch could not impart spiritual gifts, much less apostleships. Only apostles could "impart . . . some spiritual gift" (Acts 8:14-18; 19:6; Rom. 1:11). (5) Barnabas and Paul were apostles from Antioch in the same way Epaphroditus was a "messenger" (*apostolos*) of the Philippian church. They were ones sent from Antioch. That

is the extent of the term in Acts 14:14. Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippians to minister unto Paul. He was Philippi's "messenger" (Phil. 2:25), or apostle. So, it is in Acts 13:1-4; 14:14.

The laying on of hands was evidently commonly and frequently practiced by the apostles. As they laid hands in giving the Holy Spirit, imparting spiritual gifts, so the disciples would naturally adopt the same act in various appointments. As the apostles died, the practice continued, but it was not required as a means of setting one apart for a special function.

Laying On Of Hands Today

We may use the same procedure today. Timothy did (1 Tim. 5:22), and we know he did not pretend to bestow gifts of the Spirit. The laying on of hands signifies appointment (1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22). Acts 13 is a special instance, a peculiar case. No such selection, separation, calling and sending is done today as was done through the Spirit then.

The New Testament supplies no illustration or demonstration of a particular mode or manner of laying hands on another. Churches appoint men to duties. Who is- to say that a handshake or an informal affectionate hand on the shoulder is not a form of "laying on hands?" Compare the "holy kiss" of Romans 16:16 and 1 Corinthians 16:20. The laying on of hands, if practiced today, must not be considered as a means of conveying authority. It is but a means of committing another to the Lord for a work.

Fasting And Acts 13:1-4

One may elect to fast, or abstaining from food may be naturally forced upon him by the awesomeness of a responsibility or situation. Fasting is not, and never has been, bound upon saints as a regular duty. In its purest form, fasting is a natural deprivation. It loses some of its appeal when it is contrived or enforced. In times of great stress and strain, we are repelled and repulsed from food. When events overwhelm us, we naturally fast. What could provide more anxious reverence than a command from the Holy Spirit to separate two men for arduous effort in foreign fields? Is it any wonder they fasted and prayed? The amazement would have been if they had feasted and failed to pray with this charge before them!

Conclusion: "Should this be practiced today?" We may, but we need not do so.

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Notes Concerning Angels (ref: Acts 12:15)

1. Common belief of the Jews that each person had his own guardian angel. They were mistaken in Acts 12:15, it really was Peter. Luke does not mention whether the concept was erroneous or not.
2. Matthew 18:10: "autos aggelos" – their angel. Correct translation. Seems to indicate that God does (in His providence) use angels to protect his "little ones." (Difference in opinion whether this has reference to children, or to the perceived "insignificant" who belong to God).
3. Hebrews 1:14 (Quote from People's New Testament)
"The real office of the angels is indicated. It is to give service in working out the plans of God for the salvation of the elect. The passage does not teach that each heir of salvation has a guardian angel, but that the angels do service in working out the Divine plans in behalf of the saved.
"The work of angels can be learned in the Scriptures from the missions in which they are engaged. It is to aid in carrying out the plans of God for the government and salvation of our race. Under the rule of Christ they are his ministers to aid in the work of redeeming man." (B.W. Johnson)
4. Quote from New Testament History – Acts (Gareth L. Reese)
"One need not rush to extremes in these matters where we are given but a glimpse into the activities in the unseen world. What we must be careful of is being influenced by the spirit of the age we live in, where it tends to be denied that heaven has any interest or active influence in the affairs of men. God does exercise an active presence in the world, and (so says the Bible) so do God's angels."