


## ACTS 13:1-3

### WORSHIP—WHEN GOD SPEAKS

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”<sup>1</sup>

 Outsiders often ridicule the thought that God can speak to mankind; and even we who are Christians are sometimes dismissive of what we see as naïve claims by believers who maintain they have heard the voice of God. Nevertheless, the Word of God assumes that God not only can speak, but that He does speak to His own people. No sensible preacher would claim that God routinely speaks in an audible voice to His people. God can speak audibly, if He wishes to do so—He has done so in the past and undoubtedly He shall do so in the future. However, God, by His Spirit, speaks to His people as they spend time in quiet mediation and reflection, as they read the written Word which the Spirit gave to His servants, as they wait in prayer and as they hear the Word preached. It is likely that the failure of Christians to know that God does speak is because they are unprepared to hear His voice—the still, small voice that asks, “What are you doing here?”

The text before us clearly states that the Holy Spirit communicated the mind of the Lord. Moreover, those who received this communication appear to have known that it was God who spoke, and they responded with alacrity and full compliance to His revealed will. What is important for our study today is the context in which God spoke. It was “while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting” that the Holy Spirit spoke. Join me in a review of this text and in thinking about this matter of when God speaks.

**PARTICIPANTS IN THE DRAMA** — I believe it is valuable at the outset to take a moment to note the prophets and teachers to whom we are introduced. The congregation at Antioch had at least five prophets and teachers. I take it that this list is complete and there were no others. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that there were others who are not named. However, from these that are named, we can glean quite a bit of valuable information.

The first mention of Antioch is in **ACTS 6:5**, where we read of the selection of servants for the Jerusalem church. Among those chosen was a man named Nicolaus, who is identified as “a proselyte of Antioch.” After the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered because of the persecution generated by the enraged rabbi, Saul of Tarsus, some came to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Listen to the divine account, noting the manner in which God worked.

There were among those who had been scattered, some who were “men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose” [**ACTS 11:20-23**].

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The significance of this pericope is that we are given an account of how the Faith came to the Gentiles. Antioch was the first Gentile congregation, though there were certainly Jewish believers in the church. Evidence of the cosmopolitan nature of the congregation is seen in the prophets and teachers that are named. Barnabas is known to be from Cyprus and Saul was from Tarsus. Simeon, also called Niger, a Latin name meaning “black” or “dark,” is assumed by many scholars to have been a black man, and thus an immigrant to the region. There was also Lucius, identified as coming from Cyrene. Then, there was Manaen (Menahem?) who had an unusual background. Manaen had been a childhood friend of Herod Antipas. Children of the same age as a prince would be invited to live with him, play with him and be trained with him as companions.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Manaen was of the social elite before his conversion to Christ.

Though it is possible that these five were not the only prophets and teachers for the congregation, I see no reason to believe that there were others. Moreover, the text intimates the role each of these men performed in the congregation. The Greek particle *te* is not translatable. However, “it was used in antiquity to connect word pairs, co-ordinate clauses and similar sentences, thereby often distinguishing one set of co-ordinates from another.” On this basis, it is probable that we should understand that Barnabas, Simeon and Lucius, introduced by the first *te* were prophets, and Manaen and Saul, introduced by the second *te* were teachers. “Prophecy,” in this instance, would be understood to be what we know as expository preaching, and “teaching” having to do with defining the Old Testament relationships and implications.<sup>3</sup>

Take one moment longer to think about the forgotten discipline of fasting. People sometimes imagine that fasting is simply the outgrowth of becoming so engrossed in what you are doing that you forget to eat. However, it is presented in the Word of God as a deliberate act when those fasting seek to know the mind of the Lord. I believe that these prophets and teachers were thinking of how to fulfil the commission given by the Risen Lord. They knew they were responsible to spread the Gospel, making disciples throughout the entire world. I cannot help but believe that they were thinking of how to fulfil this responsibility. Notice that they did not form a planning committee; rather, the leaders served God and fasted. They voluntarily, deliberately forewent food in order to focus on the will of God until it was revealed to them!

Think with me how this may have played out. Paul knew he was to be a missionary to the Gentiles. Perhaps he didn’t use those words, but he knew the mind of the Lord. Remember, when Ananias was sent to him, the Lord specifically said of Saul, “He is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My Name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” [ACTS 9:15].

It is easy to see how Saul, understanding the call of the Lord in this matter, could have been impressed by the Holy Spirit to prepare to leave the safety of the Church at Antioch. Undoubtedly, if this is the case, he had discussed this with his fellow elders, asking for their input. In a decision of such importance, the congregation did not want to act without consulting the mind of the Lord, and so the prophets and teachers had committed themselves to fasting as they sought the will of God. Perhaps the church shared this sense that now was the time to begin to penetrate the darkness with the light of the Gospel. So, as the leaders of the congregation continued their service before the Lord, they fasted. This was a solemn act as they endeavoured to know the mind of the Lord—and God honoured their search by giving them the answer they sought: “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

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<sup>2</sup> D. E. Hiebert, Manaen (article) in Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney, **Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 4, M-P**. Revised ed. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2009) 62

<sup>3</sup> See Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in Frank E. Gaebelein (ed.), **The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 9: John and Acts** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1981) 416-7

I note that Barnabas and Saul appear to have been the more accomplished—the most able—of those individuals named in the text. We do not hear again of Simeon, Lucius or Manaen, but Barnabas and Saul are central to the account of the advance of the Faith in the First Century. If this is the case, then it is a rebuke to modern church life. We imagine that most seminarians will pastor a church. If they are especially capable, they will pastor large churches. Should the seminary student be exceptional, we imagine he should be a professor of theology. Adopting the biblical view, we would appoint the average students to be instructors in seminary and encourage the most capable among those studying for divine service to fulfil a role as a missionary or a church planter. The most brilliant should be the one to engage the culture.

There is another aspect of God's call and appointment that must be stated as I pursue this diversion. It was not merely that God appointed whom He willed to this demanding service, but the leaders of the congregation concurred enthusiastically. Surely, they must have thought, "But, these are our two most capable preachers. Couldn't God choose someone else?" We think in terms of finding someone we can spare; but God wants our best. If we witness God raise up capable men from within our assembly, we should rejoice when God appoints them to His service. We work with those whom God is raising up to ensure that He has our best!

Let me point out a final truth from this text before I return to the subject at hand, which is worship. If any work is to succeed, it will need to be the Lord's work. Thus, we read the Spirit saying, "*Set apart for Me* Barnabas and Saul for *the work to which I have called them.*" God appoints, not man; this is His work, not ours.

God communicated His will clearly; and it is apparent that He communicated the same truth to multiple individuals. I assume that Barnabas and Saul were aware of His call on their lives, but the text indicates that the Spirit of God communicated the mind of God to Simeon, Lucius and Manaen. He spoke so clearly and so convincingly that all five were united in obeying the revealed will of God. When the people of God wait in the presence of God, seeking to know His will, there will be unity of purpose and unity in implementation. When the people of God politicise church labour, there will ultimately result conflict and chaos. Whether we experience harmony or conflict depends upon whether we seek the Lord or pursue our own will.

**THE CONTEXT IN WHICH GOD SPEAKS** — "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting..." The text asserts the context in which God spoke to these early believers in the Risen Saviour. To be certain, the text implies that those present were "prophets and teachers." Frankly, if those who purport to be teachers of the Word do not know the mind of God, they are disqualified from teaching. If they have never known the awe of standing in the presence of the Living God, they are incapable of leading others into His presence. However, the text does not permit us the luxury of imagining that suddenly God interrupted their busy lives to speak with them. They were attuned to hear the voice of the Lord because they lived in His presence.

"Worshipping" translates the Greek word *leitourgéō*, a word normally used to refer to the performance of a public service or which spoke of service performed in a public office. In biblical use, the word speaks of the service performed by priests and Levites [e.g. **HEBREWS 10:11**], refers to the various ways in which a religious person serves God (teaching, benevolences or prayer as in our text), or it speaks of service in general [e.g. **ROMANS 15:27**].<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick Danker and Walter Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur** (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1996)

Note that it was while the prophets and teachers were serving God that He spoke. Doctor Luke deliberately adds the information that in addition to serving the Lord, these men (at least) were fasting. What is not clear is whether these five were all together in one place, engaged in prayer or preparing to perform their public responsibilities, or whether they were each fulfilling their separate appointed duties when the Spirit of God spoke to them, so that they received the same knowledge of the will of God and later conferred. I believe the text supports the understanding that they were fasting as they carried out their responsibilities within the congregation. In the context of fulfilling the ministry to which God had appointed them and with fasting, God spoke, confirming His will for Barnabas and Saul. There resulted harmony because they had shared in the adventure of serving, of worshipping and of seeking the mind of the Lord.

I must take a moment to stress a truth that arises from this information we are given. ***True worship leads to genuine harmony.*** Fleshly worship does not—indeed, cannot, guarantee harmony, and in fact may be the genesis of disunity. By true worship, I mean worship that is ***the natural outflow of being in the presence of the True and Living God. True worship is worship that engages the mind and invites intellectual response to the divine initiative.*** When I speak of true worship, I mean worship that ***transforms the soul and changes the worshipper so that he or she more accurately reflects the character of Him who is worshipped.***<sup>5</sup>

If all we share is ritual—singing choruses, reciting prayers, enduring sermons—there is no foundation for harmony. If our ministry is based on how we feel, it is impossible for us to walk continually in the presence of the Risen Saviour as we will always be seeking a more exciting experience to stimulate the insatiable appetite demanded by our senses. If our ministry consist of performing mere rituals or in doing what we think best rather than waiting on the presence of the Lord and fulfilling His will, we must not imagine that we will be transformed—our life will continue as it has always been.

To iterate, it seems apparent that the prophets and teachers were conducting their duties as normal, with the exception that they were fasting while conducting their service. While there are undoubtedly texts that speak of time spent in quietness before the Lord, such does not appear to be the case here. These gifted men were busy doing what God had appointed them to do. However, that does not mean they were oblivious to the need for divine guidance. Hence, they devoted themselves to prayerfully waiting before the Lord to discern His will. Prayer does not enable us to go greater work for God—prayer is greater work!

This observation demands that some ancillary matters be established. First, ***we are to be busy about the Lord's work.*** Our best worship consists of serving as God has appointed us to serve. Let me remind you that true worship is not about what you feel or experience—true worship consists of serving the Living God. When you came to faith in the Son of God, His Spirit took up residence in your life. Living in you, He gifted you with spiritual gifts entrusted to your oversight so that you could participate in building up the Body of Christ. Underscore in your mind the implications of what was just said. Each Christian is gifted and each believer is a gift to the assembly where the Spirit of God places him or her. Your gifts were entrusted to you so they could be invested in others—you are not to squander the gifts of the Spirit on yourself.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For further information, see Michael Stark, “True Worship” (sermon, 2010 10 31), <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/romans%2012.01-02%20spiritual%20worship.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Stark, “The Body of Christ, and You” (sermon) <http://sermons.logos.com/#q=%22body%20of%20christ%20and%20you%22/1000001&content=/submissions/32714&tab=paneTabResults&pane=resultsPane>

Again, it is no stretch to deduce that *all labour can be offered up as service if it is honourable*. In focus in our text are prophets and teachers appointed by God to serve His people in the congregation at Antioch. Their work was honourable and blessed, to be certain. However, does anyone imagine that Paul's labour as a tent maker [see ACTS 18:3] was any less honourable than his labour as an Apostle? Or that Luke's service as a physician [see COLOSSIANS 4:14] was less honourable than his service as historian of the nascent Christian movement? We have lost the concept of calling in this day. Christians are to see their work as a calling to be presented as an act of worship before the Lord. Surely this is the import of the apostolic admonition, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" [COLOSSIANS 3:23].

If the text is taken at face value, it should encourage us that what we do can be presented as an act of worship to the Lord. At issue is our attitude, and not the labour that we perform. What would it be were each of us to see that our housework, the labour of our hand, the studies that we conduct in preparation for a lifetime of service—all alike are an act of worship as we present of service to the Lord. We need to recapture the sense of Paul's encouragement that "You are serving the Lord Christ" [COLOSSIANS 3:24].

Finally, I observe that *we have forgotten the discipline of fasting in this day*. I want to take a moment to look at this business of fasting. Certainly, Jesus practised fasting. Before being tested by the devil, the Master fasted for forty days and forty nights [see MATTHEW 4:3]. Fasting was common among pious Jews, and even the Baptist's followers fasted [see MARK 2:18]. It is true that Jesus' followers were not at that time fasting, but the Lord make it evident that the time was coming when they would fast. The Word of God informs us of the service of Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, noting in particular that her uninterrupted, continual service consisted of "worshipping with fasting and prayer" [LUKE 2:36, 37]. The observation is made in a manner that would indicate approval of the practise rather than presenting it as extraordinary.

I note that the Master spoke of fasting during the sermon we know as The Sermon on the Mount. "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" [MATTHEW 6:16-18]. Did you notice that Jesus assumed that His followers will fast? He did not say, "If you fast," but rather He said, "When you fast."

Fasting is an act of self-discipline when one devotes himself or herself to seeking to know and understand the will of God. There is no particular efficacy in going without food. There is, however, great value in committing oneself to knowing the mind of the Lord. And that is the inestimable value of fasting.

My understanding is that those named in the text continued their service while fasting, but there is reason to understand that the Greek text is teaching that the entire church served and fasted. Noted New Testament scholar Howard Marshall has written: "It is not clear whether the subject of the sentence is the prophets and teachers or includes the members of the church in general. Since the list of names in verse 1 is primarily meant to show who was available for missionary service, and since changes of subject are not uncommon in Greek, it is preferable to assume that Luke is thinking of an activity involving the members of the church generally; this will fit in with the fact that elsewhere similar decisions are made by the church as a whole. On this view the members of the church were assembled together to serve the Lord and fast."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I. Howard Marshall, **Vol. 5, Acts: An Introduction and Commentary**, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1980) 229

The text is quite clear that when the church set apart Barnabas and Saul to the work of advancing the Kingdom of God through missionary service, the act was conducted “after fasting and prayer.” This is in keeping with the practise that Paul maintained when appointing elders. Later, in this book, we read, “When [the missionaries] had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” [ACTS 14:23]. While I would not encourage mere ritual, I cannot help but wonder if our lack of self-discipline in this day has hindered the advance of the Faith. Perhaps it is that we are not greatly concerned about any aspect of advance of the Kingdom of God, and thus we no longer find it necessary to fast. However, it is equally possible that this accounts for the spiritual poverty of many of our churches despite the relative abundance that we enjoy as a society.

**THE MEANS BY WHICH GOD SPEAKS** — “The Holy Spirit [spoke].” God does speak. On at least forty-nine occasions, the Bible speaks of “the voice of the Lord.” Admittedly, many of these instances could simply imply that His people are responsible to obey His will. However, other instances are not so easy to dismiss. For instance, Isaiah is quite clear that he audibly heard the voice of the Lord when he writes, “I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us’” [ISAIAH 6:8]?

Stephen, also, asserted without contradiction before the theological elite of the nation, “Moses ... was amazed ... and there came the voice of the Lord: ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob’” [ACTS 7:31, 32]. He was citing the account of Moses’ call found in Exodus. There, we see a complete dialogue between God and Moses as God directs Moses to act and Moses dissents. Repeatedly, the Word informs us, “The Lord said” [EXODUS 3:5, 7; 4:2, 4, 6, 11, 19, 21, 27].

In addition to these verses that speak of “the voice of the Lord,” there are at least 327 occasions when we read that “God said” or “the Lord said”; and there are an additional 114 verses informing us that “God spoke” or “The Lord spoke.” Whatever other conclusion one may draw from reading the Bible, it is impossible to avoid the understanding that God speaks to those willing to hear His voice. Perhaps we should ask how God speaks? Or how we hear His voice?

There are instances in the Word where people appear to have had a conversation with God. Admittedly, these are exceptional incidents, but not totally unique. As an example of this, we read that “The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” [EXODUS 33:11]. This fact is substantiated by God’s rebuke to Aaron and Miriam when they inveighed against Moses’ wife. Listen to the Word of God. “The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. And he said, ‘Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD’” [NUMBERS 12:5-8]. These verses echo the statement concerning communication between God and Moses: “When Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him” [NUMBERS 7:89].

Whenever I read such a statement, I think of Jacob wrestling all night with a man. After the exhausting contest, “Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying ‘For I have seen God face to face’” [GENESIS 32:30]. However, according to the text, he not only saw God face to face, he spoke with God and God to him. In fact, God changed his name and blessed him as result of that wrestling match.

There is also the account Paul provides of his conversion that states that God the Son communicated His will directly to him. Listen to Paul's recitation of the events surrounding his conversion. "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do'" [ACTS 22:6-10].

In one of the passages just cited, God says that He makes Himself known through dreams and visions [see NUMBERS 12:6]. God is certainly capable of communicating his will through dreams and visions, though this is the exception and not the rule. Moreover, it is often the case that those who received a communication via dreams and vision required someone to interpret what was communicated. As an example, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which disturbed him greatly [see DANIEL 4:4-18], though he could not understand it until Daniel interpreted it for him [DANIEL 4:19-26].

Perhaps you will recall an incident in the ministry of Paul which Doctor Luke records. "The Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people'" [ACTS 18:9, 10]. Of course, Paul was obedient to this heavenly vision, remaining in the city for many days, ultimately establishing the Church of God in Corinth. The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision just as He had spoken to Ananias through a vision to send him to baptise Saul, commissioning him for divine service [ACTS 9:10-15].

Paul, though speaking directly with the Risen Saviour, did so in a vision. This seems to be a not unusual means of communicating. Relating his conversion before Agrippa, Paul spoke of that transformation thusly, "I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'" Now, listen to his summation of all that transpired that day. The Apostle boldly testified in the presence of the king, "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" [ACTS 26:12-19].

It should be apparent that God speaks through His Word. There is a reason we speak of this as the Word of God—it is because God gave the Word. Notice, as an example of this truth, LEVITICUS 26:12, which states, "I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be My people." Writing the Corinthian Christians, Paul makes a significant point by quoting this verse. However, it is the preface to his citation that is important for our study this day. Paul asks and answers the question, "What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the Living God; *as God said*,

‘I will make My dwelling among them and walk among them,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be My people.’”

[2 CORINTHIANS 6:16]

The Apostle cites the verse found in Leviticus and specifically says that these are the words of God. The appropriate conclusion is that God communicated through this written Word.

Again, God speaks through those who deliver the Word. There is a formula which the prophets used—“the LORD spoke.” A similar formula is often found as we read that “the Word of the LORD came” to a particular prophet. One or the other of these formulae recurs throughout the prophetic writings. This truth is echoed in the New Testament as the writer opens the Letter to Hebrew Christians. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” [HEBREWS 1:1, 2].

Let me bring that concept into the New Testament realm by pointing to some significant passages. After Barnabas and Saul had departed on their first missionary journey, they made their way to Cyprus where they arrived at Salamis and there “proclaimed the Word of God” [ACTS 13:5]. Sailing from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia, from whence they journeyed to Pisidian Antioch where, they enjoyed unusual success in the ministry God had assigned to them. Speaking in the synagogue on one particular Sabbath day, God was glorified and many of the people who attended on that day were deeply stirred by the message they heard. Thus, we read, “The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord” [ACTS 13:44]. The message the missionaries declared is identified as the Word of the Lord. The preached message was the means by which God spoke to the hearts of those who listened.

After that first penetration of benighted lands with the Good News, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch where they again served as they had before. The divine text says of them, “Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord, with many others also” [ACTS 15:35]. Therefore, it was not only the two missionaries who were speaking “the Word of the Lord,” but there were many others also.

When Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi God opened the prison doors. Under conviction, perhaps by the fact that they did not flee and expose him to punishment that would likely have included execution, the jailer asked of the missionaries, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The answer he received was, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” It is the next verse that is significant in the context of the message this day. “And they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” [ACTS 16:30-32]. The message that they preached, what we would call the Gospel or the Good News, is identified as “the Word of the Lord.”

In Ephesus, the Apostle entered the synagogue as was his custom to speak when given opportunity. This is the divine account of that powerful ministry that Paul conducted. “For three months [Paul] spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading [the Jews] about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” [ACTS 19:8-10]. The message concerning the Kingdom of God is identified as “the Word of the Lord.”



The Thessalonians received Paul's commendation because despite persecution, they embraced the apostolic message and imitated the lives of the missionaries. In turn, they declared the message of grace, which Paul identifies as "the Word of the Lord." This matter is so important that I invite you to consider what is written in the Bible. "You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" [**1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-10**].

He states that the message that was preached, and the message they lived out before their pagan neighbours, served as the Word of the Lord—it was as though God was speaking through the Thessalonian Christians as they witnessed to their family, friends and neighbours. Whenever a preacher stands, providing exposition of what God has caused to be written, he is delivering the Word of the Lord. This is the reason underlying the encouragement for us to "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God" [**HEBREWS 13:7**]. Likewise, whenever you speak to another in the power of the Spirit, whenever you seek to glorify the Lord through telling of His mercy and grace, at that time your words are no longer your own, they are the Word of the Lord. This is nothing less than the fulfillment of the promise of the Master, "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness" [**JOHN 15:26, 27a**].

We have received a wonderful promise—a promise that serves to comfort believers in the face of certain persecution. "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" [**MATTHEW 10:16-20**].

When you tell others of the grace and goodness of the Lord, when you testify of what He has done in your life, God is speaking through you. When the preacher stands to deliver the message, so long as that man of God adheres to the biblical message, God is speaking through that man. God does speak—powerfully, convincingly as He convicts the lost and calls His people to walk in righteousness. Though wicked people resist the Word of the Lord as it is delivered, God's Spirit is nevertheless at work through His preachers and through His people convicting and calling to the praise of His glory.

To conclude the message, take note that God speaks when His people worship. And when we worship, we call outsiders to life in the Son of God. Whenever God speaks, it is always for man's good and for His glory. Have you heard the voice of the Lord? Christ died because of your sinful condition, but He was raised from the dead so that you can be declared right with the Father. This is the reason the Word of God declares, "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father, and with the mouth one confesses and is set free." This message boldly declares, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be set free." It is echoed by all who believe. I pray that includes you. Amen.