

Apostolic Strategy: Part 1 of 2

by David Orton

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... *the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work ...*

Acts 13:2

God is restoring a new level of the 'apostolic' to his church.

But for this to occur we must cut through the extraneous and get to the foundational. In an age of communication and information overload we are desperately in need of distinguishing between the primary and the peripheral.

And so, in this article my object is to uncover the primary strategy for an apostolic release and show how the kingdom of God may increase on earth.

Distinguishing between *strategy* & *tactics*

To do this we must understand two terms:

Strategy—the art of war; the planning and direction of the larger military movements and overall operations; and **tactics**—the art of disposing armed forces; the carrying out of the larger strategy through manoeuvres in actual contact with the enemy.

The former consists of foundational principles, which are inviolable and universal—applicable to all peoples and all times. They look at the big picture—to where, when, and why troops and resources are best directed to ensure victory.

The latter consists of situational procedures—methods that will vary depending on circumstances to deliver troops and resources in implementing the strategy. For example, troops and supplies may be dropped in by parachute, or they may be landed by boat. It deals with the logistics of a specific mission.

Tragically the church devotes most of her energies to the *tactical*, trying to implement and improve practical programmes, assuming they are integral to God's larger *strategy*.

The *tactical* must come out of the *strategic* and relates to the management of either the church (this management is called the *diaconate*) or the sphere of the apostle (the *apostolate* which is managed by the ministry of 'helps and administrations'). This opens the difference between the *church* and the *work*, which we will unpack later in this chapter.

The *strategic* is macro-leadership, while the *tactical* is micro-management. But one must flow from the other—the latter out of the former.

This article therefore will take us into the 'war room'—into the macro. There we will explore the apostolic strategy for the global expansion of the gospel and the increase of Christ's kingdom on earth.

Defining the term *apostle*

To do this we must first define the term *apostle*. The Greek word *apostolos* simply means "a sent one". Jesus used the verb form of this word when He declared, "*As the Father has sent (apostello) me, so I send you*" (Jn 20:21). Every believer clearly has an apostolic commission. The marching orders have already been given. But how are those orders delivered in a given situation so that the body of Christ might move into the apostolic—into its commission as a *sent one*?

This is where the apostle kicks in. Along with the prophet, they are the pivotal ascension-gift-ministries for the healthy functioning of the body and the releasing of the saints to the work of ministry (see Eph 2:20; 4:11-14). In other words, the body cannot function apostolically without the full and mature functioning of the apostle.

The use of the term *apostolos* in classical Greek is instructive: *first*, in the context of Roman colonial expansion, it was used to refer to the commander of a naval expedition sent out to establish a new colony; and *also*, to the whole fleet and colony which was founded by that commander.

Nature & function of the apostolic

The Holy Spirit has lifted this term from its classical context and embedded it within the sacred text to describe for us both the nature and function of the apostolic.

Sent from God, the primary function of the apostle is to plant the colony of heaven on earth. This is far larger than just planting new churches. It encompasses this, but has more to do with the increase of the kingdom both in a quantitative and qualitative sense—the raising up of a new humanity enjoying and advancing "*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 14:17; see also Rom 8:29; Heb 2:10).

This is borne through the corporate and plural nature of the apostolic. We have just seen in the original usage of the term the thought of leadership (the commander) and the corporate (the fleet and the colonists).

While not teaching explicitly the corporateness of the apostolic ministry, the Scripture does teach it implicitly by way of a model.

Paul, for example, on his 3rd missionary journey returning from Greece "*was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia*" (Acts 20:4). Through this corporateness the gospel spreads and the kingdom is expanded.

Paul said of his associate Timothy, "*For I have no one else of kindred spirit...But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel...*" (Phil 2:20, 22). Likewise, Luke in his record of Paul's 2nd missionary journey provides us clear testimony to the corporateness and effect of Paul's ministry in the spread of the gospel: "*And a vision appeared to Paul...a certain man of Macedonia...saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'* And when **he** had seen the vision, immediately **we** sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them" (Act 16:9,10). It is important to note that while *he* (Paul) had seen the vision *we* (Paul's team including Luke) sought to go. Through the apostle, Luke concludes that "*God had called us to preach*"—a vivid picture of what could be called the 'corporate apostle'.

It appears that Paul's apostolic grace was the catalyst for the release and function of other ministries. His life and dynamic irrepressibly found expression in a company of intimates (see Rom 16:1-16). These men and women, while free, subordinated any individualistic pursuit of ministry, resulting not in an organisational structure, but in a pure and powerful demonstration of the body of Christ—of free men walking together in relationship as love-slaves to Christ.

Paul the prototype apostle

And so, the history of God's activity through the church is primarily a history of people and movements; he calls and commissions apostles, through whom he raises up a work. After the ascension of Christ Peter, James, and John, all had their spheres of ministry from which flowed related movements of followers and co-labourers.

However, as significant as these men were I would suggest that there is one man and movement which is the normative model—the prototype.

This, in my view, is Paul—the pioneer *apostle to the Gentiles* (Gal 2:8). A man sent to the *ethne*—to all tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations (see Acts 26:16-18). His mission was universal—to *all* nations.

Let me explain.

Peter, by contrast, was recognised as an *apostle to the Jews*. This was according to a divine commission, as was Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles (see Gal 2:7,8). James and John were also established as 'pillars' in Jerusalem—the Hebrew church (see Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12; Acts 15:13; 21:18), although, tradition later places John in Ephesus (living out his days towards the close of the first century as an old and venerated leader of that church); and Peter in Rome.

However, Paul was the chosen instrument to take the gospel to the nations in accordance with God's purpose (see Acts 9:15; 26:15-18; 13:47; Isa 49:6; Rom 1:1; Gal 1:15). This was primarily an issue of call and revelation:

15 But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man,

Galatians 1:15–16 NIV

Because of his call to the nations God entrusted a unique revelation to Paul. This revelation was not received from any man, nor revealed to previous generations:

... the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, ... I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:11-12 NIV

He did not receive it from Peter, James, or John. In fact Paul's revelation was so distinctive he could describe it uniquely as *my gospel* (Rom 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim 2:8; 2 Th 2:14; 2 Cor 4:3).

He also warned of a *different gospel*, in contrast to the gospel that he had preached (see 2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6, 8, 9). Paul's gospel was so distinct in contrast to that of Peter, James, and John, and so integral to the establishing of the new covenant order that he publicly withstood Peter in Antioch to protect it (see Gal 2:11-14). Peter, writing many years later, acknowledged that Paul's revelation was *hard to understand*, but had evidently accepted the rebuke, affirming his writings as *Scripture* (see 2 Pet 3:16).

So, what was the revelation that others found so hard to understand—and what was unique about it?

Paul explains:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation... In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of **one body** (emphasis mine) ...

Ephesians 3:2-6 NIV

It is the revelation of the *one body*, in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile (see Eph 2:11- 18; Col 3:11; Gal 3:28; 6:15; Rom 2:28, 29). Until this revelation the gospel – with the exception of Cornelius's household in Acts 10 – was viewed as exclusive to the Jew. And even after the outpouring of the Spirit at Cornelius's house the Gentiles were still subjected to the ritual law. Certain individuals came from James in Jerusalem to Antioch demanding the Gentiles submit to circumcision. Conflicting with Paul's revelation of the gospel this precipitated the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and triggered Paul's later confrontation with Peter at Antioch because of his withdrawal from the Gentiles (Gal 2).

This revelation of the *one body* is the essence of the apostolic mandate.

Antioch – the prototype apostolic church

Before we expand on the revelation of the *one body*, viewing Paul as the apostolic prototype for the universal church, let us explore the beginnings of that ministry.

If we are to understand the intent of the Holy Spirit in any given direction, we must go back to the first instance of that direction. This provides the model for all future development.

To do this we must return to the city of Antioch. It was from here that the Gentile mission was born, becoming the true parent of the universal church. The action of the Holy Spirit in this city creates the DNA for the apostolic—it becomes the prototype for gospel expansion and kingdom increase.

Focussing on Antioch, Acts chapter 13 divides the record of Acts in two the first section (ch 1-12) finding its focal point in Peter's mission to the Jews, and the second (ch 13-28) finding it in the unfolding Pauline mission to the nations. Significantly, the first reference to Paul as an 'apostle' does not occur until chapter 14 (vs. 4, 14)—after he has been sent from Antioch.

Acts 13, therefore, provides the ingredients for the release of the apostolic.

Let us examine this in more detail.

A *gateway city*

First, we see that Antioch was a *gateway city*.

Antioch, in Syria, the third largest city of the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria, was a commercial and political hub. Close to the frontier between the Greco-Roman world and the Orient, it contained a highly cosmopolitan population. It was the gateway between West and East—a city through which commerce, government, many nationalities, and belief-systems found access to larger geographical regions and spheres of influence.

The international complexion of the city, and therefore of the church, is reflected in its leadership:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch) and Saul.

Acts 13:1 NIV

In addition to Barnabas from Cyprus and Saul from Tarsus, the leadership consisted of Simeon called Niger (meaning *black*), obviously from Africa; Lucius of Cyrene, from Libya, in North Africa; and Manaen, "*brought up with Herod*", a member of the Jewish aristocracy.

As the master-strategist, in this melting pot of the nations, the Holy Spirit chose to give birth to the apostolic. It became the launch pad for the Gentile apostolic mission—for the colony of heaven invading earth.

And so, the *Antioch model* illustrates that the Holy Spirit is strategic in choosing *gateway cities* for the raising up of the apostolic.

Even so, it must be remembered that *forerunners* and *saviours* most often come from, or minister in, obscure places before strategic expansion. He sent, for example, John the Baptist into the wilderness; Amos was called from a small country town, and Jesus came from Nazareth. Paul was also taken into Arabia for a season before his strategic placement in Antioch (Gal 1:17, 18).

The church of the city — " ... in the church in Antioch ... " Acts 13:1

God is restoring the *church of the city*. The coming worldwide visitation will be so extensive, and so intensive, that one group will not be able to contain it. It will demand a new wineskin—the emerging *city-church*.

The apostolic church knows nothing of our modern denominational divisions. It was not denominated by theologies or celebrities, but by *geographies*. Geographical boundaries and civil jurisdictions alone determined the church's boundaries. They were not in competition with one another; when the apostle addressed a church he would speak, for example, to the whole "*church of God in Corinth*" (1 Cor 1:2). Evidently, the church, even in these large cosmopolitan cities, was functioning

as one unified body.

This brings us again to the content of Paul's revelation of the mystery:

That through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of **one body** (emphasis mine) ...

Eph 3:6

The revelation of the *one body* was not only the *message* but also the *method* of Paul's apostolic mission to the Gentiles. Once received it was modelled in the citywide church of Antioch and then in Paul's apostolic team. Conceived in the womb of the city-church, Paul's apostolic team was thrust out from Antioch to plant and nurture the corporate Christ – city by city – throughout the nations. Paul and his team, having had hands laid on them by the Antioch church, were 'sent' (*apostello*) out (see Acts 13:3). And so, the prophecy is fulfilled that "*the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty'*" (Zech 8:21).

This is in vast contrast to many of the so-called *apostolic networks* that litter the current church landscape. Flying the flag of a particular *network*, new members are *recruited* to that network rather than *re-formed* into the one body of Christ of the city. Consequently they are defined and denominated by their membership of that particular network rather than by the church of the city. In my view this is incipient denominationalism—it is not materially different to our existing denominational divisions.

Because we are in transition this aberration is in some measure understandable. We are emerging from a centuries-old sub-normal Christianity; and so, the fullness of the apostolic ministry will occur only in harmony with the restoration of the apostolic church—the one church of the city. This will occur as a work of the Spirit and will require distinguishing between two very different spheres of ministry—between the *church* and the *work*. It will also demand that one serve the other, but more of this later.

The apostolic Gentile mission began in Antioch and will continue until the "*full number of the Gentiles has come in*" (Rom 11:25). As the parent of that mission, Antioch's DNA will, therefore, play out in every authentic expression of the apostolic.

Just as the Church of Ephesus "*tested those who claimed to be apostles... and found them false*" (Rev 2:2), contemporary apostles will also need to be measured and tested.

The marks of an apostle, in addition to the *miraculous* (signs, wonders and miracles - 2 Cor 12:12), are seen in the *man* (the fellowship of Christ's sufferings for the sake of his body – see 2 Cor 4; 6:3-13; 11:16-12:10; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24-27); in their *message* (the revelation of the mystery – the one body – Eph 3:2-6); and in their *method* (the Antioch-model as a prototype discussed here).

The revelation of the mystery – of one corporate Christ – in every city was shown to Paul and to the "*apostles and prophets*" (see Eph 3:5). This revelation will drive every authentic apostle, not to build empires and networks, but to spend and be spent in growing the one church of the city. This is the peculiar mission of apostles, prophets, and teachers who are set in the body as the spearhead of heaven's invasion of earth (1 Cor 12:28). They do not exist for themselves—to be a successful and growing network, but for the body of Christ of each locality that it might come to "*the fullness of the stature of Christ*" (Eph 4:11-14). This DNA only comes by the Spirit: "*...it is now being revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets*" (Eph 3:5); and is therefore one of the proofs of true apostleship.

Without it, new *apostolic networks* will only prove to be a deviation—as self-serving, sectarian, and schismatic as historic denominationalism.

And so, when Paul planned to visit Rome, for example, he addressed himself "*to all in Rome* (ie to the *whole* church of the city)...*I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong...*" (Rom 1:7, 11 NIV). He was concerned to impart something of the Spirit to the *whole* church of the city that would add to their corporate maturity. His apostolic passion and purview took in the *whole* horizon of the city-church. He was not looking for recruits to grow

his *part*—his own network.

It is time to ask ourselves whether we are merely building for the *part* or for the *whole*—a 'successful' network or the corporate Christ!

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