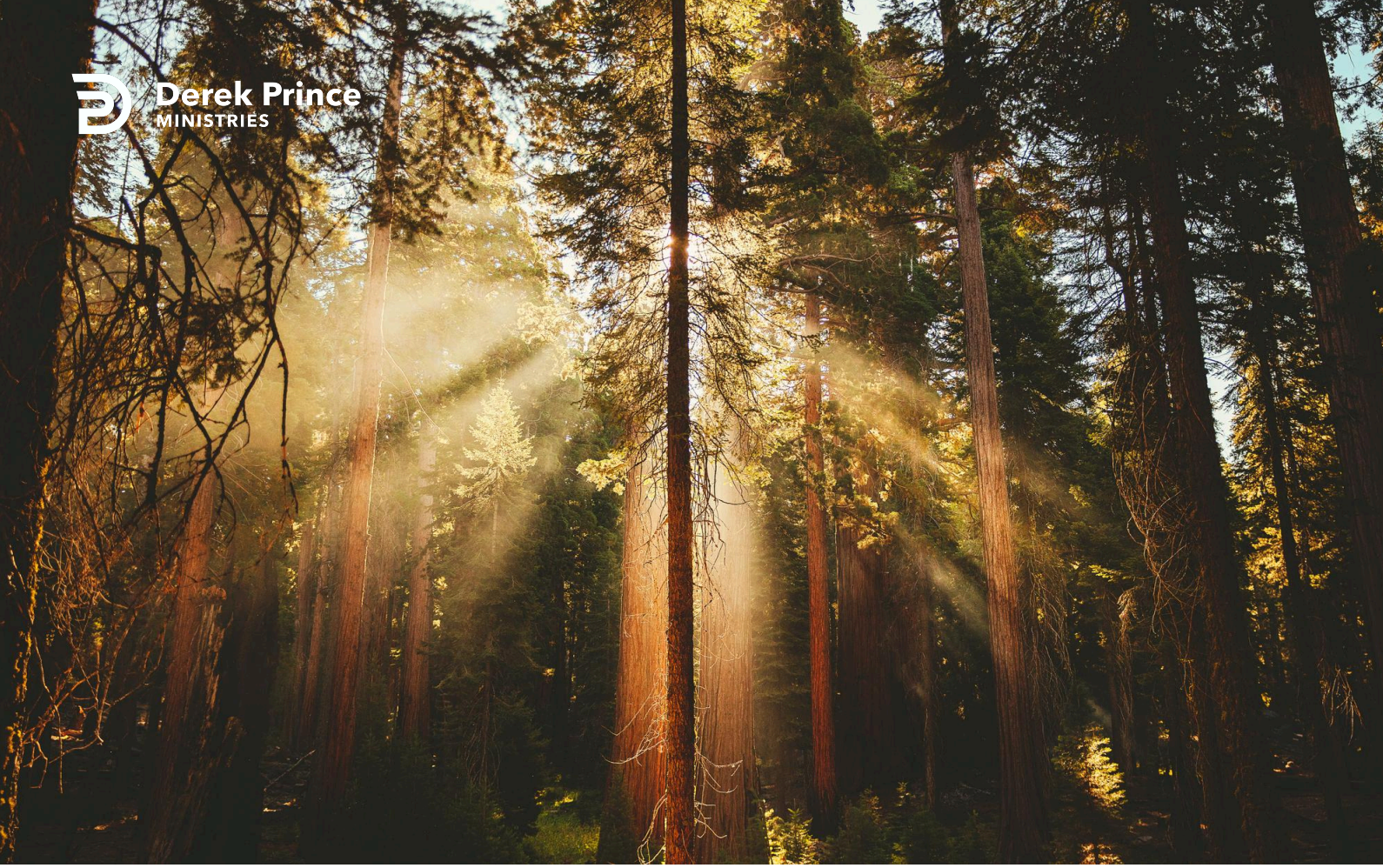

Acknowledging That God Sends Out Someone For A Specific Task



Foundations (Day 263)
by Derek Prince

In contemporary Christianity the title usually given to Christian workers sent forth from a local church is "missionaries." However, the actual word used in the New Testament is "apostles."

This becomes apparent if we compare the phraseology used in Acts 13:1 with that used in Acts 14:4 and 14. In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas are described as "prophets and teachers." In Acts 14 they are called "apostles." The word apostle means literally "one sent forth." Thus this title was applied to Paul and Barnabas after they had been sent forth from the church at Antioch.

By its origin the word missionary likewise means "one who is sent." Thus the words apostle and missionary have the same original meaning. However, in modern Christianity the word missionary is applied in many cases where it would not be scriptural to use the word apostle.

An apostle is, by definition, someone sent forth by divine authority to accomplish a special task. Many Christians have the impression that the apostles of the New Testament were limited to the twelve originally appointed by Jesus while on earth. However, a careful study of the New Testament does not support this view. In Acts 14, both Paul and Barnabas are called apostles, yet neither of them was appointed during the earthly ministry of Jesus.

A similar conclusion follows from a comparison of two verses in 1 Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 three men are named as joint writers of the epistle: Paul, Silvanus (or Silas) and Timothy. In 1 Thessalonians 2:6 these three men say of themselves: "We might have made demands as apostles of Christ." That is, all three of them were recognised as apostles.

In fact, a thorough examination of the New Testament reveals more than twenty men who are called apostles. However, it is outside the scope of the present study to analyse the full

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extent of the apostolic ministry.

Returning to the original sending forth of Paul and Barnabas, we need to ask: What was the purpose for which the other leaders laid hands on them?

First, this act represented the open, public acknowledgement by the church leaders that God had chosen and called Paul and Barnabas to a special task and ministry. Second, by laying hands upon Paul and Barnabas, the other church leaders claimed for them the special spiritual wisdom, grace and power which they would need for the successful accomplishment of their God-given task.

In this respect, this use of laying on of hands in the New Testament is closely parallel to the incident already referred to in the Old Testament where Moses laid hands upon Joshua, publicly acknowledging God's choice of Joshua as the leader who was to succeed him and also imparting to Joshua the spiritual wisdom and authority needed for his God-appointed task.

Devotional

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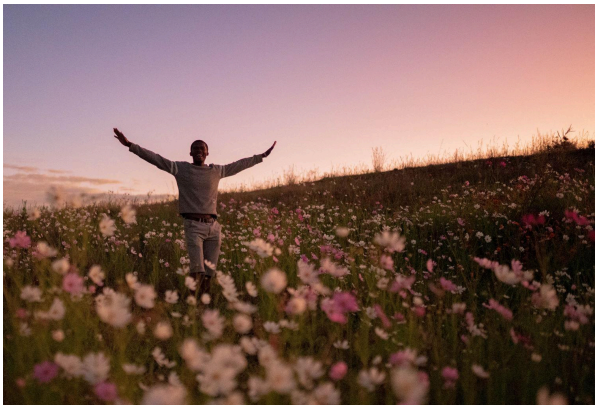

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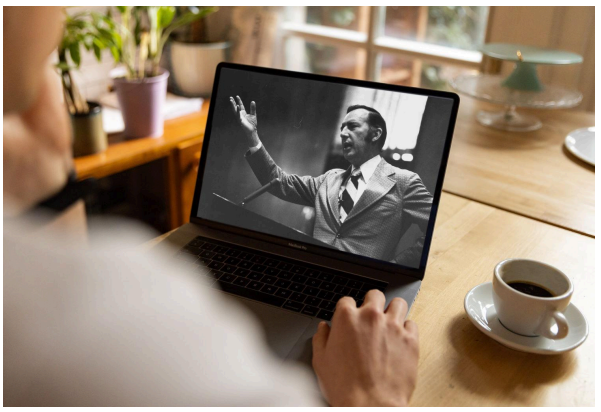

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