

THE N.T. OFFICE OF THE APOSTLE

***By David Mitchell, Pastor
Park Meadows Church***

The Greek word for “apostle” has a dual meaning, as do many words in Greek (and every other language, for that matter). There were some persons called “apostles” in the Bible, other than the twelve. Therefore we make a distinction between the word “apostle” and the phrase “Holy Apostle” which we will use to mean one of the twelve who fulfilled all the apostolic qualifications listed in the Bible. We do not mean to say that the phrase “Holy Apostle” is always used in the Bible when referring to one of the twelve, merely that we will use this phrase as a convention in this paper to limit confusion caused by the dual meaning of the word in the Greek. The word “apostle” is *apostolos*. It has the two-fold meaning: (1) a delegate; specifically an ambassador of the Gospel; (2) officially a commissioner of Christ [“apostle”] (with miraculous powers), i.e. one of the twelve.

Since the word has two meanings, its proper usage must be distinguished by the context. First, a general meaning of “a delegate or ambassador of the Gospel,” can be applied to people other than the twelve, both in the Bible and in Christian history. This word is often translated in other places in the N.T. as “messenger” and “he that is sent” Using one of these translations would clarify the word’s usage when referring to a person other than one of the twelve Holy Apostles. The second definition is “an officially commissioned apostle” of Christ with authenticating miraculous powers, of which there are only twelve. The biblical qualifications of the twelve are listed in our study, “The Office of the Apostle” and they preclude the possibility of any additional Holy Apostles beyond the earthly life of the twelve (see the study).

The biblical qualifications of the twelve are as follows, and they preclude the possibility of any additional Holy Apostles beyond the earthly life of the twelve:

1. THEY ARE NUMBERED OF THE TWELVE

Luke 6.13 says, And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.... There are only, and always will be only, twelve Holy Apostles chosen directly by Jesus Christ (not counting Judas who

lost his bishopric, and Matthias who was given Judas' place, before Pentecost, by men who apparently were not willing to wait on God's timing--Paul would later be chosen by Jesus Christ Himself--we never hear from Matthias again). Therefore, we believe that the "twelve" includes the original twelve Holy Apostles, minus Judas, plus Paul--1 Cor 15.5; Eph 3.5; Mat. 10.2; Lk. 6.13; 9.1,10; 22.14; Lk. 1.26 "the 11" plus Paul--Acts 9.27; 1 Cor. 15.7-8; Gal. 1.1). These twelve were chosen to be the foundation of the church (along with the N.T. prophets), and to pen the N.T. revelation of Jesus Christ, which is the final revelation of God. These same will have their names engraved for all eternity upon the twelve foundations of the four square city (signifying, we believe, that they are the foundation of the N.T. church--see Eph 2.20). Rev. 21.14: And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (16) And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

There is a warning against calling men apostles who are not.

(Rev 2:2) I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

2. GIVEN COMMANDMENTS FROM CHRIST AFTER THE ASCENSION

JOH 16.12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.

15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.

(Eph 3:5) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

(Acts 1:2) Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

(Acts 2:42) And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

(2 Pet 3:1-2) This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: {2} That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour:

(Jude 17) But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Eph. 3:1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

3. MUST HAVE WALKED WITH JESUS

ACTS 1.20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take.

21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

JOHN 15.26 But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

27 And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

1 Cor 15:7-8 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. {8} And last of all he was seen of me (Paul) also, as of one born out of due time.

Rom 1.4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

5 By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:

1 Cor 1.1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

1 Cor 9.1 Am I not an apostle (Paul)? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?

2 If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.

3 Mine answer to them that do examine me is this,

4 Have we not power to eat and to drink?

5 Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?

6 Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?

Gal. 1.15 But when it pleased God, who separated me (Paul) from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

4. SAW HIM ALIVE AFTER HIS PASSION

(Acts 1:3) To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

(Acts 1:13) And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

(Acts 4:33) And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

(1 Cor 15:7-8) After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. {8} And last of all he was seen of me (Paul) also, as of one born out of due time.

5. MANIFESTED THE SIGNS OF AN APOSTLE

Acts 2.42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

Acts 4.33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

Acts 5.11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

Acts 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

2 Cor 12.11 I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

13 For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I (Paul) myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.

6. IT WAS THE HIGHEST CALLING OF JESUS CHRIST

(1 Cor 12:28) And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

FIRST = PROTON - FIRSTLY (IN TIME, PLACE, ORDER); BEFORE

(Eph 4:10-11) He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) {11} And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. . . .

7. CHOSEN BY JESUS HIMSELF, IN PERSON

(Luke 6:13) And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;

(Acts 1:2) Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

(Acts 1:25) That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

APOSTLESHIP = 651. apostole, ap-os-tol-ay'; from G649, commission,

(Rom 1:1) Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

(Rom 1:5) By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:

(1 Cor 1:1) Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

(a.) SET FORTH LAST = ESCHATOS--FINAL--APPOINTED TO DEATH

(1 Cor 4:9) For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

(b.) CALLED TO BE THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

EPH 4.11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

EPH 3.3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

EPH 2.19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

APOSTLES AND PROPHETS WERE THE FOUNDATION

It is important to note that the phrase “ARE BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION,” is not present tense, but aorist. The aorist tense in Gr. deals with the fact of the action without so much regard for time. English has no such tense, and aorist verbs are usually translated in the past tense in English. It implies something that just “is” not something that is ongoing.

FOUNDATION

2310. themelios, them-el'-ee-os; something put down, i.e. a substruction (of a building, etc.).

FROM

5087. tithemi, tith'-ay-mee; a prol. form of a prim. theo, theh'-o: to place (in a passive or horizontal posture, and thus different from, G2476 histemi his'-tay-mee, which prop. denotes as upright and active position).

So, we see that the foundation (the apostles and N.T. prophets) was first laid down, then Jesus Christ began to build upon the foundation with us, born again believers brought into the building one at a time, fitly framed and growing in Christ. This phrase, “fitly framed together,” in contrast to the foundation, is present, active, indicative tense (ongoing in the present). The language, as the example itself, pictures a foundation which was laid once. Then once it was finished, the building was built, and is being built, upon it.

Once a foundation is build, and the structure of the building is begun on top of it, nothing further can be done with the foundation--it is finished. Therefore, though there may be apostles in the sense of delegates or “sent ones” today, and prophets in the sense of “those who tell forth the word” there cannot be any further office of the apostle (the twelve, i.e. the Holy Apostles) nor the prophet, now that the foundation is complete, and the building is being built upon it.

The concept popular today that there are modern day apostles and prophets, violates the grammar and the example of the foundation and the building given in the above passage. Once the apostles and prophets had given us the Words of Jesus Christ, from Jesus Christ, as He promised He would send through them, and once these words had been authenticated by the signs and wonders of the Apostles and prophets, these offices ceased, as did the authenticating signs and wonders (because their purpose had been fulfilled, for the time being). Now, let us be quick to say that we do not believe that the “sign gifts” have ceased in the sense of God not being able to use them when He pleases. We simply believe that God is sovereign over the power which energizes them, and that they were for a specific purpose, which was fulfilled for the time being, until the approach of the second advent when He will energize them in abundance again (see Joel). It is certainly consistent with the Lord’s example of the foundation and the building, and with Christian history, where before the 4th century both Chrysostom and Augustine gave record that these gifts (apostolic, authenticating signs and wonders, i.e. tongues, words of wisdom, words of knowledge, prophecy, etc.) were not operating in the church. It is also consistent that these manifestations shall return during the tribulation period when the building of the church will be damaged by persecution and death, Bibles will be destroyed, and the church will, as it were, be reduced back to its foundation. Without the written Word, the prophetic words are necessary, and the signs and wonders to authenticate them.

Eph. 4.11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

Apostles and prophets were given during the foundational time of the church, as the N.T. written revelation of Jesus Christ, the full revelation of God, was being laid down. The work of the evangelist, the pastor, and the teachers continued and are used by God in the building of the rest of the building on top of the foundation, which has long since been laid. All this works . . .

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.