

DOCTRINE OF APOSTLES

I. Vocabulary.

- A. ἀποστέλλω (apostello), 129X, verb, to send out or send forth, in relation to the sender, to send with a commission, send with authority.
 - 1. ἀποστολή (apostole), 4X, noun, literally, a sending off, one sent off as a special envoy or messenger, apostleship.
 - 2. ἀπόστολος (apostolos), 79X, noun, one who is sent on a mission with the authority of the one who sends him. A commissioned representative, a messenger, envoy or apostle.
- B. This family of words is to be distinguished from πέμπω (pempo—to send), since the terms related to apostle focus on the authoritative commission behind the sending; the verb πέμπω (pempo) focuses on the basic act of sending.
- C. In Classical Greek, the term ἀπόστολος (apostolos) was used for a group of men sent out for a particular purpose, and came to be applied to the primary leader of the expedition; in a naval campaign, the term referred to the commander of the fleet.
- D. ἀπόστολος (apostolos) was a term that would have been understood readily by the Jews, since they had an Aramaic equivalent שְׁלִיחַ (shaliyach) that was related to the Hebrew verb שָׁלַח (shalach—to send out, to send away); in one Old Testament passage it has the idea of a Divine commission. IKings 14:6
- E. The Rabbis often used the term שְׁלִיחַ (shaliyach) to refer to one who was commissioned and authorized by God; these men were normally ordained rabbis, who were especially set apart for their task by the laying on of hands.
- F. Thus, the Jews recognized the religious element as well as the official character of those being sent out.

II. Definition and description.

- A. It must be immediately noted that the term **apostle** is used in the New Testament in a technical and a non-technical sense.
- B. Technically, the term is used to denote the twelve men originally selected by Jesus from His followers to occupy **the office of apostle**. Eph. 4:11
- C. In that regard, it is correct to refer to men that fill the office of apostle as apostles, just as it is to speak of those that occupy the office of pastor-teacher as pastor-teachers.
 - 1. During Jesus' earthly ministry, these men were apostles to Israel.
 - 2. Jesus made it plain that He was sent only to Israel at the first advent. Matt. 15:24
 - 3. He instructed these men to also limit their ministry to the Jews. Matt. 10:5-6
 - 4. As His commissioned representatives, they were to follow His instructions explicitly. Lk. 10:1-6
 - 5. After the suicide of Judas, the remaining eleven continued as apostles to Israel, with a further mandate that expanded their mission. Acts 1:7-8
 - 6. With the addition of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, the original number of twelve was restored. Acts 9:15, 15:12; Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8; Rev. 21:14

- D. In order to be an apostle in the technical sense in the Church age, one must have been selected by Jesus and an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ, and commissioned by the Lord Himself. ICor. 15:5,8-9; Gal. 1:1
- E. Non-technically, the term is used to denote anyone sent out by another individual or church on a mission. Acts 14:14; Rom. 16:7; Gal. 1:19
- F. As with any work of God, satanic counterfeits attempted to pass themselves off as bona fide apostles. IICor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2

III. The twelve apostles.

- A. The roster of the original twelve men that Jesus chose from among the general group of disciples who followed Him is recorded in three of the Gospels. Matt. 10:2-4; Mk. 3:14-19; Lk. 6:13-16
- B. They include:
 - 1. Simon, nicknamed Peter by Jesus. Matt. 16:17-18
 - 2. Andrew, Peter's brother. Jn. 1:40
 - 3. John, called the disciple that Jesus loved, who was the author of the fourth gospel. Jn. 13:23
 - 4. James, brother of John, the first apostle to suffer martyrdom. Acts 12:2
 - 5. Philip.
 - 6. Bartholomew, generally identified with Nathanael of Cana. Jn. 1:45
 - 7. Thomas, most famously known as doubting Thomas. Jn. 20:24-25
 - 8. Matthew, a tax collector, disliked by the Jews generally, and author of the first gospel.
 - 9. James, called James the less or small.
 - 10. Thaddaeus, also called Judas. Lk. 6:16
 - 11. Simon, a member of the radical Zealot party.
 - 12. Judas Iscariot, an unbeliever. Lk. 6:16; Jn. 6:70, 17:12
- C. With the suicide of Judas, the remaining apostles attempted to elect a replacement, perhaps understanding that the Lord intended to retain twelve apostles. Acts 1:21-26
 - 1. They had no divine sanction for this action.
 - 2. Their attempt was based on a correct understanding of the fact that the office of one of those chosen by Jesus would be left vacant. Acts 1:15-20
 - 3. They enacted their own views of what was required for one to occupy the office of apostle; however, their views were not in accord with God's will. Acts 1:21-22
 - 4. Men cannot elect an apostle; that is something only done by the Lord Himself.
 - 5. Therefore, we hear no more of Matthias.
- D. Paul, not Matthias, was the replacement for Judas.
 - 1. While Matthias had been with the Lord from the earliest days of His ministry, it should be very evident that the Lord did not select him to be numbered among the twelve.
 - 2. There are two criteria necessary for one to occupy the office of apostle.
 - a. Must be an eyewitness of the resurrection.
 - b. Must be personally selected by Jesus Christ.
 - 3. While Matthias was qualified as an eyewitness of the resurrection, he was never selected by Jesus.
 - 4. Paul fulfills both qualifications and is the man Jesus Christ selected to fill the vacant office of Judas.

E. Therefore, there are only twelve names on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. Rev. 21:14

IV. Characteristics of Church Age apostles.

- A. The men selected by Jesus Christ to occupy this office were twelve in number and were provided as a foundation for the Church. Acts 1:25; Eph. 4:11
- B. Along with the Church Age **prophets**, they are viewed as the earliest and most important building blocks of God's plan for this dispensation. Eph. 2:20
- C. They were the recipients of the new doctrines for the Church Age, and they faithfully adhered to and communicated those doctrines to those that were positive. Eph. 3:5
- D. The apostles were the men that generally, although not exclusively, established the local churches in regions where they took the gospel. Acts 11:19-26, 14:21-23
- E. They possessed authority over a **canon**, a geographical area for which they were responsible. IICor. 10:13-15
- F. In their respective canons, they had authority over a number of local churches and were the ranking authorities over those churches until their deaths. Gal. 1:2; IPet. 1:1
 - 1. They were free to use apostolic representatives, or trouble-shooters, in various areas since it was impossible for them to be in more than one place at one time. ITim. 1:3; IITim. 4:12; Tit. 1:5
 - 2. While these men acted with apostolic sanction, it did not make them apostles in the technical sense.
- G. They possessed many of the temporary gifts, a blessing God provided in order to validate their authority and message. Acts 5:12,15, 19:11-12; IICor. 12:12
- H. It should be noted that the possession and practice of the temporary gifts (like tongues and healing) appears to have followed the same pattern as others that had these gifts during the transitional period at the beginning of the Church age. Phil. 2:25-27; IITim. 4:20
- I. The apostles, or men who were closely associated with them, were responsible for writing much of the New Testament.
 - 1. Apostles who wrote scripture included Matthew, John, Paul, and Peter. *21 of the 27 New Testament books were written by apostles.*
 - 2. Those associated with apostles wrote the balance of the New Testament and include, Mark, Luke, James, and Jude.

V. The false doctrine of apostolic succession.

- A. The Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Nestorian and Anglican Churches hold that apostolic succession is maintained through the ordination of bishops in unbroken personal succession dating back to the apostles; however, they do not necessarily interpret this succession in the same manner.
- B. The doctrine of apostolic succession is defended by its exponents on two grounds; the first is tradition, while the second is based on distortion of the Scriptures.
 - 1. The Church Fathers, who were links in that chain of succession, regularly appealed to apostolic succession as a test for whether Catholics or heretics had correct doctrine.
 - 2. Those that argued for apostolic succession included Iranaeus (189 AD), Tertullian (200 AD), Cyprian of Carthage (253 AD), Jerome (396 AD), and Augustine (397 AD).
 - 3. The scriptural appeals include **the assumption** that apostolic succession is necessary to fulfill Jesus' promise concerning the Church. Matt. 16:18

4. Those that advocate apostolic succession distort other passages to allow for authority over the Church Universal. Acts 20:17,28
 5. Lastly, they offer the Timothy Principle as a proof text for apostolic succession. IITim. 2:2
- C. These “proofs” are easily refuted when one considers all the historical and scriptural evidence.
1. The historical appeal to apostolic succession did not appear before 170-200 AD, and all early succession lists were not compiled until late in the 2nd century.¹
 2. While this concept was developed as a means to counter various heresies (like Gnosticism), it became a convenient way to assert validity and authority; unfortunately, this often took the place of appealing to the Word of God.
 3. The passage in Matthew does not demand apostolic succession in order to be fulfilled; rather, the very idea of a foundation is that of a non-successive foundation, since one only lays a foundation once. Eph. 2:20
 4. The passage in Acts is completely taken out of context, and those that advocate apostolic succession ignore the fact that this only involved the Ephesian elders; these men were not given authority over the entire Church, just that portion that was allotted by the Holy Spirit. Acts 20:17,28
 5. The appeal to the Timothy principle is an example of overstating what the Scripture actually says; it is one thing to say that the apostles made provision for leadership in the churches once they were gone, but quite another thing to say that those so commissioned were to function as actual apostles. IITim. 2:2
 6. In that regard, the commands to Timothy to fulfill his pastoral ministry in Ephesus deals only with the issue of communicating sound doctrine; it does not speak of transmitting an authoritative office to him. Although Timothy certainly possessed a legitimate office as overseer of the church at Ephesus, there is no suggestion of apostolic authority being passed on to Timothy by Paul. IITim. 4:1-6
- D. As stated previously, twelve men were selected by Jesus Christ to fill the office of apostle for only a limited time; it is impossible for anyone to remain in any office after death.
- E. As with the office of prophet and evangelist, the office of apostle was a temporary situation that was designed to provide the foundation for the Church. Eph. 2:20
- F. As the Church became established in the world, those that formed the foundation began to be martyred or die, leaving John as the last living apostle.
- G. Lastly, the qualifications for entering the office of apostle included factors that make apostolic succession an impossibility.
1. The first, and most important, qualification was that one had to be an eyewitness of the resurrection; since there is no verifiable evidence that Jesus Christ appeared to anyone following John on Patmos, no one can fulfill that qualification.
 2. The second qualification was that one had to be commissioned by the Lord personally; again, there is no verifiable proof that Jesus Christ has commissioned anyone since Saul of Tarsus. Acts 9:15-16

¹ Elwell Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology

- VI. The apostleship of Paul.
- A. Paul was obviously the last apostle selected by Jesus Christ.
 - B. He considered himself as the least deserving of all men to be selected for this important position. ICor. 15:9; ITim. 1:12-13
 - C. However, he did not allow any false humility or inappropriate guilt to influence how he fulfilled his office; nor, did he consider himself inferior to any of the other apostles in any way. IICor. 11:5-6
 - D. The legitimacy of his apostleship was openly acknowledged by the other apostles. Gal. 2:7-9; IIPet. 3:15-16
 - E. Any suggestion that there was some serious conflict between Paul and the other apostles is not substantiated by the Word of God.
 1. This thinking often arises out of the public rebuke that Paul administered to Peter when he came to Antioch. Gal. 2:11-14
 2. However, a careful study of Galatians and other epistles in the New Testament yields no such conclusion. Gal. 2:7-9; IIPet. 3:15-16
 3. There is no extant writing in which Paul disparages Peter or any of the other apostles; there is also no extant writing in which any other apostle discredits Paul.
 - F. He was not arrogant, but submitted his doctrine and agenda to the other apostles in Jerusalem, who added nothing to his message. Gal. 2:2,6-10
 - G. His primary mission was determined by God, which involved a mission to the Gentiles and their leaders. Acts 9:15; Rom. 11:13, 15:15-16; Gal. 1:15-16, 2:7-9; Eph. 3:8
 - H. The apostles recognized that they had been assigned a particular sphere of authority, which seems to have functioned in harmony with the sphere of others. Gal. 2:6b-7
 - I. Due to his positive volition and the abundant grace of God, Paul surpassed many of the other apostles in applications (although this is not a competition):
 1. In his willingness to work himself to exhaustion to fulfill his ministry. ICor. 15:10 cf. ICor. 4:12; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29; ITim. 4:10
 2. In the sufferings he endured. Acts 9:16; IICor. 11:23-33
 3. In the number of places he took the gospel. IICor. 10:14-16; Rom. 15:24,28
 4. In the revelations that God provided. IICor. 12:1-7; Eph. 3:1-10
- VII. Jesus is designated as **the Apostle and High Priest of our confession** since He proved Himself a totally faithful representative of the One who sent and commissioned Him. Heb. 3:1