

Apostles

Apostle. The word 'apostle' means 'sent one' or 'messenger'. It can be used for any messenger, or it may refer to specific offices. Here are a few examples of its general application:

- Titus and other brethren; *"they are deputed messengers of assemblies"* (2 Cor. 8:23).
- Epaphroditus; *"your messenger"* (Phil. 2:25).
- Any sent one; *"neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him"* (John 13:16).

However, the word 'apostle' is used more specifically for those who are sent according to a Divine will in service to a Divine Person.

The Apostle of Our Profession. As the Sent One of God, Jesus is the one true Apostle of our faith. In this case it implies a divine commission in the one sent. *"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus."* (Heb. 3:1). In the case of our Lord, the "sender" was the Father; *"the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world"* (1 John 4:14).

Qualifications for an apostle. We now proceed to deal with "apostles" in the sense of a Christian office. An apostle had to:

1. Have been chosen directly by the Lord (Luke 6:13; Acts 1:24; Acts 9:15)
2. Have been sent specially by the Lord (Matt. 10:5; Mark 3:14-15; Mark 16:15; Gal. 1:1)
3. Have been empowered miraculously by the Lord (Mark 16:16-17; 2 Cor. 12:12)
4. Have seen visibly the Lord in resurrection (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1; 2 Cor. 12:2).

The Twelve Apostles. There were others that were sent with a divine commission, and they were sent, not by the Father, but by the Son. "The apostles" were those who were sent by the Lord with special missions to accomplish. We find the purpose of their ordination in Mark 3:14-15; *"And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils."* The twelve were (see Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:18):

1. Simon Peter
2. Andrew
3. James the Great

4. John
5. Philip
6. Bartholomew (or, Nathanael)
7. Matthew (or, Levi)
8. Thomas (or, Didymus)
9. James the Less (son of Alpheus)
10. Simon Zelotes (or, the Canaanite)
11. Judas Thaddaeus (or, Lebbaeus, the brother of James)
12. Judas Iscariot (son of Simon)

An earthly commission. These twelve were “sent” out for the first time by our Lord with the gospel of the kingdom to Israel. Peter is always named first; Judas Iscariot is always named last. Matt. 10:2-4 gives the pairing of the twelve apostles as they were sent out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel with the gospel of the kingdom.

A resurrection commission. These same apostles (except Judas Iscariot, the betrayer) received a new mission from the Lord as risen, but still on earth. We find that they are given the Holy Ghost (John 20:21-23) as the teacher of divine things, but told to remain in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Ghost as the power of divine life; read Luke 24:49, which says *“behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”* We find that they are commissioned to take the gospel out to every nation, *“repentance and remission of sins preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”* The gospel would no longer be restricted to the borders of Israel, and yet the order was to be *“to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”*. One of the primary functions of the apostles was to be witnesses of Christ’s resurrection; read Luke 24:46-48, which concludes with *“and ye are witnesses of these things.”*

Appointment of Matthias. On the death of Judas Iscariot, the other eleven apostles chose Matthias, a disciple who had known our Lord on earth, to fill Judas’ place. They knew from the scriptures that Judas was the fulfillment of David’s words concerning the betrayer, and that God’s mind was that *“his bishoprick let another take”* (Acts 1:20). He knew also from the Lord’s words that there must be twelve apostles (Matt. 19:28; Rev. 21:14), and so *“one must be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection”* (Acts 1:22).

One born out of due time. The twelve earthly apostles carried out their ministry, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. They presented Christ crucified to the nation of Israel. They rejected the apostles’ witness however, and finally stoned Stephen in Acts 7. At that point, the final offer to Israel was closed, and the Holy Ghost takes up a new direction. He takes

the leader of the opposition, Saul of Tarsus, and turns him into *"a chosen vessel"* (Acts 9:15). The expression *"as one born out of due time"* (or, "as to an abortion") brings out the *unlikeliness* and *untimeliness* of his conversion. The Apostle Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, and was caught up to the third heaven, where he *"heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter"* (2 Cor. 12:3-4). He received a number of truths from an ascended Christ (c.p. with the twelve who knew a risen, but not ascended Christ). These truths he *"received of the Lord"* and passed them on to us through his epistles (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3; Gal. 1:12; 1 Thess. 4:15). Chiefly, Paul received the truth of the Mystery, which he calls *"the dispensation of the grace of God"* (Eph. 3:2-3). This mystery concerns the heavenly nature and calling of the Church, its formation from Jews and Gentiles into one body, our mystical union with Christ, and God's purpose to place Christ and His bride over the entire universe in the Millennium. Truly Paul could say, *"for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing"* (2 Cor. 12:11). In Galatians 2 we find that Paul had the fellowship of the other apostles, and even had sufficient authority to rebuke another apostle, even the leader of the twelve. In this way, he was of an equal status as the twelve; a witness of the resurrection as he too had seen the Lord, not just risen, but ascended and glorified; *"last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time"* (1 Cor. 15:7-8). The apostle Paul's testimony as an eye-witness for the risen Christ was every bit as valid as the testimony of the twelve (1 Cor. 15:11).

A heavenly commission. In Ephesians 4:8-11 we find that the term 'apostles' cannot be limited to the twelve, or even the thirteen, including Paul. *"When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ... And he gave some, apostles; etc."* There were others, besides the twelve that were given by *an ascended Christ* with an apostolic ministry. Certainly, Paul is included in among the "some" that Christ gave, but the word is plural; *"some, apostles; etc."* They had a heavenly commission and were given as gifts to the Church by an ascended Christ. Barnabas was one of these 'heavenly' apostles; for it says in Acts 14:14, *"When the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, etc."* We do not know how many of these apostles there were. These "heavenly apostles" are distinct from the twelve, who had an earthly commission. The twelve will have *"twelve thrones"* for judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). In the Millennium, that promise to the twelve will be fulfilled, for we read of the city having *"twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb"* (Rev. 21:14). Paul will sit on no such throne. His commission was entirely from heaven.

Female apostles? In Romans 16:7 we read of *"Andronicus and Junia"*, Paul's kinsmen, who were *"of note among the apostles"*. The name "Junia" can be either masculine or feminine. Some have tried to argue that Junia was a female apostle, interpreting the verse; "counted

among the apostles.” First of all, we don’t know if Junia was female. Secondly, it does not say “counted among” but rather “of note among” the apostles. That is, they were held in high esteem by the apostles. Specifically, here I think Paul refers to the twelve apostles. Generally speaking, when Paul says “the apostles” he means the twelve. To summarize, there is no indication of a female apostle, which would subvert God’s order with regard to men and women (1 Cor. 14:34).

Apostolic succession. There were no successors to the apostles. I will give three reasons why:

1. One requirement to be an apostle was that they must have seen the Lord in resurrection (1 Cor. 9:1). Those born later than the first century (with the exception of Paul, a chosen vessel) could never be apostles.
2. The foundation of the church is complete. We read in that the Church’s foundation includes the apostles. “...Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20). Now, we all know that a foundation of a house must be laid first chronologically, before the framing can begin. There can be no more apostles because the foundation was laid in the first century!
3. The New Testament warns about false apostles. Even in Paul’s day, we warned of those who claimed to be ‘sent ones’ by Christ, but really were “*false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ*” (2 Cor. 11:13). Then, when we get to John’s day (a few decades later) we find that the early Church found it necessary to put a number on trial for claiming to be apostles. The angel of the church in Ephesus is commended because they had “*tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars*” (Rev. 2:2).

Is Apostleship a Gift, an Office, or Both? Both. We find that apostles are in the list of gifts (Eph. 4:11, 1 Cor. 12:28) and they are also involved with administration (Acts 15:6, 1 Cor. 5:3). As the only scriptural role that is both a gift and an office, the administrative jurisdiction of an apostle went beyond the sphere of the local assembly; e.g. Paul judging from a distance, 1 Cor. 5:3. For all other Christian offices, their jurisdiction is limited to the local assembly. This is the great failure of the papal system. Christian gift on the other hand is never limited to the local assembly, but rather is “*given to every man to profit withal*” (1 Cor. 12:7) and for the purpose of “*the edifying of the body of Christ*” (Eph. 4:12). Prophets in this way differed from apostles because they had no universal administrative authority.