

TRANSLOCAL MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

James W. Garrett

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James W. Garrett

When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; (Ephesians 4:8, 11-12)

Preface

Absolute objectivity is difficult to achieve when writing on a topic such as this one. Most would argue that absolute objectivity on any topic is impossible to achieve. That may be so, but when writing I always ask Our Lord to reveal to me any unconscious agenda that might be driving me toward certain conclusions. After a piece is finished, I prayerfully reread it and I ask My Master to reveal where any dishonesty or manipulation of the evidence has taken place, especially any motivated by pride or self-protection. Should any revelation of these motivations come forth, I prayerfully rewrite that section. Although I would not claim to be free from all subjectivity, I do believe that He does answer that prayer. As a result, I often find that at the conclusion of a study I hold a position different from the one with which I began.

The advice that Dr. Millar Burrows gave to John C. Trevor, “Let your evidence lead you where it will,”¹ has become my motto. That motto sometimes leads me to a conclusion with which my dearest friends disagree, but those with whom I would never camp are in agreement with my conclusions! Even so, when I have diligently sought facts, trusted God to bring to me material that I need to consider (it seems that He always serendipitously places into my hands relevant materials) and I have prayed over them, I am at peace with whatever the result might be.

May Our Lord and King be glorified by the following undertaking.

PART ONE THE MINISTRY OF APOSTLES

Some church groups declare that the last apostle died in 100 A.D. and that there have been no apostles since John the Revelator. On the other hand, many contemporary church leaders call themselves, “apostles.” Every issue of *Charisma Magazine* contains full-page ads of conferences in which “apostles” are featured speakers. In some quarters, the term has become a title of honor. A young seminarian whose field education I was overseeing told me that his career goal was to become an apostle. In recent years, C. Peter Wagoner, Bill Hammond, Rick Joyner, and others have launched a new apostolic movement in the Evangelical/Charismatic community.²

¹ John C. Trevor, *The Untold Story of Qumran* (Westwood, NJ, Fleming H. Revell and Company, 1955) page 23

² The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)

Are there apostles today? If so, who are they and what is their role in the Church? The answers to these questions are the pursuit of our study. We begin by seeking to gain an understanding of the identity and role of apostles in the New Testament..³

Section One

Apostles and Apostolic Ministry in The New Testament

Definition of the term, “apostle”

The English term, *apostle*, is an Anglicization of the Greek noun, *apostolos*⁴. A frequently repeated statement is that apostles are "sent ones," the implication being that the significant characteristic of apostles is that they are "sent." Such a definition misses the significance of the Greek term. *Apostolos* is the noun form of the verb, *apostello*.⁵ There are a number of Greek verbs that communicate the concept of sending. Each of them tends to be used with a particular understanding about the nature of the sending. The most common of these is *pempo*, which conveys the simple idea, *to send*. *Apostello*, however, conveys a particular type of sending. J. G. Machen states, "*pempo*⁶ is the general word for 'send,' while *apostello* means 'I send with a commission.'"⁷ The meaning of the verb prevails in the definition of the noun. The noun form, *apostolos*, means "one sent with a commission." The distinctive characteristic of this word is not the fact that one is sent, but that one is sent to do something - its focus is upon the purpose of the sending. Rather than Anglicizing the term, *apostolos*, we could translate it as, *commissioned ones*.

That being true, when someone is called an *apostle*, in order to understand how the term applies to him, we must discover what that particular apostle is commissioned to do. In the New Testament, there are many apostles with many varied commissions.

Here are five examples of those whom the New Testament labels, *apostle*. Note the variety in their respective commissions:

1. Jesus⁸ was commissioned to:

- redeem those under law (this involves His atoning death, victory over the grave, impartation of the Holy Spirit and abundant life, and the consummation of the kingdom);⁹
- reveal the person and character of God.¹⁰

³ Chapter Three, "Apostles Then and Now," in our 1996 book, *New Testament Church Leadership*, is a cursory study of this topic. Some of that material is repeated in this paper.

⁴ ἀπόστολος

⁵ ἀποστέλλω

⁶ πέμπω

⁷ J. Gresham Machen, DD., Litt.D. *New Testament Greek for Beginners*, (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1923) page 64

⁸ Hebrews 3:1; Galatians 4:4 (The term "He sent forth" in Gal. 4:4 is ἐξαπέστειλεν [*ezapestellen*], a form of ἐξαποστέλλω [*ezapostello*] "sending someone away to fulfill a mission in another place." W. Bauer *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated and edited by W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1957)2 pg. 272

⁹ Galatians 4:4-5

2. The Twelve¹¹ were commissioned to:

- testify to the fact that Jesus was resurrected;¹²
- cast out demons and heal every kind of disease¹³
- make disciples of all nations;¹⁴
- be agents, used of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim accurately the teaching and person of Christ;¹⁵
- open up the kingdom of heaven to all mankind, binding and loosing people in their relationship to the Church.¹⁶

3. Barnabas and Paul¹⁷ were commissioned to:

- be propagators of the Gospel before Gentiles, kings, and Jews¹⁸ - but especially to the Gentile world.¹⁹
- Paul also considered himself called to be a "master-builder" of local churches. His responsibility was to lay the foundation of Jesus Christ. Other local leaders then would build the local church upon the foundation laid by Paul.²⁰

4. Epaphroditus²¹ was commissioned to:

carry a love offering from Philippi to Paul during his imprisonment in Rome.²²

5. Representatives²³ of the Gentile congregations were commissioned to:

travel with the offering to Jerusalem so that no one could accuse Paul of misuse of funds.²⁴

¹⁰ Hebrews 1:1-3; John 14:7-10

¹¹ Matthew 10:1-4; Acts 1:2, 26; etc. (The term, *apostoloi*, is applied to this group more than 40 times in the New Testament.)

¹² Acts 1:8, 21-22; 2:22-24, 32; 3:15, 4:2, 33; 5:30-32; 10:39-42 etc. The Twelve considered this to be their primary mission.

¹³ Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19;

¹⁴ Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁵ John 14:25-26; 15:26-27

¹⁶ (to Peter) Matthew 16:18-19; (to all the apostles) Matthew 18:18; John 20:22-23

¹⁷ Acts 14:14

¹⁸ Acts 13:1-3; 9:10-15; Romans 11:13; etc.

¹⁹ Galatians 1:16a; 2:9

²⁰ I Corinthians 3:10

²¹ Philippians 2:25 (Although the word, *messenger*, occurs in some versions, the word in the original is *apostle*.)

²² Philippians 2:29-30; 4:15-18

²³ 2 Corinthians 8:23 (Although the word *messenger* occurs in many versions, the word in the original is *apostle*.)

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 8:16-21

6. The seventy were commissioned to:

be advance-men, going into cities in advance of Jesus arrival, preaching and healing in order to prepare the people for Jesus' arrival.²⁵

From these examples it is apparent that there are different types of apostles (commissions) displayed among those bearing that label in the New Testament.

The New Testament's generic use of the terms, *apostello/apostolos*

The verb, *apostello*, is used in the New Testament in its generic sense, simply meaning "one who is sent to do something." If a man sent his son to fetch a pail of water, he would use the word, *apostello*, and in that sense, his son would be his *apostolos*. In such common usage, the term does not imply any special calling or an ecclesiastical role. In examples 4 & 5 above, we see such a common usage.

*But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger (Greek – ἀπότολος [apostolos]) and minister to my needs.*²⁶

Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippian church to deliver money for Paul's living expenses while in prison. So, he was their *apostle*, or *messenger*.

The two unnamed Corinthian brethren labeled, "apostles," are mentioned in II Corinthians 8:23.

As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers (Greek- ἀπόστολοι [apostoloi]) of the churches, a glory to Christ.

These, like Epaphroditus, were carrying out a commission from the churches - the supervision and delivery of the offering gathered for the Jerusalem Church.

In addition to these two examples, the term is used in this generic sense with reference to Timothy, Erastus,²⁷ Judas, Silas,²⁸ and Tychicus.^{29 30} In these instances there is no sense of a Christ-given call to a specified ministry. Rather, these were messengers commissioned to go to certain places and carry out certain things.

²⁵ Luke 10:1-20. Some ancient manuscripts state that their number was seventy-two. Although the noun, *apostle*, is not used for the seventy, the verb, *apostello*, is used in reference to their commission (verses 1 & 3, and by inference, verse 16 [God *apostled* Jesus, and Jesus, by inference, *apostled* the seventy])

²⁶ Philippians 2:25

²⁷ Acts 19:22

²⁸ Acts 15:32-33

²⁹ II Timothy 4:12

³⁰ In each of the three passages, a form of the verb, *apostello*, is used. In Acts 19:22 (referring to Timothy and Erastus) and in Acts 15:32-33 (referring to Judas and Silas), the verb form is a masculine participle, aorist, active; The literal translation would be *having sent*, or *apostled*, them. In II Timothy 4:12 (referring to Tychicus), the verb form is first person, singular, first aorist, indicative. The literal translation would be, *I sent*, or *I apostled*, him.

The New Testament's technical use of the terms *apostello/apostolos*

Our interest lies in the New Testament's technical use of these terms. A modern example of how a generic term can become a technical designation is the manner in which the word, *messenger*, is used for delegates of churches in some Baptist conventions. The generic term becomes an official title for voting delegates; *messenger* becomes, *Messenger*. Thus, *apostle* is found in the New Testament both in its generic sense and as the technical term for a class of individuals to whom God imparted lifetime commissions related to His Kingdom. The following are examples of the technical use of the term (we will define as *ecclesiastical apostles*, those to whom the technical use of the term applies).

*And He gave some as **apostles**, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,...* (Ephesians 4:11)

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the **apostles** and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.* (Ephesians 2:19-20)

*...which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to **His holy apostles** and prophets in the Spirit.* (Ephesians 3:5)

*And God has appointed in the Church, first **apostles**, second prophets, third teachers,...* (I Corinthians 12:28)

*Am I not free? Am I not **an apostle**? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an **apostle**, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my **apostleship** in the Lord.* (I Corinthians 9:1-2)

*For I am the least of the **apostles**, who am not fit to be called an **apostle**, because I persecuted the Church of God.* (I Corinthians 15:9)

*I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me; actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent **apostles**, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a **true apostle** were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.* (II Corinthians 12:11-12)

These passages clearly display the existence of a class of individuals defined by the term, *apostle*. Within this class there are two groups: *pre-ascension apostles* and *post-ascension apostles*.

GROUP ONE: Pre-Ascension Ecclesiastical Apostles

The Twelve, chosen by Jesus during His earthly ministry, were commissioned prior to His ascension. Thus, the Twelve were **pre-ascension** apostles. They were recognized as being a special class.

The original Twelve consisted of men who had been with Jesus from the baptism of John until Jesus' ascension. John, one of the Twelve, wrote that he and his companions had heard Jesus,

seen Jesus, and had touched Him with their hands.³¹ When a replacement was sought for the pre-ascension apostle, Judas, Peter stated this qualification:

*It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us - beginning with the immersion of John, until the day that He was taken up from us - one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection.*³²

Matthias, one of two men in the post-ascension prayer meeting who met these qualifications, was chosen by lot to occupy the vacated position.³³ From that time onward, Matthias was one of the Twelve.³⁴ The Twelve understood that their unique commission was to be witnesses to the fact that Jesus had been resurrected.³⁵

The Twelve were recognized as the agents of revelation and their ministry was considered foundational to the Church, in every place. Even among the Gentile churches established by Paul, the uniqueness of the Twelve was recognized. Evidence of the special role of the Twelve is seen in:

1. the Antioch Church's sending Paul, Barnabas, and other Antiochans to Jerusalem for an ecclesiastical meeting with the Twelve and the Jerusalem elders,³⁶
2. Paul's statement that the Twelve were "reputed to be pillars," even though he considered his calling to be equal to theirs;³⁷
3. from time to time, Paul found himself having to defend his apostleship as being equal to that of the Twelve.³⁸
4. Paul's plural use of the term when he wrote of the apostolic foundation of the Church.³⁹

The commission of the Twelve included both Jews and Gentiles, but their primary ministry was among the Jews.⁴⁰

GROUP TWO: Post-Ascension Ecclesiastical Apostles

*When He ascended on high,...He gave gifts to men...and He gave some as **apostles**,...*⁴¹

This passage states that Jesus gave apostles to the Church *after His ascension*. Most English versions of Ephesians 4:8 obscure the sense of what is being said. The Greek term rendered,

³¹ I John 1:1 John uses an interesting term to describe their "hands handled." The term is ψηλαφάω, which implies "to feel around for." It is the word used to describe a blind man's feeling of something in an effort to determine its identity.

³² Acts 1:21-22

³³ Peter justified this action by citing Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 (Acts 1:20)

³⁴ Even though one of the Twelve, Matthias would be classed a post-ascension apostle.

³⁵ Acts 1:8, 22; 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:2, 33; 5:30-32; 10:39-42

³⁶ Acts 15

³⁷ Galatians 1:18; 2:1-9

³⁸ I Corinthians 9:1-2; II Corinthians 12:11-12

³⁹ Eph. 2:19-20; et al. The fact that Paul uses the definite article, "the apostles," in Ephesians 2:20 can be understood to refer to a specific group, i.e., the Twelve. If he were speaking of all apostles, including himself, he probably would not have used the definite article. However, this cannot be stated with certainty.

⁴⁰ Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Galatians 2:7-9

⁴¹ Ephesians 4:8, 11

when He ascended, does not mean that the action happened at the time that He ascended, but after he ascended.⁴² The fact that the term is plural indicates that there would be a number of post-ascension apostles given to the Church by Jesus.

The most famous post-ascension apostle is Paul. Other post-ascension apostles include:

- Matthias⁴³
- James, the Lord's brother⁴⁴
- Barnabas⁴⁵
- Apollos⁴⁶
- Silas and Timothy⁴⁷
- Unnamed apostles to whom the resurrected Lord appeared⁴⁸

The Question of Female Apostles

Christian feminists argue that Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7) were apostles. Andronicus is a masculine name, but Junia can be feminine, depending on how one would accent the Greek term in this text.⁴⁹ Of course, feminists argue that the name is feminine. Whether or not both Andronicus and Junia were male or one of them female is not the first question to be asked of this verse. The primary question is, “were they apostles?” Whether or not they were apostles depends upon how one interprets the Greek text. The Greek construction used in this verse could mean that they are outstanding apostles or it could mean that the apostles have great respect for Andronicus and Junia.

Translators cannot agree on the sense of the terms. The two opposite views on how this verse should be rendered are displayed in *The New Jerusalem Bible*, and the *Simple English Bible*:

NJB *to those outstanding apostles Andronicus and Junias*⁵⁰

SEB *Greet...Andronicus and Junias...The apostles think they are special*⁵¹

⁴² "The *aorist participle* has its most proper temporal force, denoting something that preceded the main event in view. It means here, therefore, that Christ's ascension had taken place *before* He distributed gifts of grace." S.D.F. Salmond, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Volume III; ed. W. Robertson Nicole, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm B. Eerdmans Printing Company; reprinted 1976) page 324

⁴³ Acts 1:26 Because Matthias replaced Judas and thus became one of the Twelve, his inclusion in this list is arbitrary.

⁴⁴ Acts 1:14; I Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19; 2:9

⁴⁵ Acts 4:36; 11:22-30; 14:1, 4, 14; I Corinthians 9:6

⁴⁶ I Corinthians 4:6-9

⁴⁷ I Thessalonians 1:6

⁴⁸ I Corinthians 15:7 We can only speculate about the identity of, “all the apostles.” The order and enumeration of those to whom the resurrected Jesus appeared imply that they were not any of those previously named in this section. Since the identity of this group cannot be determined with any degree of certainty, it is best to acknowledge that the New Testament Church recognized as apostles men other than those whom this passage identifies.

⁴⁹ Ἰουνίας or Ἰουνιᾶς. See W. Sanday and A.C. Headlam, *The International Critical Commentary, Romans* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895, 1896) page 422

⁵⁰ *The New Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990)

⁵¹ *The Simple English Bible*, American Edition (New York: International Bible Publishing Co., 1981)

There is not a clue in the Greek text as to which concept is the most probable. The weight of what slight evidence there is, one way or the other, seems to favor the latter view - that the apostles had great respect for them.

1. If they were apostles, and in Rome, Paul's statement that he did not want to build on another man's foundation,⁵² coupled with the expression of his desire to come to Rome and to bear fruit there,⁵³ would not make much sense. Andronicus and Junias, as apostles, would be a foundational ministry already in Rome.
2. If they were so outstanding in apostolic ministry, why don't we find a biblical record of any of their exploits?
3. The only reason for declaring them to be apostles is the arbitrary choice of how to translate the Greek text.
4. Even those who argue for their apostleship (Moule), must use terms such as, "probable."

In the light of the above, we conclude that Andronicus and Junias do not occupy the Christ-given apostolic role. This is a very important point because it excludes females from having received the label, *apostle*, in the New Testament. Apart from this possible exception, Scripture does not mention any female apostles, and this exception fails the test of reason.⁵⁴

The Apostolic Band

Some put forth the view that Paul applied the term, *apostle*, to all members of his traveling band, which often included Silas and Timothy.⁵⁵ Paul's use of *we* in I Thessalonians 2:6 is the justification for this view. Others argue that the *we* in this verse is an editorial *we* (referring only to Paul).

...nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

A reading of the epistle from its beginning favors the view that *we* in this verse is not an editorial *we*, but refers to the entire team. This view is shored up by the historical record of the events to which Paul is referring in this passage. Paul, Silas (a contraction of the name, *Silvanus*), and Timothy, had come to Thessalonica after the senior members of the team had been arrested and imprisoned in Philippi. The statements made in this section of the Thessalonian epistle describe the team's activity in that city. Therefore, it would be difficult to exclude Silvanus and Timothy from the, *we*, that Paul uses frequently in this discourse.

Another telling point is the fact that the term is plural (*apostles*, not singular, *apostle*) which would have been the terminology used if the *we* were editorial.

Whether or not all members of the team would be called, *apostles*, all of the time, may be open to conjecture. However, as long as they were a part of Paul's team, they were functioning in that role and wore that label.

⁵² Romans 15:20

⁵³ Romans 1:9-15

⁵⁴ For a detailed study of this topic see the 1994 conclave paper, An Analysis of the Arguments for Female Leadership in the N.T. Church.

⁵⁵ I Thessalonians 1:1

The Distinctive Work of New Testament Ecclesiastical Apostles

Post-ascension variety

The work of the *post-ascension apostles* other than Paul was varied. In addition to Paul, Scripture clearly identifies the ministry of four post-ascension apostles:

1. Matthias - one of the Twelve (his role already has been described)
2. James, the Lord's brother - became a pillar and leader in the Jerusalem Church. He is the probable author of the Epistle of James.⁵⁶
3. Barnabas - a mature leader who built up the Church, as well as evangelizing in virgin territories.⁵⁷
4. Apollos - chiefly an evangelist. He seems to have done some foundational work, but more often than not, evangelized in territory where churches already existed.⁵⁸

Paul and the Twelve

As noted earlier, the primary commission for Paul and the Twelve was to give witness to the resurrection and Lordship of Jesus and to proclaim the Gospel that resulted from the atonement/resurrection events. All other dimensions of their commission were expressions of this central responsibility.

Since the Twelve had walked with Jesus, and since they were the first apostles, and since their number included Peter to whom had been given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven,⁵⁹ they were respected and considered to be authoritative by all Christendom.

Although Paul could not meet the qualification of having been with Jesus from the time of John's baptism, he was a witness to the Divinity of Jesus. His Damascus road experience⁶⁰ qualified him in a special way, because he had seen the ascended-glorified Lord, a privilege that the Twelve, as far as we know, had not experienced at that time.⁶¹

Some contend that Paul was not regarded as an apostle by the Jerusalem Church. As evidence for this, they would point to the on-going problem that he had with Judaizing teachers coming from Jerusalem to the churches that he had established, attempting to bring them into Jewish conformity. They further would point to the times in his epistles when Paul felt it necessary to defend his apostleship and to compare himself with the Twelve.⁶²

This view of Paul's apostleship is an overstatement. The Jerusalem elders and The Twelve held Paul in high esteem.⁶³ Even so, the evidence seems to indicate that they did not consider him to

⁵⁶ Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18

⁵⁷ Acts 11:22-26; 13:1-15:39

⁵⁸ Acts 18:24ff; I Corinthians 3:1-9

⁵⁹ Matthew 16:18-19

⁶⁰ Acts 9:1-22; 22:3-16; 26:9-18

⁶¹ They had seen the resurrected Lord, but not the ascended-glorified Lord. John certainly experienced this, years later (Revelation 1), as did Stephen, at his martyrdom (Acts 7:56-57)

⁶² I Corinthians 9:1-2; II Corinthians 12:11-12; Galatians Chapters 1 & 2

⁶³ Acts 21:17-26; II Peter 3:14-16; Galatians 2:1-9

have the same apostolic authority in Jerusalem as that attributed to the Twelve. He was, however, held in high esteem by the Gentile Churches that directly or indirectly had come into existence through his ministry.

Sphere's of Ministry

The Lord assigned different sphere's of ministry to Paul and the Twelve. They understood this and each tried to fulfill the ministry in his sphere. As with the Twelve, Paul's commission was to present the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles,⁶⁴ but, as with the Twelve, he was assigned a specific sphere - the Gentiles. In writing to the Galatians, Paul describes a meeting in Jerusalem in which all sides acknowledged this truth.

*But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.*⁶⁵

Paul understood the distinction between his commission and that of Peter,⁶⁶ but he also understood that their commissions were equal.

*Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*⁶⁷

*I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me; actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.*⁶⁸

The Twelve established and led the Church in Jerusalem. They also exercised visitation rights among the churches of Judea. The only biblical record of the Twelve's ministering outside of Judea are Peter's visit to Antioch,⁶⁹ Peter and John's visit to Samaria,⁷⁰ and Peter's coastal ministry.⁷¹

The Apostolic Work of Evangelizing Virgin Territory

The view that the Twelve and Paul were commissioned to open up virgin territory is derived not only from the biblical record and historical tradition of their activity, but also from Paul's statement in Romans 15:20,

⁶⁴ Acts 9:15

⁶⁵ Galatians 2:7-9

⁶⁶ Galatians 2:7-9

⁶⁷ I Corinthians 9:1-2

⁶⁸ II Corinthians 12:11-12

⁶⁹ Galatians 2:11

⁷⁰ Acts 8

⁷¹ Acts 9:31-11:2

Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.(KJV)

The biblical record does not describe where the apostles went after they left Jerusalem. That they did leave that city is quite evident. Extra-biblical literature and tradition hold that the Twelve left Jerusalem in the latter-half of the First Century and took the Gospel to various nations of the world. Thomas supposedly took the Gospel to India, Andrew to Scotland (he also is reputed to have gone to the Ukraine), and Peter is reported to have died in Rome. Although some of these traditions seem to be improbable, they are consistent with the view that the commission of the apostles was to take the Gospel to un-reached peoples, resulting in the establishment of churches.

The Twelve and Paul were Vehicles of Divine Revelation

Jude wrote the definitive statement concerning the revelation and doctrines that God bestowed upon His Church.

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.^{72 73}

Jesus promised the Twelve that after His ascension He would ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit. One of the purposes for the sending the Spirit was to cause them to remember what He had said and to give them understanding of the things that He said. These statements of Jesus to the Twelve are foundational to Christian truth.

These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.⁷⁴

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify

⁷² Jude 3-4

⁷³ A reading of Jude reveals the sort of things that were upsetting to him:

- Gross immorality v7
- Disrespect and irreverence for spiritual hierarchies v8-10
- Grumblers v16
- Those who follow their lusts, rather than godliness v16
- Arrogant speech v16
- Flattering and deceptive speech for the sake of gain v17
- Divisiveness v19
- Worldly minded and devoid of the Spirit v19

⁷⁴ John 14:25-26

Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you.^{75 76}

After Pentecost, the Jerusalem Church was eager to hear the apostles' doctrine – the revelation that had come to them from the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷

Paul declared that one reason he could be certain of the exclusivity of the doctrine that he taught was its source. At some unspecified time the ascended-glorified Lord revealed to him the Gospel which he was to preach.

*For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*⁷⁸

*that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.*⁷⁹

The Greek term, *musterion* (μυστήριον), which we translate, *mystery*, has a different meaning than the English word. In English, the term means something that can't be known or understood – "It's a mystery to me!" In New Testament Greek, the term, *musterion*, always is used for something that is known, but it is known only because God has revealed it. It is something that could not have been discovered through human reason or exploration. It is revealed truth. Paul uses this term a number of places; it occurs three times in the Gospels and in the Revelation.

Thus, both Paul and the Twelve were agents of revelation.

The Ecclesiastical Authority of Apostles

One dimension of the commission given to the Twelve and especially to Paul, was the exercise of authority in the churches that they had planted. Because he wrote so many epistles, this is more apparent in Paul's ministry. A clear example of that authority is seen in Paul's asserting his authority in Corinth.

- **The Corinthian's toleration of an immoral man**

A member of the Corinthian Church was sexually involved with his father's wife – probably the step-mother of the offending member. The Corinthian Church leadership was not mourning over this brother's sin, but there was a pride that caused them to be blind to the horror. It is intimated that they were boasting over their spiritual superiority. Paul took them to task.

For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus,

⁷⁵ John 16:12-15

⁷⁶ Some claim that the statements of Jesus in these verses apply to all believers. This misses the point that Jesus was making and also undermines the certainty of revelational truth that Jesus was guaranteeing to the Twelve through the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁷ Acts 2:42

⁷⁸ Galatians 1:11-12

⁷⁹ Ephesians 3:3

when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus... But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.⁸⁰

Paul considered himself to have the authority to order the Corinthian elders to excommunicate the brother, *I have decided to deliver⁸¹ ...Remove the man!* He was unhesitant and unambiguous in his command to expel this man from their fellowship.

- **Corinthian interlopers who declared themselves superior to Paul**

Some unnamed itinerant teachers had arrived in Corinth, preaching doctrine that was at variance with Paul's. These teachers were very gifted speakers and expected the church to support them financially. In Paul's absence they mocked him. One of their sarcastic slanders was that Paul was a powerful letter writer, but in person he had no authority or power. In II Corinthians 10-13 he puts forth a defense, but in the midst of it he declares his authority and warns them that he will be as strong in person as he is in his letters.

For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame, for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible." Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.⁸²

This echoes what Paul had written to them in I Corinthians.

Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power. What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?⁸³

Paul reiterates his authority in the closing paragraph of II Corinthians 13.

For this reason I am writing these things while absent, in order that when present I may not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ I Corinthians 5:3-5, 11-13

⁸¹ NIV *hand this man over*; KJV *to deliver such a one*. The verb is infinitive, aorist, active, which points to purpose.

⁸² II Corinthians 10:8-11

⁸³ I Corinthians 4:18-21

⁸⁴ II Corinthians 13:10

Paul wrote such strong words to Corinth, because he had the relationship with them that allowed/required him to do so. Also, Corinth was within his sphere of responsibility and authority.⁸⁵

These examples and others demonstrate that Paul had authority in (if not over) the churches that were within his sphere. This was in keeping with his role of being a “master-builder” of churches. Reading of the ministry of the Twelve in Acts, we do not see pictured any situations in which the Twelve had opportunity to display their ecclesiastical authority, as did Paul, but given their primary leadership role, it certainly would have been recognized.

Apostolic Foundational Work

In assessing the work of the biblical apostles, their foundational role is front and center. Several passages of Scripture highlight this role. The following are some of the most important:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward.⁸⁶

...for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.⁸⁷

There are three ways to interpret the expression, *the foundation of the apostles and prophets*.⁸⁸

1. The genitive of apposition = the foundation consists of the apostles and prophets
2. The genitive of possession = “The Apostles’ foundation,” i.e., that on which they built or that on which they were built.
3. The genitive of originating cause = the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets

View # 1 Those who advocate this view point to the vision that John received concerning the New Jerusalem. In the vision, the names of the Twelve were inscribed on the foundation stones of the city’s walls.

And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ... The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third,

⁸⁵ I Corinthians 4:15; II Corinthians 10:13-18

⁸⁶ I Corinthians 3:10-14

⁸⁷ Ephesians 2:18-22

⁸⁸ ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν *epi to themelio ton apostolon kai propheton*

chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysolite; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. (Revelation 21:14, 19-20)

This view was popular with some of the older exegetes, especially those who were advocates of apostolic succession. Jesus' statement to Peter in Matthew 16:18-19 was understood to mean that Peter himself was and is a foundational stone of the Church, and his successors continue in that role.

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:18-19)

It is obvious why Roman Catholics and others who build their churches upon the doctrine of apostolic succession would favor View #1. If the Church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (as persons), so their successors (as persons) continue to be essential and foundational to the Church.

However, exegetes who are not advocates of apostolic succession also have held this view. For example, Dr. Lehman Strauss, who for eight years taught Old Testament History at Philadelphia Bible Institute,⁸⁹ was a Baptist pastor, wrote material for Plymouth Brethren publishers,⁹⁰ and was a strong dispensationalist, commenting on Ephesians 2:20-21, wrote,

“The believing Jew and Gentile constitute one holy temple: ‘And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple of the Lord.’ Paul adds that the Church is a building, a holy temple, the New Testament prophets and apostles forming the foundation and Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. It is Christ Himself who holds together the foundation and the superstructure.”⁹¹

View #2 This view also has been held by some of the older exegetes, such as Anselm (died 1109), Archbishop of Canterbury, a thorough-going Roman Catholic who withstood the King of England's⁹² effort to rule the Church; Theodore Beza (died 1605), a Greek scholar on whose

⁸⁹ In 2000 the name was changed to Philadelphia Biblical University. The Doctrinal Statement of PBU, (available at <http://www.pbu.edu/info/doctrine/htm>) Section X states...”We believe in the actual offering of a kingdom to Israel by Christ at His first coming and His postponement thereof as a result of their rejection.” This, and other positions taken in the Doctrinal Statement are classic Dispensationalist ecclesiology. Dr. Strauss wrote a number of books advocating this ecclesiology.

⁹⁰ Loizeaux Brothers

⁹¹ Lehman Strauss, *Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians* (New York, Loizeaux Brothers, 1957) page 150

⁹² His first conflict was with King William II (successor to William the Conqueror), and then with King Henry I. Both of these controversies were over the question of “investiture” In the Middle Ages, the princes presented the ring and staff to the prelate, thus indicating that the prince had authority in the Church. Beginning in the 11th Century, a reform movement took place that eventually declared that positions in the Church should not be under the control of secular princes. One of the problems was that the princes were more concerned with the church leaders' being loyal to the crown, than how moral or spiritual he might be. This resulted in a clergy with low morals, especially the practice of simony (the

texts both the Geneva Bible and the King James Version are based, and who succeeded Calvin as the leader of the Reformation in Geneva (1605); and Henry Alford (died 1871) the Anglican dean of Canterbury, another brilliant Greek scholar who was and responsible for much of the text that became the American Standard Version (1901)⁹³ and the author of the original *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*.⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that Anselm and Alford both were respected leaders in churches that based their right to exist on the doctrine of apostolic succession. Even so, their view was that the lives of the apostles and the church that they built both were built upon the person of Christ. These would declare that saying that the foundation of the Church consists of humans, regardless of how devout, is out of place.

View #3 This view has come to be the one that has gained more adherents in recent days. This view is very similar to View #2, the difference being this view states that the foundation *laid* by the apostles and prophets is in view, and that foundation was Jesus Christ, i.e. the *Gospel*. The work of the apostles and prophets is in view#3, whereas it is not in View #2. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), commenting on Ephesians 2:20, states,

“the church is compared to a building. The apostles and prophets are the foundation of that building. They may be so called in a secondary sense, Christ Himself being the primary foundation; but we are rather to understand it [the foundation] of the doctrine delivered by the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New.”⁹⁵

Of note is Henry's view that the prophets of Ephesians 2:20 are the Old Testament prophets. Many of the older exegetes, both Roman Catholic and Reformed, held that view. It appears to be the view of the Early Church. However, the order of the text seems to oppose that view, i.e., *apostles and prophets*, rather than, *prophets and apostles*. More telling however is the subject of this section of Ephesians. Paul is writing about the preaching and teaching that began after Christ's death. For example in 3:3-5, he wrote,

that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;

The prophets in Ephesians 2:20 must refer to those whom the ascended Christ gave to His Church (Ephesians 4:11).

View #3 seems to be most consistent with the other statements made by Paul concerning the foundation of the Church.

sale of church positions) and concubinage (sexual cohabitation without the sanction of marriage). The reform movement was an effort to restore high morals and spiritually mature leadership to the Church.

⁹³ Revised into the currently popular, New American Standard Version.

⁹⁴ The currently available, *Expositor's Greek New Testament*, (reprinted 1976), is the work of several scholars, edited by Robertson Nicoll. This five volume edition identifies itself as a successor to Alford's work.

⁹⁵ Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible, with Practical Remarks and Observations by Matthew Henry*, Volume VI (New York, Theo. E. Schulte [no copyright date]) page 1125

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.⁹⁶

To write that the apostles and prophets, as persons, are the foundation of the Church, with Jesus being the Chief Cornerstone of that foundation, puts humans in a role that Paul consistently decried. If Ephesians 2:20 refers to the apostles and prophets as persons, then Paul contradicts himself.

Paul's description of Gospel preaching as foundational work also is consistent with this view.

And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation;⁹⁷

Either View #2 or View #3 are biblically consistent. In both of these views, Jesus Christ is the ultimate focus. Jesus Christ is the only foundation that the First Century apostles and prophets laid and that is the only foundation upon which the world-wide Church or a local church of any age legitimately can be built.

Conclusions Concerning The Work Of Twelve And Paul:

The evidence of Scriptural statements and examples, as well as extra-biblical data and traditions, leads to the following conclusions concerning the work of the Twelve and of Paul:

1. They were the primary communicators to the world of the fact of the resurrection.
2. They interpreted the implications of that resurrection. This is the Gospel.
3. They were the vehicle of revelation of theological truth, the bottom-line doctrines that all Christians must believe.
4. They were not commissioned to evangelize in areas that already were recipients of the Gospel.
5. They had continued authority and oversight over those churches that had come about as a result of their personal ministry.

Apostolic Credentials

The credentials of New Testament ecclesiastical apostles are few, but very clear.

- There is a public inauguration into the ministry. Apostles do not call themselves. In each instance where information is given, apostolic ministry originated in a publicly witnessed choice and call. If need be, witnesses to the call could be produced.
 1. The Twelve were called by Christ in the presence of many witnesses.⁹⁸
 2. Matthias was chosen by lot in the presence of the 120.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ I Corinthians 3:10-11

⁹⁷ Romans 15:20

⁹⁸ Matthew 10:1-5; Mark 3:13-15

⁹⁹ Acts 1:23-26

3. Barnabas and Saul were chosen and called by the Holy Spirit through the Church leaders at Antioch.¹⁰⁰ Note: Even though Paul was set apart from his mother's womb,¹⁰¹ and the choice was revealed to Saul and Ananias at the time of Saul's (Paul) conversion,¹⁰² it was not functional until the commissioning through the prophets and teachers at Antioch. The title, *apostle*, is not applied to Paul until Acts 14:4.
 4. Both Silas and Timothy were chosen by Paul to join him in apostolic work, which resulted in their being described as, *apostles*.¹⁰³
 5. There is no biblical record of the call of Apollos¹⁰⁴ or of James, the Lord's brother,¹⁰⁵ so we cannot make any statement concerning their call.
- Supernatural signs were credentials of New Testament apostles.¹⁰⁶

*The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.*¹⁰⁷

The Twelve and the Seventy were given authority over demons, as well as the power to heal the sick and to raise the dead.¹⁰⁸ When the disciples at Joppa needed a miracle, they sent for an apostle.¹⁰⁹ When the Twelve obeyed the Great Commission, signs and wonders attended their preaching.¹¹⁰ Barnabas and Saul found their ministry attended by miracles immediately following their commission.¹¹¹ Although many who were not apostles were used miraculously of God, it was expected for apostles to be so used.

- Abiding fruit is another one of an apostle's credentials.

*If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*¹¹²

Paul's commission was to be a witness for Jesus, chiefly among the Gentiles. Despite its imperfections, the Corinthian Church was shining evidence of Paul's commission; it probably was the largest church raised in his ministry. Paul's argument in this verse is valid only if apostles are expected to bear fruit consistent with their commission.

¹⁰⁰ Acts 13:1-3

¹⁰¹ Galatians 1:15

¹⁰² Acts 9:15-17; 22:14-15; 26:16

¹⁰³ Acts 15:40; 16:1-3

¹⁰⁴ I Corinthians 4:6-9

¹⁰⁵ Galatians 1:19; 2:9, etc.

¹⁰⁶ Some believe that this qualification refers only to the "revelatory" apostles, those who were the inaugural communicators of Gospel truth ("true" apostles).

¹⁰⁷ II Corinthians 12:12 Note the use of the passive, "were wrought." Paul does not claim to be anything more than God's instrument.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 10:7-8; Mark 3:14-15; Luke 10

¹⁰⁹ Acts 9:36-41

¹¹⁰ Mark 16:14-16, 19-20

¹¹¹ Acts 13:10-11

¹¹² I Corinthians 9:2

- Holy Spirit empowered speech was obvious.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that his ability to persuade was not his eloquence. Neither were miraculous signs the epitome of persuasion. His ability to persuade people was the authority of the Holy Spirit in his speech.

For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, ... And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.¹¹³

Although miraculous signs often were precursors to preaching, it was the anointed proclamation that convinced hearers, bringing conviction, faith, and salvation.

The Question of Post-biblical Ecclesiastical Apostles

As noted in the opening paragraph, the title, *Apostle*, has been applied to various church leaders and saints. The Eastern Orthodox Church uses the term as a part of the title for high level hierarchical divines. The title is applied to the Roman Catholic Pontiff, as well as to certain clergy in various denominations. Some missionaries, such as J. Russell Morse and Samuel Zwemer have been called apostles to particular peoples, since they went into unevangelized territory and established networks of churches.

One of the nonconformist groups born in the nineteenth century was the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church. Growing out of the ministry of Scottish Presbyterian clergyman, Edward Irving (1792-1834), this group, colloquially called *Irvingites*, believed that through prophecy in 1832, six apostles were designated. The number was completed to twelve in 1835 and they were given the title, the *Twelve Apostles of the Lamb*. The group spread to Germany and to the United States. Irvingites expected the speedy return of Christ, but the last of the apostles died in 1901.

The early 20th Century Pentecostal movement and the mid-20th Century Latter Rain movement had as core tenets the restoration of the "Five-fold Ministries" of Ephesians 4:11. Some Pentecostal groups advocated the establishment of churches to be governed by apostles and prophets.¹¹⁴ Almost all groups in the contemporary Charismatic movement assume the presence of apostles and prophets. As noted in the preface, the New Apostolic Reformation was launched in the closing years of 1990 and has gained world-wide adherents.

The question remains, "Is there scriptural authority for the existence of apostles today?"

The various New Testament apostolic orders

Certainly, no one could be an apostle of the same order as the Twelve. No living human can meet the qualifications of having been with the original Twelve from the time of Jesus' baptism

¹¹³ I Corinthians 1:18, 22-23; 2:4-5

¹¹⁴ *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee editors (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1988) page 532ff

by John through the time of Our Lord's ascension.¹¹⁵ With the possible exception of Roman Catholicism's contention that the Pope occupies the office of Peter, no responsible segment of Christendom would contend for a current apostleship of the order of the Twelve.

An apostle of the same order as Paul could exist today if God so chose, but a lot would have to happen for it to be so. A Damascus Road revelation, plus personal teaching by the glorified Christ, plus consistent miraculous credentials would have to be presented before one could seriously contend for recognition as an apostle of the order of Paul.

Clearly, for these two orders (The Twelve and Paul) revelation of Divine truth is a key factor in their identity. Paul and the Twelve were *Revelatory Apostles*. Because Jude declares that the faith was once delivered *once for all*,¹¹⁶ we must assume that God will not give any revelation beyond that which already is in Scripture. So, for that reason we assume that God will not choose to bring forth another Paul or the Twelve.

An apostle of the same order as James, Jesus' half-brother, possibly could exist today, if God so chose. James was an unbeliever until the resurrected Christ appeared to him.¹¹⁷ From that time on, he was a devoted believer and the apostolic leader in the Jerusalem church who never left Jerusalem. In order for someone to be an apostle of the order of James, the resurrected Lord would have to appear to him.¹¹⁸

Given his quick rise to a prominent and mature place in the embryonic church, Barnabas probably was among those who saw the resurrected Lord, as described in I Corinthians 15:6.

All of us alive in the world today fit Peter's description,

*...and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*¹¹⁹

Something similar to Saul's Damascus road experience would be required for any contemporary leader to be of the order of James or Barnabas. There is no reason to conclude that apostles of the orders of Apollos, Silas, or Timothy are beyond reproduction today.

Does the Past-tense of the Verb in Ephesians 4:11 Prohibit Contemporary Apostles?

The terminology of Ephesians 4:11, *He gave*,¹²⁰ concerning the individuals given to the Church to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers, is past tense. Does that mean that all of the Ephesian 4:11 individuals were put into place at the time of Christ's ascension, and that after these First Century saints died, there were no more? Certainly, not, because I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 provide guidelines for the selection of future pastor/teachers. Thus the past tense verb cannot mean that the roll is closed.¹²¹ Not only that, Paul himself was made an apostle years

¹¹⁵ Acts 1:21-22

¹¹⁶ Jude 3

¹¹⁷ John 7:5; I Corinthians 15:7

¹¹⁸ I Corinthians 15:7

¹¹⁹ I Peter 1:8-9

¹²⁰ ἔδωκεν *edoken* aorist indicative

¹²¹ It could be that Our Lord gave future apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers to the

after Jesus' ascension. Therefore, the Ephesians 4:11 past tense statement cannot be taken to mean that all were then in their respective ministry roles and none would be given in the future.

A Summary of Conclusions Reached in Section One

1. The Greek term, *apostello*, means "to send with a commission," and the noun form, *apostolos*, means "one sent with a commission." The distinctive characteristic of this family of words is the focus upon the purpose of the sending--to fulfill a commission. In its common usage, it refers to any type of sending for a purpose (a child sent to fetch a pail of water is an *apostle*). Such is the ordinary use of the term. However, Our Lord took this generic term and used it for a class of people. The term became a technical designation.
2. The Twelve pre-ascension apostles were a special class or order and the requirements for being of this order preclude the perpetuation of that order.
3. For apostles of the order of Paul to exist (a post-ascension apostle), certain sovereign supernatural events would have to occur.
4. Because the Twelve and Paul were revelatory apostles, their orders are not possible today.
5. There is no reason to conclude that apostleships of the order of Apollos, Silas, or Timothy are beyond reproduction today.
6. The past tense of Ephesians 4:11 (*edoken* [ἔδωκεν] - "He gave") could not mean that all apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor/teachers given at the time of Jesus' ascension were alive at the time of the Ephesian letter, since I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 contains qualifications for future elders.
7. There is no Scriptural authority for the view that apostles or apostolic ministries cannot exist today.

Section Two

Post-New Testament Apostles & Apostolic Ministry

Although there is no Scriptural authority for the view that apostles or apostolic ministries cannot exist today, post-biblical literature does pose some objection to the view that apostles were present in the Post-New Testament Church.

Sometime between 315 and 340 AD, Eusebius of Caesarea, wrote the first organized history of the Church. His history spans the years that began with the Life of Christ and closed in his own era.¹²² He seems to have had access to documents penned by early church leaders that are unavailable today. In describing the Church as it existed at the close of the First Century and the beginning of the Second Century, Eusebius recorded the esteem in which evangelists were held immediately after the death of the apostles.

“There were many others, also, noted in these times, who held the first rank in the apostolic succession. These, as the holy disciples of such men, also built up the churches where foundations had been previously laid in every place by the apostles. They augmented the means of promulgating the gospel more and more, and spread the seeds of salvation and of the heavenly kingdom throughout the

church at the time of his ascension. Thus, some are foreordained to be in these roles. Paul stated his role as an apostle had been foreordained (Galatians 1:15).

¹²² He actually began his history by discussing the pre-existence of Christ.

world far and wide. For most of the disciples at that time, animated with a more ardent love of the divine word, had first fulfilled the Saviour's precept by distributing their substance to the needy. Afterwards leaving their country, they performed the office of evangelists to those who had not yet heard the faith, whilst with a noble ambition to proclaim Christ, they also delivered to them the books of the holy gospels. After laying the foundation of the faith in foreign parts as the particular object of their mission, and after appointing others as shepherds of the flocks, and committing to these the care of those that had been recently introduced, they went again to other regions and nations, with the grace and co-operation of God. The Holy Spirit also, wrought many wonders as yet through them, so that as soon as the gospel was heard, men voluntarily in crowds and eagerly, embraced the true faith with their whole minds. As it is impossible for us to give numbers of individuals that became shepherds or evangelists, during the first immediate succession from the apostles in the churches throughout the world, we have only recorded those by name or history, of whom we have received the traditional account as it is delivered in various comments on the apostolic doctrine, still extant."¹²³

It is significant that in his historical account of the early church, Eusebius clearly distinguished between the apostles (those labeled "apostle" in the New Testament) and church leaders who succeeded them. According to Eusebius, the successors of the apostles did not bear the label, "apostle." Evangelists, as itinerant preachers of the Gospel, were considered to be those who succeeded the apostles in their trans-local ministry. The senior (most aged) overseer in a region became the arbiter of apostolic doctrine. Thus, after the death of John (95-99 AD), according to Eusebius' record, no one was called an "apostle" in the early Church.

In order to confirm what Eusebius reported, I researched the extant literature of the early Church, produced during the years 100 AD – 325 AD. I conducted this research by searching for the term, *apostle* or *apostles*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*,¹²⁴ as contained in the *Master Christian Library* database (8566 printed pages in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volumes I – VII). The list of the 150 documents that I surveyed is contained in ADDENDUM A. The following is a list of the number of occurrences of these terms in Volumes I – VII.

Volume I	1162 pages	Singular 162	Plural 313
Volume II	1227 pages	Singular 221	Plural 91
Volume III	1298 pages	Singular 322	Plural 229
Volume IV	1365 pages	Singular 306	Plural 156
Volume V	1345 pages	Singular 237	Plural 202
Volume VI	1028 pages	Singular 90	Plural 78
Volume VII	1141 pages	Singular 38	Plural 112

There are a few other documents from this era that are not included in the seven volumes, but the amount of material in these volumes is so massive that a study of them provides an accurate picture of the beliefs and language of the 225 years of the Church immediately following the New Testament record.

¹²³ Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 37, translated by Christian Frederick Cruse (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, reprinted 1994) page 123

¹²⁴ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts, Editor (version contained in The Master Christian Library, Books for the Ages, AGES Software, Albany, OR, Version 2.0, 1997)

As noted in the above list, I encountered the term, *apostle* (singular), 1376 times and *apostles* (plural) 1181 times, a total of 2557 occurrences. This included not only the text of the documents but comments and introductions by the translators. I then went to each passage and examined it to determine the identity of the apostle/apostles that were referenced.

In these documents, with very few exceptions, the term, *apostle*, was used only for those who in the New Testament were labeled, *apostle*. Most of these exceptions are New Testament figures who did apostolic work, but are not labeled, *apostle*, in the New Testament. Those who claimed the title, *apostle*, after the death of John, were, for the most part, labeled, *false apostles*.

ADDENDUM B contains the text of passages relevant to our quest. Some of these passages are of interest because they label as *apostles* those to whom the New Testament does not give that title. Others are of interest for other reasons.

Here is the list of those who are called, *apostle*, in one or more documents, even though the New Testament does not designate them by that title:

- Moses is called an apostle in one document;
- Jude, the half-brother of Jesus and author of the *Epistle of Jude*, is called an apostle in two documents;
- Stephen, the first martyr is called an apostle in one document;
- Philip, the deacon and later evangelist, is called an apostle in two documents;
- Mark, who wrote *The Gospel of Mark*, is called an apostle in one document;
- Clement of Rome, an associate of Paul & Peter, mentioned in Philippians 4:3 and later an elder/overseer of the Roman Church, is called an apostle in one document. Some felt that Clement's *Epistle to the Corinthians* (written about 100 AD) should have been in the canon.

In addition to these, Hippolytus, before 250 AD, listed those whom early church tradition said constituted the Seventy whom Jesus had sent out, as described in Luke 10. Because of the Greek term used in Luke 10:1, it is appropriate to call the Seventy, *apostles*. However, Luke does not list their names. Almost all of those on Hippolytus' list, although biblical characters, were not labeled, *apostle*, in the New Testament (see ADDENDUM B).

Only in the *Didache*, is there any hint of the ongoing presence of apostles. In the *Didache*, instructions are given concerning the reception of apostles and prophets and how to test them.

“But concerning the apostles and prophets, according to the decree of the Gospel, thus do. Let every apostle that cometh to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet...”¹²⁵

Of further interest is Hippolytus' listing of the Thirteen Apostles (the Twelve and Paul), so that there could be no mistake as to the identity of the apostles (see ADDENDUM B).

¹²⁵ See fuller citation and reference in ADDENDUM B.

Clearly, the Church in its earliest centuries carefully protected the term, *apostle*. It was stingy in its bestowal of the label on any who were not so labeled in the new Testament. What made the protection of this label so important?

Two challenges faced the Church in its earliest centuries:

- The first, and most prevailing, was the birth of aberrant doctrine, usually presented by transient teachers. In the 150 documents examined, the constant appeal is to the teaching and doctrine of the New Testament apostles. They are quoted voluminously and loyalty to their doctrine is steadfast. Because of this, we are not surprised to find the title, *apostle*, reserved for those so named in the New Testament. False apostles sometimes are mentioned, both those mentioned in the New Testament and post-New Testament teachers (usually transient). Those who taught doctrines other than that which was taught by New Testament apostles are described as false apostles, false prophets, and heretics. Protecting the pure apostolic doctrine was a priority.
- The other challenge faced was church unity. The two basis of unity presented in these writings: (1) the apostolic doctrine and (2) apostolic succession. In document after document, the idea is put forth that those churches which were planted by apostles or apostolic men (men associated with the apostles), are *apostolic churches*. Because the first elders of these churches were ordained by one of the apostles or an apostolic man, the elders (later, bishops) of these churches were in the line of apostolic succession. When the elders/bishops of apostolic churches ordained leaders in new churches, these new churches and their leaders also entered the line of apostolic succession. It is interesting to find certain writers (for example, Hippolytus [died c235] and Cyprian [died 258]) who strongly resisted the idea of the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome but with the same vigor contended for the principle of apostolic succession in the churches. Churches which could claim apostolic succession could be looked to as arbiters of doctrine. The post-New Testament documents present the apostolic churches as being united in doctrine.

A Summary of Conclusions Reached in Section Two

1. In the years immediately following the death of the apostles and apostolic men, various ones arose presenting themselves as having revelation from God which was at variance with that which the Twelve and Paul had taught.
2. Elders and bishops of the local churches rigidly maintained the view that only doctrines taught by the biblical apostles were true and binding upon the churches.
3. Churches that were established by biblical apostles and apostolic men were the arbiters of truth; they were called, “apostolic churches.” Churches started by individuals other than apostles, unless they were the outgrowth of an apostolic church, were not arbiters of truth.
4. In order to meet the challenge of false doctrine and division, the title, “apostle,” was jealously guarded and bestowed only upon biblical apostles, or, in a few cases, biblically prominent individuals.
5. There were those in the early centuries who were doing “apostolic work,” but the title “apostle,” was not bestowed upon them, lest the authority of the revelatory apostles (Paul and the Twelve) might be weakened.

Section Three

Contemporary Apostolic Ministry in the Light of the New Testament

In Section One, we examined the New Testament record of Christ's gift of apostles to His Church. We also concluded that there is nothing in the New Testament record would preclude the existence of apostles (of some description) from being present throughout the history of the Church.

In Section Two, we noted the challenges facing the Post-New Testament Church and the need in that era to affirm the uniqueness of the New Testament apostles. For that reason, even though apostolic work was being done, the title was not bestowed upon even the most noble church leaders in these early centuries. We now seek to answer to two questions:

1. Is it God's plan for apostles to exist and function in every age?
2. If so, who are they, and what is their ministry?

Scriptural Authority for the View That Apostles Will Exist Throughout Church History

Even though there is nothing in the New Testament that closes the door on the possibility of apostles' being present in the post-biblical church, the question has to be asked, "Does the New Testament clearly state that there will be apostles throughout the history of the Church?" The passage that has been the rubric for this paper, Ephesians 4:11, is followed by a clear statement that the gift of apostles is an ongoing gift.

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ...And He gave gifts to men... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ... from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.¹²⁶

This passage clearly states that the gift of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers will be Christ's means of building up and leading the church **until we all attain...**

The verb rendered, *attain*, is crucial. This verb (*katantao καταταντάω*) describes movement, usually a procession's arriving at a certain place. This verse speaks of the Church as being on a journey, moving toward a particular goal:

¹²⁶ Ephesians 4:7, 8b, 11-13, 16

1. to the unity of the faith,
2. to the full knowledge¹²⁷ of the Son of God,
3. to a mature man,
4. to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ...

Two views prevail as to both the translation and interpretation of this passage. One view understands this passage as referring to the character and spiritual development of the Church. The other view, held by some given to detailed exegetical activity, sees the person of Christ and His return in the final phrases of verse 13c.

Either of these views, however, would declare that apostles are to be ministering today, since:

- Neither the Church nor individual Christians manifest fully the qualities described in verse 13;
- The *parousia* is still in the future.

Since this passage is so blatant in its pronouncement, and since there is no passage that contradicts it, it must be accepted as the definitive statement on the subject.

What is the Ministry of Contemporary Apostles?

As noted in Section One, "In order to understand one's apostleship, we must discover what he is commissioned to do." Here are some of the apostolic activities that we can expect to experience today. These are consistent with the picture of apostolic activity in the New Testament.

Evangelism and Church planting:

As Eusebius reported (see earlier quote), the Christians of the Post-New Testament Church considered evangelists to be the successors to the apostles. This is in contrast to the emphasis in some of the 20th Century movements that advocated the "restoration" of apostles. The 20th Century movements tended to focus on authority and governmental activity, rather than evangelism and church planting. Clearly, the dominant activity of Paul and, during some periods, that of the Twelve, was evangelism of virgin territory (for a season, Jerusalem was virgin territory).

I have had the blessing of knowing some missionaries, who truly were apostles. These apostles went into virgin, often dangerous, territories and spent their lives proclaiming the Kingdom of God. One of these was the late J. Russell Morse, who went into China and established churches throughout the region occupied by the Lisu. Miraculous activity attended his ministry, from time to time. After twenty-five years in this field, he was imprisoned for his faith, spending 18 months in solitary confinement in a Communist prison. Although highly honored among the Lisu, he is unknown today in most missionary circles. He is known in heaven.

Throughout the world, especially in the so called, "under developed" nations, this type of apostolic work is taking place. In the highly developed nations of Europe, which for the most part have become post-Christian, apostolic evangelism and church planting is ongoing. In the United States there are unchurched communities and unreached segments of society where apostolic evangelism is needed (Hollywood is an example). One difference between apostolic

¹²⁷ *epignosis*, ἐπίγνωσις

evangelism and the work of pure evangelists is the establishment of churches. Apostolic evangelism will produce a local church of some sort.

Laying foundations:

True apostolic church planters will lay the foundation of Christ as the church is planted. Church planters who are not truly apostolic, often lay other foundations (denominational, doctrinal, personality, cultural, program centered, purpose driven, human ambition, etc.).

When a church has had years of problems, the source often is found in the foundation. I have seen churches that have existed for decades, relocated more than once, yet the same problems prevail. Two things often are the problem in such cases. First, there may have been a spirit that was present in the lives of the planters, or early leadership. I know of one church that has existed since the 1930's, it has gone through many generations of elders, it has relocated several times, even changed its name once, yet adultery among leaders has plagued the church in each generation. Some of the finest men that one could ask for have been brought down by becoming leaders in this church. In such a case, a team of prophets and apostles could identify the problem and being led of the Holy Spirit, do what it takes to expel the destructive spirit.

The second problem is the absence of Christ as **the** foundation. It is important that Christ be more than the center – He must be everything. Some churches have Christ in the foundation, along with some other things. An astute apostle, usually accompanied by a prophet, could discern these matters, tear up the foundation, and rebuild the church on the foundation of Christ. This is very difficult work because members of the church often are very attached to those things that must be stripped away.

Ordination of those whom the Holy Spirit had chosen to be elders in local churches:¹²⁸

- Paul and Barnabas are pictured in this role as they made return visits to churches that they established on the first missionary journey.¹²⁹
- In two instances, Paul's apostolic delegates, Timothy and Titus, were charged with this task in the apostle's stead.¹³⁰
- Although no details are given, we would assume that the Twelve were God's instruments for choosing the elders in the Jerusalem Church, since these elders were chosen during the Twelve's tenure in Jerusalem.¹³¹
- There is no Scriptural record of a congregation's choosing its elders.

Initially, the apostolic leader who planted the church, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, will discern the elders and ordain them. After that, the elders council will function in this role, but it always is wise to seek apostolic and prophetic input and participation in ordination of leaders. When an apostle ordains local leaders, he is credentialing them, and vouching for them in the church at large. This is a serious responsibility.

¹²⁸The apostles ordained the first elders. In I Timothy 3, there is the intimation that Timothy, as Paul's delegate, would ordain another generation of elders. The pattern seems to be that in most situations, the apostles and their delegates ordained only the first council of elders in each setting. The local council then became self-perpetuating.

¹²⁹ Acts 14:21-23

¹³⁰ Titus 1:5ff; I Timothy 3:1ff

¹³¹ Acts 11:30 is the first mention of elders in the Jerusalem Church

Equipping and building up existing churches:

- It is interesting to note that Phillip's very successful evangelistic enterprise in Samaria was not complete until the apostles, Peter and John, came down and supplied what was lacking. Note that Phillip welcomed their coming.¹³²
- Antioch was a city in which unnamed believers from Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Cyrene preached Christ with great success. When the Jerusalem Church heard of this new center of faith, Barnabas was dispatched to Antioch. Upon arrival he found a flourishing congregation of new converts. For more than a year, he and his helper, Saul, engaged in foundational and edifying teaching. In essence, he was *equipping the saints for the work of ministry* - genuine apostolic activity as outlined in Ephesians 4:11-12.
- Apollos seemed never to minister in virgin territory, but ministered in regions where others already had introduced the Gospel. In Apollos, we have an example of an apostle whose commission seemed to be limited to strengthening and building up already existing churches.¹³³
- Both Barnabas and Paul considered visiting and strengthening churches they had established to be one aspect of their apostolic ministry.¹³⁴
- Peter also is pictured as traveling among the churches in Judea and Samaria.¹³⁵

From these and other examples, it is clear that certain apostolic commissions include the encouragement, instruction, and building up of existing churches. This is the exclusive calling of some apostles. Experience has shown that those who have a special calling to this ministry usually are not very effective as evangelistic apostles.

One thing about this calling that is difficult to explain is that the physical presence of the apostle often accomplishes as much (perhaps more), than what he does. When he visits a church, the church is uplifted; there is a sense of security and being cared for. This is the sort of thing that is difficult to explain in a report.

In some situations, a church may attach itself to an apostle for a season. He will visit, teach, and give advice. With the apostle's help the church gets over a hump, past a particular place in the road, and the apostle never again visits the church. Sometimes when this happens, an apostle may take an offense because he is not invited for further visits. Sometime, the church becomes offended because the apostle doesn't take the initiative to set up further visits. It is best to recognize that the church needed that apostle for a particular season and that God now has the church moving forward in another chapter of its life. The relationship (friendship) can continue, even though there will not be ongoing ministry.

¹³² Acts 8:14ff

¹³³ The first mention of Apollos (Acts 18:24ff) finds him in Ephesus, where Paul's apostolic band already had presented the Gospel. Apollos next visited the disciples in Achaia, where he *helped greatly those who had believed through grace; for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ*(Vs.27-28). The largest Church in Achaia was in Corinth. His ministry in Corinth was so successful that factious individuals sought to elevate him above Paul. Apollos and Paul both seemed to have been grieved by this turn of events. Paul, however, described Apollo's ministry in these words, *I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth*. The last mention of Apollos is in Titus 3:13, where he is mentioned as being on a journey through Crete.

¹³⁴ Acts 14:36ff; I Thessalonians 4:9-10

¹³⁵ Acts 9:32-43

Putting churches in order

Even churches built upon the foundation of Christ can have serious problems. Satan is not asleep. When things are out of order in a local church, local leaders are wise to invite apostolic input. If turmoil and disunity are present, experience has shown that it is not wise for a lone apostle to take on this role. An apostolic team is necessary. Satan wars with all of his energy when apostles are called in to dispel his influence. That means that he will do all that he can to attack the apostle, seeking to disable him or to make him ineffective. This not a battle an apostle should undertake alone. Also, insight from members of a team usually is more accurate and effective than insight from a single apostle.

Some apostles seem to be called to this ministry. These will be seasoned men with many scars who understand the issues, as well as being honest about their own proclivities. This is not the work for neophytes, regardless of how gifted they may be. Usually, there is an indefinable air of authority mixed with humility that accompanies those called to this work.

When a team is called into a local church, it is important for the local leaders to give a degree of authority to the apostolic team. Trust is vital in these situations. For that reason, if for no other, every local church should cultivate a relationship with one or more apostles, so that trust will be present when apostolic input is sought.

Setting forth pure doctrine and refuting errors:

The epistles written by Paul, Peter, and John major on correcting doctrinal error. I John, although a beautiful document, is one of the most polemical books in the Bible. Paul warned the Ephesian elders,

*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.*¹³⁶

This is not easy work, but it truly is apostolic work. Sometimes this is accomplished through writing, sometimes through public teaching, and sometimes in private conversation or closed meetings. Apostles who are called to this ministry must be good exegetes, but also possess discernment – when they encounter false doctrine, they usually will sense that it is false, even before they examine it. When one has to correct false doctrine, he always makes enemies, because those who are presenting the doctrine, and those who have accepted it, don't want to surrender it. Apostles called to this ministry must have a deep longing for the approval of God, rather than the approval of man. They also must be kind and gracious; otherwise they may be right, but they will be ineffective. We have written in previous papers about this ministry and so we will not repeat that material here.

¹³⁶ Acts 20:28-30

Apostolic writing is an important commission

Although rarely mentioned when apostolic ministry is discussed, this is one of the most effective apostolic ministries. The greatest influence that Paul has had on the life of the Church has been his apostolic writing. Throughout history, some of the most significant apostolic contributions to the Church have been through the production of literature. Apostolic writing can range all the way from doctrinal and polemical material, to literature that contains spiritual insights and devotional encouragement. There is a difference between those who are gifted writers and those who are gifted apostolic writers. Apostolic writing, whether letters, emails, tracts, pamphlets, or books, will carry an indefinable authority. Apostolic writing will influence the Church, not just individual believers.

Supernatural activity may be a part of an apostle's ministry

As noted in Section One, signs and wonders were routine in the ministries of the New Testament apostles. Certain contemporary apostolic commissions may include this element. When Christ commissions an apostle, He will equip him with what he needs to fulfill that commission. Reports of the miraculous are common today in certain apostolic works where signs and wonders are required. This especially is true in cultures where demonic activity is overt and obvious.

Not all apostolic commissions require supernatural activity – most of those listed above do not. There may be prophetic discernment, etc., but not physical miracle manifestations.

Conclusions

1. The New Testament anticipates the presence of apostles in every era of Church history.
2. Apostles are not gifted pastor/teachers or evangelists who finally mature into apostles. A call, authenticated by the church (usually a prophetic word) is the norm.
3. Supernatural activity may accompany the ministry as a part of an apostle's credentials. That supernatural activity may take a variety of forms.
4. There will be obvious fruit from an apostle's ministry, consistent with his calling.
5. Some apostles will be church planters.
6. Some apostles will be especially gifted in setting in order already existing churches.
7. Apostles will be effective in building up the community of faith - corporately and individually.
8. Apostles may be used of the Holy Spirit to install elders - they will have special insight in this area.
9. An apostle may function as an apostle in one setting, but as a teacher, preacher, etc., in another. The difference has to do with calling and relationships. This especially is true in the apostle's home church. Unless he is the one who planted the church, his role in his home church rarely is apostolic.
10. Apostolic ministry may take a variety of forms, including writing.

Our Lord has given apostles to the Church so that, in every generation, She can be all that He intends for Her to be. Churches need to recognize and receive from these men the blessing that God has provided through them.

PART TWO

THE MINISTRY OF PROPHETS

Ephesians 4:11 *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,*

1 Corinthians 12:28-29 *And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets...*

The study of prophets and the study of apostles are closely aligned. The same Scriptures that argue for the presence of apostles in every age also argue for the perpetual existence of prophets. As we already have seen, many passages mention apostles and prophets together, as if they are inseparable. Because we already have covered that material and there is no need to repeat it, Part Two of this paper will be shorter than Part One. This does not mean that prophets are less important than apostles, nor that the study of prophets is of less importance; it merely means that we are not repeating the material that is applicable to both.

Section One

General Information and Background

The New Testament does not contain as much information on prophets as it does on apostles. Because prophets were an integral part of Jewish history, the ministry of prophets did not require explanation or comment. To the Jews, steeped in knowledge of the Old Testament, the term carried a clear meaning. Greeks, however, influenced by their culture, would have had somewhat different response to the term, *prophet*. In order to have a rather full-orbed biblical understanding of New Testament prophets, we must begin by conducting a cursory study of Old Testament prophets.

In the Old Testament, prophets are designated by several descriptive terms:

- Servant of Jehovah¹³⁷
- Messenger of Jehovah¹³⁸
- Interpreter (teacher)¹³⁹
- Man of the Spirit¹⁴⁰
- Watchman¹⁴¹
- Seer¹⁴²

¹³⁷ I Chronicles 6:49; I Kings 14:18; II Kings 9:7

¹³⁸ Isaiah 44:26; Jeremiah 20:7-9

¹³⁹ Isaiah 43:27

¹⁴⁰ Hosea 9:7 (here, in mockery); Micah 3:8

¹⁴¹ Ezekiel 3:17; Habakkuk 2:1-2

¹⁴² 1 Samuel 9:9, 11, 19; 2 Samuel 15:27; 24:11; 2 Kings 17:13; 1 Chronicles 9:22; 21:9; 25:5; 26:28; 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15; 16:7, 10; 19:2; 29:25, 30; 35:15; Amos 7:12

The Old Testament employs three Hebrew terms to describe the mechanics of prophetic activity:

1. רֹאֵה (ro'eh) – This term is from the verb, *to see*, and literally means a *seer*, i.e., *one who has visions*. Of course, the vision is given by Jehovah; it is not some supra-human insight as certain New Age concepts would promote. The *seers* were not *psychics*. This word was used in portions of the Bible written 1150 BC – 700 BC.¹⁴³
2. חֹזֶה (hozeh) – This word can refer either to having a visual revelation (a vision), or a word revelation. Again, Jehovah always is the source of the revelation, usually the initiator. This word was used biblically, 1000 BC – 600 BC.¹⁴⁴
3. נָבִיא (nabhi) – This is the word that is rendered, *prophet*, in English. It is used throughout the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi. Although the other two words continued to be used, this became the prevailing word, especially after the establishment of the theocracy. In the theocracy, a man who occupied the office of prophet was God's spokesman to the King.

I Chronicles 29:29 contains all three words.

Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the chronicles of Samuel the seer (ro'eh), in the chronicles of Nathan the prophet (nabhi), and in the chronicles of Gad the seer (hozeh),

The English term, *prophet*, is an Anglicization of the Greek term, *prophetes* (προφήτης), and has as its basic meaning, *one who speaks for another*. A clear illustration of this meaning is seen in God's ultimate response to Moses' pleading that he wasn't able to speak well. God said that Aaron would be Moses spokesman.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land."¹⁴⁵

The Old Testament prophet was concerned with the present, often proclaiming righteousness to those who were out of step with God. That ministry, however, could involve predicting the future, should God give such a prediction. One of the tests of a prophet was the accuracy of what he predicted, when he predicted.

And you may say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?" When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ 1 Samuel 9:9, 11, 18f; 2 Samuel 15:27; 1 Chronicles 9:22; 26:28; 29:29; 2 Chronicles 16:7, 10; Isaiah 30:10

¹⁴⁴ 2 Samuel 24:11; 2 Kings 17:13; 1 Chronicles 21:9; 25:5; 2 Chronicles 29:25; Isa. 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; Ezekiel 12:27; Daniel 4:7, 10; 7:1f, 4, 6f, 9, 11, 13, 21; Amos 1:1; 7:12; Micah 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1

¹⁴⁵ Exodus 7:1-2

¹⁴⁶ Deuteronomy 18:21-22; et. al.

The New Age idea of prophecy and some Charismatic thinking on the subject seems to involve catching a prophetic stream and letting it carry the prophet along. This is similar to a bird that catches a particular stream of air and soars upon it. However, the scriptural picture of prophecy is otherwise. A couple of examples from the life of Elisha highlight this distinction.

Elisha was the “miracle prophet.” Not only did he perform more miracles than any other, but in the routines of life he had an attention-getting number of prophetic insights. However, he could not just enter the “stream” and know everything. For example, note the following scene in II Kings 4:25-29. If God did not reveal things to Elisha, he did not know them.

*So she went and came to the man of God to Mount Carmel. And it came about when the man of God saw her at a distance, that he said to Gehazi his servant, "Behold, yonder is the Shunammite. "Please run now to meet her and say to her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?'" And she answered, "It is well." When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came near to push her away; but the man of God said, "Let her alone, for her soul is troubled within her; **and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me.**" Then she said, "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?" Then he said to Gehazi, "Gird up your loins and take my staff in your hand, and go your way; if you meet any man, do not salute him, and if anyone salutes you, do not answer him; and lay my staff on the lad's face."*

Another interesting episode involves the building of a lodge for Elisha’s disciples. In the process an axe head came off its handle and fell into a stream. A young man had to show Elisha where it was, before the prophet could perform a miracle. He did not automatically “know” everything.

But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, "Alas, my master! For it was borrowed." Then the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" And when he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float.¹⁴⁷

Prophets didn’t have X-ray vision, that allowed them to go around reading everyone’s mind or seeing through walls. They did not know what was happening everywhere nor always what would happen in the future. If God did not give them knowledge, and the words to speak resulting from that knowledge, they were dead in the water, unless they were false prophets. False prophets could conjure up something to say when it was to their benefit to do so. True prophets, speaking in obedience to God, often spoke to their own hurt.

This lack of full knowledge in every circumstance reflects Paul’s comment on the limitation of prophecy,

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;¹⁴⁸

Jesus Himself, who is the one of whom all apostolic and prophetic ministry is an expression, confessed that He prophetically did not know everything.

¹⁴⁷ II Kings 6:5-6

¹⁴⁸ I Corinthians 14:9

*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah...*¹⁴⁹

Jesus continually declared that He spoke only the words that the Father gave Him and did only what He saw the Father doing. The Father had to reveal and impart, or else Jesus did nothing.¹⁵⁰ That is the picture of a true prophet. If no word is given to him, nor any direction given to him from heaven, then he is inactive and silent.

Section 2

Identifying New Testament Prophets

With this background, we now proceed to note the comments made in the New Testament concerning the ministry of prophets.

Only four individuals or groups are identified by the label, *prophet*, in the New Testament. These are

1. Agabus¹⁵¹
2. Judas¹⁵²
3. Silas¹⁵³
4. The Antioch leadership council¹⁵⁴

In the first mention of Agabus (Acts 11:27-28), he was accompanied by a band of prophets, but the others are not named. We are unable to identify them.

Acts 13:1 informs us that the Antioch leadership council consisted of prophets and teachers. The names of those who constituted the council are given, but the text does not inform us as to which ones were prophets, which ones were teachers, and if any were both.

In addition to these, the question of Philip's daughters has to be considered.

*And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea....*¹⁵⁵

The NAS, as quoted above, states that Philip's daughters *were prophetesses*.

The NIV more accurately states, *He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied*.

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 24:36-37

¹⁵⁰ John 5:19-20, 30; 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:10; 15:15

¹⁵¹ Acts 11:27-28; 21:10

¹⁵² Acts 15:32

¹⁵³ Acts 15:32

¹⁵⁴ Acts 13:1-2

¹⁵⁵ Acts 21:8-10

*The Greek text literally says, and this one had four daughters, virgins, prophesying.*¹⁵⁶

The manner in which this is stated in the midst of the narrative makes it clear that these young women did not just occasionally “have a word.” They spoke prophetically to the degree that it was a defining part of their identity. The gift of prophecy must have been theirs. However, they are not given the title of prophetesses.¹⁵⁷ In writing Acts, Luke recorded what they did, not who they were. This is significant because in the very next verse, Luke wrote,

*And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea*¹⁵⁸

The contrast between Philip’s daughters who prophesied, and Agabus who was a recognized prophet cannot be missed. Philip’s daughters did not have a word for Paul. Agabus did.

And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.^{159 160}

Although instructions are given for the attitude and modest dress of women who prophesy in the local assembly,¹⁶¹ no women in the New Testament are given the title, *prophetess*. Whether they were a part of the leadership of a local church (Acts 13:1), or traveling prophets (Acts 11:27ff and Acts 21:10), they were men. Those who bore the label, *prophet*, were known, trusted, and carried spiritual authority.

All of those on whom Scripture bestows the appellation, *prophetess*, were active under the Old Testament dispensation. Six women are given the title, *prophetess*.

1. Miriam (Exodus 15:20)
2. Deborah (Judges 4:4)
3. Huldah (II Kings 22:14; II Chronicles 34:22)
4. Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14)
5. Isaiah’s wife (Isaiah 8:3)
6. Anna who blessed the baby Jesus in the Temple, is described as a prophetess (Luke 2:36). Although recorded in the New Testament, Anna lived and functioned under the Old Covenant.

¹⁵⁶ τούτω δὲ ἦσαν θυγατέρες τέσσαρες παρθένοι προφητεύουσαι – *touto de esan thugateres tessares parthenoi propheteuousai* – participle present active nominative feminine plural

¹⁵⁷ Greek προφητίδες *prophetides* – prophetesses.

¹⁵⁸ Acts 21:10

¹⁵⁹ Acts 21:11-12

¹⁶⁰ Paul, of course, had no choice but to go to Jerusalem, unless he wanted to be disobedient to the Holy Spirit. He had begun the journey to Jerusalem *in the Spirit* (Acts 19:21); was *bound in or by the Spirit* [Greek] (Acts 20:22), etc.

¹⁶¹ I Corinthians 11:4ff

The only other time the term is found in the Bible is in Revelation 2:20, in a rebuke to the Church at Thyatira,

But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

Given these facts, we have to conclude that women can prophesy, but they are not a part of the Ephesians 4:11 ascension gift to the Church. They are not prophets/prophetesses.

There are episodes in Scripture in which significant prophetic activity took place through a believer who was not labeled, *a prophet*. For example, in Acts Chapter Nine, we encounter a very important prophetic ministry, exercised by a man who is not known to be a prophet. Ananias is called, “a certain disciple.” The wording of the text implies that there was nothing special about Ananias – there was no special calling upon his life. Yet, the Lord chose him to be the one to deliver a Divine message to Saul of Tarsus. In speaking for God, Ananias functioned as a prophet.

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, here am I, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight."¹⁶²

And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him, said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit."¹⁶³

“Brother Saul, receive your sight!... The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.”¹⁶⁴

This “certain disciple,” named, *Ananias*, is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. Nothing beyond this account is known about him. Yet he fulfilled one of the most significant prophetic moments in the New Testament.

In our effort to grasp fully the role and ministry of prophets, we must examine the use of the term, *prophet*, in I Corinthians 14. In the early portions of the chapter, Paul calls attention to the value of prophecy in the gathered body. He contrasts the benefit of prophecy in the public meeting with the uselessness of uninterpreted tongues in the public meeting (verses 1-4). He states that the purpose of prophecy is the edification, exhortation, and consolation of believers

¹⁶² Acts 9:10-12

¹⁶³ Acts 9:17

¹⁶⁴ Acts 22:13-16

(verse 3). He continues to make that point throughout the chapter; then, in verse 29, he applies the label, *prophet*, to those who prophesy in the assembly.

How is he using the term, here? Interestingly, throughout this section, Paul is emphasizing the involvement of all members of the body, not just the ministry of a select group. Terms such as, *all*¹⁶⁵, *every* or *each*,¹⁶⁶ and the plural, *you*¹⁶⁷, are a part of his argument. The implication of his presentation is that every member of the church potentially could manifest any one of the spiritual gifts, as the Holy Spirit distributes to each one individually as He wills (12:11).

The impression given in this section is that Paul is not describing those who are recognized, “prophets,” but those who in a given meeting of the local church speak Holy Spirit given prophecies. The fact that they bring prophecies makes them prophets in that particular meeting. Gordon Fee, agreeing with this position, presents a cogent argument against these verses’ referring to a class of prophets.

“Some have argued on the basis of 12:28, that “prophets” refers to the special group of authoritative persons in the community who have been given this gift. [According to this view] “The others”¹⁶⁸ in this case means “the other prophets,” so that the whole text is intended to regulate the activities of the prophets, vis-à-vis regulating “prophecies” per se. But nearly everything else in the argument stands over against such a view.

(a) The argument from v. 1 has been in the second person plural, addressing the entire community. He urges all of them “eagerly [to] desire spiritual gifts, especially that *you* prophesy,” without a hint that this gift is limited to the “prophets.”

(b) So with the rest of the argument; for example, in v. 12 he exhorts, “since you are zealous for spiritual manifestations (referring to their collective enthusiasm for tongues), seek to excel in the building up of the church (meaning especially the gift of prophecy).”

(c) The evidence in v. 24, even though hypothetical, is especially telling. As in v. 23, Paul implies a situation that could conceivably occur, namely that “all prophesy,” so that the unbeliever is convicted by *all* and judged by *all*.

(d) So also in v. 31 he urges orderliness, “for you may *all* prophesy in turn so that *all* may learn and *all* be encouraged/exhorted.” It is gratuitous to suggest that the first “all” means “all the prophets” while the next two refer to the whole community. This does not mean, of course, that all *will* or *do* prophesy. It is simply to note that Paul’s concern here is not with a group of prophets, but with the functioning of prophecy in the assembly.

¹⁶⁵ Verses 5, 18, 23, 24, 31

¹⁶⁶ Verse 26,

¹⁶⁷ Verses, 5, 9, 12, 18, 26, (brothers – verse 39)

¹⁶⁸ As Fee points out (see next footnote), Greek, οἱ ἄλλοι; cf. on 12:8 and 10. This word basically means, “others different from the subject.” Whereas it could mean “the rest,” had Paul intended that idea the more correct term would have been λοιποὶ (cf. 9:5, οἱ λοιποὶ ἀποστόλοι). To put that in another way, the use of οἱ λοιποὶ would almost certainly have meant, “the rest of the same class,” i.e., prophets. Paul’s word could mean that, but ordinarily does not, referring simply to “someone else” or, in the plural, “the others that make up the larger group.”

The noun “prophets,” therefore, is to be understood as functional language, similar to the use of “interpreter” in v. 28, and means, as in v. 3, “the one who is prophesying.” Although he uses the noun in this case, which he does not do with “the one who speaks in a tongue,” the structure of the two sentences (vv. 27 and 29) calls for a similar understanding in both cases and does not imply that he is now speaking about a special group of persons.”¹⁶⁹

For want of better terminology, it can be said that *prophet*, like, *apostle*, can be used as an official title, designating a class of men whom God has given to provide prophetic guidance to His Church. However, the term also can be used for those who bring prophetic words in a given service. In that particular service, these are *prophets*, but they are not of that class described in Ephesians 4:11, or I Corinthians 12:28, who have as their lifetime calling the role of prophet to the Church.

Another difference between the prophetic activity described by Paul in I Corinthians 12-14 and the ministry of Ephesian 4:11 prophets, is the source:

- The activity described in First Corinthians is a *distribution of the Holy Spirit in the meeting* (I Corinthians 12:11).
- The existence of Ephesian 4:11 prophets is an *ascension gift of Christ to His Church*. These are lifetime prophets, not just prophets in a given setting.

Further confirmation of this point is the purpose of prophecy in the corporate meeting. In I Corinthians 14: 3, Paul stated that the purpose is *for edification and exhortation and consolation*. However, the two prophecies delivered by a known prophet, Agabus, do not fit that description.

*Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.*¹⁷⁰

*And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"*¹⁷¹

Both of these were predictive prophecies. The first one resulted in the Antioch Church's sending an offering to Jerusalem. The second one confirmed what other prophetic words had been saying to Paul as he proceeded to Jerusalem, much as the revelation that came to Jesus as He proceeded to Jerusalem. Neither of these words fits Paul's statement concerning the purpose of prophecy in the local assembly. Both were predictive warnings.

The ministry of ascension-gift prophets was not bounded by Paul's statements to the Corinthian Church concerning the manifestation of the gifts in the corporate meeting of the local church.

¹⁶⁹ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1987) page 694

¹⁷⁰ Acts 11:27-28

¹⁷¹ Acts 21:10-11

Section Three

Similarities and Differences Between Old Testament and New Testament Prophets

Most students of prophecy make a distinction between Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets. Some of these alleged distinctions have merit and some do not. For example, the above notation about the purpose of prophecy in the corporate meeting has been put forth as the definition of the role of a New Testament prophet, whereas the role of the Old Testament prophet was warning, calling to repentance, sometimes chastisement, and prediction of future events, especially concerning the nation.

As already pointed out, the definition of prophecy in I Corinthians 14 does not circumscribe the ministry of an ascension gift prophet. Even so, the three listed purposes of body-ministry prophecy may describe what a prophet puts forth in many situations (perhaps most). For example, note the comment made concerning Judas & Silas

And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.¹⁷²

The encouraging and strengthening that resulted from the work of these two prophets, certainly fits the I Corinthians 14:3 definition of body-ministry prophecy.

Some have asserted that one difference between Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets is accuracy. The Old Testament prophet was 100% accurate or else he was a fraud.¹⁷³ In the Charismatic Movement the prevailing idea in recent years has been that New Testament prophets do not have to pass that test. According to this view, a New Testament prophet will be increasingly accurate as he becomes more experienced but if a word does not pan out, he is not disqualified. Some even have debated what percentage of a prophet's words must be accurate for him to qualify as a prophet. Where is the justification for this view? If God Himself speaks to the prophet, then what is there to mistake – God has spoken. Old Testament prophets did not always understand the implications of what they spoke,¹⁷⁴ but they had no uncertainty about what to speak.

Body-life prophetic activity as described in I Corinthians 14 could be understood to have a degree of inaccuracy, since two or three prophets are to speak and then there is to be a time of judging what was said for *edification, exhortation, and consolation*. This, however, is not the activity of an ascension gift prophet.

There is nothing in God's Word that indicates that the test of accuracy has been suspended for New Testament prophets. A prophet is a prophet, which means that he receives his word from God and delivers it – he speaks for God. If he is not certain that God has spoken, then he should not speak. Jesus spoke only what He heard the Father say. There is no intimation anywhere in Scripture that an Ephesians 4:11 prophet might be less accurate than an Old Testament prophet.

¹⁷² Acts 15:32

¹⁷³ Deuteronomy 18:22

¹⁷⁴ I Peter 1:10-12

Based upon the scriptural test, when someone puts himself forth as a prophet and declares that God is present in the meeting to heal backs (no uncertainty – he has heard from God), and people with bad backs come forward for prayer, but no one receives a healing, then the purported prophet has misrepresented himself. He is not a prophet. He is someone who receives, “impressions.”

Receiving impressions is not wrong, but they must be recognized for what they are. Brother Owen Carey, in a seminar presented at TCF in 2004, gave some excellent guidelines for prophetic ministry. One of the insights that he brought out was that there are three levels of prophetic activity and that each has a particular way of being appropriately presented:

- “I sensed that,” (God may be saying);
- “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us”¹⁷⁵
- “Thus saith the Lord” (this is rare)

A prophet should be certain that he has a word from God when he frames a prophecy with the declaration, “Thus saith the Lord.” Most contemporary prophetic activity is in the, “I sensed that,” arena. However, true New Testament prophets from time to time will have a “Thus saith the Lord,” message.

One clear difference between Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets is that some of the words brought by Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah. For New Testament prophets, that is foundational history, not prophetic future. Thus, as noted in Part One, New Testament prophets were participants with the apostles in laying the foundation of Christ, upon which each local church is to be built. One would expect New Testament prophets to be very sensitive to detect when a church is built upon some other foundation, or a mixed foundation.

Of special note is the statement in Revelation 19:10, which describes the angel’s response to John’s falling down to worship him.

And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The statement, *the testimony* [witness] *of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*, is a telling statement. The spirit that drives the New Testament prophet is the testimony or witness concerning the Divine person of Jesus Christ. All genuine New Testament prophetic activity in some way points to the Christ, however remote the connection might be.

However, as with Old Testament prophets, not every word brought by a New Testament prophet is obviously foundational. Neither of the two recorded prophecies of Agabus were “foundational.” They were words that God had given concerning specific situations, to which the recipients responded. Thus, even though the apostles and prophets laid the foundation of Christ in establishing churches, they also brought “words” that served other purposes.

¹⁷⁵ This was the manner in which the Jerusalem elders and apostles described the conclusion that they reached in the conference held concerning Gentile acceptance into the Church (Acts 15:28)

Paul never called himself a prophet. The ministry labels that he applied to himself were *apostle*, *preacher*, and *teacher*;¹⁷⁶ once, referring to his establishment of the Corinthian Church, he described himself as a *wise master-builder*.¹⁷⁷ Yet, even though he did not describe himself as a prophet, he did function prophetically. An example of this is seen in the events associated with his trip to Rome.

And when considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them, and said to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be attended with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."¹⁷⁸

Paul's comment here falls into Owen Carey's category of "I sensed that." His sense was correct, as far as loss of the cargo and ship were concerned, but he missed the total picture – there was no loss of life. The ship's officers and the Roman centurion ignored Paul's warning and they set sail. Before long, the ship was in dire straits and Paul brought another word. This word, imparted to him by an angel, was a "Thus saith the Lord."

And since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned. And when they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete, and incurred this damage and loss. "And yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told."¹⁷⁹

Another example of Paul's "missing it" is seen in his response to the prophetic words that were given concerning his future imprisonment. He interpreted these to mean that he would not be freed to return to the churches.

And now, behold, bound in the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more."¹⁸⁰

Paul was released from prison and traveled among the churches again.¹⁸¹ Clearly, when he stated that the Ephesians would never see him again, he was not speaking a, "Thus

¹⁷⁶ I Timothy 2:7; II Timothy 1:11

¹⁷⁷ I Corinthians 3:10

¹⁷⁸ Acts 27:9-10

¹⁷⁹ Acts 27:20-25

¹⁸⁰ Acts 20:22-25

¹⁸¹ A compilation of early church documents, biblical statements, and early traditions, result in the

saith the Lord.” Based on the prophetic predictions of what awaited him, he drew a conclusion. At best, it was, “I sense that...”

In Part One, we used the term, *Revelatory Apostles*, for the Twelve and Paul, in that they presented the facts concerning Christ and the Gospel that flowed out of these facts. It is appropriate to use the term, *Revelatory Prophets*, in the same sense. Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

*...that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,*¹⁸²

As noted in Part One, the Greek term rendered *mystery*, means something that God has revealed, and had He not revealed it, it could not be known. This mystery was revealed to Paul as well as to Christ’s other holy apostles and to prophets. The mystery is that people of all races can be partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel. The part of this statement relevant to our study is that not only apostles, but prophets also were God’s vehicles for delivering these foundational truths.

Acts 15:32 relates to the statements made in Ephesians 2:20 concerning the foundational work of apostles and prophets.

And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message [better rendered, through much discourse].

The Greek term rendered, *strengthened*, is *episteridzo* (ἐπιστηρίζω), which carries the idea of *settlement on a foundation*.¹⁸³ Thus, in keeping with the other scriptures noted, Acts 15:32 describes two prophets, Judas and Silas, doing the work of firmly establishing individual lives and the life of the Antioch Church upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:20, the work of establishing churches on the foundation of Jesus Christ was not just the work of apostles, but also the work of prophets. This especially would have been true for the *revelatory prophets*, and *revelatory apostles*, who delivered *once for all the faith delivered to the saints*.¹⁸⁴

following scenario for Paul’s final years. After his release from his first imprisonment in Rome, Paul probably went first to visit the churches in Asia and Macedonia. According to Lightfoot he visited Colossae and Laodicea, then came back to Philippi. Early Church documents indicate that he next made his journey to Spain. He then returned to Ephesus (I Timothy 1:3), leaving Timothy in charge and going on to Macedonia where he wrote I Timothy. He next visited Crete, where he left Titus (Titus 1:1ff) and returned to Corinth (passing by Miletus), from whence he wrote back to Titus (II Timothy 4:20). Later he went to Troas (II Timothy 4:13), where he was arrested (II Timothy 4:20) and carried on to Rome. In the prison in Rome he wrote II Timothy. Later, between 65 – 68 AD, he was executed outside of Rome on the Ostian Way (see J. W. Shepard, *The Life and Letters of St. Paul*, [Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1956] Page 570)

¹⁸² Ephesians 3:3-6

¹⁸³ See H.C.G. Moule, *Studies in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1977) page 84

¹⁸⁴ Jude 3

Section Four

The Ministry Of Contemporary Ephesians 4:11 Prophets

In the light of the foregoing, what appropriate ministry should the Church anticipate from contemporary Ephesians 4:11 prophets? In the following discussion, we are not going to strive over the distinction between words of wisdom, words of knowledge, foretelling, etc. All of the following will include the entire arena of Holy Spirit impartation, without distinguishing between the various manifestations.

- First and foremost is the laying of the foundation of Jesus Christ. There are no *revelatory prophets* or *revelatory apostles* today, but there are apostles and prophets who are laying that glorious foundation, both in individual lives and in the corporate body. Because of this important part of Ephesians 4:11 prophets, we would expect them to be important members of apostolic church-planting teams.

In this vein, one also would expect Ephesian 4:11 prophets to be sensitive to improper foundations and misguided emphasis in local churches. One would expect such prophets to be very practical in their work of foundation laying – not just delivering ephemeral “words” that have little practical application to life.

- Ephesian 4:11 prophets may bring words concerning coming events for which preparation should be made. This was the nature of the prophetic word that Agabus brought to Antioch.

*Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.*¹⁸⁵

Should God choose to use a prophet in this manner, great benefit would result. Such prophetic ministry is rare, but does take place. Sadly, false prophets often have claimed to predict the future, resulting in great harm to their followers. Horror stories of such abuse have caused many moderns to reject the possibility of prophetic predictions.

It is important to remember that even those who predict the future are not necessarily true prophets of God. Jehovah told the Israelites that He would test them, by allowing false prophets to accurately predict the future. Those who were into “predictions,” rather than following the true God, would be led astray by this perfidy and thus reveal their lack of devotion to Jehovah.

*and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, “Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,” you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Acts 11:27-28

¹⁸⁶ Deuteronomy 13:2-3

Jesus warned the apostles,

*For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance.*¹⁸⁷

John wisely exhorted all of us,

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*¹⁸⁸

Interestingly, the *Didache* noted the presence of true and false prophets in the first quarter of the Second Century (around 120 AD).

*But not every one that speaketh in the Spirit is a prophet; but only if he hold the ways of the Lord. Therefore from their ways shall the false prophet and the prophet be known. And every prophet who ordereth a meal in the Spirit eateth not from it, except indeed he be a false prophet; and every prophet who teacheth the truth, if he do not what he teacheth, is a false prophet. And every prophet, proved true, working unto the mystery of the Church in the world, yet not teaching others to do what he himself doeth, shall not be judged among you, for with God he hath his judgment; for so did also the ancient prophets. But whoever saith in the Spirit, Give me money, or something else, ye shall not listen to him; but if he saith to you to give for others' sake who are in need, let no one judge him.*¹⁸⁹

These First Century Christians judged a prophet by his behaviour and lifestyle as much as they did by the quality of his prophetic utterances.

Signs, wonders, and accurate predictions indicate that supernatural activity is taking place. However, correct doctrine concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and a surrendered life must be affirmed by a prophet before any of his predictions should be accepted as coming from the Holy Spirit.

- Personal prophecy is a valid activity of Ephesians 4:11 prophets. Agabus' second recorded word was a personal prophecy to Paul

*And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"*¹⁹⁰

It is natural to assume that most personal prophecy will fit the I Corinthians 14:3 description of the purpose of prophecy in the local church.

¹⁸⁷ Matthew 24:24-25

¹⁸⁸ I John 4:1

¹⁸⁹ *Didache*, Volume VII, page 757

¹⁹⁰ Acts 21:10-11

But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

From my own experience, I must say that personal prophecy can be a mixed bag. The first “word” ever given to me happened in a meeting in the late 1970’s, foretelling my future role in the Church at large. This was a time when things were not going well for me; my stand for truth concerning the Holy Spirit had cost me dearly; longtime friends had turned against Barbara and me. Inaccurate things were written about me in newsletters distributed nationwide. The word given by this prophet was totally out of sync with our situation. The prophet who delivered the word was a man who did not know my name, and I never had heard of him before that night. We had no conversation before or after the word was given. A tape of the prophecy was given to me, and I never did listen to it – I lost it or recorded something over it. I honestly don’t remember what happened to it. I felt that to listen to this could be unhealthy. If this were God’s plan, He would do it and I didn’t need to do anything other than to continue serving Him with all my heart. A few years later, I entered a season in which it seemed that everywhere I went there was a prophetic word for me – almost always by someone whom I never had met – and the word always was the same thing, being consistent with that first word given. When a prophet approached me, I could almost predict what he was going to say. I began to wonder if my style of speech or facial expression caused some sort of Pavlovian response. My own response always was the same - I would serve God with all of my heart and if the prophecies became reality – OK; if not - OK. I would not dwell on them. I didn’t need them and I didn’t let them influence anything I did. I continued to live by prayer and obedience. Indeed, through nothing that I have done, that consistent word has been fulfilled many times over.

On the other hand, there have been a number of enthusiastic prophets who have given me “words” that never did come about. Most of these prophets knew me, to some degree. Looking back I realize that they usually gave words that were in line with their values and wishes for me.

There is a serious problem that often crops up when a prophet becomes known for bringing personal prophecy. The problem is the human tendency to seek fortune tellers and psychics. One cannot deny that the drive to receive a word, in some instances, is a manifestation of this unholy motive. Some in prophetic ministry succumb to the pressure to give “words” and come up with something for everybody. This is pandering to the unholy craving mentioned above. In such an instance, there is a manifestation of the flesh on the part of both the giver and receiver. A true prophet will not put forth anything that God has not given to him, and once that is done, the ministry is over.

- Some prophets are teachers and preachers, giving prophetic insight into the Word. A prophetic teacher is a great blessing to the church, especially when bringing forth foundational truths.

Other prophets are not gifted as teachers and it is a tragedy when they teach and preach. Again, in my own experience, I have seen those who truly are called and gifted in a particular ministry (not just prophets) end up in a strange place when

they try to teach about that ministry. They would be better off to function in the ministry to which God has called them and for which they are equipped, rather than trying to teach about it. The church does them a disfavor when they are put into the position of having to teach about their ministry.

- Prophets are a valuable asset when discerning leadership and when ordaining individuals into a particular ministry.

Barnabas and Saul were released into ministry in response to a prophetic word.

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."¹⁹¹

Prophecy was an important part of setting aside Timothy and releasing him into ministry with Paul. Although the historical record in Acts does not report this prophetic activity, Paul's later comments add the needed detail. The only time in Timothy's life that Paul's comments fit, was when Timothy was released from Lystra.

And he [Paul] came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.¹⁹²

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.¹⁹³

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight,¹⁹⁴

We would assume that Paul joined the elders in laying hands on Timothy and participating in the impartation.

And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Acts 13:1-2

¹⁹² Acts 16:1-3

¹⁹³ I Timothy 4:14

¹⁹⁴ I Timothy 1:18

¹⁹⁵ II Timothy 1:6

Paul's comments are rather telling. Referring to the prophetic word that was given to Timothy, Paul stated that he received an equipping for ministry by the laying on of the elders' hands, but that prophetic words confirming that gift were given at the time of the bestowal. Furthermore, the inner assurance that came from the prophetic word would encourage and give strength to Timothy in his encounters with the enemy. When doubts came, he could recall those words, and move forward with Holy Spirit imparted courage.

Although observation and experience are important in discerning whom God would choose to become elders, apostles, etc., a great blessing of assurance is imparted when a proven prophet confirms that choice through prophetic utterance.

- Exposing sin was a ministry of Old Testament prophets, and by inference is an appropriate ministry of New Testament prophets.

Our Lord, speaking of the reasons for the His sending of the Holy Spirit, and the benefits of the Spirit's coming, stated,

*But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.*¹⁹⁶

Concerning a benefit of prophetic ministry in the corporate meeting, Paul wrote,

*But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.*¹⁹⁷

The Holy Spirit speaks through prophets. In keeping with Jesus' promise, we would expect the Holy Spirit through prophetic words to reveal what is in individual hearts and to bring conviction. In keeping with Paul's statement concerning prophetic activity in the local church, we should anticipate such specificity in words, even though the one delivering the word may not realize the full import of what he is speaking. We would expect the Holy Spirit to give Ephesians 4:11 prophets words that are equal to or of the same insight as those described in I Corinthians 14.

Even though the above list might be helpful, in my opinion we should not expect to be able to create a list and say that we have defined the ministry of Ephesians 4:11 prophets. Our Lord is beautifully creative, and when we think that we have everything in a neat box, he does something outside of the box.

¹⁹⁶ John 16:7-11

¹⁹⁷ I Corinthians 14:24-25

PART THREE

THE MINISTRY OF EVANGELISTS

The New Testament contains less information on evangelists, than it does on the other two trans-local ministries referenced in Ephesians 4:11. The term, *evangelist*, occurs only three times in the New Testament, and the title is given to only one person,¹⁹⁸ Philip, one of the seven Jerusalem deacons.¹⁹⁹

*And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.*²⁰⁰

Timothy, who was Paul's apostolic delegate, although not an evangelist is urged to *do the work of an evangelist*.²⁰¹

*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*²⁰²

The only other place that the term occurs in the New Testament is in Ephesians 4:11, which is the rubric under which this paper is written.

One cannot miss the irony of the contemporary church's response to Ephesians 4:11. In spite of the fact that the New Testament has a lot to say about apostles, and a considerable amount to say about prophets and prophecy, many denominations question the ongoing apostolic and prophetic ministry in every age; yet, every denomination assumes that evangelists, about which the New Testament says little, will be present in every age.

The two most famous and respected Christians of the 20th Century (and the early 21st) have been the late, Pope John Paul II and Billy Graham. Since Roman Catholics believe that the Pope is Peter's successor, they consider the Pope to be an *apostle*. Billy Graham, the *evangelist*, outshines anyone else in the Evangelical/Protestant/Pentecostal world.

As already noted in Section One, the early church considered evangelists to be the successors of the apostles. In Part One, Section Two, we quoted Eusebius' statements concerning evangelists. We repeat a portion of that quote.

“There were many others, also, noted in these times, who held the first rank in the apostolic succession. These, as the holy disciples of such men, also built up the churches where foundations had been previously laid in every place by the apostles. They augmented the means of promulgating the gospel more and more,

¹⁹⁸ Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have been called, *The Evangelists*, in many classic documents of the Church, but no such label is given to them in Scripture.

¹⁹⁹ Acts 6:1-6

²⁰⁰ Acts 21:8

²⁰¹ From all of the duties and responsibilities given to Timothy, it is clear that he was not an evangelist, in that evangelism was not the focus of his life. Even so, as a trans-local minister, and as a member of Paul's team, evangelism was one of the things that Paul expected of Timothy.

²⁰² II Timothy 4:5

and spread the seeds of salvation and of the heavenly kingdom throughout the world far and wide.... [they] fulfilled the Saviour's precept by distributing their substance to the needy...leaving their country, they performed the office of evangelists to those who had not yet heard the faith, whilst with a noble ambition to proclaim Christ, they also delivered to them the books of the holy gospels. After laying the foundation of the faith in foreign parts as the particular object of their mission, and after appointing others as shepherds of the flocks, and committing to these the care of those that had been recently introduced, they went again to other regions and nations, with the grace and co-operation of God. The Holy Spirit also, wrought many wonders as yet through them, so that as soon as the gospel was heard, men voluntarily in crowds and eagerly, embraced the true faith with their whole minds."²⁰³

Based on the above description, we conclude that in the early church there was a proliferation of evangelists, who first gave away their possessions then spent the rest of their lives traveling from city to city, nation to nation, proclaiming the Gospel and planting churches.

Important Terms

In order to study the topic before us, three terms must be noted and understood.

- *Euangelion* (Εὐαγγέλιον) Glad tidings, good or joyful news
- *Euangelidzo* (Εὐαγγελίζω) To proclaim or announce glad tidings
- *Euangelistes* (Εὐαγγελιστής) One who announces glad tidings

In English Christian literature, *euangelion* traditionally has been rendered, *Gospel*.²⁰⁴ The other two terms have been anglicized:

- *euangelidzo* is rendered, *to evangelize*
- *euangelistes* is rendered, *evangelist*.

These terms carry no special meaning in themselves, but for Christians they are very specific terms.

- *Euangelion* is not just any good news but it is **The Good News** of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- *Euangelidzo* is to proclaim that specific Good News.
- *Euangelistes* is one who has but one message to proclaim, The Good News.

The Evangelist's Message

If evangelists are to proclaim the Good News, what is that Good News?

²⁰³ Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 37, translated by Christian Frederick Cruse (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, reprinted 1994) page 123

²⁰⁴ The term, *gospel*, is derived from an Old English term, *godspel*, which means "a good story" (god = good; spel = story). To early English Christians, **the** good story was the doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ, thus this doctrine became, *the Gospel*.

Paul's Gospel

Paul gave the basic answer to this question in I Corinthians 15.

*Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...*²⁰⁵

Earlier in the letter, Paul had reminded them of the exclusive nature of his preaching.

*And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*²⁰⁶

These are the facts of the Good News. However, the significance of these facts and how to respond to them also constituted the Good News proclamation.

For example, in I Corinthians 15, Paul is arguing for the physical resurrection of every believer. Throughout this chapter he argues this point and concludes by declaring that our resurrection is a *mystery* (verse 51ff). We have pointed out earlier that the Greek term *musterion* is used in the New Testament to signify something that has been revealed to us; but we could not have known this truth if it had not been revealed to us. The resurrection of Christ is not a mystery; it was an observable fact. However, our resurrection is a mystery. Paul thus declares that it has been revealed that all of us will be resurrected because Jesus was resurrected. So, not just the fact of His resurrection, but the implications of that resurrection are the Good News. If this mystery had not been revealed, one might ask, “Jesus was resurrected, so what?”

The same could be said of Jesus' dying for our sins. What does that mean, and does it require any response from us? The Good News includes the marvelous truth that we are saved by faith as a result of God's grace. We are called to believe, to repent, to confess, and to be baptized. Each of these responses is a part of the Good News, because each of them brings into our life a particular dimension of the Good News.

Jesus' Gospel

The Gospel that Jesus and His disciples proclaimed was the Gospel of the Kingdom. Four times in the Gospels, the expression, *the Gospel of the Kingdom* is used to describe the preaching and teaching ministry of Jesus and His disciples.

*And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.*²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ I Corinthians 15:1-5

²⁰⁶ I Corinthians 2:1-2

²⁰⁷ I Corinthians 2:1-2

And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.²⁰⁸

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.²⁰⁹

The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.²¹⁰

In addition to that specific term, Jesus made many declarations that His message concerned the Kingdom of God. Here are just a few quotes from Luke.

But He said to them, I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.²¹¹

And it came about soon afterwards, that He began going about from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God; and the twelve were with Him,²¹²

And He said, To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.²¹³

And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to perform healing.²¹⁴

But He said to him, Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.²¹⁵

After Pentecost, the Kingdom of God was the topic of Apostolic Good News teaching and preaching.

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.²¹⁶

And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.²¹⁷

²⁰⁷ Matthew 4:23

²⁰⁸ Matthew 9:35

²⁰⁹ Matthew 24:14

²¹⁰ Luke 16:16

²¹¹ Luke 4:43

²¹² Luke 8:1

²¹³ Luke 8:10

²¹⁴ Luke 9:2

²¹⁵ Luke 9:60

²¹⁶ Acts 8:12

²¹⁷ Acts 19:8

And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.²¹⁸

preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.²¹⁹

Clearly, Jesus and His disciples, plus the post-Pentecostal apostles and evangelists proclaimed the Gospel of Kingdom of God. This Gospel is far more encompassing than the Gospel preached in many quarters today. As one reads the Four Gospels, it is obvious that in addition to the atonement and God's grace, the Gospel of the Kingdom involved morals, mercy, spiritual power, a right heart, all flowing out of the rule of God. For example, the Sermon on the Mount contains many truths about the Kingdom of God, especially truths concerning the human heart displayed by citizens of the Kingdom.

The Greek terms translated, *Kingdom of God*, rightly mean *the Rule of God*.²²⁰ This understanding is important in the light of a statement that Jesus made in response to questioning by the Pharisees.

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.²²¹

The Greek terms can be understood to mean, *in your midst*, or *among you* and various English versions render the terms one way or the other. Both are appropriate for Jesus' answer. In this encounter, Jesus was referring to Himself as *The Kingdom*. His point (which the Pharisees didn't grasp) was, "Wherever the King is, there is the Kingdom." His Kingdom is where He rules, whether it is within a person's heart, or in the midst of a group (a church). Where Jesus is Lord - that is His Kingdom.

The gospel that proclaims God's grace, but does not include Lordship in the message, is not the Gospel that was proclaimed by New Testament apostles, prophets, and evangelists. For example, baptism was proclaimed as a part of the Gospel package. In baptism the convert expressed the death of self-rule, the death of bondage to sin, and the recognition of Christ's rule in his life.²²²

Much modern evangelism has obscured this essential element in the salvation package. "Just invite Jesus into your heart and pray a little prayer," is a concept unknown in New Testament evangelism. The Post-Pentecostal Gospel of the Kingdom involved being a part of a church – the Community of Saints, which is the Community of God. The Church was a community which was ruled by Christ and the standards of Christ were displayed in the lives of the members of that community. Baptism involved being both baptized *into Christ*²²³ and *into His Body*²²⁴, which is

²¹⁸ Acts 28:23

²¹⁹ Acts 28:31

²²⁰ This is the wording used in some more literal translations, such as *Young's Literal Translation*.

²²¹ Luke 17:20-21

²²² Romans 6:5-14, 18

²²³ Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27

the Church. New Testament evangelists, proclaimed the Rule of God and called for a surrender of one's will to the will of God.

The Good News is Good News because the atoning death of Christ and His resurrection make it possible for us to be free from the bondage that is the result of the fall of man; and in that escape we enter into the Kingdom of God. The elaboration of that Good News is the quality of life that is expressed in that Kingdom. This is seen in the preaching and teaching of Jesus and His disciples, who proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom.

In this sense, Paul stated to the Ephesian elders that he had proclaimed to them the whole counsel of God.²²⁵

The vital role of evangelists

Because evangelists always have been recognized and have functioned in every generation, little comment needs to be made about them and their ministry. We will content ourselves with a few passing comments.

- Evangelists are those whom God has given to the Church with a special call and Holy Spirit imparted gifting that enables them to proclaim the Good News with effective power. True evangelists are not created by some training program or a school, although these might help an evangelist fine-tune his ministry. Evangelists are an Ephesians 4:11 gift from God. Jesus recognized this when He exhorted His disciples to pray for God to send forth evangelists.

*And He was saying to them, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*²²⁶

- Sadly, evangelists seem to be lacking in many American churches. Of equal sadness is the fact that most American Christians are so concerned about their own quality of life that they do not grieve over the unsaved. It is unheard of for a church to fast and pray for God to give us a coterie of evangelists.
- Elders often find relating to evangelists a bit difficult. Many evangelists are not polite, quiet church members. Evangelists tend to be impatient with the routines of church life. It is not unusual for an evangelist to skirt congregational protocol and bureaucratic systems because they are interested in the "bottom line," i.e., reaching the lost. They usually have one thing on their minds and that is getting folks saved. Everything else is secondary and a waste of time and energy.
- Some evangelists are solo operators. Philip, the only man whom Scripture labels, *evangelist*, was a solo operator. Beginning with his evangelistic ministry in Samaria through his encounter with the Ethiopian in the desert, and culminating in his evangelistic tour that took him from Azotus to Caesarea (Acts 8), Philip traveled alone. Yet, even

²²⁴ I Corinthians 12:13

²²⁵ Acts 20:27

²²⁶ Luke 10:2; Matthew 9:38

though he traveled alone, he was intensely aware of his connection to the Church, and his relationship with the apostles. He was a soloist, but not an independent operator.

- Many evangelists, on the other hand, are gifted in organizing and motivating evangelistic teams. These evangelists are a special blessing to the local church. One thing that evangelists have been doing in recent years is leading short-term mission trips. In the past this would have been almost impossible, but with modern transportation and communication, as well as the unprecedented prosperity of this generation, such trips have become a viable and productive evangelistic ministry.
- Those who have been recognized as outstanding evangelists of the past century – Billy Sunday, D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, Billy Graham, etc., - have given the impression that they were soloists, but in reality they were the front men for dedicated teams, or else working in conjunction with the local churches in the cities where they held their meetings. In some cases, churches were planted as a result of their evangelistic activity in a city.
- Ephesians 4:11 describes evangelists as being a gift to the Church. Because of this, we would expect Ephesians 4:11 evangelists to have a strong sense of being used of God to build up the Church, rather than being on a mission to do their own thing. They either would be church planters or related to a church (or churches) into which converts can be placed for discipleship. Experience has shown that problems tend to develop when an evangelist is not answerable to a local church or an apostolic team.

May Our Lord raise up a new army of evangelists.

A PERSONAL CONCLUDING WORD (OPINION)

This is a very dangerous paper because of the snare inherent in titles. As believers, ministry often becomes our identity. People sometimes ask me, “What are you, an apostle, a teacher – what are you?” My reply is, “I am a slave of Jesus Christ” (if I were honest, I would add, “and a very imperfect one”). In my opinion, each of us should relax, be ourselves, and serve God with all of our hearts. When we are doing what we enjoy doing, and responding to what God puts before us, we are who and what God has designed us to be. When we become obsessed with labels, something invariably goes wrong.

Several years ago, when tests to determine one’s functional spiritual gifts were the rage, we decided to present such a test at Tulsa Christian Fellowship to help future leaders determine their functional gifts. Tulsa’s First Methodist Church had such an inventory. I used their material as a guide and created a survey test to be used at TCF. Although some good did come from these assessments, I regret that I ever prepared this test, because the negatives seem to greatly outweigh the good. When someone took the test and as a result determined that he/she was a teacher, a prophet, an exhorter, etc., all too often, that became the individual’s identity; in some cases this identity became an excuse for obnoxious behavior (“after all, I am prophetic,” or “I am an exhorter”). Some felt pressure trying to live up to their label. It became apparent that such self-consciousness about labels was interfering with a full-orbed healthy life in the Spirit. As stated in the above paragraph, in order to be what God intends for us to be in His Kingdom, we should just do what we enjoy doing. We don’t need a label, a spiritual title, or some self-defining description, other than, “Servant of Jesus Christ.”

This does not deny that the New Testament uses labels. Usually, these were job descriptions, rather than designating some office. Yet, I cannot deny that Paul defended his apostleship and authority when it was necessary to do so in order to preserve pure doctrine and godly standards in the Church. The manner in which he did this communicated more than just a functional description. There was the sense of position and authority of office in his statements. Neither can I deny that some clearly were designated as prophets. Even so, called and gifted ministers (whatever that ministry might be) have to deal with the risk of having one's identity defined by a title or a role.

I have seen situations in which a member of the flock, in deep frustration, vented that frustration through an angry outburst to an elder and was told, "You can't talk to me that way, I am an elder!" Such a foolish response from an elder betrays an insecurity that Satan can and will use.

I know of instances in which someone has served for years as a missionary; then the time came for them to leave the field. Upon returning to the community that sent them out, they have difficulty in settling into the routines of life. It is difficult for them to get a job and begin supporting themselves because, "I am a missionary."

I have seen the same thing happen with some men who identify themselves as a "pastor." These men can't do what everyone else does to earn a living because that would conflict with their identity. This is spiritual folly. Our Lord addressed this tragic tendency in His final encounter with the Pharisees,

But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi.

*But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.
And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.
And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.*

But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.²²⁷

Certainly, Jesus was not prohibiting the use of titles, because titles are used in Scripture. He was addressing the pride (and insecurity) that requires a title. He was addressing the human tendency to find worth and meaning in a position. He also was addressing the human need to have a titled person over us. I know of more than one church, led by a council of elders, in which a visitor has commented that he/she would not return, because – "I want to go to a church that has a real pastor."

This is a serious snare for all whom God calls into ministry. I believe that it is important for us to have our identity in Christ, and our role to be that of His slave, whatever that means at any time and in any situation.

²²⁷ Matthew 23:5-12

Should Christ cause a man to be born with a particular temperament; then, through the indwelling Holy Spirit endow him with certain gifts; then, put him through years of cruciform experience so that his ego is dead; then, begin to use him effectively in correcting leadership problems in local churches – let that man be who he is in Christ, obediently doing what His Master puts before him, without becoming self-conscious about a title or job description. If he does that, he will be what the Master intended for him to be and do; he will fulfill God’s purpose for his existence. However, if he begins to think, “I am an apostle,” that self-consciousness can become a snare and even limit his availability to be in every situation what God wants him to be.

On the one hand, we should thank God that He has cared enough about His Church to give to the Church, apostles, prophets, and evangelists. On the other hand, let those whom God has given to the Church beware of the pitfall of labels.

ADDENDUM A

Early Church literature produced during the years 100 AD – 325 AD that mention apostles.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clement To The Corinthians • Mathetes To Diognetus • Polycarp To The Philippians Martyrdom • Ignatius. To The Ephesians To The Magnesians To The Trallians To The Romans To The Philadelphians To The Smyrnaeans To Polycarp Appendix. Syriac Version Spurious Epistles Martyrdom • Barnabas. Epistle • Papias. Fragments • Justin Martyr. First Apology Second Apology Dialogue With Trypho Discourse To The Greeks Address To The Greeks The Sole Government Of God The Resurrection, Fragments Martyrdom • Irenaeus. Against Heresies Fragments. • The Pastor Of Hermas • Tatian. To The Greeks • Theophilus. To Autolycus • Athenagoras. A Plea For The Christians The Resurrection • Clement Of Alexandria. To The Heathen The Instructor The Stromata, Fragments Who Is The Rich Man That Shall Be Saved? • Tertullian. The Apology On Idolatry De Spectaculis De Corona To Scapula Ad Nationes Appendix, Fragments An Answer To The Jews The Soul's Testimony A Treatise On The Soul Against Heretics Five Books Against Marcion Against Hermogenes Against The Valentinians The Flesh Of Christ Resurrection Of The Flesh Against Praxeas Scorpiace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tertullian continued Against All Heresies On Repentance On Baptism On Prayer Ad Martyras Perpetua And Felictas Of Patience On The Pallium On The Apparel Of Women On The Veiling Of Virgins To His Wife On Exhortation To Chastity On Monogamy On Modesty On Fasting De Fuga In Persecutione • Minucius Felix • Commodianus • Origen Origen De Principiis Africanus To Origen Origen To Africanus Origen To Gregory Origen Against Celsus • Hippolytus Refutation Of Heresies The Extant Works And Fragments • Cyprian The Epistles Of Cyprian The Treatises Of Cyprian The Seventh Council Of Carthage Treatises Attributed To Cyprian • Caius Fragments • Novatian Concerning The Trinity On The Jewish Meats The Baptism Of Heretics Against The Heretic Novatian A Treatise On Re-Baptism • Gregory Thaumaturgus. A Declaration Of Faith A Metaphrase Of The Book Of Ecclesiastes Canonical Epistle To Origen A Sectional Confession Of Faith On The Trinity Twelve Topics On The Faith On The Subject Of The Soul Four Homilies On All The Saints On The Gospel According To Matthew • Dionysius The Great. Fragments • Julius Africanus. Extant Writings • Anatolius And Minor Writers Alexander Of Cappadocia Theognostus Of Alexandria Pierius Of Alexandria Theonas Of Alexandria Phileas Pamphilus Malchion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archelaus The Disputation With The Heresiarch Manes • Alexander Of Lycopolis. The Manicheans • Peter Of Alexandria. The Genuine Acts Of Peter The Canonical Epistle Fragments • Alexander Of Alexandria. Epistles On The Arian Heresy The Deposition Of Arius • Methosius. The Banquet Of The Ten Virgins Concerning Free-Will On The Resurrection Fragments Concerning Simeon And Anna Oration Of The Palms Three Fragments From The Homily On The Cross And Passion Of Christ. Other Fragments • Arnobius. The Seven Books Of Arnobius Against The Heathen • Lactantius. The Divine Institutes. The Epitome Of The Divine Institutes. A Treatise On The Anger Of God. On The Workmanship Of God/The Formation Of Man. Of The Manner In Which The Persecutors Died. Fragments Of Lactantius. The Phoenix. A Poem: The Passion Of The Lord. • Venantius. Poem On Easter. • Asterius Urbanus. Extant Writings. • Victorinus. The Creation Of The World. Commentary On The Apocalypse Of The Blessed John • Dionysius Of Rome. Against The Sabellians. • The Teaching Of The Twelve Apostles. • Constitutions Of The Holy Apostles. • The Homily Ascribed To Clement. • Early Liturgies. The Liturgy Of James. The Liturgy Of Mark. The Liturgy Of The Blessed Apostles.
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ADDENDUM B

The following is a listing of passages of interest to our study. Some of these are of interest because they list as apostles those who do not receive that title in the New Testament. Some of these passages are of interest for other reasons pertinent to our study.

Ignatius

During the reign of Roman Emperor Trajan, Ignatius of Antioch was arrested and transported from Antioch to Rome where he was martyred. He was accompanied by a few friends and was allowed to receive visitors and write letters to churches along the way. His trip to Rome is dated variously. His biography states that he died in 107 (less than ten years after the death of John), but some date his death between the years of 110-117.²²⁸ Ignatius was the first (as far as the written record goes) to describe one elder as being over the other elders and giving to him the title, *the bishop*.

- The first passage of interest is found in Ignatius' *Epistle to the Trallians*.

“It is therefore necessary, whatsoever things ye do, to do nothing without the bishop. And be ye subject also to the council of elders, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ, who is our hope, in whom, if we live, we shall be found in Him.”²²⁹

COMMENT: Of interest to us in this quote is Ignatius' description of the council of elders as having the same authority as the apostles. However, he does not apply to them the label, *apostles*. He uses the same language for the council of elders in his *Letter to the Magnesians*.²³⁰

- The second, third, and fourth passages of interest make identical statements.

“I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were apostles; I am but a condemned man: they were free, while I am, even until now, a servant.”²³¹

“Let not the widows be wanderers about, nor fond of dainties, nor gadders from house to house; but let them be like Judith, noted for her seriousness; and like Anna, eminent for her sobriety. I do not ordain these things as an apostle: for ‘who am I, or what is my father’s house,’ that I should pretend to be equal in honor to them? But as your ‘fellow-soldier,’ I hold the position of one who [simply] admonishes you.”²³²

²²⁸ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume II, “Ante-Nicean Christianity (Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers 1996) page 49

²²⁹ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume I, “Ignatius to the Trallians,” Chapter 2. Page 135

²³⁰ *ibid*, “Ignatius to the Magnesians,” Chapter 6, page 124

²³¹ *ibid*, “Ignatius to the Romans,” Chapter 4, page 150

²³² *ibid*, Chapter 4, page 162

“But as to the practice of magic, or the impure love of boys, or murder, it is superfluous to write to you, since such vices are forbidden to be committed even by the Gentiles. I do not issue commands on these points as if I were an apostle; but, as your fellow-servant, I put you in mind of them.”²³³

COMMENT: Ignatius, who claimed to occupy the office of magisterial bishop, still refused to claim the title, *apostle*.

- The next passage of interest is in the biography of Ignatius, supposedly written by one who traveled with him on his way to his execution.

“When Trajan, not long since, succeeded to the empire of the Romans, Ignatius, the disciple of John the apostle, a man in all respects of an apostolic character, governed the Church of the Antiochians with great care...”²³⁴

COMMENT: These disciples of Ignatius attributed to him “apostolic character,” but did not apply to him the title, *apostle*.

Irenaeus

Irenaeus was discipled by Polycarp, who was a companion of the Apostle John. He wrote a lengthy refutation of Gnosticism (five books), which are known as, *Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)*. He is regarded by many as the clearest thinker of the last quarter of the Second Century. He wrote *Against Heresies* c185 AD.

- “...those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, [affirming] that John conveyed to them that information. And he remained among them up to the times of Trajan. Some of them, moreover, saw not only John, but the other apostles also, and heard the very same account from them, and bear testimony as to the [validity of] the statement. Whom then should we rather believe? Whether such men as these, or Ptolemaeus, who never saw the apostles, and who never even in his dreams attained to the slightest trace of an apostle?”²³⁵

COMMENT: Once again, the doctrine of the apostles is the issue. Those who had been conversant with the apostles presented the doctrine that the apostles consistently taught. Those who were traveling about with a new revelation never did see an apostle and were not apostles, so their doctrine is to be rejected.

Clement of Alexandria

Between 190 -195 AD, while teaching in the catechetical school in Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria wrote his most important documents. The following is a quote from *Stromata or Miscellanies*.

²³³ *ibid*, “Ignatius to the Antiochans” Chapter 11, page 216

²³⁴ *ibid*, “The Martyrdom of Ignatius,” Chapter 1, page 245

²³⁵ *ibid*, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 2, Chapter 22, page 782

- “Moreover, in the Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle Clement also, drawing a picture of the Gnostic, says...”²³⁶

COMMENT: Clement of Alexandria quoted Clement of Rome’s epistle to the Corinthians (written about 100 AD). In this quote Clement of Rome is called an *apostle*. Clement of Rome was a disciple of Peter and Paul and describes them as those whom we should imitate. Most consider Clement of Rome to be the Clement in Philippians 4:3. Here is the first example of a biblical person’s being labeled, *apostle*, whereas the New Testament does not give him that label. Many in the early church had great respect for Clement of Rome because of his intimate contact with the apostles. Some considered his letter to the Corinthians to be Scripture.

Tertullian

Tertullian wrote his most famous works about 200 AD. He was a native of Carthage and lived a licentious life until his 30th or 40th year, at which time he became a Christian. Tertullian was a lawyer. He was the first writer of importance in the Church to write in Latin. Before Tertullian, all of the great writers and thinkers wrote in Greek. Tertullian did everything to extreme, blasting the worldliness of the Roman Church and its growing casualness. He was a strong opponent of heresy and wrote some of the most telling documents against the heresies of his day.

- “For apostles have the Holy Spirit properly, who have Him fully, in the operations of prophecy, and the efficacy of (healing) virtues, and the evidences of tongues; not partially, as all others have. Thus he attached the Holy Spirit’s authority to that form (of advice) to which he willed us rather to attend; and forthwith it became not an *advice* of the Holy Spirit, but, in consideration of His majesty, a *precept*.”²³⁷

COMMENT: Tertullian declared that apostles have authority to impart *precepts* of God, not *advice*. For one to be an apostle, he had to have all of the operations of the Holy Spirit.

- “There is, however, a certain man named Nigidius, and Hermogenes, and several others, who still pursue the course of perverting the ways of the Lord....Let them prove themselves to be new apostles! Let them maintain that Christ has come down a second time, taught in person a second time, has been twice crucified, twice dead, twice raised! For thus has the apostle described (the order of events in the life of Christ); for thus, too, is He accustomed to make His apostles — to give them, (that is), power besides of working the same miracles which He worked Himself. I would therefore have their mighty deeds also brought forward; except that I allow their mightiest deed to be that by which they perversely vie with the apostles. For whilst they used to raise men to life from the dead, these consign men to death from their living state.”²³⁸

²³⁶ *ibid*, Volume II, Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book 4 Chapter 17, page 855

²³⁷ *ibid*, Volume IV Tertullian, *On Exhortation to Chastity*, Chapter 4, page 106

²³⁸ *ibid*, Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics*, Section One, Chapter 30, page 465

COMMENT: Tertullian set the standards for being an apostle, i.e., they had to be taught by the incarnate Son of God, in person; witnessed the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection; the power to work the same miracles that Christ worked. Any who claimed to be an apostle without meeting these conditions was a false apostle.

- “But if there be any (heresies) which are bold enough to plant themselves in the midst of the apostolic age, that they may thereby seem to have been handed down by the apostles, because they existed in the time of the apostles, we can say: Let them produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that [that first bishop of theirs] shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men, — a man, moreover, who continued steadfast with the apostles. For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers: as the church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John; as also the church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter. In exactly the same way the other churches likewise exhibit (their several worthies), whom, as having been appointed to their episcopal places by apostles, they regard as transmitters of the apostolic seed. Let the heretics contrive something of the same kind. For after their blasphemy, what is there that is unlawful for them [to attempt]? But should they even effect the contrivance, they will not advance a step. For their very doctrine, after comparison with that of the apostles, will declare, by its own diversity and contrariety, that it had for its author neither an apostle nor an apostolic man;... To this test, therefore will they be submitted for proof by those churches, who, although they derive not their founder from apostles or apostolic men (as being of much later date, for they are in fact being founded daily), yet, since they agree in the same faith, they are accounted as not less apostolic because they are akin in doctrine. Then let all the heresies, when challenged to these two tests by our apostolic church, offer their proof of how they deem themselves to be apostolic.²³⁹

COMMENT: Tertullian declares that only doctrines taught by apostolic churches are acceptable. For a church to be apostolic, it must pass one of two tests: (1) the church must have been planted by an apostle, or (2) the church must teach what the apostolic churches teach. Again, we see the exaltation of the apostles, and no granting of that title to post-New Testament leaders.

- “Permanent still, therefore, stood faith in the Creator and in His Christ; manner of life and discipline alone fluctuated. Some disputed about eating idol sacrifices, others about the veiled dress of women, others again about marriage and divorce, and some even about the hope of the resurrection; but about God no one disputed. Now, if this question also had entered into dispute, surely it would be found in the apostle, and that too as a great and vital point. No doubt, after the time of the apostles, the truth respecting the belief of God suffered corruption, but it is

²³⁹ Ibid, Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics*, Section One, Chapter 32, pages 466-467

equally certain that during the life of the apostles their teaching on this great article did not suffer at all; so that no other teaching will have the right of being received as apostolic than that which is at the present day proclaimed in the churches of apostolic foundation. You will, however, find no church of apostolic origin but such as reposes its Christian faith in the Creator. But if the churches shall prove to have been corrupt from the beginning, where shall the pure ones be found? Will it be amongst the adversaries of the Creator? Show us, then, one of your churches, tracing its descent from an apostle, and you will have gained the day.²⁴⁰

COMMENT: Tertullian, arguing against Marcion concerning the identity of the Creator and the humanity of Christ, once again argued for apostolic succession. Marcion rejected all of the New Testament, except those books written by Paul. Tertullian argued that Paul's doctrine is consistent with that of the other apostles. Again, the role of the apostles is protected in its uniqueness.

- “Luke, however, was not an apostle, but only an apostolic man; not a master, but a disciple, and so inferior to a master — at least as far subsequent to him as the apostle whom he followed (and that, no doubt, was Paul) was subsequent to the others...”²⁴¹

COMMENT: Tertullian is careful to distinguish between an “apostolic man,” and an “apostle.” Once again, he reserves the title for those whom Scripture labels as *apostle*.

- “The form of it which He uses — ‘He that despiseth you, despiseth me’ — the Creator had also addressed to Moses: ‘Not against thee have they murmured, but against me.’ Moses, indeed, was as much an apostle as the apostles were prophets. The authority of both offices will have to be equally divided, as it proceeds from one and the same Lord, (the God) of apostles and prophets.”²⁴²

COMMENT: Here, the title, *apostle*, is bestowed on Moses because, Tertullian reasoned, God said to both Moses and the apostles that those who despised them (or murmured against him/them) despised (murmured against) God. Here is an example of a biblical person's being labeled an *apostle*, whom the Bible does not so label. However, this still is not giving the title to a post-biblical person.

- “To these considerations is added the fact that Enoch possesses a testimony in the Apostle Jude.”²⁴³

COMMENT: Here is another example of giving the label, *apostle*, to a biblical person who is not so labeled in the New Testament. Jude, the half-brother of Jesus and author of the Epistle of

²⁴⁰ *ibid*, Tertullian, *Five Books Against Marcion*, Book One, Chapter 21, page 518

²⁴¹ *ibid*, Book 4, Chapter 2, page 627

²⁴² *ibid*, Book 4, Chapter 24, page 697

²⁴³ *Ibid*, Volume IV, Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Woman*, Book One, Chapter 3, page 29

Jude, was given that title by Tertullian. Once again, however, the title is reserved for prominent New Testament figures.

Origen

In 203 AD, when Origen was only 18 years of age, he was appointed as president of the catechetical school in Alexandria. Not long afterwards, he wrote *De Principiis*, four books on the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. He is regarded as the most influential thinker of the early church, even though some of his speculative doctrines did prove divisive.

- “Let us touch briefly upon the Acts of the Apostles, where Stephen and the other apostles address their prayers to that God who made heaven and earth...”²⁴⁴
- “And in the first place, in the book of Genesis, the serpent is described as having seduced Eve; regarding whom, in the work entitled *The Ascension of Moses* (a little treatise, of which the Apostle Jude makes mention in his Epistle)...²⁴⁵

COMMENT: Origen, like Tertullian, ascribes the title, *apostle*, to Jesus’ half-brother Jude, the author of the Epistle of Jude, but he also gives the label to Stephen. The New Testament does not bestow that title on either of these.

Pamphilus

Pamphilus was an elder in the church in Palestinian Caesarea. In course of the persecutions of Diocletian he was thrown into prison by Urbanus, the governor of Palestine. This took place towards the end of the year 307 A.D., and his confinement lasted till the beginning of the year 309, when he suffered martyrdom by order of Firmilianus, who had succeeded Urbanus in the governorship of the country. During his imprisonment he gave himself to copying the works of various church fathers. He also is the probable author of *An Exposition of the Character of the Apostles*, from which the following quote is taken.²⁴⁶

- “Of the persecution of the Church and the burial of Stephen; also * of the healing of many in Samaria by Philip the apostle.”²⁴⁷

COMMENT: In the New Testament Philip is a deacon in the Jerusalem Church, and later an evangelist on the Palestinian coastline. The New Testament does not label him an *apostle*. This is another example of a prominent biblical character’s being given the title, *apostle*, by a post-New Testament writer.

Archelaeus

²⁴⁴ *ibid*, Origen, *De Principiis*, Book 2, Chapter 4, Section 2, page 531

²⁴⁵ *ibid*, Origen, *De Principiis*, Book 3, Chapter 2, Section 1, page 630

²⁴⁶ Some scholars ascribe it to Euthalius, bishop of Sulce.

²⁴⁷ *ibid*, Volume 6, Pamphilus, *An exposition of the Character of the Apostles*, Chapter I, page 314

Manichaeism plagued the church toward the close of the Third Century. One of the proponents of this heresy was Manes. In a public debate, Manes faced Diodorus, and seemed to be getting the better part of the debate. Suddenly, Archelaus arrived and took over the orthodox side of the debate. Manes was disgraced in the debate with Archelaus. This dispute took place between July and December 277 AD.

- “But when Manes caught sight of Archelaus, he at once drew back from his insulting attitude; and with his pride cast down not a little, he made it quite plain that he would gladly flee from the contest. The multitude of hearers, however, looked upon the arrival of Archelaus as something like the advent of an apostle, because he had shown himself so thoroughly furnished, and so prompt and ready for a defense of the truth by speech. Accordingly, after demanding silence from the people by a wave of his right hand...”²⁴⁸

COMMENT: Archelaus’ arrival was, “something like the advent of an apostle.” However, the label, *apostle*, is not bestowed upon Archelaus, in spite of his authority and commanding presence.

The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (The Didache)

This document appears to be a compilation of earlier documents. Some portions definitely reflect more mature development than others. The compilation probably was completed no later than 120 AD. Neither the place of the compilation nor the name of the compiler is known. Professor M. B. Riddle, D.D., who edited the *Didache* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, makes this comment, “[I am] of the opinion that the work represents, on many of these points, only a very small fraction of the Christians during the second century, and that, while it casts some light upon usages of the period, it cannot be regarded as an authoritative witness concerning the universal faith and practice of believers at the date usually assigned to it.”²⁴⁹

Chapters I-VI set forth the duty of the Christian; Chapters VII – X, and XIV contain a directory for worship; Chapters XI – XIII, and XV give advice respecting church officers, extraordinary and local, and the reception of Christians; Chapter XVI enjoins watchfulness in view of the coming of Christ, which is then described. It purports to be Christ’s instructions to the Church, conveyed by the Apostles. Truth is, it is a compilation of documents whose authors are unknown. Neither is the identity of the compiler known.

- “But concerning the apostles and prophets, according to the decree of the Gospel, thus do. Let every apostle that cometh to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goeth away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodgeth; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ *ibid*, Archelaus, *The Acts of the Disputation with the Heresiarch Manes*, Section 46, page 408

²⁴⁹ *ibid*, Volume 7, Professor M.B. Riddle D.D., *The Teaching of the Apostles*, Introductory Notice, Section 5, page 756

²⁵⁰ *ibid*, Volume 7, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, Chapter 11, page 757

COMMENT: This is the first document to allow the possibility of the existence of post-New Testament *apostles*. One factor to consider is that this document claims to be the teaching of Jesus Christ given through the Twelve apostles (which it isn't). That means that it supposedly represents standards that prevailed in the lifetime of the Twelve Apostles. If that is true, does it follow that this possibility continued after the death of the Twelve?

Constitutions Of The Holy Apostles

Concerning this document, Philip Schaff writes, “[it is] the most complete and important Church Manual. It is, in form, a literary fiction, professing to be a bequest of all the apostles, handed down through the Roman bishop Clement, or dictated to him... It contains, in eight books, a collection of moral exhortations, church laws and usages, and liturgical formularies, which had gradually arisen in the various churches from the close of the first century, the time of Roman Clement, downward, particularly in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome, partly on the authority of apostolic practice. These were first orally transmitted; then committed to writing in different versions, like the creeds; and finally, brought, by some unknown hand, to their present form.”²⁵¹ Most scholars believe the compilation to have been completed before 325 AD, although some would assign it to a slightly later date.

- “For when Philip our fellow-apostle, by the gift of the Lord and the energy of His Spirit, performed the miracles of healing in Samaria...”²⁵²

COMMENT: This is another case of a prominent New Testament individual's being given the title, *apostle*, even though the New Testament does not give him that title.

- “The Divine Liturgy Of The Holy Apostle And Evangelist Mark, The Disciple Of The Holy Peter.”²⁵³

COMMENT: This section of the *Constitutions* contains several ancient liturgies. This particular liturgy supposedly was composed by Mark, and assigns to him the title, *apostle*. This is another instance of a prominent New Testament person's being given this title, whereas the New Testament does not do so.

Hippolytus

Hippolytus was a disciple of Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John. He served the Church in Rome and was martyred by drowning. He died c250 AD. Hippolytus wrote strongly against many heresies that arose in the Roman Church. In order to remove ambiguity about the identity of the apostles, he lists them.

²⁵¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 2, (Peabody, MA, Hendrickson Publishers, first printing July 1996) page 185

²⁵² *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 7, *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Book Six, Section II, paragraph vii, page 899

²⁵³ *ibid*, *Early Liturgies*, page 1087

- First he gives information on the thirteen (the Twelve and Paul), where each of them preached and where each of them died.
 1. Peter preached the Gospel in Pontus, and Galatia, and Cappadocia, and Betania, and Italy, and Asia, and was afterwards crucified by Nero in Rome with his head downward, as he had himself desired to suffer in that manner.
 2. Andrew preached to the Scythians and Thracians, and was crucified, suspended on an olive tree, at Patrae, *a town* of Achaia; and there too he was buried.
 3. John, again, in Asia, was banished by Domitian the king to the isle of Patmos, in which also he wrote his Gospel and saw the apocalyptic vision; and in Trajan's time he fell asleep at Ephesus, where his remains were sought for, but could not be found.
 4. James, his brother, when preaching in Judea, was cut off with the sword by Herod the tetrarch, and was buried there.
 5. Philip preached in Phrygia, and was crucified in Hierapolis with his head downward in the time of Domitian, and was buried there.
 6. Bartholomew, again, preached to the Indians, to whom he also gave the Gospel according to Matthew, and was crucified with his head downward, and was buried in Allatum, a town of the great Armenia.
 7. And Matthew wrote the Gospel in the Hebrew tongue, and published it at Jerusalem, and fell asleep at Hieres, a town of Parthia.
 8. And Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Hyrcanians, Bactrians, and Margians, and was thrust through in the four members of his body with a pine spear at Calamene, the city of India, and was buried there.
 9. And James the son of Alphaeus, when preaching in Jerusalem, was stoned to death by the Jews, and was buried there beside the temple.
 10. Jude, who is also called Lebbaeus, preached to the people of Edessa, and to all Mesopotamia, and fell asleep at Berytus, and was buried there.
 11. Simon the Zealot, the son of Clopas, who is also called Jude, became bishop of Jerusalem after James the Just, and fell asleep and was buried there at the age of 120 years.
 12. And Matthias, who was one of the seventy, was numbered along with the eleven apostles, and preached in Jerusalem, and fell asleep and was buried there.
 13. And Paul entered into the apostleship a year after the assumption of Christ; and beginning at Jerusalem, he advanced as far as Illyricum, and Italy, and Spain, preaching the Gospel for thirty-five years. And in the time of Nero he was beheaded at Rome, and was buried there.²⁵⁴
- Next, he lists the Seventy whom Jesus sent out, as recorded in Luke 10. In the New Testament, none of the Seventy are identified. The list that Hippolytus gives reflects a tradition, concerning the identity of the Seventy.

²⁵⁴ *ibid* Volume V, Hippolytus, "On The Twelve Apostles" page 527-528

Hippolytus' list of the Seventy

1. James the Lord's brother, bishop of Jerusalem.
2. Cleopas, bishop of Jerusalem.
3. Matthias, who supplied the vacant place in the number of the twelve apostles.
4. Thaddeus, who conveyed the epistle to Augarus.
5. Ananias, who baptized Paul, and was bishop of Damascus.
6. Stephen, the first martyr.
7. Philip, who baptized the eunuch.
8. Prochorus, bishop of Nicomedia
9. Nicanor died when Stephen was martyred.
10. Timon, bishop of Bostra.
11. Parmenas, bishop of Soli.
12. Nicolaus, bishop of Samaria.
13. Barnabas, bishop of Milan.
14. Mark the evangelist, bishop of Alexandria.
15. Luke the evangelist.
16. Silas, bishop of Corinth.
17. Silvanus, bishop of Thessalonica.
18. Crisces (Crescens), bishop of Carchedon in Gaul.
19. Epaenetus, bishop of Carthage.
20. Andronicus, bishop of Pannonia.
21. Amplias, bishop of Odysus.
22. Urban, bishop of Macedonia.
23. Stachys, bishop of Byzantium.
24. Barnabas, bishop of Heraclea.
25. Phygelus, bishop of Ephesus
26. Hermogenes
27. Demas, who also became a priest of idols.
28. Apelles, bishop of Smyrna.
29. Aristobulus, bishop of Britain.
30. Narcissus, bishop of Athens.
31. Herodion, bishop of Tarsus.
32. Agabus the prophet.
33. Rufus, bishop of Thebes.
34. Asyncritus, bishop of Hyrcania.
35. Phlegon, bishop of Marathon.
36. Hermes, bishop of Dalmatia.
37. Patrobulus, bishop of Puteoli.
38. Hermas, bishop of Philippi.
39. Linus, bishop of Rome.
40. Caius, bishop of Ephesus.
41. Philologus, bishop of Sinope.
- 42, 43. Olympus and Rhodion were martyred in Rome.
44. Lucius, bishop of Laodicea in Syria.
45. Jason, bishop of Tarsus.
46. Sosipater, bishop of Iconium.
47. Tertius, bishop of Iconium.
48. Erastus, bishop of Panellas.
49. Quartus, bishop of Berytus.
50. Apollo, bishop of Caesarea.
51. Cephas.
52. Sosthenes, bishop of Colophonia.
53. Tychicus, bishop of Colophonia.
54. Epaphroditus, bishop of Andriace.
55. Caesar, bishop of Dyrrachium.
56. Mark, cousin to Barnabas, bishop of Apollonia.
57. Justus, bishop of Eleutheropolis.
58. Artemas, bishop of Lystra.
59. Clement, bishop of Sardinia.
60. Onesiphorus, bishop of Corone.
61. Tychicus, bishop of Chalcedon.
62. Carpus, bishop of Berytus in Thrace.
63. Evodus, bishop of Antioch.
64. Aristarchus, bishop of Apamea.
65. Mark, who is also John, bishop of Bibloupolis.
66. Zenas, bishop of Diospolis.
67. Philemon, bishop of Gaza.
- 68, 69. Aristarchus and Pudes.
70. Trophimus, who was martyred along with Paul.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ *ibid*, pages 529ff

COMMENT: By giving this list, Hippolytus is guarding the use of the term, *apostle*. Although in the list of the Seventy, he ascribes that title to some whom the New Testament does not give that title, calling the Seventy “apostles” is appropriate, since the Greek of Luke 10:1 uses the term, *apostello*, and could be rendered awkwardly, “He apostled them.”

Cyprian

Cyprian was baptized 245 or 246 and was martyred September 14, 258. He spoke strongly of apostolic succession, but he did not believe in the primacy of any episcopacy. Each church in each region had bishops who were successors to the apostles and the regional church government was equal to any other regional government.

- “For this, my brother, we especially both labor after, and ought to labor after, to be careful to maintain as much as we can the unity delivered by the Lord, and through His apostles to us their successors, and, as far as in us lies, to gather into the Church the dispersed and wandering sheep which the willful faction and heretical temptation of some is separating from their Mother;”²⁵⁶

COMMENT: Cyprian described the overseers of the churches as successors to the apostles, but he did not apply the title to himself or any other.

²⁵⁶ *ibid*, Volume V, Cyprian, *Epistle 41*, Section 3, page 661. He makes the same statement in *Epistle 74*, paragraph 16, page 813