



“What does the Bible say ?”

1. Where does the Bible talk about this ?
2. What is the context of each passage ?
(refer to the 7 basic questions of context)
3. How can I apply this to my life today ?

What & Who is an “apostle” ?

The word “apostle” (ἀπόστολος) is used 80 times in the New Testament. It is a composite word made of ἀπό (away) and στολος (stand) simply meaning “someone on a mission” or “missionary”. Its Hebrew Old Testament counterpart used 995 times would be (נשל) “one sent away for a purpose”.

In Mt10v2, Mk6v10, Lk6v13, 9v10, 11v49, 17v5, 22v14, 24v10, Ac1v2, 1v26, 2v37, 2v42, 43, 4v33, 35, 36, 37, 5v2, 12, 18, 29, 40, 6v6, 8v1, 14, 18, 9v27 & 11v1 the apostles were the ones the Lord chose to “go to the lost sheep of Israel” (Mt10v6 & 15v24) for ‘Mission Israel’. They were commanded “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans” (Mt10v5). The Lord Jesus Christ promised them “you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt19v28, Lk22v30 & Rev21v12-14). Since there are twelve tribes of Israel, that is why Peter recommended the appointment of a replacement for Judas (Ac1v15-26). It should be noted that this was BEFORE the church was begun and went to the nations of the world (cf Ac1v13 & 2v8) and when the first Christians went down to the street from the upper room. So the mission for these first 12 missionaries (the 12 apostles) was to Israel alone.

After Israel rejected Christ, at the end of the Gospels, He changed the commission to ‘Mission World’ (Mk16v15, Mt26v13, 28v19 & Lk22v35-36). Some of the disciples named apostles for ‘Mission Israel’ now became apostles for ‘Mission World’, but not all. It should be noted that only 11 participated in both mission according to Ac2v14. There is no mistake in the Bible. Matthias is never mentioned again in Acts after Acav26 where it concerned Hebrew Christians.

In Jn13v16 the Lord Jesus Christ defines what an apostle is. He is (1) lesser than his Master and (2) sent by a greater One. He does not say it is an office of the church, nor the gift of prophecy, nor limited to the early church age. He uses the term just as it was understood in His time and context.

In Ac13v1-4 we see the first sending away (ἀπολύω) of apostle to the world. It should be noted that the Holy Spirit of God sent them (Ac13v2 & 4). The church in Antioch joined God's plan. Consequently, both Paul AND Barnabas (neither one of them were among 'the twelve') were BOTH called apostle by the Holy Spirit of God who inspired the writing of Ac14v4 & 14). Others clearly called 'apostles' in the New Testament include Junias (Rm16v7), Apollos (1Cor4v6-9), James the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor15v7 & Ga1v19), Epaphroditus (Ph2v25) where 'messenger' IS the Greek word 'apostle', Silas & Timothy (1Th1v1 & 2v6)

It is sometimes claimed that 'apostles' had to have seen the Lord Jesus Christ, because Peter required it (Ac1v21) and Paul saw Christ (1Cor9v1), but what about Barnabas, Junias, Apollos, James, Epaphroditus, Silas and Timothy? Peter's requirement has been dealt with, because it was before the church was born and for a 12th apostle to rule over the tribes of Israel. Paul's proof of apostleship is a list of life's blessing, never mentioning having seen the Lord Jesus since the baptism of John. On the contrary, in the same context he declares what makes him able to be called an apostle (1Cor9v2). He clearly states that being a missionary is his seal of apostleship (cf also 2Cor11v5, 13, 12v11-12) and that God alone appointed him (Rm1v1, 1Cor1v1, 2Cor1v1, Ga1v1, Ep1v1, Col1v1, 1Tim1v1, 2v7, 2Tim1v1, 11).

So a church sending people to the mission field does not make them apostles. It is a spiritual gift from God, not a job, office or position of authority in the church (1Cor12v1, 11, 28-29 & Ep4v11). Men appoint deacons and elders in the local church (Ac14v23, 1Tim3 & Titus1v5), but only God appoints apostles (1Cor12v28) and shows who they are by the results they have (1Cor9v2).

Nowhere does the Bible say that the New Testament books were all written by or under 'apostolic authority'. Marc and Luke were NOT apostles. See notes on "What does the Bible say about Inspiration?"

Finally, the obvious conclusion is that, although the English word 'missionary' is not in our current translations, the word 'apostle' (ἀπόστολος) should have been translated 'missionary'. The **application for today** then is to recognize spiritually gifted Christians who the Holy Spirit of God is setting apart for missionary work (Ac13v1-3 & 14v26). The gift is defined as able to leave home, lead others to the Lord and disciple them. It is different from the gift of evangelist (εὐαγγελιστής) seen in Ac21v8, Eph4v11 & 2Tim4v5. This gifted person does not necessarily stay to make disciples and see a local church begin (cf Ac8v5-6, 26 & 39). Perhaps God has gifted you and is calling you to the mission field?