

APOSTLESHIP:

The Greek word, *apostolos* (apostle) is an Attic Greek word which was already 500 years old when used in the New Testament. First, it was used for the highest-ranking naval admiral in command of the Athenian fleet and the army. These men were chosen by a special council and were given absolute authority in time of war. This would be equivalent to the authority given to the twelve apostles sent to evangelize the unbelievers of Israel and to the twelve apostles commissioned in the Church Age for the primary function of evangelizing, establishing Churches and writing the New Testament Canon. Regarding its secondary meaning, the Athenian government would delegate authority to a person for the purpose of governing an Athenian colony. This new governor of the colony was called an *apostolos* as well. Paul, for example, delegated authority to many pioneer missionaries that they might have the necessary power to execute their responsibilities. Therefore, both uses of this word are found in the New Testament.

Who were the apostles to the Lost Sheep of Israel?

Jesus had approximately 5000 disciples at one point in his ministry. Out of these disciples only a small number would be promoted to the position of apostleship. Jesus realizing that he needed to promote some of his students to apostleship went up to a mountain and prayed all night regarding this matter. The next morning, he came down with a promotion list. Twelve disciples were promoted to the temporary rank of apostleship. It was temporary since they would hold this position until 30 A.D. when the Church Age would begin. As believers taught by Christ himself, their responsibility was to give the gospel to the “Lost Sheep of the House of Israel”.

“And it was at this time that he went off to the mountain to pray, and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When he returned, he called his disciples (approximately five thousand) to him and chose twelve from among them whom he named his apostles: Simon whom he also named

Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor” (Luke 6:12-16).

What was their responsibility? Jesus gave these twelve the authority and responsibility to evangelize the unbelievers of Israel (Matthew 10:5, 6) and to announce that the rule of the Messiah was coming nearer (Matthew 10:7). They were given the gifts of healing and miracles to identify themselves as the Lord’s apostles. (Their sensational gifts of healing and miracles were never designed to remove suffering. If so, they would have healed all and performed miracles to benefit all, but they didn’t.) These gifts of healing and miracles were designed to gain an audience and then to give those in the audience the gospel message.

Who were the apostles in the early church?

In the Church Age in order to become an apostle, one had to see the resurrected Christ. “One of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22). The resurrected Christ appeared to the eleven disciples, and to Paul conferring on them the permanent rank of apostleship in the Church Age.

“And that he appeared to Cephas (Peter) then to the twelve (the twelve is a title, actually there were only eleven). After that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now (still alive), but some have fallen asleep (died); Then he appeared to James (Lord’s half-brother), then to all the apostles (the eleven) and last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me (Paul) also” (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).

What was their responsibility? These twelve men had absolute power and authority to teach the spiritual life of the Church Age, to establish churches, to train men for the ministry and to write the New Testament

epistles (Also, a few others wrote who were closely associated with apostles). They had rank with absolute power to get the Church Age started.

As the Athenian Commander had absolute power over the Athenian Navy so the twelve apostles had absolute power over the Churches. To illustrate their power, Paul had the authority and power to turn a Christian over to Satan for the purpose of being tortured to death (1 Corinthians 5:1, 5).

Others were called apostles in the early church!

The second meaning of the Greek word *apostolos* was used for pioneer missionaries who were under the authority of the apostles. They had tremendous powers, but they were delegated powers. They were called apostles because *apostolos* is also used for a Greek who founded and governed a colony as we mentioned in the introduction. They did not possess the spiritual gift of apostle, but held such gifts as pastor-teacher, evangelism, prophets etc. Since Barnabas helped Paul on some of his missionary journeys, Paul delegated to him authority to function as a pioneer missionary.

“But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting out” (Acts 14:14).

ἀκούσαντες δὲ οἱ ἀπόστολοι Βαρναβᾶς καὶ Παῦλος, διαρρήξαντες τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν ἐξεπήδησαν εἰς τὸν ὄχλον, κρᾶζοντες

Also, Epaphras, Andronicus, Junias, Timothy, Silvanus were called pioneer missionaries (In the Greek: *apostolos*) just to mention a few.

“But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your spiritual ruler (in the Greek: *apostolos*), a minister to my needs” (Philippians 2:25).

Ἀναγκαῖον δὲ ἠγησάμην Ἐπαφρόδιτον τὸν ἀδελφὸν καὶ συνεργὸν καὶ συστρατιώτην μου, ὑμῶν δὲ ἀπόστολον καὶ λειτουργὸν τῆς χρείας μου, πέμψαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς,

“Pay my respects to Andronicus and Junias, my cousins, and fellow prisoners who are prominent among the missionaries (in the Greek: *apostolos*), who also have been in Christ before me” (Romans 16:7).

ἀσπάσασθε Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ Ἰουნიᾶν τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου καὶ συναιχμαλώτους μου, οἵτινές εἰσιν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, οἳ καὶ πρὸ ἐμοῦ γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ.

“Nor did we (Paul, Silvanus, Timothy) seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles (Paul, Silvanus and Timothy) of Christ we might have asserted our authority” (1 Thessalonians 2:6).

οὔτε ζητοῦντες ἐξ ἀνθρώπων δόξαν, οὔτε ἀφ’ ὑμῶν οὔτε ἀπ’ ἄλλων, δυνάμενοι ἐν βάρει εἶναι ὡς Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολοι.

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Based on the scholarly work of R.B. Thieme Jr.

I recommend downloading 'THIEME'S BIBLE DOCTRINE DICTIONARY' from this website: rbthieme.org