

## What does the term apostle mean? A Series on Apostleship: Part 1

### 1. How does the Old Testament use the term “apostle?” Use a Lexicon as a reference in your research.

This is a trick question, because the noun “apostle” is not found in the Old Testament! “Apostle” is derived from the Greek term “apostolos,” which, in its component parts, “apo” and “stello,” means “from” and “to send,” and can be understood today as “messenger.” In its earliest uses, “apostolos” was a maritime term that referred to a cargo ship or naval fleet that was sent out. Subsequently it was used in reference to people such as a commander of a naval fleet or a group of colonists.

The verb “apostello” meant “send away” or “send off,” and it conveyed the idea of a personal representative who has the power and authority of the one who sent him.

The Greek Old Testament (LXX) uses the Greek terms “apostellō” and its compound “exapostellō” about 700 times to express the Hebrew **verb** “šālah.” While this Hebrew verb describes “sending,” its emphasis is on “commissioning” and “empowering.” The Greek noun “apostolos” for apostle is not found in the LXX.

“Apostellō” is an authorization of the individual to fulfill a particular function or task.

With “apostellō” emphasizing the sending linked to a task, the focus of the passage is on the one who gave his authority to the one whom he sends.

During the time of Jesus, Rabbinical Judaism recognized the use of proxies, where a messenger served as the representative of the person(s) who commissioned him. This common legal Jewish institution was called the “šālīaḥ” and was exemplified by Rabbis who were sent to represent the Sanhedrin. The “šālīaḥ” was not for the purpose of evangelism, did not represent an office of the synagogue, but functioned as a commission of limited scope and duration and ended upon completion.

### 2. How does the New Testament use the term “apostle?” Use a Bible dictionary as a reference.

In contrast to the LXX, the **noun** “apostolos” appears frequently. The English term “apostle” comes from the Greek term “apostolos,” and in context of the New Testament, it essentially means “a special messenger of Jesus Christ.” It appears to be used in 3 ways:

#### 1. Apostle of God.

There is a singular and special use of this term in Hebrews 3:1 in reference to the function of Jesus Christ as God’s special Messenger.

#### 2. Apostles of Jesus Christ. There appear to be two groups here.

a) Apostles was used to refer to men that Jesus chose: the original eleven (Matt 10:2; Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2) and Matthias who replaced Judas (Acts 1:24-26). These men were in a class of their own as they have the privilege of judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29-30; Rev 21:14).

b) Men who personally met with the resurrected Jesus such as Paul (Acts 9:5-6; Rom 1:1; 11:13; 2 Cor 1:1) and Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14). James, the brother of Jesus, was not a Believer before the crucifixion (John 7:5), but saw the resurrected Lord (1 Cor 15:7) and was considered an apostle by Paul at a later date (Gal 1:19). Furthermore, after the resurrected Jesus sees the twelve apostles, 1 Corinthians 15:7 mentions, “then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles,” which suggests a wider group of apostles than the original twelve (1 Cor 15:5-7).

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3. Apostles of the church.

Apostle may be understood as a church authorized designation of a person that delivers charitable gifts to another church (2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25). There is some debate whether these passages refer to “apostolos” in the technical sense or simply a reference to a “messenger.”

Romans 16:7 is notable for its controversy of suggesting the possibility of a female apostle. Whereas Greek grammarians show that there is no grammatical and linguistic evidence to support this view, the evidence instead indicates that the passage is better understood as “Andronicus and Junia were not apostles, but were well known to the apostles.” A more technical discussion of this controversy can be seen in a study by Daniel Wallace: Junia Among the Apostles: The Double Identification Problem in Romans 16:7 (<http://bible.org/article/junia-among-apostles-double-identification-problem-romans-167>).

3. Who are the 12 apostles? Study Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16 and Acts 1:13. What do you observe?

<b>Matthew 10:2-4</b>	<b>Mark 3:16-19</b>	<b>Luke 6:14-16</b>	<b>Acts 1:13</b>
Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter
Andrew	James	Andrew	John
James	John	James	James
John	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James (of Alphaeus)	James (of Alphaeus)	James (of Alphaeus)	James (of Alphaeus)
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon (the Zealot)	Simon (the Zealot)
Simon (the Canaanite)	Simon (the Canaanite)	Judas (of James)	Judas (of James)
Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	----

Matthew and Mark have the name Thaddaeus while Luke, in his two lists (Luke 6 and Acts 1), has Judas (of James). Some think Judas may have been his original name and that it was changed later to Thaddaeus in order to avoid the stigma attached to the name Judas Iscariot.

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The “Canaanite” is a transliteration which probably represents an Aramaic word meaning “Zealous.”

All four lists begin with Simon Peter and end with Judas Iscariot except in Acts by which time Judas had already killed himself.

All four lists list the Twelve in groups of four. The first group is comprised of Peter, Andrew, James and John. The second group is comprised of Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew.

In all four lists, Peter’s name heads the first group, Philip heads the second group and James (of Alphaeus) heads the third group.

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).
2. Harris RL, Archer Jr GL, and Waltke BK., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Chicago: Moody Press, (1980).
3. Mounce MD, ed., *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Grand Rapids:
4. Radmacher ED, Allen RB, House HW, eds., *The Nelson Study Bible New King James Version*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher, (1997).

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