

Spiritual Gifts: Apostleship / Apostle and Prophecy / Prophet
A Series on Spiritual Gifts: Part 3

Apostleship / Apostle

In the two lists of spiritual gifts where apostle is mentioned, there is an apparent order of gifting, and apostles are designated as first.

And God has appointed in the church, first **apostles**, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. (1 Cor 12:28)

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

The Bible does not indicate when the gift of apostleship was bestowed; however, the position of apostle was well known among the apostles and understood to be men chosen by divine appointment and shared in Jesus' entire ministry from His baptism by John to the witness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:20-26).

It is on Pentecost that there is a manifest display of supernatural power promised by Jesus (Luke 24:49) with physical phenomena (Acts 2:1-4) and a bold grasp of the Scriptures by "uneducated and untrained men" (Acts 2:14-37, 40-47; 4:13-14, 19-20).

It is difficult to differentiate whether the twelve apostles are twelve men who received the spiritual gift of apostleship or if they are in a special class all by themselves. Revelations 21:14 seems to indicate that Jesus' chosen twelve (Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot) are a special class all by themselves. Thus to gain some insight into the gift of apostleship, it may be worthwhile to study the men the Bible identified as apostles outside of the Twelve: James, the half brother of Jesus (1 Cor 15:5-9; Gal 1:19), Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and Paul (Acts 14:14). Note: while it is possible that there were more apostles during the genesis of the church (1 Cor 15:5-7), only three were mentioned.

While James (1 Cor 15:7) and Paul (1 Cor 15:8) witnessed the resurrected Lord, it cannot be concluded with certainty if this was a prerequisite for the gift of apostleship. Barnabas is not specifically mentioned as a witness; however, he was very involved in the early Jerusalem church (Acts 4:36), and it is very possible that Barnabas witnessed the resurrected Lord. Aside from this, several observations can be made of these apostles:

The teaching of the apostles was authoritative and established doctrine (1 Thess 1:5). Their writings and letters were the words of God (1 Cor 14:37-38; 1 Thess 2:13; Gal 1:8-9), composed the New Testament and were foundational for establishing the church (Eph 2:20-21; 3:3-5). It is believed that an apostle of Christ was personally taught by the resurrected Christ as indicated by Paul (Gal 1:11-24; Luke 24:27, 45; Acts 1:3).

James, overseeing pastor of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13-21), wrote one book of the New Testament: James.

Barnabas did not author a New Testament book; however, he was held in high regard (Acts 14:12 suggests slightly more than Paul) and was an effective teacher (Acts 11:22-26).

Paul wrote thirteen books of the New Testament: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Scholars debate whether Paul also authored Hebrews.

The gift of apostleship included the ability of performing miracles to validate their apostleship and testimony of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:6-12; 14:8-12; 16:16-19, 25-33; 19:11-17; 20:9-12; 2 Cor 12:12).

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The gift of apostleship established their authority to organize the local churches (Acts 11:19-26), set standards for leadership (1 Tim 3:1-13) and appoint their leaders (Acts 14:23; Tit 1:5-9).

The authority included instruction on faith and practice (Acts 15:29; 1 Cor 4:17; 2 Thess 2:15).

The authority over churches included administering discipline (1 Tim 1:20; 1 Cor 4:21; 2 Cor 13:2).

The gift of apostleship instilled a love and passion for people in the service of God despite the risk of personal safety (Acts 20:18-21).

In many ways, those with the gift of apostleship were similar to the Old Testament prophet in function and authority (Ex 4:1-17; Deut 18:18-20).

Paul suggests that, "as the last of the apostles," there were no more apostles of Christ after him (1 Cor 4:9; 15:8-11). It would seem that the gift of apostleship is no longer bestowed and with it no further addition to the New Testament canon.

Prophecy / Prophets

The Greek verb "prophēteia" is translated as "prophecy" and has the primary meaning of "to proclaim openly" or "to state aloud" in the context of some external influence which may or may not be divine (Luke 22:64; John 4:17-19; Tit 1:10-12). In other words, the prophet is declaring something that is not his own, and it could include saying something about the future. The meaning of "to predict" developed much later well after the first century A.D. "Foretelling future events" was usually associated with "soothsaying" which is translated from a different Greek term.

Paul presents the spiritual gift as a function using the Greek verb "prophēteia" or as a person using the Greek noun "prophētēs":

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy (**prophēteia**), according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom 12:6-8)

And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets (**prophētēs**), third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets (**prophētēs**), are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? (1 Cor 12:28-29)

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

In the Old Testament, Moses desired that the nation of Israel would be prophets where the Holy Spirit empowered all of God's people:

But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" (Num 11:29)

In the Old Testament, the noun "prophet" arises from the Hebrew term "nābī" which is largely used for "one who speaks on behalf of Yahweh." When an Old Testament prophet said "Thus says the Lord," his very words were the words of God (Deut 18:18-20; Jer 1:9; Ezek 2:7; Acts 3:18-25).

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When the Holy Spirit came upon the Old Testament prophet, he proclaimed God's word, exhorted, comforted, taught and provided counsel to the nation of Israel. Old Testament prophets did foretell the future the most significant of which were predictions that Jesus Christ would fulfill and validate His deity.

The New Testament prophet, in contrast, was not comparable to the Old Testament prophet whose function in the New Testament was provided by the apostles of God. However, prophets of the New Testament were held in high regard (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11), and Paul repeatedly mentioned this spiritual gift as desirable (1 Cor 14:1, 5, 39).

When examining those with the spiritual gift of prophecy in the New Testament, who were not apostles of God, several observations can be made:

New Testament prophets did not speak with divine authority equivalent to Scripture. Prophecy should be tested and weighed (1 Cor 14:29-32; 1 Thess 5:19-21). Thus while the prophecies may have errors in them, they are still relevant to the church.

While Old Testament prophets said, "thus said the LORD" (Ex 3:15; 5:1; 8:1, 20), New Testament prophets would indicate their prophetic source as the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-11).

New Testament prophets shared "revelations" (1 Cor 14:26-32), which meant that the prophets shared something in their own words that God brought to their mind. This can be understood within the context of Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) and guide to all truth and understanding (Eph 3:3-5). These "revelations" did not add to Scripture.

New Testament prophets may predict future events (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11) but with some inaccuracies.

A New Testament prophet's prophecy appears to be spontaneous and may serve as a sign to Believers (1 Cor 14:22).

New Testament prophets prophesy for the purposes of edification, exhortation and consolation (1 Cor 14:3; Acts 15:32).

Edification (Greek: oikodomēn) is the process of "building up" or "strengthening" through encouragement (exhortation) and comfort (consolation).

Encouragement (paraklēsin) with the sense of exhortation means to exert an influence upon the will and decisions of another with the object of guiding his behavior. It presupposes that the recipient has some previous knowledge.

Comfort (Greek: paramythian) means to empathize with an overtone of sentiment but with an emphasis on the word of God (Ps 119:50) as the means of comfort. This consolation gives strength to the faint hearted especially during this period of Christian persecution (first century).

With participation of the Holy Spirit, both encouragement and comfort are expressions of love, which Paul emphasizes as the basis of being like Christ (Phil 2:1).

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The Bible does not indicate explicitly whether the spiritual gift of prophecy continues today. In light of the above purpose of New Testament prophets, there is clarity to how apostles and prophets played an essential role in forming the foundation of the church with Jesus Christ as its cornerstone (Luke 11:49; Eph 2:20).

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