

APOSTLE*

There is debate over whether the gift of apostle was given only to the twelve who were discipled by Jesus, or if it is still given to believers today.

In its most restricted and official usage, the following criteria must be met to qualify as an apostle:

- An apostle must have been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. *Acts 1:21-22*
- An apostle must have had a personal call from Christ. *Mark 3:14; John 20:21*
- An apostle must have witnessed the resurrection. *Acts 1:22*
- Apostles laid the doctrinal foundation of the church. Later century Christians admitted to the sacred canon only those writings they knew emanated from the apostolic circle, or from close associates, such as Mark, Luke, and James, the brother of Jesus. The test of New Testament canonicity was apostolicity. *John 14:26; 16:13*
- Apostles laid the structural foundation of the church. They opened the door for the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles, and the church was built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets. *Matthew 16:18,19; Acts 2:38-41; Acts 8:14-17; Acts 10:44-48; Ephesians 2:20*
- Apostles had power to work miracles. Many believe that when the apostles died, the sign gifts (tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles) diminished dramatically or disappeared. *Acts 2:43; 5:12; 8:18; II Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4*
- Apostles will one day sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Their names will be inscribed on the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem. *Luke 22:29-30; Revelation 21:14*

No one of a later generation can meet these specific qualifications. However, if the guidelines are broadened, an apostle would be one with the Spirit-given ability and authority to begin new churches. This would include bringing in new converts, teaching, ordering their structure or government, encouraging and discipling them. The apostle would eventually leave and establish (or minister to) another church, as opposed to one who would stay and pastor the church.

An apostle is similar to an evangelist, but focuses more on establishing churches than on saving individual souls. Missionaries would certainly fall into this category, as would those who stay within their own culture, but they would travel or move in order to help begin or nurture churches. Many denominations have within their structure the office of the apostle (without calling it that). This is one who looks for locations where a church could be established, trains leadership and helps get the church on its feet.

* This gift is not included in the "Finding Your Spiritual Gifts" quiz.

Scriptural basis for a broader definition of the gift of apostle:

- Others, beside the twelve, were called apostles. Barnabas (*Acts 14:4,14*), James, the Lord's brother (*Galatians 1:19*), Silas, or Silvanus and Timothy (*I Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6*), Andronicus and Junia (*Romans 16:7*), and most notably, Paul. (*Romans 1:1; I Corinthians 9:1-5*)
- Paul does not claim to be one of the twelve, but he does claim to be an apostle in the sense that he was a missionary, and as such founded the church at Corinth. *I Corinthians 9:1-5*
- In New Testament and other early church literature, the word "apostle" is used in both the narrow and the wider sense.

CAUTIONS

1. Misusing authority. An apostle has an unusual degree of authority as the founder or leader of a new or struggling church, and it can be a real temptation to become authoritative instead of maintaining a servant's attitude.
2. An apostle can become a controlling presence rather than one who is a pleasure to work with. Unwilling to relinquish control of a congregation when it begins to mature, wanting instead to continue making decisions when the church should be making its own decisions under the leading of the Holy Spirit.
3. Becoming discouraged on the mission field. It may seem that everyone back home has forgotten about them, or no longer supports their ministry. Financial pressure can be extremely stressful, resulting in missionaries trying to make ends meet instead of concentrating on ministry.
4. Participating in dissension among fellow missionaries. Missionaries can disagree about priorities, methods, doctrine, and a host of other things in ways that do not honor Christ.