

# How Many Apostles Were There?

*Some people believe there can be no apostles except for the original 12. Others believe all ministers and even deacons can be classed as apostles. What does the Bible say about apostleship?*

By Leroy Neff

**W**hat does the Bible reveal about the office of an apostle in the Church of God? How many apostles are listed in the New Testament? What does apostleship have to do with the Church today?

The word *apostle* comes from a Greek term that literally means *one sent forth*. Some authorities explain that it means *one commissioned*. Others define it as *one sent with a special message or commission*.

This word was also used in the Greek-speaking world in reference to people who were not of apostolic office in God's Church. A person who was sent by another person or group might be referred to as an apostle. It is important to know *who* does the sending, and therefore the power vested in the individual sent forth.

How many apostles were mentioned in the New Testament? You may be surprised when you see the complete answer.

Surely everyone will agree that there were 12 original apostles. They are mentioned by name in several places including Acts, the first chapter. Because one of those apostles, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Christ and later hanged himself (Matt. 27:5), it became necessary to select a replacement. The Acts account states that Matthias was the one selected by God (Acts 1:26) to replace Judas. The list of named apostles of Christ now totaled 13 in the New Testament.

## **James, the Lord's brother**

In the 12th chapter of Acts, we learn that James, the son of Zebedee,

one of the original apostles, was killed by King Herod (verse 2). There was another James among the original 12, the son of Alphaeus, who apparently is not mentioned after Acts 1:13.

Continuing in the 12th chapter of Acts, we learn from verse 17 that after James was killed, another James remained. In this place Peter said, "Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren."

Who was this James? He is referred to in several other places. He played a prominent part in the Jerusalem conference of Acts 15 and is mentioned again in I Corinthians 15:7. Who this other James was is explained in Galatians 1:19, "But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother." This James, who was a half brother of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, is in this place called an apostle. This brings the number to 14 named apostles.

This James is mentioned again in Galatians 2:9, "And when James, Cephas [Peter], and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go to the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." This James, called "James the Just," had a prominent part in the early Church.

## **Other apostles named**

The next apostles named in Acts are mentioned in chapter 14. Note verse 4, "But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the *apostles*."

Who were these apostles? The previous chapter, verse 50, identifies them as Paul and Barnabas. This now brings our total to 16 named apostles. Lest there be any question about Paul and Barnabas, notice also Acts 14:14, "Which when the *apostles, Barnabas and Paul*, heard . . . they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out."

It is mentioned on many occasions that Paul was an apostle, but Barnabas' office is not quite as well known or as often referred to. If you think that there are no other apostles mentioned in the New Testament, get set for some more surprises.

The next apostle is referred to in I Corinthians 9:5. Here Paul refers to "other apostles, and as the *brethren* of the Lord, and Cephas [Peter]?"

It is obvious from this statement that more than one brother of the Lord was an apostle. The book of Jude was written by the brother of James. He was also the half brother of Jesus Christ, so it would seem that at least Jude is included in this statement. Conceivably, the other brothers Joses and Simon could have been included. Notice Matthew 13:55:

"Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?" As nothing of importance is mentioned about Joses and Simon elsewhere in Acts or the epistles, they probably were not apostles.

Some claim that those called apostles must have seen Christ. But there is no indication in the Scriptures that Barnabas saw Jesus. Likewise, the

Bible nowhere states any such requirement of an apostle of Jesus.

Others have claimed that it was necessary that an apostle be with Christ and be a witness to His resurrection. The Scriptures do not indicate that the apostles Paul and Barnabas were witnesses of His resurrection.

It has also been said that apostles must all work great miracles. But there is no record of Jude or James and possibly some of the others working such miracles.

### The highest office mentioned

God has set the office of apostle ahead of all other Church offices (I Cor. 12:28). We learn from Ephesians 4 that apostleship, along with other ministerial offices, is a gift of God to carry on His Work and to bring the Church to perfection.

We have now seen evidence of at least 17 apostles from the New Testament. But the greatest apostle of all time has still not been named. Notice: "consider the *Apostle* and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3:1).

Yes, Jesus Christ, our High Priest, is also an *apostle*. He is one sent from God. He carried a commission that He fulfilled in a glorious way. Jesus Christ, then, is the 18th apostle named in the New Testament.

Depending on what was meant by the original writers, four other possible apostles are mentioned. In each case, it seems more likely that the Scriptures do not actually mean that these people were apostles.

Compare I Thessalonians 2:6 with I Thessalonians 1:1. These scriptures refer to Silas (Silvanos) and Timothy as possible apostles. However, elsewhere we read that Timothy was an evangelist (II Tim. 4:5).

Another scripture that some think implies apostleship is Romans 16:7, which refers to Andronicus and Junia. Possibly Junia was the wife of Andronicus, which would mean the text here is not implying that they were apostles, but that they were *well known* by the apostles.

The Bible refers to other apostles who were sent not by Jesus Christ, but instead by the adversary Satan the devil: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of

Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (II Cor. 11:13-14). How many of these satanic apostles there were and are, we do not know.

But it should be clear that an apostle of Jesus Christ is in a totally different category from the false apostles sent by Satan and from other people commissioned by various individuals.

### An apostle for today

What has happened during the last 19 centuries? Have there been any other apostles? We have no historical record of any until this century. Quite possibly there have been apostles in God's Church down through the ages. But there seems to be no way of knowing until God's Kingdom is established on earth, and Jesus Christ Himself reveals that knowledge to us.

In I Corinthians, chapter 9, the apostle Paul shows the proof of his apostleship: "Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord" (I Cor. 9:1-2).

Just as proofs in the life of Paul set him forth as an apostle of Jesus Christ, in our time another has also been used by God in a powerful way. Through him, the Worldwide Church of God was established. Through him, the doctrines of God were restored to the Body of Christ. Through him, directly or indirectly, all of us in the Church have come to the knowledge of the truth, repentance and baptism. Through him, demons have been cast out and many have been healed — even of cancer. Isn't that the fruit, the seal of apostleship?

It is eminently clear, and has been for some time, that Jesus Christ and God the Father have specially sent forth Herbert W. Armstrong with a commission, and his fruits have shown that he is an apostle. For many years, Mr. Armstrong did not claim that he was fulfilling the office. Probably he did not need to, as the Church recognized him as an apostle whether or not he took that title. But in recent years, he has consistently said that he is an apostle. Some few people have resented this.

A few reject Mr. Armstrong as an apostle because they disagree with how he does things, or what he does. Such people probably would have the same criticism of Abraham, Moses, David or any other biblical personality if any of these men were alive and in charge of God's Work today.

### Who is preparing the way?

Note that Malachi 3:1 says, "Behold, I will send." An apostle is *one sent*. Mr. Armstrong is fulfilling this passage, and thus even this Old Testament verse shows that he is an apostle — "one sent forth." God says that before Christ's return, He would *send* someone.

Is this God's Church? If not, we had better find where it is and go there. If this then is the true Church of God, then who is in charge?

The Scriptures answer clearly and unmistakably that Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church (Col. 1:18). Christ is in and with His Church.

Therefore, if Jesus Christ is in charge, does He have power to direct the affairs of the Church the way He wants? Yes. He is in charge and has sent Mr. Armstrong to lead His Church, and thus the decision — and responsibility to judge — are not ours.

Here are the words of Jesus Christ, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (John 13:20).

Notice that Jesus is referring to the one that *He sends*. If we receive the one that He sends, His apostle, then we are receiving Jesus Christ and the Father. On the other hand, if we reject the one whom Christ has sent, we reject Christ.

This lesson is made clear in the Old Testament account of Samuel. After the people had rejected Samuel, God told him, "they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (I Sam. 8:7).

Rejecting one that the living Christ sends can be a fatal mistake!

As a Church, we need to get back of Mr. Armstrong and support him in carrying out this Work the way that Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, wants it done. □