

Paul: An Apostle

Today is the second lesson on Romans 1:1. The focus is on the word “apostle.” When I was a new Christian, I was taught that apostle referred to one of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ. But there are other men who are called “apostles.” So there were various explanations why they were called apostles. There didn’t seem to be a clear logical explanation. So I became confused. I found the answer to my confusion in the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT). The answer lies in who does the sending. But that is what this lesson is about.

Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

Last week, it was observed that Paul characterized his ministry in three ways: He identified his master (Jesus Christ), his office (apostle) and the purpose of his mission (the Gospel). Apostle is the second characterizations of his ministry.

I. His Master

This aspect of Paul’s introduction to Romans was covered last week. Slave of Christ Jesus.

II. His Office

A. Vocabulary Definition

What is an apostle?

The English word “apostle” is nothing more than the Greek word *αποστολλος* transliterated into English. In other words, we write the Greek word using English letters and apply English pronunciation and

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spelling rules. This does not help our understanding of the basic meaning and may even hinder attempts to understand the technical meaning of the word. On the other hand, it may help us by not channelizing our thoughts to a specific word for meaning. This is not unusual. Bible teachers do this with words like baptism.

The Greek word for “apostle” is derived from apo (from) and stellos (to send). Hence, the word means to send from. Webster says concerning the English word apostle:

“1. a person sent out on a special mission; specifically [usually A-], a disciple of Jesus commissioned to preach the gospel. Twelve persons were selected by Jesus for this purpose.” This is a compact definition but does not cover the spectrum of meanings. It is channelized toward the apostles of Jesus Christ. That was the confusion I ran into as a new believer. This word means more than just the twelve.

Unger’s Bible Dictionary similarly says:

“1. In General. One sent with a special mission or commission.”

These short definitions do not delve into the details and nuances of the word.

From the TDOT, apostello “...alone is a technical term for the sending of a messenger with a special task; the messenger himself does not have to be named. In other words, the emphasis rests on the fact of sending in conjunction with the one who sends, not on the one who is sent.¹”

The key is who is doing the sending. That is the person the apostle represents and that is who he is an apostle of. John the Baptist could be said to be an apostle of God the Father:

1 TDOT, Volume 1, Page 400

John 1:6 There came a man sent (apostello/perfect passive participle) from God, whose name was John.

John 1:7 He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him.

Jesus could be said to be an apostle of God the Father. In the Gospel of John, Jesus talks of the Father sending (apostello) Him.

John 5:36 But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent (apostello) Me.

John 5:37 And the Father who sent (pempo) Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form.

John 5:38 You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent (apostello).

There are two Greek words translated to send.

Herman has insight into the usage of the words apostello and pempo:

“This word (apostello) means to send emphasizing the relationship between the one doing the sending and those to whom they are sent.

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While the other word *pempo* emphasizes the relationship between the one doing the sending with the one being sent.²”

John likes to mix both words in a context to emphasize both aspects of sending.

The apostle is related to other words and concepts.

Sender: Person of higher rank than the one sent who has authority over the one sent who personally (face-to-face) sends the appointee. According to the TDNT, this is the most important aspect of the apostle. Who is doing the sending? This drives the meaning in any context. That is why there are different kinds of apostles. The difference is both in who does the sending and what the mission is. For Paul, Jesus Christ sent him.

Galatians 1:1 Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),

1 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

Appointee/Apostle: A man who is qualified to represent the sender.

Credentials: Since traveling from the sender to target audience is usually part of the concept of this word, there is a need of something that can attest that the holder of the credentials does in fact represent and is sent by the Sender.

² <https://www.springvalleybiblechurch.org/Audio/Matthew/notes/2015-03-15-Sunday.pdf>

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Authority: What power was given to the appointee by the sender for carrying out his commission.

Mission: The goal of the sending. The apostle is sent to do and accomplish something.

Communication: The one sent necessarily communicates to the target audience a message which is not his own, but that of the one that sent him.

Gift. For the 12 apostles (the eleven plus Paul) they had been bestowed the gift of apostleship by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Paul, in his great dissertation on spiritual gifts says:

1 Corinthians 12:28 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 Corinthians 12:29 All are not apostles, are they?

The concept of an apostle is included in a Hebrew word, *shalech*. The Septuagint translates this Hebrew noun as *apostello*.

When Abraham sent someone to get a wife for his son Isaac, all the elements of an apostle are on display even if the Hebrew word for apostle is not used. Let us read Genesis chapter 24.

Summary:

Sender: Abraham

Appointee/Apostle: Servant

Mission: Find a qualified bride for Isaac and bring her back to Canaan.

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Authority: Full authority of Abraham to negotiate for a qualified bride
Credentials: Although not explicitly stated, the various presents given to Rebekah and the servant's knowledge of Abraham attest that this servant had authority from Abraham. I suspect there was something that the servant gave or said that convinced the father of the bride-to-be that this servant was indeed sent from Abraham.

Another illustration in the New Testament using the verb apostello is found in Luke 4:16-21.

Luke 4:16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

Luke 4:17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent (apostello) Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed,

Luke 4:19 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

Luke 4:20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the

eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

Luke 4:21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus Christ is referred to multiple times as being sent (apostello) from the Father.

“Jesus Christ commissioned the twelve disciples who were called apostles in Luke chapter six to take the gospel to the house of Israel, and their message was: “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” There was no spiritual gift involved. They were called apostles but that is not the same as what we have after the day of Pentecost. Then there was Jesus Christ commissioning the twelve to go to the world, and this involved a spiritual gift that was given to them when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and the apostles had the spiritual gift of apostleship, and it is a church age ministry. So there was an apostleship of Jesus in the time during the incarnation that is related to the house of Israel but it is not a spiritual gift, it is not a church age ministry at all, and then there is the church age ministry that began on the day of Pentecost that is related to this mission to the world. Then the third way in which the term is used and applied is to Barnabas and a number of other leaders in the early church who were not commissioned by the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ but were commissioned by a local church and are sent out as missionaries. So that is a lower case apostleship, it doesn’t involve a spiritual gift of apostleship—though it may involve a spiritual gift of teaching or evangelism.³”

3 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/message/2010-romans-003b/read>

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“There are three things in Scripture that are requirements for someone to be an apostle (of Jesus Christ in the Church Age). First, it was a gift that was given by the Holy Spirit. They were appointed by Christ, Ephesians 4:11-12 “And He gave some {as} apostles, and some {as} prophets, and some {as} evangelists, and some {as} pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” This clearly emphasizes that it is Jesus who appointed the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists and the pastors and teachers. He does the gifting by the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 12:8-11. Second, an apostle needed to be an eyewitness of the resurrection or have seen the resurrected Christ, and commissioned by Him—1 Corinthians 15:8-9; Acts 1:22. Third, the apostleship was evidenced by an enduement by miraculous power, 2 Corinthians 12:12.⁴”

B. Types of Apostles

Having stated that an apostle is determined by who does the sending, it is then possible to look at the New Testament and identify the twelve and separate them from the other kinds of apostles.

1. **Apostles to the house of Israel.** Prior to the start of the Church Age, there were two sets of apostles appointed by Jesus Christ one set prior to the cross and another starting at Pentecost.

First are the apostles in Luke chapter 6/Matthew chapter 10. They are appointed in the Dispensation of the Law, the Old Testament.

The twelve included Judas Iscariot.

The twelve were directed to the House of Israel ONLY.

Matthew 10:5 These twelve Jesus sent out (apostello) after instructing them: “Do not go in

4 <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/message/2010-romans-003b/read>

the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans;

Matthew 10:6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matthew 10:7 And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

2. **Apostles to the "Nations."** After the resurrection, Jesus sends (apostello) the eleven on the "great commission."

Matthew 28:16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.

Matthew 28:17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations (the Greek word is sometimes translated as "Gentiles" as in Matthew 10:5), baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

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3. **Matthias.** In my opinion, strictly speaking, Matthias was not an apostle. He was not appointed by Jesus Christ. He was appointed by Peter/the eleven by lot. My view is that he was a “placeholder” until Paul was appointed by Jesus Christ face-to-face on the Damascus road. God did not need a placeholder. But men, Peter in particular, felt driven to replace the unbeliever Judas with someone. Judas was a zero spiritually, a placeholder. It also gave Satan an inside view of Jesus’ operation as part of the appeal trial of Satan. Judas was needed as a witness for the furtherance of the appeal trial of Satan.

This reminds me of the need for a king in Israel. God was the king. But men had difficulty obeying a king they could not see. So God gave them a king. Saul. In a sense, he was a placeholder for David. But that is a story for another day.

4. **Barnabas.** Acts 14:14

Acts 14:14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out

I have a suggested explanation of why Barnabas is called an apostle here. They are being sent by the command of the Holy Spirit on Paul’s first missionary journey. It is God the Holy Spirit that is doing the sending in the spiritual realm but they are sent physically from the church at Antioch.

Acts 13:1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Acts 13:2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Acts 13:3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

They sent them. “They” is not overtly identified, but the implication is that the authorities in the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas. So, they were apostles, ones sent, from the Antioch church.

4. James, the Lord’s half-brother. 1Corinthians 15:7 Galatians 1:19

Galatians 1:19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.

Robby Dean says this about this verse: “James was not one of the eleven and was not an apostle. He was the leader of the local church in Jerusalem and was never an apostle in the broader sense of the term that we have been talking about as one given the spiritual gift of apostle who exercised authority over a plurality of congregations. James was the pastor of the local congregation there and is also the author of the epistle of James.⁵”

1 Corinthians 15:6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep;

⁵ <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/galatians-menuitem/message/1998-galatians-009/read>

1 Corinthians 15:7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;

I don't see this as calling James an apostle. I suspect that those who are intimately associated with the twelve apostles (the eleven plus Paul) are considered apostles of the apostles. They were not "apostled" by Jesus nor do they have the gift of apostleship from the Holy Spirit, but have been tasked by the apostles. The tasks of the twelve was to found churches, proclaim the gospel and write the New Testament. As such, James was tasked to write his letter under the authority of the twelve.

6. Apollos. 1 Corinthian 4:6,9

Apollos was not one of the twelve apostles appointed by Jesus. But by his association with Paul, he was tasked by Paul and hence had authority to carry out apostolic missions.

7. Sylvanus and Timothy. 1Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6

As far as being an apostle, Paul met Jesus on the Damascus road. Not only that, but he likely saw Jesus face-to-face and was familiar with His teachings.

Called.

"The word translated "called" is KLETOS is one of two or three different ways Paul expresses this idea of being designated something by God. He is designated, given a commission as an apostle. That is what it means to be called to an apostle. At the point of salvation in Acts chapter eight when the resurrected, ascended, glorified Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Saul when he was going to Damascus to arrest a number of Christians, and said: "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" Those with him saw the light and heard the sound of the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. They didn't know what Jesus said because it wasn't any of their business. Paul

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was then ordered to go to Damascus where his sight would be restored and the Lord Jesus Christ at that point told him that he would be His messenger to the Gentiles. So the Lord Jesus Christ commissioned the apostle Paul for a specific task. That is the core meaning of this word APOSTOLOS. In the New Testament an APOSTOLOS is a man who is officially commissioned by an authorizing agent—Jesus Christ, a local church or someone else—and given the authority to perform a task. In the New Testament there are three different kinds of apostles and they are distinguished by three different categories: who commissioned them, what they were commissioned to do, and whether the commissioning involved a spiritual gift.⁶

In my opinion, in light of Old Testament history, let me suggest an additional perspective to this “calling.” In the Old Testament, prophets were “called” directly by God. One of my favorites, is the calling of Samuel. When God calls Samuel, the Septuagint (LXX) translates the Hebrew by a verb from the Greek work for call, “kaleo.”

If we have time, let us read 1 Samuel chapter 3.

⁶ <https://deanbible.org/new-testament-menuitem/romans-menuitem/message/2010-romans-003b/read>