

**A Review of Biblical Evidence for
Present Day Apostolic Ministry and
Authority**

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1 Introduction

“If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck and walks like a duck - then it is probably a duck.” – Old saying

It is now over 30 years since teaching on modern-day apostles began to emerge in the British charismatic movement, and, I daresay, in other parts of the world. However, the preponderance of literature, and the preponderance of apostles, surfacing in the last decade lends weight to the suggestion that modern apostleship has been gathering pace. Even outside the charismatic movement, figures have arisen whose influence on the wider church, beyond their own congregation, could easily be labelled “apostolic”, even if their theology hasn’t quite caught up with their ministry. On the other hand, there are also those whose theology permits them to call themselves “apostle” whether or not their ministry bears any resemblance to biblical apostleship.

A cursory flick through the New Testament indicates that, of all the ministries mentioned, apostleship is mentioned most often. Scripture has plenty to say, therefore, in relation to apostles. However, as the Bible is not designed to be a theology text-book, we must draw on a large number of Scriptural reference points to build a picture of apostleship.

2 Scope

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the interaction of apostles with churches, specifically in relation to authority. Fundamentally - who is in charge? And how should this work in practice?

The prime source of information will be the Bible, and I shall use the NIV as a starting point. However, on some of the more contentious verses, I will make reference to the Greek where necessary.

There is always a danger that we approach the Bible with a presumption about how things should work, and then try to make the Scriptural evidence fit our preconceptions. It is easy to espouse a basic principle, based on a couple of proof-texts, and then label any contrary evidence as obscure or exceptional. Often there is subjectivity in our choice of what is the "basic principle" and what is "exceptional". I am not immune to such tendencies, but I have attempted to draw as widely as possible from the New Testament in forming my conclusions. While it is reasonable to interpret the obscure in the light of the obvious, this doesn't justify us ignoring Scriptures that "don't fit" our models.

It is also important not to "go beyond what is written" and overstate the evidence, trying to force principles into patterns. I will try to avoid drawing sweeping conclusions where Scripture doesn't warrant it. As Rick Joyner says,

*"Like other great principles of the faith, when there is an attempt to overly define[apostleship], the essence of what it is intended to be is often lost."*¹

Obviously, our view of apostleship itself affects the conclusions we draw about apostolic authority. In order to understand apostolic authority, it is therefore necessary to answer the question, "What is an apostle?", which I shall endeavour to do.

However, a number of related issues are specifically excluded from the scope -

- (1) I will not be directly addressing the question of whether or not apostleship ceased with the end of the apostolic age, or the closing of the Canon. As you will expect, I believe the answer to those questions is "no", but there is plenty of discussion in many of the books in the bibliography that deal admirably with this issue, so I don't propose replicating it here.
- (2) I will not be addressing the question "Can a woman be an apostle?" since this question properly belongs in the wider debate on women in leadership, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

3 Defining the Term

3.1 The problem with apostles

*"Most people in church history who have claimed to be new apostles have been branded as heretics and excommunicated from the church"*²

There are two main problems with the subject of apostles. Firstly, the whole issue has often generated more heat than light over the years because of the foundational role of the original apostles in the formation of Scripture. This issue will be dealt with later.

The second problem is a conceptual one. For all the other ministries in the New Testament, it is possible to get a foothold simply from reading the term itself. At least on a shallow level, we can say that prophets will prophesy, teachers teach, evangelists evangelise and pastors shepherd people. There is no equivalent verb "to apostle." It is common knowledge that the simple translation of apostle is "sent one", but this doesn't initially tell us very much about the role itself.

There is also no obvious cultural reference point in the Old Testament for apostles.³ However, Jesus seems to begin calling his disciples "apostles" without any recorded

¹ Joyner, p121

² Vince Synan, quoted in Cannistraci, p77

³ Hamon comments that the Jews "were familiar with the ministry of the prophet as well as the priest, which is typical of the New Testament pastor; the Levite, which is typical of the New Testament evangelist; and the scribe, which is typical of the New Testament teacher. But no-one had heard of Apostles being ministers in the ministry of the Tabernacle." (p24)

Some of these links are a little tenuous, but the basic point is well made.

explanation of the term itself.⁴ Therefore, we must assume that the term "apostle" meant something to Peter and the others - but what, exactly?

All of this has created something of an air of mystery surrounding apostles, which has the unfortunate tendency of causing extreme reactions. As Cannistraci puts it -

*"The Body of Christ seems at times to deify apostles when we are not denying their existence"*⁵

It is important, therefore, that we try to slice through the mystique to find a balanced, biblical view. We will begin with the word itself.

3.2 Apostolos & Apostello

*Wanted: Apostle. Must have his own bicycle"*⁶

The translation of the Greek word *apostolos* is "one who is sent", i.e. a messenger. Kittel notes that the term was originally a nautical one, referring to a naval expedition, or even to a boat used for such purposes. The word commonly carried no specific sense of authorisation.

*"Material contacts between the NT apostolate and the Greek world are slight"*⁷

The Septuagint (LXX)⁸ in fact only uses the word once. On the other hand, the related verb, *apostello*, "to send", is used over 700 times, where there is regularly a sense of commissioning or authorisation. There is often a sense of "sending forth to serve God with God's own authority"⁹, particularly in relation to the Old Testament prophets. They were essentially representatives of God, who spoke on His behalf.¹⁰

The focus is more commonly on the sender than the one sent. A good example of this in LXX is the commissioning of Isaiah -

⁴ See, for example, Luke 6:13

⁵ Cannistraci, p83

⁶ Advertisement in a Greek newspaper, quoted in Scheidler, xiii

⁷ Kittel, p69. Longenecker notes that "there are only a few references in all the extant Greek and Jewish Greek writings from the 5th century BC to the 2nd century AD where the term means, or could be taken to mean, something like "envoy", "messenger" or delegate", and so to signal the idea of personal, delegated authority." (p2-3)

⁸ The Septuagint is a Greek version of the Old Testament used at the time of Christ. It is therefore a useful source for understanding the usage of Greek words in a Jewish context.

⁹ Kittel, p68

¹⁰ Kittel, p69, and Longenecker, p3, both discuss the link between *apostolos* in the New Testament and the rabbinic idea of *shaliach*, which refers to an authorised representative.

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send (apostello)? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”¹¹

Turning to the New Testament, we find that *apostolos* is used 81 times. We will look in detail at the kinds of people who are called *apostolos*, but it is worth noting that, not for the first time, the Bible takes a secular word and deliberately invests further significance in it.¹² Interestingly, the word is only used in the Gospels nine times, and the only time Jesus’ disciples are called “apostolos” is when he chooses the Twelve and sends them out on a mission trip. In particular, Matthew and Mark only use the term on this one occasion, emphasising the delegating of authority and the preaching of the word –

“He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles (apostolos)... These Twelve Jesus sent out (apostello) with the following instructions ... preach this message, ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’ ...”¹³

Similar emphases are also found in Luke¹⁴, but in this gospel Jesus goes further, giving the seventy-two a similar commission, with similar results. However, there is no mention of the seventy-two also being called *apostolos*, and the term seems to remain reserved for the Twelve throughout the gospels.

The first uses of a word in Scripture are often important, so we shall return to these themes later. Suffice it to say for the moment that, while many are “sent”, not many are “sent ones”.

4 Apostles in Scripture

4.1 Jesus

Nobody is designated an apostle in the Old Testament¹⁵, so in a sense, Jesus is the first apostle we meet in Scripture. He is only described as *apostolos* once, in the book of Hebrews –

“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle (apostolos) and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house.”¹⁶

Although the writer to the Hebrews doesn’t elaborate on this point, it is interesting that he groups together “apostle and high priest”, followed immediately by a comparison to

¹¹ Isaiah 6:8

¹² Another good example of this would be the word translated “church” – *ekklesia* – which carries a meaning in Scripture far beyond the Greek meaning

¹³ Matthew 10:1-5,7. See also Mark 6:7,30

¹⁴ Luke 9:1-2,10, 10:1-24

¹⁵ However, it is not unreasonable to see some OT figures as prefiguring apostolic ministry – e.g. Moses, Nehemiah. See also discussion of prophets in section 10.

¹⁶ Hebrews 3:1,2

Moses. In the new covenant, Jesus takes both the role of Moses, sent by the Father to lead his people to redemption, and Aaron, the High Priest, interceding before the Father on our behalf.

In fact, Jesus elaborates on his own apostleship in the gospel of John. *Apostolos* only appears once in John's gospel, but it is not obvious from the NIV because the word is translated "messenger" –

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger (apostolos) greater than the one who sent him."¹⁷

As far as Jesus was concerned, the *apostolos* is, literally, slave to the sender as well as his willing mouthpiece¹⁸. The sender, for his part, has delegated authority to him¹⁹, so he acts as his representative.

4.2 Christians in general

"As you have sent (apostello) me into the world, so I have sent (apostello) them into the world."²⁰

Although verses like this are directed at the twelve apostles, most believers interpret them to include the whole of Christendom. This is not without good warrant – for example, the Great Commission is spoken by Jesus to the Twelve²¹, but the reference to him being "with us to the end of the age" clearly widens the scope to beyond the apostles. Similarly, there is a sense in which the original delegation of authority by Christ that we looked at earlier – first to the Twelve, and then the Seventy-two – extends to all believers.

This perspective is entirely consistent with the biblical teaching on other ministries. We are all called to "be eager to prophesy"²², but not all are prophets. Similarly, we are all encouraged to "teach and admonish one another"²³, but clearly not all are teachers. Likewise, we will not all be apostles²⁴, but nevertheless we should all aspire to the kind of apostolic passion, character, commitment and servanthood that is demonstrated by all the *apostoloi* in Scripture. In a sense, we are all "ambassadors of Christ."²⁵

4.3 The Twelve

¹⁷ John 13:15-6

¹⁸ See John 12:49. See also 5:30

¹⁹ See John 5:22, 6:27, 10:18

²⁰ John 18:18. See also 20:21b

²¹ Matthew 28:19

²² 1 Corinthians 14:39

²³ Colossians 3:16

²⁴ Paul makes this clear - 1 Corinthians 12:29

²⁵ c.f. 2 Corinthians 5:20

Apostles are “sent by God” – but sent to do what, exactly? What are the specifics of the commission, and does this change from one apostle to another? Or, to put the question another way, so far it seems obvious that the nature of *apostolos* involves a commission from God, carrying His authority. However, the question still remains “authority to do *what*?” Casting out demons and healing the sick is one thing, but how does that correspond to government in the church?

We saw earlier how Peter & Co. were only rarely described as apostles in the Gospels, and then only in certain circumstances. They are more commonly designated "The Twelve", a title that is used once in the book of Acts²⁶, but is generally replaced later in the NT by *apostolos*. We have already said that in a sense all Christians are "sent", but what was distinctive about the Twelve that they should be called "sent ones"?

Comparatively little is recorded after the Gospels regarding the ministry of the Twelve, in particular compared to the ministry of Paul. In fact, only Peter, John and James are mentioned individually, the latter dying within 15 years of Jesus' death. Even concerning Peter, of whom we know the most, we hear nothing after the Council of Jerusalem in approximately AD 49²⁷.

However, we can draw some simple conclusions regarding their ministry.

- They took up positions of authority in the early church in Jerusalem. Peter refers to the need for a replacement to take up Judas' "place of leadership"²⁸. They took a lead in the teaching²⁹, distribution of money³⁰, resolution of disputes and appointment of deacons.³¹
- They spent at least the first three years after the Ascension based at Jerusalem, strengthening the church.³² After that, Phillip's successes in Samaria prompted a consolidating visit by Peter and John³³, and they used the occasion for a missionary tour through the outlying villages. Chapters 9 and 10 find Peter travelling round the country, again presumably engaged in missionary work and strengthening the nascent “churches of Judea.”³⁴

There is an abundance of "tradition" concerning the parts of the world where the apostles ministered. Little is certain, of course, but it seems that most of the Twelve, after spending the early decades in Israel, moved far and wide throughout the known world, before

²⁶ Acts 6:2

²⁷ See Acts 15. Of course, Peter and John also wrote epistles, but they don't provide significant detail regarding their ministry

²⁸ Acts 1:20. The word for “leadership” here is *episkopos*, “overseer”, the same word used by Paul when referring to eldership – see 1 Timothy 3:1. See also the links between apostles and elders in section 8.

²⁹ Acts 2:42

³⁰ Acts 4:34-37

³¹ Acts 6:1-6

³² The persecution which was triggered by the death of Stephen, after which many were scattered but the apostles remained in Jerusalem, took place in approximately AD33, three years after Jesus' death.

³³ Acts 8:14-24

³⁴ Galatians 1:22

experiencing martyrdom (except for John, who is said to have died of natural causes). It is likely that some of them would have left as early as AD 45.

Whilst their leadership of the early Jewish churches is clear, there is another aspect to their commission that stands out clearly in the book of Acts. On the occasion of their apostolic test run during their training by Jesus, He told the Twelve that they would be His “witnesses” before those who persecuted them³⁵. Time and again in Acts they return to this theme during their evangelism. What was prophesied by Jesus³⁶ begins to find fulfilment during the first 10 chapters of Acts. On six occasions, Peter describes himself and the Twelve as “witnesses” –

“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.”³⁷

This seems to be a distinctive of the Twelve, which points to their uniqueness.

4.3.1 The Uniqueness of the Twelve

“The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”³⁸

In this final vision of John, we are given a glimpse of the uniquely foundational role that the Twelve play in the construction of the ‘city of God’, the church. As we will see later, there is something foundational about apostolic ministry in general, but this verse is suggestive of something unique in the particular commission of the Twelve. Fortunately, Peter lays the issue out for us quite clearly when Judas’ replacement is chosen –

“Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”³⁹

There were in fact, over 500 people who could testify to Jesus’ resurrection, having seen the risen Christ.⁴⁰ However, very few of them would have been with Jesus for the three years of his ministry. They wouldn’t have seen what the Twelve saw, nor heard what they heard. It seems that an intimate knowledge of both the ministry and teaching of Christ, with the personal training that this encompassed, was a prerequisite for being an “apostle of the Lamb.”⁴¹ This has important ramifications for the question of doctrine, to which we shall return later.

³⁵ Matthew 10:18. See also Luke 21:13

³⁶ Acts 1:8

³⁷ Acts 2:32. See also 1:8, 3:15, 5:32, 10:39, 10:41, plus Luke’s general description in 4:33

³⁸ Revelation 21:14

³⁹ Acts 1:21-22

⁴⁰ See 1 Corinthians 15:6, and also X.X below (add in final draft)

⁴¹ I am assuming here that Peter was in fact correct to recruit a replacement for Judas, and indeed to appoint Matthias. Some suggest that Paul was really the rightful heir to this position, but Peter and the

The verse in Revelation also hints at a further distinction in their apostleship. They were foundations for the whole city – *the church universal*. Church tradition tells us that the impact of their ministry was directly felt as far apart as Libya, Britain and China. Even if these traditions are inaccurate, they suggest a collective sphere of ministry beyond even that of Paul, and certainly far beyond the land of Palestine.

It is also clear that Jesus' choice of the number 12 is not arbitrary, but mirrors the twelve sons of Jacob. They are the new Patriarchs of the new Israel, the first twelve members of the universal church. They are "the core of a new nation"⁴².

Whilst it is clear that there is something unique about the Twelve, we must not lose sight of the fact that the same word is used for both Peter, say, and Apollos (see later). Whilst we focus on the differences, we must not lose sight of the similarities. In other words, whilst there is a difference in the kind of apostleship we find in the lives of these two men, the very fact that the same word is used, often side by side or in similar contexts, suggests that there are points of similarity in their ministries. To suggest otherwise would imply that the Bible is misleading. Moreover, as we will see later, the same Christ who commissioned the Twelve commissioned the other apostolic figures of the New Testament.

However, given their uniqueness, we must be cautious in drawing conclusions about normative apostolic behaviour merely from examining the Twelve.

4.4 The Rest

Aside from the Twelve, there are perhaps as many as 13 separately identified individuals in the New Testament who are identified as *apostolos* (see appendix 2 for a complete list). We must consider the nature of their apostleship in detail, if we are to balance our expectations of apostles today.

4.4.1 Was Paul unique too?

Given that our primary source is Scripture, and given that the vast majority of biblical revelation on this issue is found in Paul's writings, it is vital that we understand where Paul himself fits in to our understanding of apostles. If Paul is completely unique, or at least, as unique as the Twelve, then that leaves us with very little in Scripture to go on -

"If Paul is not our example of apostolic ministry for today, then we do not have a good example to follow."⁴³

others acted in haste. In any case, I don't propose covering that particular issue in this paper. Scheidler covers this issue quite well (p47-50)

⁴² Virgo, p120

⁴³ Scheidler, p53

It is hard to argue with the suggestion that Paul is something of a unique figure. In fifteen years of travelling he visited over 100 cities, and the letters he wrote to the churches he planted form a sizeable chunk of the New Testament. He is perhaps the most influential figure in church history after Christ Himself. It would indeed be a neat and simple solution to slot him into the Twelve, perhaps replacing Matthias, as some would like to do.⁴⁴

4.4.1.1 Paul's call

In order to understand Paul better we must return to his Damascus conversion. On two occasions Paul repeats the words Jesus spoke to him, recounting events once in Jerusalem to an angry mob⁴⁵ and once in Caesarea to King Agrippa.⁴⁶

*"You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard"*⁴⁷

*"Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you."*⁴⁸

On both occasions Paul recounts his call to be a "witness" (Gk. *martus*), specifically a witness of Christ's resurrection. Up to this point in Acts, this term has been reserved exclusively for the Twelve, as we saw earlier, but Paul (and indeed Luke) are comfortable with a similar designation for him.

In the second verse, where Jesus himself is speaking to Paul, He describes him as "a servant and a witness." This is in fact an almost identical phrase to Luke 1:2, where the same author describes the process of handing down testimony of the events of the gospel

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*"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses and servants** of the word."*⁴⁹

In both of these places the word translated "servant" is not the more common *doulos* (literally, "slave"), but *huperetes*. In fact, Paul describes himself, Apollos and Cephas as *huperetes* of Christ⁵⁰. On this issue, at least, Paul does not feel the need to draw a distinction between himself and Peter, or even Apollos.

Regarding *huperetes*, Kittel notes –

⁴⁴ See note 41

⁴⁵ Acts 22:1-13

⁴⁶ Acts 26:12-19

⁴⁷ Acts 22:15

⁴⁸ Acts 26:16

⁴⁹ Luke 1:1-2

⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 4:1

“The term first occurs with reference to Hermes, the messenger of the gods. It denotes one who does the will of Zeus and has his authority behind him.”⁵¹

It seems reasonable, therefore to treat the term in these verses as a proxy for “apostle”, in the way that Paul uses it of himself and others. In any case, Paul seems to see a twin role for himself, as an apostle and as an eye-witness.

4.4.1.2 Defending the call

At various points in Paul’s letters, he has to defend his ministry. In 1 Corinthians, this twin aspect to his call can be seen again –

*“Am I not free? **Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?** Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defence to those who sit in judgment on me.”⁵²*

Later in the epistle he returns to the subject of witnessing the resurrection –

“...and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”⁵³

Paul clearly shared, in common with the Twelve, a valid claim to be considered an eyewitness to the resurrection of Christ. However, we know from the choice of Matthias as a replacement for Judas, discussed earlier, that in order to be one of the Twelve, it was necessary to be a witness of Jesus’ *life and ministry* as well.

No-one was more keenly aware of the nature of Paul’s call than the man himself, and no-one defended his apostleship more resolutely than he did. Nevertheless, we do see some suggestions that Paul was aware that a distinction existed. Interestingly, in the above passage, Paul refers to Jesus appearing to “the Twelve” together, even though at that time there were in fact only eleven of them, Matthias not having yet been appointed. This suggests that Paul saw the “apostles of the Lamb” as a group distinct from himself.

In Galatians, Paul is again defending his ministry, this time against those who, amongst other things, would insist that his commissioning, and indeed his very gospel message,

⁵¹ Kittel, p1231. He also notes uses of the word in the LXX, such as in Daniel 3:46, where “ ‘servants of the king’ execute royal commands.” (p1232)

⁵² 1 Corinthians 9:1-3

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 15:5-9

came from the apostles in Jerusalem. Uniquely, he chooses in this letter to introduce himself not simply as “an apostle of Jesus Christ”⁵⁴, but as –

“... an apostle-sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead”⁵⁵

Paul knew that the authority of an apostle stemmed from the one who commissioned him. He was therefore keen to emphasise the independence of his call and message from the Jerusalem apostles, even to the point of recounting a dispute with Peter.⁵⁶

4.4.1.3 Putting the pieces together

The picture that emerges is somewhat complicated, but it is worth summarising the points we have learned concerning Paul and the Twelve –

- All the Twelve were designated as “apostles” by Jesus during his earthly ministry
- The Twelve viewed their witnessing of his life and ministry, as well as his death and resurrection, as essential qualifications for *their* ministry
- There were others who also witnessed Jesus’ life, ministry and ascension, but who weren’t part of the Twelve (e.g. Joseph Barsabbas⁵⁷)
- Paul was called by Jesus to be an apostle and eye-witness of the resurrection
- There were others, such as Apollos, who were also apostles, but not eye-witnesses
- There were still others, such as James, the Lord’s brother, who were apostles and eye-witnesses of Jesus’ death, but not his life and ministry⁵⁸
- There were many, up to 500, who were eye-witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection, but are never described as apostles.

This can be summarised visually in the following diagram.

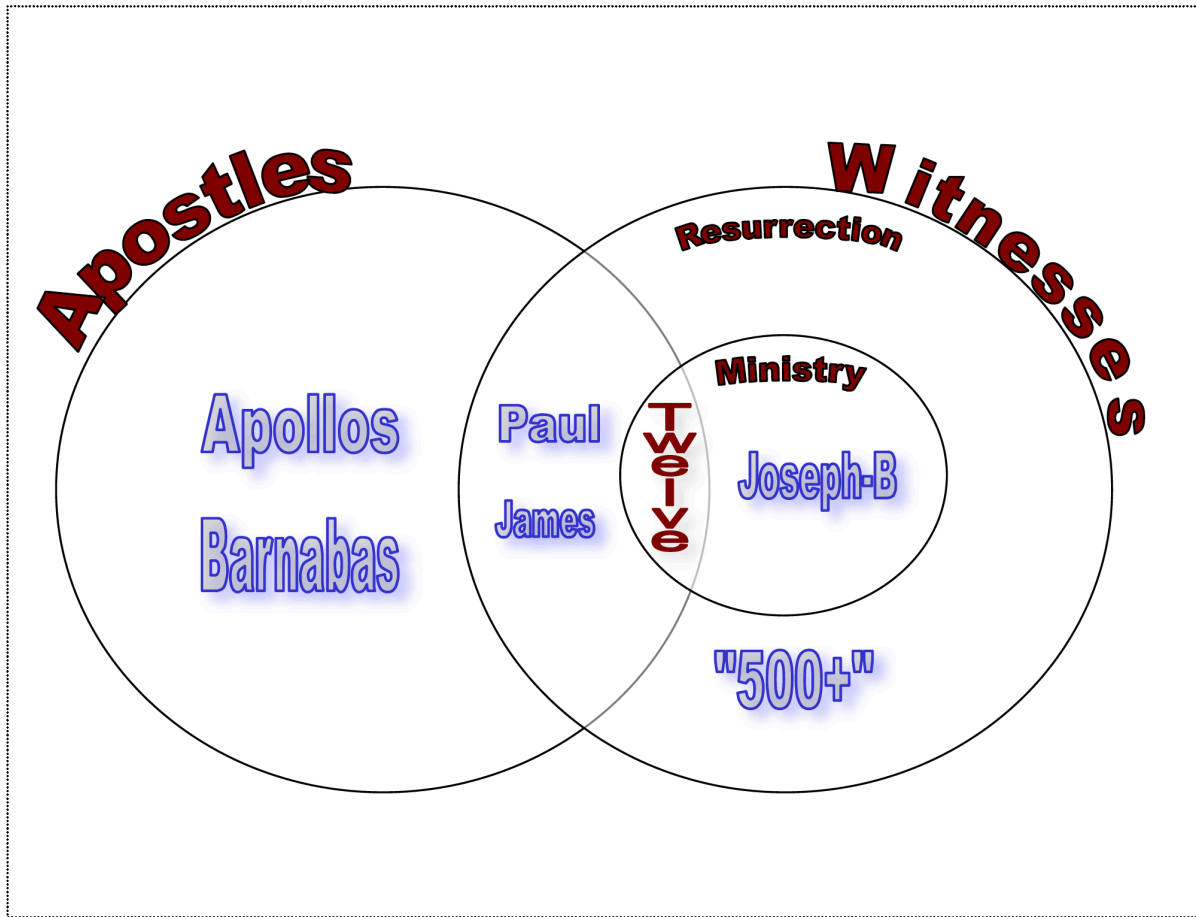
⁵⁴ See the first verse in 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. Peter does likewise in his letters.

⁵⁵ Galatians 1:1

⁵⁶ See Galatians 2:11

⁵⁷ See Acts 1:22

⁵⁸ This is a reasonable assumption, since Jesus’ brothers did not initially believe in him – see John 3:5.



From a historical viewpoint, all the “witnesses” are in a sense unique, since they saw some aspect of Jesus’ life first-hand; a few within that group were also trained and discipled by Him. However, by no means all the “witnesses” are “apostles”, and by no means all the “apostles” are “witnesses”. Amongst the twenty-five or so people described as *apostolos* in the New Testament, only the Twelve, Paul, and to a lesser extent, James, the Lord’s brother, had their commission coloured by a physical encounter with the Christ.

5 Apostles and Doctrine

This is all very well, but where does it leave us? What is the impact of these distinctions upon our understanding of modern-day apostles?

We have yet to look in detail at the roles of an apostle, but it is already apparent that, if we are to fit a modern-day apostle on our diagram, it would go on the left side, with Apollos, Barnabas and others. This suggests that, whilst such an apostle will share some of the characteristics of Paul and the Twelve, those relating to a specific role of an “eye-witness”, in the New Testament sense, are excluded.

The specific area that we can identify in Scripture as being the sole ambit of “apostolic witnesses” is in relation to *the forming of doctrine*. Paul is keen to stress in his writings that

his gospel is a result of a “revelation from Jesus Christ”⁵⁹, which could not be undermined even by angelic visitation⁶⁰. Peter, in his categorisation of Paul’s writings as equivalent to Old Testament Scripture⁶¹, attests to Paul’s authority in this regard. Similarly, other parts of the New Testament are either directly attributable to Paul or one of the Twelve (e.g. Matthew, 1 & 2 Peter, 1,2&3 John) or believed to have been based on teachings and events passed on by them to other writers (e.g. Mark).

James is also responsible for part of the New Testament, and this, combined with his decisive role in the Council of Jerusalem⁶², points to a similar authority. However, it is no doubt true that he would have learned much from spending time with the Twelve in Jerusalem. Even Paul at times alludes to Jesus’ teachings in a way that suggests that he has found out from those who heard them first-hand.⁶³

Clearly, it is important to emphasise that this role is not the creation of doctrine so much as the passing on of Jesus’ teachings. However, Scripture emphasises the importance of receiving revelation “first-hand”, in one way or another. The role of the next generation of leaders then becomes the *preservation* of apostolic teaching, as Paul makes clear to Timothy –

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”⁶⁴

It is interesting that Paul does not stipulate that Timothy should pass on such responsibility to apostles. In fact, the qualification – “to teach others” – sounds rather similar to his previous letter to Timothy, where he says that elders must be “able to teach.”⁶⁵ It seems that the preservation of apostolic teaching is applied more generally to local church leaders, not simply to apostles like Timothy. Oral tradition is gradually superseded by the written tradition contained in the Bible, but the essential responsibility remains the same – Christians everywhere must be nourished with the “apostolic doctrine”, the teachings of Christ.

6 What do Apostles do?

Having established that there are certain elements of biblical apostleship that we would not expect to see in our times, we can now focus on other areas. What does the New Testament indicate are the key functions of an apostle?

6.1 Pioneer

⁵⁹ Galatians 1:12

⁶⁰ Galatians 1:8

⁶¹ 2 Peter 3:16

⁶² See Acts 15

⁶³ Various points in Romans 12-15 provide the prime examples of this

⁶⁴ 2 Timothy 2:2. See also Titus 2:1 – “You must teach what is in accordance with sound doctrine.”

⁶⁵ 1 Timothy 3:2

The apostles of the New Testament are nothing if not pioneers. Sometimes, as in the case of Paul's missionary journeys, this will mean starting from scratch, moving into locations untouched by the gospel, winning new converts and discipling them into a functioning community. At other times, as in the case of Barnabas in Antioch⁶⁶ or Peter and John in Samaria⁶⁷, they will respond to the success of evangelists in producing new believers. In either case, the focus is not simply on making converts but on building the church. Biblically, this appears to be the pre-eminent role of an apostle; a leader who is focused more on maintenance than mission is not an apostle.

In a culture that is becoming increasingly 'unchurched', opportunities for pioneering work are multiplying. The pioneering work of an apostle can also have a very positive impact on the established churches to which he relates. Just as Paul drew the church in Rome into his plans for pioneering work in Spain⁶⁸, so modern-day apostles will provide a link for an established church to a new horizon.

"It is hard to remain inward-looking when there is world vision and the stimulus of news from other growing churches."⁶⁹

There are many fruitful para-church missionary organisations that God is blessing in our day, as they perform this pioneering function. However, it is clear from the New Testament that such activities were not intended to be performed independently from churches. Indeed, the very presence of these organisations is an indictment for the Church, both in its lack of unity and its lack of recognition of apostolic ministry.

6.2 Foundation-layer

This leads on to a parallel activity of apostles, that of laying foundations within a local church. Doubtless the initial foundation of the Universal church was laid on the day of Pentecost, but Paul in particular speaks of his apostolic work in laying foundations for each new church he builds.⁷⁰ As Cannistraci says -

"A foundation in any structure is indispensable; it provides strength, stability and is the key to expansion potential."⁷¹

A good understanding of Jesus and the gospel message is a crucial part of this, but that doesn't give the full picture. As we will see later, the early apostles were involved in the training and appointing of local leadership. Community, communion, prayer and worship⁷² were also areas of apostolic focus very early in the young Jerusalem church.

⁶⁶ See Acts 11:22

⁶⁷ See Acts 8:14

⁶⁸ Romans 15:24

⁶⁹ Terry Virgo, quoted in Matthew, p43

⁷⁰ See 1 Corinthians 3:10-13

⁷¹ Cannistraci, p82

⁷² See Acts 2:42

Paul first concern on meeting new believers in Ephesus was the activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives.⁷³

“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established.”⁷⁴

If an apostle is a foundation-layer, then he will know a good foundation when he sees one, and conversely, he will be able to spot any weaknesses. We shall return to the subject of apostolic wisdom shortly.

6.3 Equipper

It is apparent from Paul’s writings that apostolic involvement in the building project doesn’t end when the foundations are completed. When Paul says to the Corinthians –

“I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it.”⁷⁵

- the “someone else” he is referring to is his fellow builder and apostle, Apollos.⁷⁶ Paul’s choice of “building materials” is telling.⁷⁷ The focus is on using substances that will stand the test of time, and in particular the fire of judgment.

It is also worth mentioning at this point that Paul’s letters were often not written to infant churches. 1 Corinthians was probably written as much as eight years after the church was planted by Paul, with 2 Corinthians and Philippians spanning an even greater divide. The problems in Corinth in particular indicate that this was not a mature church without problems, but nevertheless, we should be careful before jumping to the conclusion that apostolic involvement is limited to a church’s infancy.

In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul describes the Ascension of Christ, quoting Psalm 68:18, in terms of a triumphant ruler ascending to his throne, and distributing gifts in the process. It is easy to assume that the gifts in this case are simply analogous to the gifts of the Spirit that Paul speaks of in Romans and 1 Corinthians, but this doesn’t really represent the thrust of the passage. Whilst the Spirit gives gifts to people, the Son gives *gifted people* to His church.

“What does the exalted Christ give to the church? He gives people, these particular people who proclaim the word and lead. ...he gives not just grace to people but he gives specific people to people.”⁷⁸

⁷³ See Acts 19:1-2

⁷⁴ Proverbs 24:3

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:10

⁷⁶ Or, to use another metaphor – “*I planted the seed, Apollos watered it*”, 1 Corinthians 3:6

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:12

⁷⁸ Lincoln, p249. Lincoln also explains why the more vague construction used by many translations – “he gave some to be apostles, etc” – is not accurate.

Apostles, along with other ministries, are themselves gifts to the church. It is clear that Paul has more than just the Twelve in mind here – indeed, Peter and the others were appointed *well before* the Ascension. The purpose of such ministries is clear – they “build up” the saints, equipping them for unity, maturity and stability –

*“... to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach **unity** in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become **mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, **tossed back and forth by the waves**, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”⁷⁹*

How does an apostle equip a church in these areas?

6.3.1 Unity

We have already alluded to the outward focus that a pioneering apostle can bring to an established church. It is not difficult to see how the same can be said for church unity. The trans-local ministry of an apostle, often coupled with a wider vision and awareness of the Body of Christ as a whole⁸⁰, means they are more likely to have a focus on unity between churches, in contrast with local church leaders, who may find it easier to simply attend to the needs of *their* flock. In fact, apostles *themselves* are often the unifying link between the disparate congregations to which they relate. This is apparent in the New Testament, where Paul is at the forefront of efforts to organise a collection for the poverty-stricken Jerusalem church from the churches he cares for.⁸¹

6.3.2 Maturity

The concept here encompasses both maturity of individual believers and numerical growth of the group – a mature church is a growing church. A mature believer, and a mature church, is one in whom both the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit are evident.

Paul certainly took on the role of a “ministry manager”⁸² in his apostleship. He was often to be found sending gifted fellow-workers to one place or another, for example sending Timothy to Philippi, or Tychicus to Colosse.⁸³ Doubtless these people were Ephesians 4 ministers in their own right, and Paul responded to the needs he saw in a particular place. One wonders what the elders at some of these places thought when someone unknown to them turned up with a letter from Paul in their hands!

⁷⁹ Ephesians 4:12-14

⁸⁰ We shall return to the subject of vision in section 10, in the context of apostles & prophets.

⁸¹ See, for example, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

⁸² Cannistraci, p102

⁸³ Philippians 2:19-20, Colossians 4:7-12

Paul was also not averse to other apostolic ministries spending time in his backyard – his reference to Apollos’s work in Corinth makes this clear.⁸⁴ Of course, this can cause problems of its own, but the heart of the apostle shines through here. He is not intent on building or protecting an empire – his primary goal is equipping the saints, whether through his own ministry or someone else’s. Paul was willing to be open towards other true apostles but equally determined to close the door on false ones who tried to infiltrate the congregations he planted.

6.3.3 Stability

Paul also speaks of his desire to impart to the Roman church “some spiritual gift to make [them] strong.”⁸⁵ Whatever this was intended to mean, it is evident that the greatest gift many churches need is leadership. The stability of a church depends not simply on a wealth of external input, but on the development of leadership from within the church.

We shall return to the appointment of elders later, but for the moment it is important to note that in the New Testament this wasn’t simply a rubber-stamping exercise. Apostles appointed leaders not just because they knew a good thing when they saw it, but because they would often have actively involved themselves in the mentoring and development of those leaders.

Nor were these leaders necessarily the “finished article”. On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas revisited cities in southern Galatia on their journey home and appointed elders, only a matter of months after they had first planted churches there.⁸⁶ It is perhaps not surprising that this region was the only place visited by Paul on all three missionary journeys!

Apostles, and indeed other trans-local ministries, can also bring perspective to help avoid churches being “tossed back and forth” by the latest teaching and methodology. Their greater length and breadth of experience can help shed light on what might seem innovative to leaders in a particular locale.⁸⁷

6.4 Parent

It is perhaps a little too cold to describe this as a function, for the scriptures which describe apostleship as parenthood are really concerned more with the heart of an apostle than his actions. In Paul, Silas and Timothy’s first letter to the Thessalonians, they reveal both maternal and paternal care for the church they planted -

⁸⁴ See 1 Corinthians 3:5 – “*the Lord has assigned to each his task*”

⁸⁵ Romans 1:11

⁸⁶ See Acts 14:23

⁸⁷ There is, of course, a parallel danger that apostles could develop a jaundiced view of alternative methods, without evaluating them in each context. Wisdom is required to walk the fine line between encouraging new initiatives and avoiding the repetition of old mistakes.

*“As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, **like a mother** caring for her little children ... For you know that we dealt with you **as a father** deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God ...”⁸⁸*

It is noteworthy that they continue to call the Thessalonians “brothers”, and the use of the parental imagery is primarily metaphoric – certainly there is no intention to talk down or belittle them. Nevertheless the warmth of feeling is evident both here and elsewhere in Paul’s letters, even when relationships seem strained. Paul knows when fatherly authority is required and when motherly tenderness is more appropriate.

Paul exhibits classic parental behaviour –

- A longing to spend time with the “children”⁸⁹
- A sacrificial attitude towards them⁹⁰
- A desire to see them succeed⁹¹
- Patience and forbearance⁹²

In fact, there are times when Paul almost seems to act like a worrying parent, describing his “daily pressure of concern for all the churches.”⁹³ He warned the Ephesian elders “day and night with tears.”⁹⁴ At times the weight of responsibility for his spiritual offspring seems to weigh heavily on his shoulders.

Similar parental love is displayed by Paul towards the church in Corinth –

“... I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.”⁹⁵

Even the Galatians don’t miss out!⁹⁶ John is another apostle to speak in such terms, regularly referring in his letters to “my dear children.”⁹⁷

It seems that apostleship is not so much about holding an office as raising a family. All ministry is relational in a sense, but these verses indicate that biblical apostleship simply doesn’t function without relationship; fathers must be bonded to their children.

"The heart of a father is committed to enduring any lengths to develop maturity in his offspring."⁹⁸ This kind of ministry is costly. As Iverson says -

⁸⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:6,11-12

⁸⁹ 1 Thessalonians 2:17, 3:6

⁹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 2:8

⁹¹ 1 Thessalonians 2:12

⁹² See 2 Corinthians 2:12

⁹³ 2 Corinthians 11:28

⁹⁴ Acts 20:31

⁹⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:14

⁹⁶ See Galatians 4:19-20

⁹⁷ See 1 John 2:1, 18, 28, 3:7

*"An apostle does not just set up an empire of churches over which he reigns and from which he receives glory and honour. Instead the charge of all the local churches that God gives him becomes a gut-wrenching, intensely emotional, heartfelt, passionate ministry of life to precious souls! It is an awesome responsibility. It is not an arms-length transaction. The apostle must feel the very heartbeat, the pulse of the church, and be in touch with the lives of its people."*⁹⁹

6.4.1 Parent to whom?

It is important to note that all of Paul's letters are addressed to the whole church, not to the eldership.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the verses we have just read are addressed to the congregation at large. This is easier to understand when we remember that Paul didn't simply preach there on the occasional Sunday. In fact, he spent long periods at many of his church plants¹⁰¹. Of course, some of these churches were very large, and it would be silly to suggest that he was on first-name terms with most of them, but nevertheless the wealth of personal greetings in his letters is indicative that Paul's love is not simply for "The Church" as an abstract concept – it is directed at the *people*.

6.4.2 Extending the family

Clearly, parents reproduce before they raise children. Individuals were reborn and churches sprang to life through the ministry of the early apostles. However, parenthood extends far beyond conception. The fact that Paul "became [the Corinthians'] father through the gospel"¹⁰² gave him the right and privilege to speak into their lives.

6.4.2.1 Discipline

Paul wasn't afraid to "admonish with all wisdom"¹⁰³ when necessary. At times, he spoke with unflinching authority into extreme problems a particular church faced.¹⁰⁴ However, most of the time, it was sufficient to "encourage" and "urge" people in the right direction,¹⁰⁵ with patience and gentleness.

6.4.2.2 Training

⁹⁸ Cannistraci, p121

⁹⁹ Dick Iverson quoted in Cannistraci, p121

¹⁰⁰ This can be seen in almost all the letters in Scripture. Even in Philippians, the letter is addressed to "all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:" (1:1)

¹⁰¹ See section 11.1

¹⁰² 1 Corinthians 4:15

¹⁰³ Colossians 1:28

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

¹⁰⁵ See 2 Corinthians 6:12, 1 Corinthians 4:16

"A spiritual father reproduces his ministry in others"¹⁰⁶

As noted earlier, apostles are actively involved in developing ministries. Timothy is a classic example of this – in fact, Paul describes him as his “son in the faith”¹⁰⁷

When addressing the wider church, Paul also saw his role as a father as one of *example* –

“... I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy ... He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”¹⁰⁸

Again, this is only effective because of the close relationships Paul had fostered in the churches. Amongst other roles, an apostle functions as a pastor of pastors; a “trans-local shepherd.”¹⁰⁹

6.4.2.3 Provision

Apostolic fathers nourish and enrich their children through teaching. We noted earlier that the relationship between apostles and doctrine has changed since the first century. We shouldn't expect modern-day apostles to be the final arbiters of truth; however they do have a passion for guarding and passing on that truth. An apostolic fervour shines through the pages of the New Testament for teaching and defending that which has now been handed down to us in Scripture. As we have already noted, Paul was keen to make sure that the leaders who were appointed in the churches were “able to teach.”¹¹⁰

6.4.2.4 Counsel

Paul saw part of his fatherly role as “exhorting and encouraging.”¹¹¹ The first verb in this verse is *parakaleo*, corresponding to the noun *parakletos*, used famously to describe the role of the Holy Spirit¹¹². Obviously, an apostle does not usurp the role of “The Counsellor” in the life of a Christian, but part of the role of the apostolic father is to apply an anointing of wisdom to situations. Even when Paul did not have specific revelation from God on a particular issue, he was happy to give the benefit of his wisdom¹¹³, which leads us on to our next apostolic role.

6.5 Wise Counsellor

¹⁰⁶ Joyner, p74

¹⁰⁷ 1 Timothy 1:2. See also 1:18, 2 Timothy 1:2

¹⁰⁸ 1 Corinthians 4:15-16

¹⁰⁹ p49, Coombes

¹¹⁰ See 1 Timothy 3:2, 2 Timothy 2:24

¹¹¹ 1 Thes 2:10

¹¹² See John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7

¹¹³ See, for example, 1 Corinthians 7:12

We have already alluded to the need for apostolic wisdom in relation to building the foundations of a church¹¹⁴ and providing insight concerning new ideas and methods. With a breadth of experience of church leadership, they should be able to analyse a church's predicament, and highlight weaknesses.

*"[An apostle is] essentially a travelling man, able to bring objectivity to appraisal of local church's present condition."*¹¹⁵

Paul felt able to bring insight to the Thessalonians, "supplying what is lacking in [their] faith"¹¹⁶ No doubt this would often be directed towards the elders, such as those in Ephesus, whom Paul "warned night and day."¹¹⁷ He also commonly involved himself in the settling of disputes between individual believers or factions.¹¹⁸

7 Authority and Accountability

7.1 The nature of authority

In any discussion concerning authority it is vital firstly to address the nature of spiritual authority.

7.1.1 Servant-hearted

*"People are always looking for a king."*¹¹⁹

Jesus contrasted authority in the kingdom with authority in the world, replacing an attitude of dominion with one of service.

*"Other forms of authority carry with them the power of enforcement, whereas spiritual authority does not..."*¹²⁰

There is no question that the early apostles clearly grasped this. Both Paul and Peter understood that they were servants first and apostles second.¹²¹ If the role of a modern-day apostle is indeed one of authority in the church, then the important issue is how it is exercised, and how people should respond to it.

¹¹⁴ See also 1 Corinthians 3:10 – "I laid a foundation as an expert builder"

¹¹⁵ Virgo quoted in Matthew, p40

¹¹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 3:10

¹¹⁷ Acts 20:31

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Philippians 4:2 – "I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord." See also Paul's efforts at conflict resolution concerning doctrinal disputes in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.

¹¹⁹ Scheidler, p4

¹²⁰ Coombs, p195

¹²¹ See 2 Peter 1:1, Romans 1:1, Titus 1:1

Given this emphasis in Scripture on service, it is probably not appropriate to use terms like “chain of command.”¹²² Nevertheless, if authority exists, there will inevitably be occasions where the proper response should be submission. If this is true of eldership, it is true of apostleship. Authority that only requires submission when there is complete agreement is really not authority at all. Authority must be exercised with respect, and gentleness wherever possible. It is telling that, when it comes to apostleship, Paul and others don’t resort to a military metaphor, where the principle is unconditional obedience, but a family metaphor, where the emphasis is on unconditional love, with a focus on growth and enrichment.

It is also vital to remember that, even though God has chosen to delegate authority to individuals, a Christian’s primary allegiance remains to God himself.¹²³

7.1.2 Relational

The absence of enforcement means that spiritual authority is also essentially *relational*, that is, it depends on a good relationship between the parties. This is perhaps more true of the modern, Western church than at any stage in history. An emphasis on education and a culture of empowerment means that people are less likely to uncritically accept the edicts of a distant authority figure. As the old saying goes, “People won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” This is evidenced in Scripture by the use of relational terms for authority figures.

7.2 Is apostleship governmental?

Before going any further, we must deal directly with this basic question. After allowing for the limitations of modern-day apostles in the area of doctrine, is it still appropriate to see them as carrying authority in the church?

In reviewing the earlier descriptions of apostolic roles, it is possible to make a case for some functions operating in a non-governmental way. The giving of wisdom, for example, does not require authority. However, a more detailed analysis reveals the operation of authority in key aspects of apostolic ministry –

- Building the foundations of a church requires the consent and co-operation of the new believers. The same could be said for building on that foundation
- The whole concept of apostolic fatherhood carries with it the notion of government, particularly when we consider the patriarchal culture in which the metaphor is utilised.
- Even the giving of wisdom has an authoritative tinge at times. Under circumstances, Paul “admonishes”¹²⁴, “commands”¹²⁵ and “insists”¹²⁶ as often as

¹²² Scheidler, p73

¹²³ See Acts 4:19

¹²⁴ Colossians 1:28

¹²⁵ 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 3:12

he “exhorts”¹²⁷ and “comforts”¹²⁸. These were not limited to narrow points of doctrine. Obviously, the nature of authority was such that he didn’t see it as “having dominion”¹²⁹, but nevertheless, he wasn’t afraid to ‘put his foot down’ when absolutely necessary.

We will see later how the appointment of elders was the domain of apostles. It is difficult to see how authority can be delegated by someone who himself carries no authority in a situation. The similarities between apostles and elders noted below also testify to the authority of an apostle.¹³⁰

Finally, we should note that Paul made this issue relatively clear for us. In the midst of a passage where he robustly defends his apostleship, he describes his commission in these terms -

*“...the **authority** the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.”*¹³¹

The phrase “building you up” is identical to that used in Ephesians 4:12 to describe apostleship and other ministries. If the ‘building work’ that an apostle does requires authority, then that authority must remain as long as the “building up” process continues.

If government is excluded from contemporary apostleship then the similarity between first-century and modern-day apostles becomes so superficial as to render the comparison meaningless and the term itself misleading.

Having established the servant nature of spiritual authority, and confirmed that the apostolic role is an authoritative one, we can look at this issue in more detail.

7.3 Is apostleship limited?

7.3.1 The sphere of authority

It is apparent from Paul’s writings that some of them were in response to specific questions about church life and practical issues.¹³² At other times, he simply spoke from the heart on matters that were dear to him, and relevant to the church addressed.

In general, it is reasonable to assume that the sphere of authority corresponds to the work an apostle does. When he is acting as a “foundation-layer”, then such detailed involvement in the church will necessitate a broader submission. However, as we have seen, apostleship doesn’t end when the foundations are completed.

¹²⁶ Ephesians 4:17

¹²⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (KJV)

¹²⁸ 1 Thessalonians 2:12

¹²⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:24

¹³⁰ See section 8

¹³¹ 2 Corinthians 13:10, emphasis mine

¹³² See 1 Corinthians 7:1 – “*Now for the matters you wrote about ...*”

Therefore, we might expect the need for ongoing submission in the following areas –

- Unity between churches
- Training and appointing leaders
- Matters of serious church discipline
- Pioneering new churches.
- Making strategic decisions

To make major judgments in these areas without drawing on the apostolic wisdom available does not seem to be a responsible way to lead.

Three other limitations are commonly applied to apostleship.

7.3.1.1 Geographical

I am using this term loosely here, but it is apparent from various scriptures that Paul didn't view his authority as applying to every congregation in Christendom. He speaks of the "measure of rule" or "field" assigned to him,¹³³ that extended to include the Corinthians, but by implication not necessarily everywhere else –

"Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you!"¹³⁴

Similarly, he describes Epaphroditus as "your *apostolos*"¹³⁵ when writing to the Philippians. Even Peter seems to allude to this principle, when he addresses the churches over a wide area, at least some of which were pioneered by Paul & Co.

*"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder ..."*¹³⁶

Although he is happy to introduce himself as an apostle¹³⁷, perhaps Peter didn't see himself as "their apostle", and therefore did not speak in the same authoritative tones we are used to in Paul's letters. Even Paul himself, when addressing the Roman church by letter, did not use rebukes or resort to the strong language he uses elsewhere. Scheidler comments –

"The level of his authority changed and he did not take liberties with another man's flock."¹³⁸

¹³³ 2 Corinthians 10:13

¹³⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:2

¹³⁵ Philippians 2:25. The NIV translates it "messenger"

¹³⁶ 1 Peter 5:1, emphasis mine. The letter addressed "God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1:1). It is likely that some of this was not actually pioneered by Paul (e.g. Bithynia – see Acts 16:7), but conversely, it is also unlikely that Peter pioneered them either.

¹³⁷ See 1:1

¹³⁸ Scheidler, p137

Obviously, this doesn't mean that in such circumstances the apostle or his views should just be ignored; the point is simply that, if an apostle carries authority, he only does so in certain churches, rather than in the Universal Church as a whole. In fact, both Scripture and church history seem to suggest that apostles tended to have burdens and commissions for specific regions and people-groups.¹³⁹

7.3.1.2 Developmental

The earlier discussion of the apostle as a “father” begs the question – what happens when the son grows up? Is it appropriate to see a change in a relationship, as some suggest? Does the relationship “change to a chain of counsel rather than a chain of command”?¹⁴⁰ Is it right to see the relationship continuing, but with “no governmental ingredient”?¹⁴¹

This is a difficult question to answer. A few specific comments can be made –

- We must be careful in avoiding the common problem of trying to push a biblical analogy too far, and consequently reading into a passage a meaning that was not intended by the writer
- If we do, however, choose to draw in detail on the natural father-son relationship, it may solve some problems but create others. Who decides when the “child” church is ‘all grown up’? This leads to the twin danger of the children wanting to grow up too quickly and the father preferring to slow the whole process down
- It is also important to remember that Paul and others who used this metaphor were not speaking to 21st century youth culture but traditional, patriarchal culture. In both cultures, manhood would officially begin at a certain age, but the magnitude of separation is probably greater in modern rather than in ancient times, which put a greater emphasis on family ties and respect for the older generation.

Having made these caveats, it seems entirely reasonable to suppose that the relationship between an apostle and a church, and specifically between the apostle and the eldership, will evolve over time. As the elders grow in experience and breadth of ability, apostles will inevitably need to be less involved at an operational level, as seems to have been the case with Paul. The question remains whether this process continues to the point where all decision-making passes to the eldership.

What is in view here is not *age* but *maturity*. There is no set time period after which a church is officially “all grown up”, much less an individual Christian. We noted earlier that sometimes as much as a decade may have passed between a church being planted and the date of the letter to that church in Scripture.

¹³⁹ See Galatians 2:8, where Paul describes himself as “apostle to the Gentiles” and Paul as “apostle to the Jews”. Thomas is a fine example from early church history, with his church-planting in India.

¹⁴⁰ Scheidler, p73

¹⁴¹ David Tomlinson, quoted in p34, Matthew

There is no question that the essence of biblical fatherhood involves a desire to cultivate maturity in the “children”. As Hamon says –

“Mature human fathers are more concerned about their children's well-being and success than their own ... True apostolic fathers are more interested in seeing those they are fathering come into their ministry than in magnifying their own ministry”¹⁴²

Paul himself seemed to see an end-point to his ministry to particular churches and regions –

“... there is no more place for me to work in these regions ...”¹⁴³

- but nevertheless, he didn't leave them “apostle-less”; Timothy, Titus and others were trained up to fill the gap.

As we saw earlier in Ephesians 4, maturity is one of the main goals of all the ministry gifts. Rarely, if ever, is there a suggestion today that a church can do without teachers or evangelists. Prophetic ministry is likewise viewed as essential by almost all of the charismatic movement. It is hard, therefore, having seen the breadth of roles that apostles play, to argue that an individual church (let alone the universal church) will progress beyond the need for ongoing apostolic ministry.

The question then becomes: where do churches get it from? It is clear, from the verse above, and others like it, that a church will not automatically remain linked to one, and only one, apostle for a lifetime; indeed, even if this wasn't apparent from Scripture we could surmise it simply from any one of these three facts –

- Churches outlive apostles
- Churches outlive elders
- Churches outlive all their members

Even if we assume, for a moment, that the eldership is able to replicate what an apostle is supposed to supply, that circumstance would cease once elders moved on. Similarly, it is not merely the elders but the congregation at large that should benefit from apostolic involvement, so there will always be another generation to be impacted.

Clearly there are only two solutions – internal or external. Either a church can work at forming links with a new apostle, or it can draw on its gifts from within. Regarding the latter option, it is important to remember that, unlike elders, apostles are given, not grown. Behind the knowledge, experience, maturity and character of an apostle should lie an apostolic gift – otherwise he is not an apostle. Nevertheless, like the other ministry gifts, we should expect that, out of a fruitful long-term relationship with an effective apostle, apostolic ministry should emerge.

“A spiritual father reproduces his ministry in others.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Hamon, p40

¹⁴³ Romans 15:23

In the absence of a leader who is demonstrating apostolic ministry, and indeed has been recognised as such - someone whose ministry includes reaching out and influencing beyond their own congregation – we should expect that a church will look for and benefit from ongoing involvement with external apostles.

To suggest that an apostle's role can become "a chain of counsel" underestimates the contribution an effective apostle can bring to a church, just as the expression "chain of command" overestimates the formality required. Indeed, it is hard to see how an apostle without authority can continue to be seen as an apostle. To reduce him to merely a "safety valve" or "insurance policy"¹⁴⁵ is to greatly undersell the role.

Even the most mature of individual Christians within a church would still be expected to submit to the eldership. However, a greater level of maturity would bring with it a diminished need for authority to be exercised in practice. Similarly, even the most mature congregation should not be seen as independent of apostolic input, although the extent of involvement may diminish over time, as indeed should the likelihood of conflict.

7.3.1.3 Foundational

A third area of limitation relates to whether or not the apostle concerned has been directly involved in the planting of the church. Some writers believe that this gives an apostle a greater right to exercise authority -

"Paul's authority was mainly directed to churches where he himself had laid a foundation and with whom he had a relationship"¹⁴⁶

"When Paul wrote to the churches that he personally established, the content of his letter was completely different from when he wrote to the churches that he did not father ... while Paul mentions his apostleship in most of his letters, he defends it only in the churches that he founded"¹⁴⁷

"Paul was the founding father of this church and therefore felt that he had the right to act in this way. If this had been an "adopted" fellowship, his writing in this manner could well have been considered presumptuous and officious"¹⁴⁸

There is some truth in all of these statements, but the point that each writer essentially makes is *pragmatic*. Each of the churches to which Paul writes is in need of apostolic input in one way or another. Some of them were planted by him, some by others on his behalf (e.g. Colosse) and some by an entirely separate ministry (e.g. Rome).

¹⁴⁴ Joyner, p74. See also Scheidler, p86 – "One of the hallmarks of apostolic ministry is that apostles are able to reproduce other apostolic ministries."

¹⁴⁵ Iverson. quoted in Scheidler, p200

¹⁴⁶ Tomlinson, quoted in Matthew, p88

¹⁴⁷ Scheidler, p136

¹⁴⁸ Coombes, p197, speaking of Paul's writings to the Corinthian church

It is true that Paul's motto was not to "build on someone else's foundation"¹⁴⁹ but the same could not be said for Apollos, nor for that matter Timothy and the next generation of apostles, who would have been involved with the Pauline churches, whilst at the same time reaching beyond their borders.

The key here is not the *origin* of the relationship, but the *goal*. We noted earlier that spiritual authority is essentially relational, and apostolic authority is no exception to this. To return to our earlier father-son metaphor, when a child is adopted, the relationship is often more difficult and requires more hard work than with a birth-child. But does that mean that the adopted child is *less* in need of fatherly involvement?

Natural parenthood is no guarantee of intimacy, as Paul found out on more than one occasion in Corinth. An adoptive relationship may be more time-consuming and progress more slowly than a birth relationship, but that doesn't mean that either the church or the apostle should settle for anything less in the long term than a full and productive relationship. All the churches in the New Testament were works-in-progress, and their relationship to Paul and the other apostles reflects this. As the relationship grows, this permits the apostle to be more forthright when the occasion warrants it.

7.4 The Sending Church

It is sometimes argued that apostles themselves must submit to the authority of the church that has "sent" them. Scheidler believes this strongly –

*"Paul did not go without the sanction and sending of the local church ... an apostle is not over the church, but sent by a local church and accountable to that local church leadership team for the work that he or she is sent to do"*¹⁵⁰

This concept is based largely around Paul's perceived relationship to the church in Antioch. In particular, it is pointed out that Paul and Barnabas, on returning from their first missionary trip, "gathered the church together and *reported* all that God had done through them."¹⁵¹

In fact, the word for "reported", *anangelo*, does not necessarily carry undertones of submission,¹⁵² and in any case, at no time does Paul describe himself as an "apostle of Antioch". It is also true that the leaders at Antioch "laid their hands on them and sent them off"¹⁵³, but the emphasis here is not on commissioning but rather on recognising what the Spirit was already doing, and releasing them from their current responsibilities in Antioch. There is no question of the elders delegating their authority to Paul to go on their behalf. As for Barnabas, wasn't he "sent" to Antioch by the Twelve in the first place?

¹⁴⁹ Romans 15:23

¹⁵⁰ Scheidler, p16, 17

¹⁵¹ Acts 14:27

¹⁵² see Kittel, p11

¹⁵³ Acts 13:3

Indeed, didn't he "report in detail" the events of his third missionary trip to the elders of the **Jerusalem** church?¹⁵⁴

Kittel sums this up -

*"An apostle is properly an apostle of Jesus Christ (rather than being sent by a local congregation) ..."*¹⁵⁵

None of this means that apostles act independently. Maybe there was, indeed, some accountability towards leaders in Antioch. It is important that all leaders genuinely open up their lives and ministries to fellow leaders, not simply paying lip-service to accountability. However, this is different to suggesting that one has authority over another.

8 Apostles and Elders

On six occasions in Acts, the phrase "apostles and elders" is used, all in relation to the Council of Jerusalem.¹⁵⁶ The immediate context is the resolution of a doctrinal dispute that was threatening to tear the wider church apart. Those involved in the decision included Peter and Paul, although surprisingly James the brother of Jesus seems to have the last word.¹⁵⁷ As we saw earlier, all of these three individuals were apostolic witnesses of the resurrected Christ, so their authority in matters of doctrine was in a sense unique. However, it is interesting that the elders of the Jerusalem church were also invited along to "consider the question."¹⁵⁸ What is the relationship between these two groups?

We can identify four similarities between apostles and elders –

- Firstly, we should notice that there were times that apostles were happy to be called elders. Peter refers to himself as a "fellow elder"¹⁵⁹, whilst John is happy to describe himself as "the elder"¹⁶⁰, and James the brother of Jesus is grouped together with the Jerusalem elders by Luke.¹⁶¹
- Secondly, we can see an echo between Paul's statement that he didn't "lord it over" the faith of the Corinthians¹⁶² and Peter's injunction to elders not to "lord it over" those entrusted to them.¹⁶³
- Thirdly, it seems that both elders and apostles are used to impart spiritual gifts.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁴ Acts 21:19

¹⁵⁵ Kittel, p73

¹⁵⁶ Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23, 16:4

¹⁵⁷ See Acts 15:13:21

¹⁵⁸ Acts 15:6

¹⁵⁹ 1 Peter 5:1

¹⁶⁰ 2 John 1, 3 John 1

¹⁶¹ Acts 21:19

¹⁶² 2 Corinthians 1:24

¹⁶³ 1 Peter 5:3

- Finally, it is apparent that both apostles and elders have specific spheres of influence. Elders of one “flock” would not automatically be elders in another.¹⁶⁵

We can also identify four specific functions apostles perform for elders –

- Appointing elders

In Acts 14:23 we find Paul and Barnabas appointing elders in the infant churches founded on the first missionary journey. Paul also delegates this responsibility to his apostolic sons, Timothy and Titus.¹⁶⁶ We have already noted that apostolic authority didn’t end in a church just because elders were appointed. However, this does not mean that elders are simply apostolic representatives – “sent by the apostles” to do their bidding. Paul was prepared to “commit them to God”¹⁶⁷ in his absence, indicating genuine delegation of authority.

- Developing a close link with elders

From reading the account of Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders, it is clear that there is a close relational bond between them.¹⁶⁸ As we noted earlier, such relationships are vital for the effective exercise of authority

- Advising elders

The apostolic wisdom we discussed earlier will have particular relevance to elders, and indeed other ministries. The book of Colossians probably arose as a result of Epaphras requesting advice from Paul in Rome regarding some dangerous heresies that had arisen in the churches he had founded.¹⁶⁹

- Supplementing the work of elders

As we mentioned earlier, Paul was not afraid to send fellow ministers into specific churches to work alongside elders, when he perceived a specific need. Although the local elders “rule” the local church¹⁷⁰, Paul encourages and expects them to receive others to share the burden with them for a season.

These similarities and links lead Coombs to conclude -

"The role of apostles and elders is one of government. The elder's sphere is local, whereas the apostle's sphere is translocal."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁴ See 1 Timothy 4:14, Romans 1:11

¹⁶⁵ See section 7.3 above for a discussion of the limitations of apostleship (to add in final draft)

¹⁶⁶ See 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5.

¹⁶⁷ Acts 20:32

¹⁶⁸ See Acts 20:17-38

¹⁶⁹ See Colossians 1:7-9

¹⁷⁰ 1 Timothy 5:17 KJV

¹⁷¹ Coombs, p213

This is a reasonable conclusion, as long as we don't forget the mission focus of biblical apostleship. An apostle is more than simply a trans-local elder, but he does carry authority in the churches.

9 Gifts and Offices

Apostleship is grouped together with other ministry gifts in both 1 Corinthians and Ephesians¹⁷². Eldership, on the other hand, is never described as a gift. The main emphasis is on character, maturity and the respect of others, rather than on gifts.¹⁷³

However, we have seen that there are some definite similarities between elders and apostles, which in fact are not found in relation to the other ministry gifts. Apostles and elders both operate within specific contexts, outside of which people don't relate to them as apostles and elders. Apostles and elders both seem to carry authority in the church, whereas the same is not readily apparent of the other ministry gifts. Apostleship therefore seems to look at times more like an office or function than a ministry gift.

Not only that, but apostles seem at times to be described as having one or other of the ministry gifts. Paul, for example, describes himself as a teacher¹⁷⁴, whilst he exhorts his apostolic son Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist"¹⁷⁵. Silas is described as a prophet.¹⁷⁶

How are we to make sense of this? It seems that apostleship can be understood as *both a gift and an office*. Elders, on the other hand, are those appointed to take charge of the local church. Elders may themselves have ministry gifts, but those with ministry gifts are not automatically elders.

The conclusion we can draw from this is that authority in the church lies with apostles and elders. Others with ministry gifts will only carry government if they are also appointed as elders, or commissioned as an apostle. As the following diagram indicates, ministry should not be confused with authority.

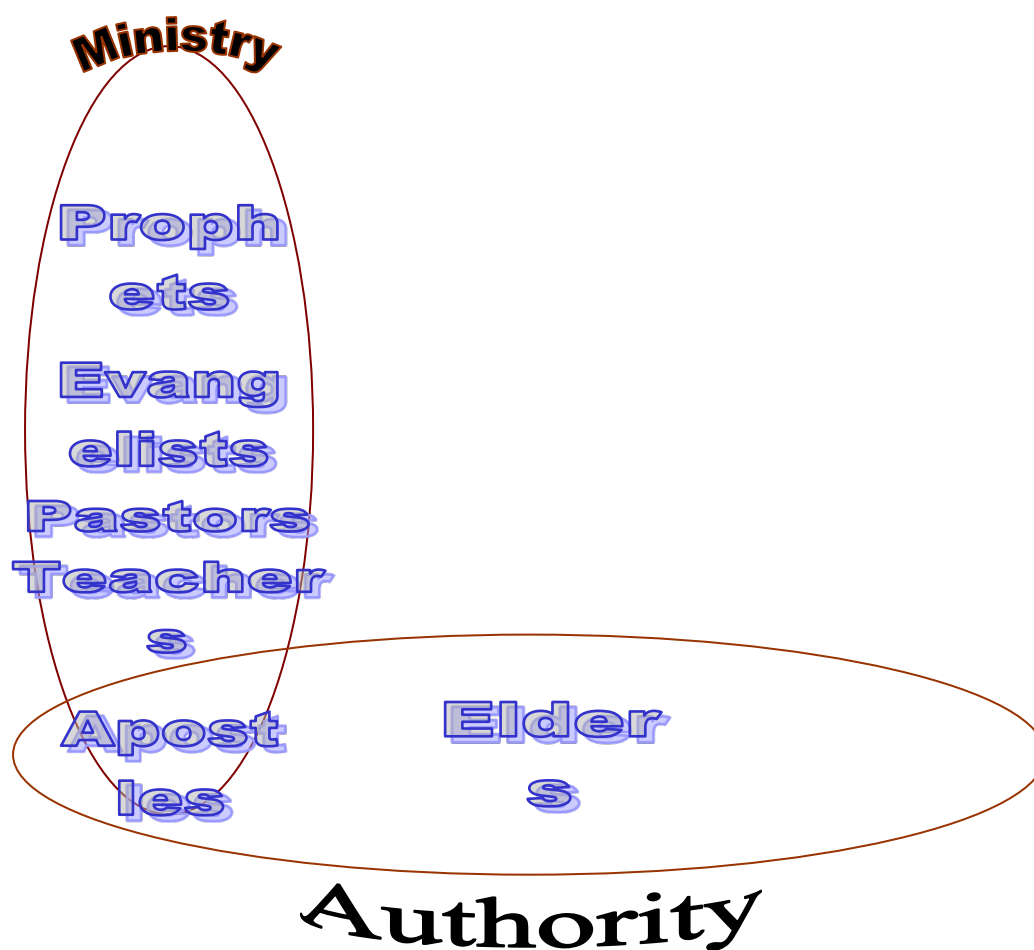
¹⁷² See 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:10-11

¹⁷³ See 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9

¹⁷⁴ 1 Timothy 2:7

¹⁷⁵ 2 Timothy 4:5

¹⁷⁶ Acts 15:32



10 Apostles & Prophets

In various places in Scripture apostles are specifically grouped together with prophets. Sometimes it is apparent that Old Testament prophets are in view. For example –

“I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles.”¹⁷⁷

The work of New Testament apostolic witnesses, which we noted earlier, faithfully preserving the teachings of Christ, mirrors the work of Old Testament prophets, who indeed are responsible for writing most of OT Scripture.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ 2 Peter 3:2. See also Luke 11:49, and Mat 23:34, where “wise men” is used instead of “apostles”.

¹⁷⁸ In fact, aside from the Prophets, the other major figure responsible for OT writings is Moses, whose ministry seems to prefigure that of NT apostles, as we alluded to earlier (see 4.1). It is interesting to note

However, some other Scriptures don't fit this pattern, specifically in the book of Ephesians

–

*“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”¹⁷⁹*

A few initial comments can be made about this passage –

- The fact that Paul is talking about the church, “God’s household”, and the fact that the order is inverted so that apostles come first, indicates that he is talking about New Testament ministries, not Old Testament prophets
- It seems safe to assume that the people he has in mind are the same apostles and prophets he mentions in Ephesians 4:11, the passage that we discussed earlier.¹⁸⁰ Therefore Paul is talking about more than just the Twelve.
- The metaphor he uses is different to 1 Corinthians 3:10, where a foundation is being laid. As Lyne says –

“... apostles don't simply lay a foundation - they are a foundation !”¹⁸¹

- The fact that apostles and prophets become part of the “structure” indicates that such ministries have a *permanent role*, more than simply initial involvement in the set-up of the church.

In what sense are apostles and prophets foundational? We find a clue in the other verse in Paul’s letter that brings them together –

“... the mystery made known to me by revelation ... which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.”¹⁸²

that, at the Transfiguration, the two individuals present with Christ were Elijah, perhaps the greatest prophet, and Moses, the O.T. “apostle” – see Matthew 17:1-3.

¹⁷⁹ Ephesians 2:19-21

¹⁸⁰ See section 6.3

¹⁸¹ Lyne, p26. It is possible to see a parallel here between this passage and Matthew 16:18, where Jesus says to Peter – “*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it*”. Hagner discusses this passage at some length, commenting “*The natural reading of the passage ... is that it is Peter that is the rock upon which the church is built ... The frequent attempts that have been made, largely in the past, to deny this in favour of the view that the confession itself is the rock seem to be largely motivated by Protestant prejudice against a passage that is used by the Roman Catholics to justify the Papacy.*” See Hagner, p470. In any case, this verse adds weight to the suggestion that the apostles themselves are foundational.

¹⁸² Ephesians 3:2-5

My intention is not to exegete this passage, but rather point out that there is a link between the grouping of NT apostles and prophets and the bringing of revelation.

“Without revelation people cast off restraint.”¹⁸³ It seems that apostles and prophets are supposed to work together to bring stability to a church by communicating a *foundation of vision*, that is, they are used by God to articulate the overarching and strategic purposes of the church.

*“Apostles, by definition, have seen God’s purpose.”*¹⁸⁴

We are told tantalisingly little in the New Testament about prophets, although the Old Testament certainly gives us plenty to go on. A detailed examination of prophetic ministry is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is apparent that apostolic and prophetic ministry are complementary, and at times similar. The prophet will have a particular sensitivity towards God’s voice and an ability to inspire action in others, as indeed Agabus did in Jerusalem.¹⁸⁵ Apostles are often more able to put truth and revelation in context and sharper definition.

Their architectural vision of the church under construction enables them to take a prophetic word and fit it into God’s overall purposes. As Bryn Jones says –

*“If people respond to a single issue at the time without understanding it in relation to the rest of God’s plan, then there is a danger of an emphasis on worship one week, dealing with fear the next, followed by having faith, using signs and wonders and campaigning against abortion! The apostle fits all these issues into their context so that the people don’t become locked into one emphasis or another but start seeing the picture as a whole.”*¹⁸⁶

Rather like houses on a Monopoly board, an apostle helps us to build *evenly*.

This link between apostles and prophets is seen in the ministry of Paul. Silas accompanied him on his second missionary journey,¹⁸⁷ and prophets helped him build the church in Antioch.¹⁸⁸

11 Apostles in Practice

11.1 Apostolic patterns

We have already alluded to some of the patterns of ministry we see in the life of Paul. Two broad methodologies are discernible –

¹⁸³ Proverbs 29:18

¹⁸⁴ Keri Jones, quoted in Matthew, p81

¹⁸⁵ See Acts 11:28

¹⁸⁶ Bryn Jones, quoted in Matthew, p110

¹⁸⁷ See Acts 15:40

¹⁸⁸ See Acts 11:26-27

- Often he spent a considerable length of time in one large city, securing the foundations of the church there and influencing the surrounding areas –
 - Corinth – 2 years (with Silas)¹⁸⁹
 - Ephesus – 3 years (with various others)¹⁹⁰
 - Antioch – 1 year (with Barnabas)¹⁹¹

Clearly if a stay was extended, the apostle would become fully involved in the life of the church. This might be followed up with shorter visits later.

- Alternatively, as in the churches he visited in Galatia, he might visit them on a number of occasions, for shorter periods of time, perhaps weeks or months.

From what little we know of the activities of other apostles, we may infer that they adopted similar policies. The important point to note yet again is that their ministry towards these churches was based on *relationship*. Paul was able to speak more effectively in his letters because of the bonds he had already formed with those he addressed, not simply because he was the ‘officially designated’ apostle of that particular church.

A review of modern apostolic patterns reveals a different story, often with much shorter visits of a larger number of congregations, perhaps notionally linked to one in particular. This is due in part to better modern travel and communication; however, it must be pointed out that Paul’s primary constraint was not geographical. Building strong relationships takes time in any century.

Are modern apostles spread too thin? Perhaps a greater focus on building large base churches and growing other apostolic ministries in key cities would lead to greater fruitfulness in the long term than an emphasis on relating to a great number of churches.

11.2 Changing seasons and multiple inputs

Apostolic relationships in New Testament times were neither static nor permanent. As Cannistraci says –

"... their places of authority were not unchangeable. They were built upon their foundational callings as apostles, but were relative to the seasons and purposes of God for their lives and for the church"¹⁹²

We have already noted that apostolic input into a church will change over time, as the congregation progresses from infancy and the leadership matures. It is apparent in

¹⁸⁹ See Acts 19:10

¹⁹⁰ See Acts 20:31

¹⁹¹ See Acts 11:26

¹⁹² Cannistraci, p145

Jerusalem, for example, that in the early years Peter was the most prominent apostle, but over time James came to the fore.

Similarly, Paul recognised that both his role in Corinth and that of Apollos were assigned by God.¹⁹³ Paul clearly did not feel threatened by Apollos, despite the immature way in which some Corinthians promoted division along “party lines”. Although there was some overlap in ministry between the two men, it is clear that Apollos didn’t view himself as part of Paul’s team –

“Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.”¹⁹⁴

It is difficult to imagine Timothy, for example, resisting Paul’s urgings! In any case, it is clear that it was God’s intention for more than one apostle to have involvement in a church. Doubtless there would be seasons where one or other of them were more closely involved, and perhaps here there *is* some validity in giving primacy to the ‘founding father’ of the church, as Paul was. Nevertheless, even Paul recognised that a time could come where he would need to move on and leave the church in the hands of another.¹⁹⁵

12 Conclusion

“As of 2000, we are again a first century church”¹⁹⁶

The early decades of the church have much to teach us regarding apostolic ministry. I have attempted to draw out broad principles, without being too dogmatic. As Joyner says –

“The Lord was building His government around people, not trying to build people around a form of government.”¹⁹⁷

It seems that apostles are key to this government, and once we grasp the breadth of intention that God has for apostolic ministry, it becomes difficult to see how any church can maximise its potential without it.

Coombs expresses concern in his book that the opportunity for church leaders to read about apostolic ministry “could actually be an inoculation against the real thing.”¹⁹⁸ Some elders are tempted to plug the gap themselves. Perhaps mindful of Paul’s injunction to Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist”¹⁹⁹, they try to do the work of an apostle, without

¹⁹³ 1 Corinthians 3:5

¹⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 16:12

¹⁹⁵ Romans 15:23

¹⁹⁶ Cannistraci, p21

¹⁹⁷ Joyner, p124

¹⁹⁸ Coombes, p75

¹⁹⁹ 2 Timothy 4:5

really opening themselves up to an apostolic gift from without. Others are put off by negative or inadequate experiences of such a ministry.

All of this is understandable, but in the long run, not really excusable. We cannot draw doctrinal conclusions about ministry gifts simply from negative personal experience. The same could be said for exposure to false teachers or suspect televangelists. God's principles survive bad application.

Scheidler lists four pillars that form the foundation of a fruitful relationship between apostle and church -

"Covenant relationship, integrity of character, commonality of vision and doctrinal compatibility"²⁰⁰

Clearly, this will mean not every apostle will bond with every church, nor indeed every group of elders. It does emphasise, however, that it is not essential to agree on every single point of doctrine for a successful relationship.

The modern church shows no sign of growing in maturity, unity and stability to the point where the ministries of Ephesians 4 are no longer required; on the contrary, they must all be embraced if the church is to be all that Christ intended. This does not mean uncritically accepting everyone with a badge as an apostle, but it does require openness to receive those whom Christ has "sent".

²⁰⁰ Scheidler, p216

Appendices

(1) *Apostles and Miracles*

It is hard to disagree with Cannistraci when he says –

*“As I read through the book of Acts, I am struck with the frequency and magnitude of the miracles and demonstrations of God’s power through the lives of the apostles Peter, John and Paul.”*²⁰¹

But how normative is this? Is it necessary for a leader to be a miracle-worker in order to be classed as an apostle? Some writers believe this is the case –

*“Any apostle who is not believing for signs, wonders and miracles in his ministry is walking short of his apostolic authority and anointing.”*²⁰²

A number of points should be made in response –

- Apostles were not the only ones to experience miracles in their ministry. Phillip the evangelist was used in signs and wonders in Samaria.²⁰³ Stephen, whose specific gifting is never identified, also experienced this in abundance.²⁰⁴ The “Seventy-Two” also experienced a supernatural outpouring when Jesus sent them out, just as the Twelve did.²⁰⁵ It seems that signs and wonders were marks of *New Testament ministry in general*, not only of the apostolic. Since apostles are most prevalent in the pages of the New Testament, it is not surprising that they perform most of the recorded miracles.
- Paul specifically distinguishes between the ministry of an apostle and that of a miracle worker.²⁰⁶
- Hamon also points out that when the apostles ministered, God performed miracles to “confirm the *Word*, not the *worker*.”²⁰⁷ The purpose of the miracles in Acts was primarily to confirm the truth contained in the preaching of the apostolic witnesses.²⁰⁸

The main Scripture quoted to support the contention that apostles must be miracle-workers is 2 Corinthians 12:12 –

²⁰¹ Cannistraci, p159

²⁰² Hamon, p33

²⁰³ See Acts 8:6

²⁰⁴ Acts 6:8

²⁰⁵ See Luke 10:1-20

²⁰⁶ See 1 Corinthians 12:28

²⁰⁷ Hamon, p37. See Mark 16:20

²⁰⁸ See, for example, Acts 4:33 – “*With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*”

“The things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance.”

Unfortunately, this may be one of the occasions where the NIV doesn't serve us well. For sound exegetical and grammatical reasons, many translations render this verse differently –

“The signs, indeed, of the apostle, were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, in wonders, and in mighty deeds.”²⁰⁹

As Jack Deere points out –

“The phrase ‘signs of an apostle’ cannot refer to miracles, for then Paul would be saying that ‘the miracles of an apostle were done among you with signs and wonders and miracles.’ What would be the point of such a statement?”²¹⁰

The context suggests that Paul was referring to his life, conduct and ministry in general, as he defended his ministry, and contrasted it with the “false apostles” who perhaps themselves boasted of their own miracles.²¹¹ Paul could certainly match them on supernatural grounds – he excelled in power and patience – but he knew that miracles could be counterfeited too.²¹² For Paul, the “seal” of his apostleship was rather the fruit that his ministry had produced amongst the Corinthians.²¹³

We must be careful not to unwittingly adopt the kind of bench-marking that the Catholic Church adopts, when in order to be a “Saint”, the individual must have performed a specific number of miracles. However, in a rather oblique way, such a teaching stumbles upon an essential Biblical truth. We are *all* saints, and true, spirit-filled New Testament saints should expect to experience the power that the Spirit brings. A discussion of why this is not greatly in evidence, particularly in the Western Church, is beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁰⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:12 Young's Literal Translation. See also NEB, RSV, KJV.

²¹⁰ Quoted in Coombes, p200. Ralph Martin also points out that “*the use of the three terms in the dative case suggests that /the NIV interpretation is incorrect/. If Paul had sought to show that the “marks” of apostleship were “signs and wonders and mighty works” only, it would have made more sense for him to have employed the nominative case and constructed a predicate nominative (“The signs of apostleship are signs, wonders and mighty works.”) But instead Paul seems to be suggesting the idea of ‘accompaniment’.*” (p436)

²¹¹ See 2 Corinthians 11:12-13

²¹² See 2 Thessalonians 2:9. See also Mark 13:22, where Jesus implies that false prophets might “*deceive the elect*” with signs and miracles.

²¹³ See 1 Corinthians 9:2

(2) List of New Testament Apostles

We have already discussed the apostleship of Jesus, the Twelve (including Matthias) and Paul. A closer inspection of the New Testament reveals many more who are definitely described as apostles, and some who may or may not fit into this category.

The “Definites”

- Barnabas

*“So Paul and **Barnabas** spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the **apostles**.”*²¹⁴

- Apollos

*“Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” ... For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.”*²¹⁵

It is readily apparent from this reference, and Paul’s discussion of Apollos’ ministry in Corinth elsewhere in the letter, that Paul viewed Apollos as a fellow apostle.

- Timothy

*“Paul, Silas and **Timothy**, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. ... We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As **apostles** of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you ...”*²¹⁶

- Silas

The same passage of Scripture above that evidences Timothy’s apostleship also evidence that of Silas.

- Andronicus & Junias

²¹⁴ Acts 14:3-4

²¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 4:6,9

²¹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6-7

*Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.*²¹⁷

- Epaphroditus

*“But I thought it necessary to send to you **Epaphroditus**, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger (**apostolos**) and minister to my need;*²¹⁸

Some commentators see Epaphroditus as simply a “messenger”, and indeed some of the more recent Bible versions translate *apostolos* in this way. It is, of course, possible, that the same Greek word can have two different meanings or usages, but at times it almost seems as though some commentators are in danger of ascribing a second usage simply in order to buttress a cessationist perspective.²¹⁹

A close inspection of the passage indicates that Epaphroditus was far more than a messenger “sent out by a church on some errand”.²²⁰ Paul’s description of him as a “fellow worker and fellow soldier” is suggestive of a long and intimate ministry link. There is no reason why we cannot simply take this Scripture at face value.

- Two unnamed apostles

*“... as for **our brothers**, they are representatives (**apostolos**) of the churches and an honour to Christ.*²²¹

The context of this verse indicates that there are two individuals in view, whose names are never given. Again, some commentators use this Scripture to justify a second usage of *apostolos*, as “messenger”, but in this case, such a usage seems even more unlikely. Paul describes the individuals concerned in such glowing terms²²² that it is apparent they have widely respected ministries. Indeed their very presence on the journey is to help oversee and legitimise the distribution of an offering, so they were clearly more than mere “messengers.”²²³ There is no obvious reason to interpret *apostolos* in anything other than the common Biblical sense, unless it is to buttress a different theological viewpoint.

Of course, it is possible that these unnamed men are in fact identical with one of the names already mentioned, and indeed Barnabas is sometimes suggested in this regard. We can only speculate, although would be surprising if Paul does not mention Barnabas by name, since he does elsewhere in his epistles.²²⁴

The “Probables”

²¹⁷ Romans 16:67. The question of whether Junias was male or female is beyond the scope of this paper.

²¹⁸ Philippians 2:25 NASB

²¹⁹ Stott is one of these – see his commentary “*The Message of Ephesians*”, p160

²²⁰ Stott, p160

²²¹ 2 Corinthians 8:23

²²² See 2 Corinthians 8:18, 22

²²³ See 2 Corinthians 8:20

²²⁴ See Galatians 2:13

- James, the brother of Jesus

*“Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹I saw none of the other **apostles—only James, the Lord's brother.**”²²⁵*

There is a rather technical disagreement amongst commentators on this scripture,²²⁶ concerning the precise meaning of the verse. Some simply take the verse at face value, accepting that Paul was calling James an apostle, whilst others argue that, based on the meaning of “other” in the Greek, it is also possible to render an alternative reading, in which James is *distinguished* from the apostles, rather than *identifying* him with them. Again, if one works from the basic assumption that apostleship was prevalent outside the Twelve and Paul, then there is no obvious reason not to take the most straightforward reading of this. This conclusion is lent further weight by James obvious prominence in the Council of Jerusalem, and in the Jerusalem church in general.²²⁷

- Epaphras

This individual is never specifically described as *apostolos*, but what evidence we have in Scripture seems to support the suggestion that he had an apostolic ministry in his own right, under the overall oversight of Paul, when the latter was in Ephesus. We have already alluded to the likelihood that Epaphras planted the church in Colosse, and probably Laodicea and Hierapolis as well. Paul indicates in the letter to Colosse that he had never visited them at that point,²²⁸ so it could not be said that he was their “apostle” in any meaningful sense. It seems reasonable to conclude that Epaphras was an apostle to these churches.

- Titus

It is sometimes argued that 2 Corinthians 8:23, quoted previously in relation to the “unnamed apostles”, proves that Titus was an apostle.²²⁹ This is an overstatement, but a wider examination of Titus’ itinerant role is suggestive of apostolic ministry within Paul’s team. Paul’s exhortations and expectations in his epistle to Titus mirror many of the words written to Timothy, and Paul also recognises that God had “*put into the heart of Titus the same concern I had for you.*”²³⁰

²²⁵ Galatians 1:18-19

²²⁶ Louis Rushmore provides a useful precis of this debate, quoting commentators on both sides. – see <http://www.gospelgazette.com/gazette/2004/may/page18.htm>

²²⁷ It is interesting, for example, that Paul seemed to seek out James, both on this visit and also on a later trip to Jerusalem – see Acts 21:18. See also Peter’s specific insistence that James be told of his miraculous release from prison (Acts 12:17).

²²⁸ See Colossians 1:4, 9, 23

²²⁹ See, for example, Cannistraci, p58

²³⁰ 2 Corinthians 8:16

Paul also notes that the Corinthians received Titus with obedience.²³¹ Finally, at the end of the epistle, when Paul is defending his apostleship and his actions, and pointing out that he was never a “burden” to the church, he says that he and Titus “*acted in the same spirit and followed the same course*”²³²

None of this is conclusive, but it does point to an apostolic ministry for Titus.

The “Possibles”

Some writers also place others in this category, mainly because they are described as being “sent” (*apostello*), mainly by Paul. Tychicus²³³, Judas²³⁴ and Erastus²³⁵ are all mentioned in this regard²³⁶. It is indeed possible that these men, all co-workers with Paul, were apostles in their own right, but we can do little more than speculate on the subject. As mentioned earlier, it is entirely possible to be “sent” somewhere, without necessarily being a “sent one”.²³⁷

²³¹ See 2 Corinthians 7:14

²³² 2 Corinthians 12:18

²³³ See 2 Timothy 4:12, c.f. Ephesians 6:21

²³⁴ See Acts 15:27

²³⁵ See Acts 19:22

²³⁶ Cannistraci, p59, mentions all three in his list.

²³⁷ See section 3.2, in relation to the Seventy-Two.

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