



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

*Resourcing for Prayer Network*

## **SPIRITUAL GUIDELINES (16)**

# **The Gift of the Apostle and Exercising an Apostolic Ministry**

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**Throughout this series we have been looking at the different gifts that Paul wrote about in his letters to enable the early church to fulfil its mission. All were seen as essential to the growth of the church especially at a time when there was growing tension in society around them. The thinking among Christians today is changing as more and more are seeing the essential need for the restoration of ALL the gifts to the church today for it to carry out God's mission.**

In the recent Spiritual Guidelines we have covered all those in the 4 lists given by Paul and come to the final ministry gift - that of the Apostle. It is with this gift to the church that we come across the greatest resistance to current day use especially from those who believe that this was a first century experience only.

### **The Original Apostles**

Mark 3.14 - 19 lists the original twelve apostles who were appointed by Jesus *'so that they could be with him and so that he might send them out to preach and to have authority over demons'*. They were sent out two by two (Mark 6.7) and significantly they returned to Jesus following the beheading of John the Baptist when Jesus then took them across the Galilee to a quiet place to rest and be replenished which was just prior to the feeding of the Five Thousand. At that time they reported back to Jesus *'all they had said and done'* (Mark 6.30 and Luke 9.10). They were called to be the closest followers of Jesus and had the special task of being the primary teachers of his Gospel message to others. The Apostolic Age refers to the lifetimes of the apostles when they established churches far and wide. The word *'apostle'* simply means *'one who is sent'*.

### **Paul becomes an Apostle**

Paul's claim to be an apostle comes with a definition *'The things that mark an apostle - signs, wonders and miracles - were done among you with great perseverance'*

(2 Corinthians 12.12). He claimed a special commission from the resurrected Jesus to become the '*apostle of the Gentiles*' (Romans 11:13) and fights for this right in 1 Cor.9.1 although he always considered himself to be the least among the apostles. Peter was seen as the foremost of the apostles and was often called the '*apostle to the Jews*': the Early Church considered it higher status to follow Peter rather than Paul.

## **Apostolic Succession**

James, the brother of Jesus, because of this relationship, was created the leader of the Jerusalem church in the dynastic succession tradition and although Jesus did not intend a hierarchy of status, by the second century AD, association of any kind with the apostles was esteemed as evidence of authority. Paul's epistles were accepted as scripture, and two of the four Gospels were associated with Apostles, as were other New Testament works. Christian bishops have traditionally claimed authority derived, by apostolic succession, from the Twelve and the Early Church Fathers are often referred to as Apostolic Fathers. Acts 8.18 teaches about the laying on of the Apostles hands led which led to Apostolic succession with the subsequent '*laying on of hands and commissioning*' being carried on today.

## **The Role of the Apostle**

Although it was never intended that there should be a hierarchy in the church, there are specific roles and a specific order was followed in the formation of the early church. Apostles were needed first with the vision and the church planting commission, then prophets to alert believers to God's presence, unchanging nature and his word to them, followed by teachers and pastors with other gifts when the group was more formed (1 Corinthians 12.28). Often this policy is followed by those who would take the name of apostle today although Paul goes to great lengths to warn against masquerading as apostles in 2 Corinthians 11.13.

## **Building on the Foundations**

It was important that the church should be '*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone*' as accentuated in Ephesians 2.20. We are called '*to follow the teaching of the apostles*' described in Acts 2.42 in the way the early church did - and it grew exponentially then - and could do so again now.

But the role coming with the gift of the Apostle (as of all the other ministry gifts) is '*to equip his 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*'.

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