

Jesus had many “disciples,” but from this group He selected twelve for a very special task. We read in Luke 6:12, “And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them whom He also named as apostles.” The word “Apostle” means “one who is sent out.” In chapter 9, Luke records that Jesus “called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to perform healing” (Luke 9:1-2). As Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:18, He again stressed the distinction of His apostles. He said, “As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” In Acts 1:8, Jesus told His apostles that they would be His “witnesses ... to the remotest part of the earth.” Those whom Jesus called “Apostles” were distinguished from everyone else. The way He selected them, as well as the focus of their mission, set the apostles apart from every other disciple.

The Lord's Apostles were also granted a distinctive measure of authority. In Luke 22:14 we find Jesus alone with His “apostles.” In verses 28-30 He said, “And you are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Again, in Matthew 16:19 Jesus said to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” It seems that Jesus allowed His apostles both judicial and legislative authority in His kingdom. They were found both declaring statutes and making judgments concerning them. In the Greek text, the promise to Peter takes on more significance, for it says, “and whatever you shall bind on earth has been bound already in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth has been loosed already in heaven.” As we study further, we shall see that the teachings of the apostles set people free from some traditions which previously had “bound them.” At the same time, their teachings also “bound” upon people new traditions which were peculiar to those “in Christ.” However, it is obvious that the apostles did not merely fabricate these traditions and teachings from their own imaginations; for the things they taught had already been decreed by the Father in heaven. They were simply conveying the things given to them by God, through the Holy Spirit (John 16:13).

After the death of Jesus, the inspired apostles directed the early church. In Acts 1, it is the apostles to whom Jesus is giving orders (vs 2); it is the apostles who witness His ascension into heaven (vs 9); it is the apostles who are listed by name in verse 13; who are “devoting themselves to prayer”; and to whom Matthias was added to replace Judas (vs 26). In chapter 2, it is the apostles who “were all together in one place” (vs 1); who were “filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues” (vs 4). It was the teaching of the apostles to whom the earliest converts devoted their attention (vs 42). It was through the apostles that “many wonders and signs were taking place” (vs 43). And on and on it goes throughout the book of Acts. Read chapters 4, 5, 6, and 8 -- the apostles were obviously in a leadership capacity. The people recognized that God was with them because of the miracles they performed. The people listened to their teaching, for it was the Word of Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit. We too should recognize their role in God's plan. And, like those of long ago, we too should continue to devote ourselves to the apostle's teaching (Acts 2:42); and to “hold to the traditions” they began for the church (II Thessalonians 2:15). The Lord's Apostles directed the church in the ways of Christ, taught the church the Word of God, and did so by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

1. What does the word "Apostle" mean?
2. How does Luke 9:1-2, John 17:18, and Acts 1:8 demonstrate why Jesus called them this?
3. Jesus had many "disciples," but Luke 6:12 reveals that He had only _____ "apostles."
how many
4. Do you believe the Apostles of Christ were given authority to reveal laws to and make judgments for the people of God? (Luke 22:14,28-30; Matthew 16:19)
5. From a deeper study of the Greek in Matthew 16:19, how did the apostles know what laws and traditions were to be "bound" or "loosed" for God's people?
6. A casual reading of the first eight chapters of Acts reveals that the early church looked to _____ as their leaders and guides?
whom
7. The people recognized that God was with them because of the _____ they performed.
(Acts 2:43; II Corinthians 12:12)
8. The first century church devoted themselves to the apostle's _____. (Acts 2:42)
9. Can you think of any reason why Christians today should not also submit to the authority of the Lord's apostles?
10. What does II Thessalonians 2:15 mean to you?