

## Chapter Three

# APOSTLES AND OTHER LEADERS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

### A. The Twelve Apostles

**1. The only leadership** that Jesus prepared for the church was the twelve apostles. The seventy (Luke 10:1-20) were appointed and sent out to minister, but there is no record that they were recognized as church leaders. From this we can say that though any believer can minister, even with a powerful anointing, this does not mean he has a leadership position in the church. These twelve apostles were foundational men (Matt. 16:18,19; John 20:21; Eph 2:20; I Cor. 12:28).

**2. All the leadership resided in them** at first (Acts 2:42; 4:33-37).

They were the evangelists and pastors. They were the prophets and teachers. They even did the servile work (Acts 6:1), which shows they had learned the lesson that leaders of the church must be servants (John 13:1-17; Luke 22:24-27). The prime activity of the church leaders, however, is found in Acts 6:4 .prayer and the ministry of the word.”

## **B. Deacons**

**1.** With a community of at least 5,000 it was imperative that **more official workers be appointed**. Thus, at the word of the apostles, seven men were selected by the assembly and set in by the apostles (Acts 6:3). These were the first deacons.

**2. Deaconship is an office** in the church (Phil. 1:1 and I Tim. 3:8-13), but we should not assume they were involved in spiritual leadership. We don't see them used in leadership in the New Testament; rather they were used in material matters. They may have handled money, since the admonition in I Timothy 3:8, concerning the qualifications of deacons was "not fond of sordid gain." From Acts 11:29,30 we see that financial decisions were made by the elders or the spiritual leaders (Acts 4:34, 35).

**3. Confusion over their role has arisen** because of Steven's and Phillip's subsequent ministries. We may note the following facts: Out of 5,000 the most spiritually qualified men were chosen (Acts 6:3,5). These men were the potential spiritual leaders of the future, but at this point they were selected as servants ('Diakonos'). On the other hand, the deacon's qualifications were as stringent as the overseer's and so they should be today.

## **C. Evangelists and Other Independent Ministries**

**1. Philip's ministry**, as well as some others, seems to have begun almost accidentally (Acts 8:1,4,5). Later in Acts 21:8 he is called "the evangelist."

The evangelist is a gift-ministry to the Church (Eph. 4:11), and thus a part of the spiritual leadership of the Church. Philip had not been sent by the apostles as far as the record informs us, but his ministry was subject to apostolic supervision (Acts 8:14-25). It is important to recognize that the initiative for ministry does not lie exclusively with the recognized leadership. The disciples learned this from Jesus in Mark 9:38-40. There is always a place for the Holy Spirit directed evangelist or evangelizer who may work more or less independently.

**2. These ministries, however, are not truly independent.** They are amenable to apostolic oversight. Paul warned the Ephesian elders of those who would "draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29,30). (See also III John 9, 10). Independent ministries that refuse guidance and correction or relationship with other churches are not of the Holy Spirit.

**3. Another example** of this type of ministry is found in Acts 11:19-26. Note that Barnabas seems to have been recognized as having an apostolic calling at this time (verses 22-26). At least we could say that apostolic responsibilities had been delegated to him.

## **D. Prophets and Teachers**

1. Jesus predicted the **prophet's ministry** in the Church (Luke 11:49). The first appearance of the prophet is in Acts 11:27, 28. In 13:1 we find Paul and Barnabas listed as “prophets and teachers.” Also in Acts 15:32 and 21:10 we find the prophet mentioned.

**2. The example of Agabus** shows us that the **prophet's gift was a supernatural foretelling** of events. Though the prophet's ministry unquestionably involved exhortation, edification and consolation (I Cor. 14:3), we should not assume that it is to be equated with preaching the gospel. From the context of the other eight gifts of the Spirit in I Corinthians 12:7-10 we can see that prophecy is more than a natural preaching gift. From I Corinthians 14:24-26 we see its supernatural element. It should also be noted that anyone can prophesy (I Cor. 14:31), but this does not mean that all have the office of a prophet. The prophet, officially recognized by the Church, is a part of the spiritual leadership (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). The prophet's position is next to the apostle in the matter of authority and foundational activities (Eph. 2:20; 3:5).

**3. There is a difference between the office of the teacher and teaching.** Teaching is a general activity that any believer can engage in (I Cor. 14:26), and a ministry that all church leaders should exercise (I Tim. 3:2). There is, however, **an official position of teacher in the Church.** We see this in Acts 13:1; I Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11. A teacher then is one with a special anointing to expound God's Word and edify the Church.

## **E. Elders and Overseers**

**1. Ten times we find the word “elders”** used in Acts. By comparing Acts 20:17 and 20:28 we see that the elder was also called an overseer (“episkopos”). Compare verses 5 and 7 of Titus 1.

**2.** The elders are first mentioned in Acts 11:30 in Jerusalem. It is clearly evident that **they were the spiritual leaders** in the local churches (Acts 21:18-25). They helped in the crucial doctrinal decision of Acts 15. (See verses 2, 4, 6, 22, 23 and 16:4). They received and oversaw the distribution of finances (Acts 11:29, 30). From Acts 20:17-35 we see their pastoral and leadership responsibilities.

**3. Elders receive their position by appointment** of the existing spiritual leadership. In Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas did the appointing. In Paul’s epistles to Timothy and Titus he instructed them to appoint the elders. We therefore conclude that elders do not get their position by popular election, wealth, education, or criteria other than a call from the Lord and His anointing. Note that prayer and fasting preceded this selection. Paul says in Acts 20:28 that the Holy Spirit made them overseers. Mistakes in the selection of church officers could be avoided if the ones responsible for appointing elders would wait for supernatural confirmation.

4. We never find a church with only one elder. **Spiritual leadership should always be a plurality.** The apostles operated as a team. Plurality of elders does not mean there is not a presiding elder. Today we call him a pastor.

## **F. The Other Apostles**

1. Barnabas and Saul had a dramatic call to their apostolic ministry in Acts 13:1-4. They are called apostles in Acts 14:4,14. Silas was called an apostle. Compare I Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:6. From the context of I Corinthians 4, verses 6 and 9 we see that Apollos was called an apostle. Though James was not called an apostle in the book of Acts, it is evident he was one from his position in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15). In Galatians 1:19; 2:9 he is called an apostle.

2. From studying Acts we can make the following **observations about apostles** in the early church:

- a. There were more than the original twelve.
- b. These men were already recognized in another ministry before they were recognized as apostles.
- c. Some were church founders, as Barnabas, Paul and Silas.
- d. Some were strong, anointed leaders to whom the churches looked for leadership and counsel, such as Apollos and James.
- e. Though the apostles' ministry could be equated with a missionary-type ministry, the example of James shows us that apostles could be more sedentary.

- f. As in the case of Paul and Barnabas, apostles should be recognized and sent out by an established home church.
- g. The various apostles were universally welcome: Apollos in Corinth, Peter at Antioch, Paul in Phoenicia and Jerusalem. There was no evident rivalry between the apostles (Gal. 2:1 - 9), and sectarianism was rebuked when it arose (I Cor. 1 and 3).