

The Apostles

God's Great Plan

God's Great Plan to deliver people from the wages of sin included Immanuel, God With Us, who would come and live on earth for just over 30 years. As a prophet, He would begin to disclose God's plan for salvation. But Immanuel had to return to Heaven to fulfill His duties as High Priest and King of Kings. To complete the delivery of the Word to all nations, He sent the Holy Spirit to speak through men whom He appointed to spread His Gospel. *"These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you"* (John 14:25-26). *"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you"* (John 16:12-14).

The title "apostle" defines one who is sent by someone in a superior position of authority. It describes Jesus' relation to God, His Father (John 17:3; Hebrews 3:1). Apostle is also the title of office given by Jesus to the twelve He chose for special training (Luke 6:13, 9:10). *"He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles"* (Luke 6:13). Peter gives the unique qualifications for these chosen messengers, sent forth by Jesus and guided by the Holy Spirit, to spread His Words to the world (Acts 1:21-22). Two others, one that traveled with Jesus and one who met Jesus on the way to Damascus, were also chosen. Matthias replaced Judas (Acts 1:23-26). Paul saw Jesus, was baptized, and became an apostle to replace James and carry the Word to the gentiles (Acts 9:1-18).

Before ascending to the Father, Jesus appeared to many, specifically to the apostles, proving that He lived and possessed complete authority to instruct them (Matthew 28:18-20). *"To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me"* (Acts 1:2-4).

Luke began the book of Acts by saying that the apostle's job was to complete the work that Jesus started (Acts 1:1-5). After Jesus returned to heaven, one of the first actions of the apostles was to declare to the Jews that Jesus is on His throne. *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."* Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, *"Brethren, what shall we do?"* (Acts 2:36-37). The Messiah, whom Moses and all the prophets said would come, is also Lord, King of Kings, and Christ. Those present showed they recognized that God was working through them when they asked the apostles what to do. Peter and the other apostles had begun by quoting Joel and stating that the Holy Spirit presented this message (Acts 2:16-21). The Apostles revealed the complete Gospel of Christ in their teaching and in the writings which we have in our New Testaments.

Paul further explained his commission this way. *"I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."* (Romans 1:13-19).

The Apostolic Age, beginning on Pentecost described in Acts 2, ended when the last of Christ's apostles died. Paul spoke of the portions of the gospel which the Apostles delivered and told of a time that

would come when the complete Word of God would be available. *"Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away"* (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). The Apostles began preaching and establishing the church. They ended by writing or dictating the 27 books that comprise the New Testament. We now have the complete Word, just as God planned it, in the Bible.