

Is Apostolic Succession Biblical? Is there still a line of apostles today that go back to the very first ones?

### Apostles

When Jesus choose the 12 apostles or disciples, He commissioned them to take the gospel into all the world, and they did, however, many believe that there has been a succession of apostles down to our day, but let me show you from Scripture why that cannot be true. After Judas hanged himself, the remaining 11 apostles thought they should choose another one to replace Judas, and they laid down the qualifications for someone being an apostle in Acts 1. This is the only place in Scripture where we're given the qualifications for being an apostle or becoming an apostle...the only place! In Acts 1:21, the Apostle Peter says that the next apostle...the one to replace Judas, must be "one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us." Clearly, this would rule out everyone living today because none of us where there during Jesus' earthly ministry, "during all the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us." No human today could be qualified to be one of the apostles because they were not with "the Lord Jesus" when He "went in and out among" the other apostles.

Paul the Apostle, by Rembrandt. c. 1657

### Jesus' Baptism

As Peter was talking about replacing the apostle Judas with a new apostle, Peter says they must have been with them from "beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1:22). Again, no human can qualify to say that they were with the original apostles "from the beginning of the baptism of John," meaning, from the time Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. And no person alive today on earth was a witness to Jesus' resurrection. The Bible never mentions other successors or that there will be a line of succession of the apostles. The one verse some use as a proof text, which is taken out of context, is the verse where Jesus tells Peter, "Upon this rock, I shall build My church" (Matt 16:18), but what was that rock? That rock was the statement Peter had just made: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16). Incidentally, the word for Peter "petra" means rock, but the rock Jesus refers to is more like a boulder that He says He will build His church on. Jesus is not telling Peter that He will build His church upon Peter, and upon an apostolic succession of men. If that were so, the church would be in trouble. Peter's dead. Besides, Jesus is actually the Head of the Church, not Peter, not Paul, or the Pope. The church is the Body of Christ, but the Head of the church is Jesus Christ Himself.

### Apostolic Succession

Apostolic succession is the belief that all authority has been passed down from the first apostles, who then passed on their apostolic authority to the next successor. This succession has lasted over 2,000 years, and today there are still apostolic successors around. These "successors" have greater authority than anyone else in the church, and so

in this view, Peter was the first Pope or first of the apostolic successors of the church, but they also view the newest apostle, Matthias, as one that had been given the apostolic succession, but wait! Matthias was not chosen by Christ but by the apostles casting lots. Jesus had told the apostles to wait at Jerusalem until the Father endued them with power (Luke 24:49), but they didn't wait. Instead, they sought to replace the 12th apostle, Judas, but Jesus never instructed them to do that, nor does Scripture indicate that's what they were supposed to do. Many believe that the Apostle Paul would be the "successor" to Judas as the 12th apostle, but the problem there is that the 12 apostles are to Judge the 12 tribes of Israel, and Paul was sent to the Gentiles. We may never know whether Matthias was the successor that God desired, but interestingly, after Matthias is chosen, you never hear his name mentioned again, but the one who is thought to replace Judas, the Apostle Paul, is about all you hear about in the church. Even the other apostle's begin to fade in the Book of Acts.

#### A New Foundation

Those who seek to lay claims that they are an apostle of God refuse to see just who can be qualified to be one (Acts 1), and it's often a matter of pride to have titles. I generally go by Jack and not Pastor Jack or Pastor Wellman. The foot of the cross is level ground that all of us stand on, and no self-proclaimed apostle stands any higher or any lower than the rest of us. The cross shows we're all equal opportunity sinners. Jesus ordained the apostles to be build the foundation of the church, while He Himself is the Chief Cornerstone. That foundation was laid 2,000 years ago, and a new foundation of apostles on a structure that's been built upon for 2,000 years, would be an unstable building. You don't put a new foundation on an old and existing building, and so you can't say that God has ordained a new set of apostles for the church, or that there are successors of the original apostles that are still in existence today. Remember, unless they lived in the first century, it's not humanly possible for them to be qualified to be an apostle.

#### Conclusion

I'm not sure why more and more people are using the title of "Apostle" or "Prophet" or "Prophetess" in their name. Maybe it's because they desire to have glory for themselves, however, God will not share His glory with anyone else (Psalm 115:1; Isaiah 41:17-43, 42:8). I don't really like titles anyway, and besides, "Pastor" is not a title but more of an office that God places men into. In fact, at first, I resisted this call, thinking that I was not worthy and not qualified to be a pastor, but maybe that's the point. God doesn't call the qualified...He only qualifies the called. I am thankful for that because what I lack, God makes up for in His grace. Of myself, I could do nothing (John 15:5), but with Christ, I can do all things, but it's not me. It is Christ Who strengthens me (Phil 4:13), so again, we know who deserves all the glory (1 Cor 4:7).