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# THINKING ABOUT APOSTLES

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

*This is a short article taken from one of “Daniel’s Travel Journal” entries he made while traveling, sharing relationship and ministry with friends and churches in various parts of our country and overseas.*

The situation in the Church-at-large has me thinking about many things, and among those issues I seem to keep encountering in my travels all over the world is the subject of ‘apostles.’ It is a biblical term—though I think many people today use it in a way that doesn’t align well with the heart and intent for the designation found in the Bible. It’s a word that is undergoing redefinition in the church world, and will probably become more commonly used among believers in the years ahead. That’s precisely why, though, I have a bit of trouble with its use in the church today: nobody really knows what it means; they just know it’s impressive. We don’t really have good parameters for determining who is and who is not an apostle—or even what is supposed to be true of people who are called *apostles*.

But if/when a leader is referred to as an “apostle,” the very lack of precision about what it means causes everyone to feel some sort of special veneration is due to the person using it (or allowing its use) to describe him or herself. The term “pastor” usually means that the person is or has been leading a church; it’s mostly a vocational identification, though Christians generally give a pastor a certain measure of respect and honor because of it. The term “apostle” doesn’t carry the vocational implication, so it’s difficult to know when it should be applied to someone. “I pastored for 22 years,” means something to people; it says I took care of and led a congregation. What does it mean to say, “I apostled for 22 years?”

Bottom line, apostolic ministry is concerned with laying doctrinal foundations upon which others can build their ministries. It should be evidenced by a larger-than-normal number of sent-disciples (i.e., people who received formative training and were then sent themselves far beyond the edges of a local congregation).