

# How God's Kingdom Grows

## Lesson 5: Roles Involved In Kingdom Growth, Part 1

The growth of God's kingdom involves work. Although the power for every kind of growth in the kingdom is accomplished through the gospel of the kingdom, God uses people in His work. To help His kingdom grow, God has given a variety of roles people will fill. Consider Ephesians 4:11-16. Notice that when these all these function as they are designed, the result is the maturation of the body of Christ, protection against false teaching, and the continual growth of the body. Therefore, we need to consider the six roles identified in this text.

**1) Apostles.** The term "apostle" refers to one who is sent out with orders on a mission. Though there are times when this word is used in a general sense (Acts 14:14; Hebrews 3:1), this word is primarily used concerning the ones who were selected and sent out by Jesus directly. These included the original twelve apostles (Matthew 10:2-4), then Matthias (Acts 1:23-26), and finally Paul (Acts 26:15-28; Galatians 1:1-2). When Matthias was being chosen to replace Judas as an apostle, we can notice two things (Acts 1:21-22). First, not everyone who followed Jesus was sent out as an apostle. Second, there were specific requirements sought in those who would be sent out as apostles – including to be a witness of Jesus's resurrection. Furthermore, the apostles would be able to perform true miraculous signs (2 Corinthians 12:12), which worked to confirm the word that was spoken (Hebrews 2:1-4).

These would play a critical role in the growth of the kingdom in the New Testament times, particularly as we see them serving as proclaimers of the gospel as eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ. Prior to Jesus's ascension, He identified how He would use the apostles in a key way to spread His gospel of salvation throughout the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:4-8). Then, the book of Acts often demonstrates the work of the apostles in the first century of kingdom growth. For example, they

preached the first gospel sermon that declared the reign and authority of Jesus (Acts 2). Furthermore, we are also given details concerning the work of the apostle Paul, who was sent on multiple preaching journeys that resulted in the gospel spreading and churches being established (Acts 13-28; Colossians 1:24-29).

Although the apostles played a critical role in the growth of God's kingdom, we must conclude that there are no longer apostles living on earth today. For example, as an apostle had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ, there are none living today who could possibly qualify. However, these apostles of the past do continue to influence the growth of God's kingdom today. For, it was the apostles who would have the truth revealed to them by the Holy Spirit and who wrote much of the New Testament (John 16:12-15; Matthew 16:18-19). Thus, they are a crucial piece to the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:19-20)!

**2) Prophets.** The term "prophet" refers to one who is an inspired messenger of God (a mouthpiece for God on this earth). Although this would sometimes include the foretelling of future events, this was not always the case with the message revealed through the prophet. In New Testament times, the gift of prophecy was one of the miraculous gifts given through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). These miraculous gifts (including prophecy) would be given through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14-19). While all the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were significant during the New Testament times (i.e. to confirm the word spoken was from God), the gift of prophecy was especially important in that the prophets would be used to reveal the truth from God (1 Corinthians 14:1-5). Particularly, in both Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, prophets are listed second after apostles.

Prophets helped people to know God's word (i.e. among local churches) prior to the completed New Testament (Acts 13:1). For example, 1 Corinthians 14 demonstrates how prophets would speak during the assemblies of the church (vv. 26-33). However, this gift would also be helpful in teaching outside the assemblies of the church, as women could also prophesy, Acts 21:9; though restricted during the assemblies, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

Although the prophets played a critical role in the growth of God's kingdom, we must also conclude that there are no longer prophets living on earth today. For example, as this was a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, these gifts cannot continue to be passed on when those who had the ability to pass them on have long since died. Furthermore, the need for this miraculous gift has also ended. Namely, these miraculous gifts (including prophecy, which were partial revelations of God's will) would cease when the perfect would come (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). Today, the full and perfect revelation of God's will to mankind has come (i.e. the New Testament, Jude 1:3; James 1:25). As some of the New Testament writings came through the prophets (in addition to the apostles), they also continue to have an impact on the growth of God's kingdom today (Ephesians 3:3-6). Thus, they also serve as a crucial piece to the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:19-20)!

God has set various roles in place in His church so as to help His kingdom grow. These roles have included the work of apostles and prophets in the past. They continue to be useful in the growth of God's kingdom today through the inspired words of God they have written. Through these roles, God uses people to help His word accomplish what He intends for it to do!

## Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

**Teaching:** What did you learn from this lesson?

**Rebuking:** What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

**Correction:** How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

**Training & Equipping:** How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?