

# The Sending Out and Return of Seventy-Two Messengers

The number of disciples Jesus sends out in **Luke 10:1** is **textually disputed**: some manuscripts say **70**, while others say **72**.

## Manuscript Evidence

Number	Supporting Manuscripts	Translation Examples
<b>70</b>	Some early Alexandrian and Western manuscripts (e.g., Codex Sinaiticus)	KJV, NKJV, NASB, NRSV
<b>72</b>	Some other early Alexandrian manuscripts (e.g., Codex Vaticanus)	NIV, ESV, NET, NLT, CSB

## Why the Difference?

The discrepancy likely arises from early copyists trying to align the number with symbolic or traditional meanings. Both numbers had **Jewish significance**:

- **70**: Often associated with the **70 nations** of the world from Genesis 10, or the **70 elders** appointed by Moses in Numbers 11:16–17.
- **72**: Some ancient Jewish texts (like the Septuagint version of Genesis 10) count **72 nations**. Also, in the **Letter of Aristeas**, 72 elders are said to have translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek.

## Symbolic Implication

Whether 70 or 72, the number represents a **broad and symbolic commissioning** — Jesus is sending out messengers to **all the world**, much like how the 12 apostles represent the 12 tribes of Israel.

## Conclusion

Most scholars acknowledge that **both 70 and 72** are well-supported by early evidence, and neither significantly alters the meaning of the text. Modern translations choose one based on which manuscript tradition they favor. Either way, the **message is the same**: Jesus is expanding His mission through a large number of appointed messengers.

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Comparing the **sending of the 12** (Luke 9:1–6; Matthew 10:1–42; Mark 6:7–13) with the **sending of the 72** (Luke 10:1–20) reveals both **continuity and expansion** in Jesus' mission. Here's a detailed **comparison chart**, followed by a **summary of differences and similarities**, and some **theological observations**.



**Chart: Comparison of the Sending of the Twelve and the Seventy-Two**

Feature / Detail	The Twelve (Luke 9:1–6)	The Seventy-Two (Luke 10:1–20)
<b>Number Sent</b>	12 apostles	70 or 72 disciples (textual variant)
<b>Sent in Pairs</b>	Yes (Mark 6:7)	Yes (Luke 10:1)
<b>Authority Given</b>	Power and authority over demons and to heal (Luke 9:1)	Implied, includes healing and casting out demons (10:9, 17)
<b>Preaching Content</b>	Proclaim the kingdom of God (Luke 9:2)	Say, “The kingdom of God has come near” (Luke 10:9, 11)
<b>Healing Command</b>	Heal the sick (Luke 9:2)	Heal the sick (Luke 10:9)
<b>Instruction on Provisions</b>	Take nothing—no staff, bag, bread, or money (Luke 9:3)	Similar—no purse, bag, or sandals (Luke 10:4)
<b>Greeting Customs</b>	Not mentioned	Do not greet anyone on the road (Luke 10:4)
<b>Lodging Instruction</b>	Stay in one house, remain there (Luke 9:4)	Same instruction (Luke 10:7)
<b>Response to Rejection</b>	Shake off dust as testimony (Luke 9:5)	Same, but adds more detail about judgment (Luke 10:10–12)
<b>Judgment Pronouncement</b>	Not emphasized	Strong warnings to rejecting cities (10:13–15)
<b>Return and Report</b>	Not recorded in Luke, but implied in Mark 6:30	Return with joy—report demons submitted (Luke 10:17–20)
<b>Joy Focus</b>	Not recorded	Jesus rejoices in the Spirit (Luke 10:21)
<b>Names Given</b>	The Twelve are named (Luke 6:13–16; Matt 10:2–4)	The 72 are not named
<b>Symbolism</b>	12 tribes of Israel	70/72 nations (Genesis 10) – universal mission

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### Summary of Key Similarities

- **Two by Two:** Both groups were sent in pairs, likely for testimony, accountability, and encouragement.
- **Proclamation of the Kingdom:** Both were tasked with announcing the **kingdom of God**.
- **Healing & Authority:** Both performed **healing** and had **authority over demons**.
- **Travel Instructions:** Minimal supplies, stay in one house, dust-shaking as a sign of rejection.
- **Mission Style:** Dependence on hospitality, urgency in the mission, simplicity.



### Differences and Expansion

Area	Twelve	Seventy-Two
Scope	Focused on Israel (cf. Matt 10:5–6)	Broader outreach, hints at global mission
Tone	Initial mission training	Expansion and intensification
Report Emphasis	Little narrative follow-up	Detailed report and theological joy
Judgment Detail	Minimal	Woes on specific cities (e.g., Chorazin)



### Theological Significance

- **12** represents **Israel** — a restoration of the twelve tribes.
- **70/72** represents the **nations** — universal outreach (based on the Table of Nations in Genesis 10).
- Jesus' mission begins with **Israel** but points forward to a **global mission** (see Acts 1:8).
- Jesus' **joy in Luke 10:21** reflects the **Trinitarian cooperation** and divine delight in the unfolding plan of redemption.

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## “Lambs Among Wolves” – Meaning and Imagery

Element	Symbolic Meaning
Lambs	Innocence, vulnerability, peace, dependence, sacrifice. Lambs don't resist or attack. They need a shepherd.
Wolves	Hostility, danger, violence, deceit. Wolves devour. Often symbolic of <b>false teachers, persecutors, or the world opposed to God.</b>



### What Jesus Means by This

#### 1. Expect Hostility, Not Comfort

- Jesus is sending His disciples into a **hostile environment** — spiritual, cultural, and sometimes physical opposition.
- They're not armed with weapons or political power but **with peace, healing, and the gospel.**  
 *"Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you."* — 1 John 3:13

#### 2. Their Character Must Reflect the Lamb

- They are to act as **lambs**, not wolves — they should not become combative or manipulative in return.
- Their response to rejection is **peaceful withdrawal** (shaking dust from feet), not vengeance or violence.

#### 3. Vulnerability Requires Dependence

- Like lambs needing a shepherd, the disciples are to **rely entirely on Jesus**, the Good Shepherd, and on God's provision.
- This is why they are sent without money or extra supplies — to **live by faith.**

#### 4. A Picture of the Cross

- The image foreshadows **Jesus Himself**, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), who would face the wolves — including religious leaders and Roman authorities — and be “slain.”
- His followers share in that mission: **carrying the cross** and offering their lives for others.



## Biblical and Theological Connections

Reference	Connection
Isaiah 53:7	“Like a lamb led to the slaughter...” — a prophecy about the suffering Servant
Matthew 10:16	Parallel account: “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” — a call to discernment + purity
John 10:12	The hired hand runs from the wolves, but the <b>Good Shepherd lays down his life</b>
Acts 20:29	Paul warns of “fierce wolves” entering the church — spiritual danger doesn't just come from outside



## Application and Reflection

- Discipleship involves risk.** Jesus does not promise safety but calls us to **faithful witness in a dangerous world.**
- Meekness is not weakness.** God sends messengers who embody **gentleness, truth, and love**, even when faced with opposition.  
**We need the Shepherd.** Only by **following Jesus** can lambs walk among wolves and not be destroyed.

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In **Luke 10:5–6**, Jesus instructs the 72 disciples:

**“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.”** (ESV)  
(Some translations say “person of peace” or “man of peace”)

## Who or What Is a “Person of Peace”?

A **person of peace** (Greek: *huios eirēnēs*, literally “son of peace”) is someone who is:

### 1. Receptive to the Message

- They **welcome the disciple** and their **message about the kingdom of God**.
- They **do not resist** or reject the peace and presence of God brought through the messenger.

### 2. Hospitable to the Messenger

- This person **receives the disciple into their home** and **offers shelter or support**.
- Hospitality is not just cultural courtesy; it’s a **spiritual alignment** with the mission.

### 3. Open to Spiritual Truth

- Their openness suggests a **prepared heart** — someone God is already working in.
- They may become a **gateway** for the gospel in that community.



## In Mission Strategy

The “person of peace” principle has become a **missional model** used in evangelism:

Aspect	Meaning in Mission Context
<b>Person of Peace</b>	Spiritually receptive individual in a community
<b>Opens Doors</b>	Introduces the messenger to family, neighbors, others
<b>Trusted</b>	Already respected within the local culture or network
<b>Not Necessarily Saved</b>	May not yet believe, but is open and welcoming

This principle echoes **Jesus’ focus on responsive hearts**, not merely numbers. A “person of peace” may unlock access to an entire **household or village** (see Lydia in Acts 16:14–15).



## Biblical Examples

Person	Passage	Why They’re a “Person of Peace”
<b>Lydia</b>	Acts 16:14–15	Opened her heart, welcomed Paul, her whole household believed
<b>Cornelius</b>	Acts 10	God-fearing, hospitable, and eager to hear from Peter
<b>Samaritan Woman</b>	John 4	Welcomed Jesus, told her village — many believed
<b>Zacchaeus</b>	Luke 19:1–10	Joyfully received Jesus, life changed