

## Doctrine of Elders

1. The concept of Elders ruling among the people of God can be traced in the *Bible* to Moses. The Elders of Israel are associated with Moses in his dealings with the people.
  - *Exodus 3:16 Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt:*
  - *Exodus 4:29 And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel:*
  - *Exodus 17:5 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.*
  - *Exodus 18:12 And Jethro, Moses' father in law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God.*
  - *Numbers 11:16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.*
2. With the passing of time the Elders in the OT administered local government and dealt with the concerns of national affairs.

## Local Government

- *Judges 8:14 And caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men.*
- *Joshua 20:4 And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them.*
- *Ruth 4:2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.*

### **National Affairs**

- *1 Samuel 3:17 And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.*
  - *1 Samuel 5:3 And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.*
  - *1 Kings 21:8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth.*
3. The right to the title of Elder was based either on age or the esteem in which an individual was held. Age and experience often go together.
  4. The Elders of Israel were very zealous to convey the Word of God to the people as well as represent the people before God. On great occasions such as the Passover, the Elders would make the initial arrangements.

### **The Word of God Given**

- *Exodus 4:29 And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel: 30 And Aaron spake all the words which the LORD had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people.*

### **Representing the People**

- *Exodus 17:5 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.*
  - *Exodus 24:1 And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off.*
  - *Numbers 11:16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.*
5. In their zeal for God the Elders did not always act according to knowledge. They united with the scribes and the chief priests in putting Christ to death and they also hurt the apostles.

- *Matthew 16:21* From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.
  - *Matthew 27:1* When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:
  - *Acts 6:12* And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.
6. As the *New Testament* church emerged as an organization with leadership needs, Elders or presbyters emerged to take their place along with the apostles, prophets, and teachers. The importance of the Elders was soon recognized.
7. At Jerusalem the *Bible* represents the Elders in association with James in administering the government of the local church acting after the custom of the synagogue (Acts 11:30; 21:18).
- *Acts 11:30* Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.
  - *Acts 21:18* And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.
8. In association with the apostles the Elders also shared in the wider government of the whole church.
- *Acts 15:2* When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.
  - *Acts 15:6* And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.
  - *Acts 15:23* And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:
  - *Acts 16:4* And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.
9. God knew that after the apostles were dead, the church would still need strong leadership in the apostolic tradition. The close relationship between the office of Elder and the office of apostle is reflected in the fact that an apostle can be a presbyter though not all presbyters can be an apostle.

- *1 Peter 5:1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:*
10. With the establishment of new churches Paul and Barnabas would appoint presbyters or Elders. In each church the Elders were always plural in number.
- *Titus 1:5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:*
  - *Acts 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*
11. Those men who hold the title and office of Elder must meet specific biblical qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. A combined list of the spiritual qualifications can be made. An Elder must be:

### **Twenty Qualifications for an Elder**

**1 Timothy 3:1-7**

**Titus 1:5-9**

- Above reproach
  - The husband of only one wife
  - Temperate
  - Prudent
  - Respectable
  - Hospitable
  - Able to teach
  - Not given to wine
  - Not self-willed
  - Not quick tempered
  - Not pugnacious
  - Not contentious
  - Gentle
  - Not a lover of money
  - One who manages his own household well
  - One who has a good reputation outside the church
  - One who loves what is good
  - One who is just
  - Devout
  - One who is not a new convert
12. As the qualifications of an Elder are clearly defined by the Scriptures so are the duties. In summary form it is the duty of an Elder engage in several activities.

- **Elders are to labor diligently in the Word of God in order to teach the people of God.** This is the primary duty of the teaching Elder.

*Acts 6:4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*

*2 Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

*John 21:15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. 16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. 17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. 18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.*

- **Elders are to pray.**

*Acts 6:4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*

*Acts 20:36 And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.*

*Acts 21:5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.*

*Acts 22:17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;*

*Acts 28:8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.*

- **Elders are to reprove, rebuke, and advise.**

*2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

- **Elders are to provide general oversight of the body of Christ. The word "bishop" which means "overseer" is used in the NT as another title for Elder.**

*Acts 20:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.*

*Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

*Titus 1:5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: 6 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; 9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*

- **Elders are to anoint the sick with oil**

*James 5:14 Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:*

- **Elders are to establish doctrinal and church policy in all matters including financial consideration**

*Acts 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.*

*Acts 15:4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.*

*Acts 15:6 and the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.*

*Acts 15:22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:*

*Acts 4:37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

13. As elders or pastor(s) have a responsibility to the people so the people have a responsibility to the elders or pastor(s).

- **James instructs those who are sick to call for the elders of the church.**

*James 5:14 Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:*

- **Paul instructs the Ephesian church to financially support elders who labor “at preaching and teaching”. Pastoral Elders are to receive adequate financial remuneration.**

*1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. 18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.*

*Galatians 6:6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in good things.*

*1 Corinthians 9:9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? 10 Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. 11 If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?*

- **Paul instructs the local church to protect elders from false accusations, to discipline elders who do sin, and to restore fallen elders.**

*1 Timothy 5:19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. 20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. 21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. 22 Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.*

- **Paul teaches the church it is an honor to want to be an elder or pastor. In other words encourage those who wish to move towards the ministry.**

*1 Timothy 3:1 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*

- **Peter teaches the young men of the church to submit to church elders**

*1 Peter 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

14. In the book of the *Revelation*, the twenty and four Elders who appear so frequently in the vision represent all authority and how they should worship before God.

- *Revelation 4:10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,*
- *Revelation 5:8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. 9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*
- *Revelation 19:4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.*