

LOCAL CHURCH

ELDERSHIP

THE BIBLICAL PATTERN

Elders are not a NT invention, but are recorded throughout the history of Israel. The exact role of elders varied according to their situation, but they were consistently treated with respect, always functioned as a group and were understood to be:

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ROLES: OF ELDERSHIP

- Heads of families -
1Ki. 8:1-3
- Wise advisors - 1Ki. 12:1-8
- Law enforcers amongst
God's people - Josh. 20:1-4
- Spiritual leaders -
Lev. 4:15; Josh. 7:6

In the 1st century AD, the Jewish community also had other types of leaders (including synagogue rulers, priests and teachers), and some of the first house churches seemed to operate simply under the oversight of the home owner (Phil. 1:2; Col. 4:15). However, when the NT apostolic teams appointed leaders for local churches, it was consistently to the role of 'elder' (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5).

ROLES: OF ELDERSHIP

Elders in NT churches operated with some authority. They were expected to

- **Be spiritual and bring blessing (Acts 13:1-2; James 5:14)**
- **Build family (1Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28, 20:20; 1Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8)**
- **Set a godly example (1Tim. 4:16; 1Pet. 5:3)**
- **Lead in mission (2Tim. 4:5; Tit. 1:9; Acts 5:22, 15:4, 15:22)**

ROLES: OF ELDERSHIP

Elders in NT churches operated with some authority. They were expected to

- **Maintain sound doctrine and refute its opponents (1Tim. 5:17; 2Tim. 1:12-14; Tit. 1:9)**
- **Rule and direct the affairs of the church (1Tim. 5:17)**
- **Govern church finances (Acts 11:30)**

ROLES: OF ELDERSHIP

Elders in NT churches operated with some authority. They were expected to

- **Teach and disciple others (1Tim. 3:2, 4:13-14, 5:17; 2Tim. 2:2, 2:24, 4:2; Tit. 1:9; Eph. 4:11-13)**
- **Deal with problems (Tit. 1:5, 1:10-13; Acts 15:6f, 22f; 1Tim. 4:6; Tit. 1:10-13)**

Acts 20:28 describes the Ephesian elders by two words which help us to further understand their role:

Shepherds/Pastors:

Elders work as under-shepherds (1Pet. 5:4) to the 'Good Shepherd' (John 10:1-18; Ps 23), looking after the well-being of God's people, searching after the lost, and leading everyone forward. This involves prayer, teaching and hospitality. It requires elders to be available, and to spend time listening to people, speaking God's word to their heart.

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Overseers:

The Greek word here is episkopos, 'one who watches over'. Some denominations use the modern equivalents 'overseer' or 'bishop' to describe regional leaders, but here the word is used to describe the team of local leaders (also Phil 1:1).

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Overseers:

As overseers, elders must have an overview of the whole church, not just one part; not promoting their favourite people or ministries, but having all the church in their hearts. All areas of church life are accountable to them, and, through servant-leadership, they unify the church. A key aspect of oversight is holding onto the 'big picture' of God's apostolic purposes.

THE TONE

The overarching tone we want in all local church leadership is one of being spiritual parents - fathers and mothers - in God's family.