

# Shepherds in the Church

## Part 5

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • November 4, In the year of our Lord Christ, 2018  
Scripture Reader and Reading: Dominic Meyer – Acts 14.21–23  
Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – No Suggestions

### **Persuasion:**

#### **I. Elders in the Book of Acts**

A. Initially, elders in the Book of Acts refer to the leaders of the Jewish people.

1. Whether they were official leaders or simply the older men, I do not know.
2. There are many references to elders throughout the Old Testament and in the Gospels, and in the earlier parts of the Book of Acts.

B. It just seems automatic

1. that as Jews aged, they were spiritual and became leaders in Israel.
2. Isn't that the way it should be?

C. In Acts 4 Peter spoke to the elders of the Jews.

1. Acts 5 shows the elders arresting Peter and John.
2. Acts 6 shows the elders opposing the preaching of Stephen.

D. Then in Acts 11, we have the first reference to elders in the church.

1. Some prophets showed that there was going to be a famine and
2. our brethren in Judea would especially suffer,
  - a) since their Jewish brethren were already persecuting them.
  - b) The Bible then says about the church north in Antioch,

**29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11.29–30).**

E. Acts 14 shows Paul & Barnabas going back to congregations they had started,

**22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." 23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14.22–23).**

1. People in the early church were growing in Christ and
2. the men from Jewish background,
  - a) already knew the Bible and
  - b) were spiritual men.
    - (1) They got to the point quickly
    - (2) that they could serve as elders.
3. Note that they appointed more than one man in the churches as elders.

F. Acts 15 shows the elders working with preachers on church problems:

**2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question (Acts 15.2).**

1. I have met members of the church
  - a) who did not believe that elders and preachers should meet,
  - b) although those critics thought that they could meet with both groups.
    - (1) They wanted to divide and conquer.
    - (2) They wanted to have power over and influence with both groups.
      - (a) Why would a follower of Jesus Christ think in such ways?
      - (b) Here in Acts 15,
        - i) we have preachers and elders meeting about problems in the church.
        - ii) Shouldn't we expect preachers and elders to meet to solve problems?

- (c) What are church leaders for?
  - i) The elders focus on shepherding and
  - ii) the preachers focus on what is preached and taught.
    - (1) Therefore, I would want both groups to meet regularly.
    - (2) Otherwise, why are they leaders?

- c) However, elders are not just decision-makers,
  - (1) they are also shepherds and
  - (2) they cannot shepherd properly without being with people.

2. When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, Luke wrote:

**4 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them (Acts 15.4).**

3. Then they got together to discuss whether Gentiles coming into the church needed circumcision:

**6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter (Acts 15.6).**

4. Once they considered the teaching of Scripture and how God had already worked in the church, they all did this:

**22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. 23 They wrote this letter by them: "The apostles, the elders, and the brethren,**

**To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings" (Acts 15.22–23).**

5. Then they let the churches know what was decided:

**4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees**

**to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem (Acts 16.4).**

G. I have already shown you Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders (Acts 20).

H. Finally in Acts 21, Luke showed what Paul did when he went to Jerusalem:

**18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present (Acts 21.18).**

I. From the Book of Acts, I think we can see these things about elders:

1. They are older men.
2. They received preachers.
3. The elders as overseers would see that everyone received financial aid who needed it.
4. They dealt with problems.
5. Each congregation had more than one elder.
6. They keep the church informed.

## **II. Elders in the Rest of the New Testament**

A. Last Lord's Day evening I shared with you this passage:

**17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine (1Ti 5.17).**

B. Titus 1 shows a working arrangement with the local preacher:

**5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— (Tts 1.5).**

C. James 5 speaks of them helping the sick:

**James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? 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.**

D. First Peter 5 shows that they shepherd the flock.

E. There are multiple references in the Book of Revelation.

1. The references show the 24 elders who encircle the throne of God.
2. These are not elders or shepherds in the flock
  - a) as we know them today, but
  - b) the passages refer to the 12 sons of Jacob and the 12 apostles of Christ.
3. Here are some of those references:

**Rev 4.4** Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.

**Rev 5.5** But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

**Rev 7.11** All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God...

**Rev 11.16** And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God...

**Rev 14.3** They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

**Rev 19.4** And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!"

4. The word elder or elders does not always refer to church shepherds.
  - a) However, it does refer to some kind of leader, and

- b) one that has proven himself.
  - (1) He has gone through great trials in life.
  - (2) He knows God.
    - (a) That is why the Bible also calls
      - (b) the shepherds of the flock, elders.
        - i) Because of what they have gone through,
        - ii) because of their knowledge of the word,
        - iii) because of their knowledge of life,
          - (1) they can shepherd a local flock of Christ.
- F. From the New Testament, I can we can see these things about elders:
  - 1. We should honor elders, especially those who do it full-time.
  - 2. An eldership is part of setting a congregation in order.
  - 3. They care for the sick.
  - 4. They shepherd the flock.

**Exhortation:**

**I. James 5 did say for the congregation to call on the elders.**

- A. Do not just sit at home, sulking about why the elders have not visited you.
- B. If you need them, call for them.
- C. If you need to go see them, call them to see if you can go over to their home.

**II. Do not expect the elders to do everything.**

- A. Elders, do not try to do everything.
- B. However, do not let others do your work.