

Wesley Hamm Study Sheet  
What Does the Bible Say?  
Class #2, 22 March 2009

History of Elders

Evolution from the Scriptural to a traditional Model in a fairly short period of time

- Approx 46 AD: The first mention of elders in the NT occurred in Acts 11:29-30
- Jerusalem elders, mentioned along with the apostles, in Acts 15
- 47-48 AD: During first missionary journey, Paul & Barnabas appointed elders in Acts 16:23
- 57 AD: Ephesian elders mentioned in Acts 20:17
- Approx 59-62 AD: Overseers mentioned again in Paul's letter to Philippi
- Approx 65-66 AD: Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus re: the elder/deacon selection, I Tim 3
- Approx 65-66 AD: Elders mentioned in again by Paul in Titus; written some time after I Tim
- 69-95 AD: Elders mentioned in the plural form in extra-Biblical writings of I Clement
- 70 AD: Jerusalem destroyed
- 90-99 AD: The Shepherd of Hermas, references church leaders as elders/overseers and deacons
- 100+ AD: The Didache, "Teachings", instructed its recipients to "appoint" men that were "approved" as "bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord"; again a plurality of men in elder role
- 110 AD: Ignatius wrote a number of letters to several churches while being transported to Rome to be executed for his faith, advocating a single bishop for each congregation; elders were in subjection to him; this change appears to have been motivated as a response to false teaching and division
- 117 AD: Polycarp writes to the church in Philippi referencing multiple elders
- Eventually the concept of a single ruling bishop evolved into a regional bishop in Rome who presided over the congregational bishops, and then later to a Papal organizational structure

## **Role of Elders**

### **What Do They Look Like? What Do They Do?**

- Presbyteros (noun): elder, presbyter; most common term; maturity, wisdom, seasoned
- Episkopos (noun): literally: epi (over) & skopos (watch); bishop, overseer; conveys idea of a superintendent or guardian; Jesus referred to as an Overseer in I Peter 2:25
- Episkeptomai, Episkopoe (verbs): to look at diligently, take oversight, examine, go & see, take care, provide relief, visit; visiting someone in their distress; there are a number of examples of these words used in the NT; these can help us understand the actions of an overseer
  - Mt. 25:36, “you looked after me”
  - Luke 7:16, “God has come to help His people”
  - Acts 6:3-4, “give our attention”
  - Acts 7:23, “decided to visit”
  - Acts 15:14, “showed His concern
  - Acts 15:36, Paul wanted “to visit the brothers...to see how they are doing”,
  - Heb. 2:6, “mindful of him”
  - Heb 12:15, “see to it”, implying diligent effort
  - James 1:27, look after or visit “widows and orphans in their distress is pure religion”;
  - Overriding thought: to be concerned about others with a sense of responsibility for others; there is not an emphasis on authority and control, but rather ministry and care for the church out of deep concern for their physical and spiritual needs
- Poimen (noun): shepherd or pastor; typically used figuratively
  - Mt. 9:36, Jesus showed compassion as a shepherd
  - Mt. 18:12-14, parable of the shepherd and lost sheep (poimen not used)
  - John 10:14-15, Jesus expressed an intimate understanding and love as a shepherd
  - I Peter 2:25, Jesus referred to as a Shepherd
- Poimaino (verb): to shepherd, to feed, to tend to
  - Acts 20:28, keeping watch and protecting as a shepherd
  - Eph. 4:11-12, God-given gift to teach, prepare, equip God’s people for service
  - James 5:14-15, responsive in time of need or illness
  - I Peter 5:1-4, willingness, eagerness to serve others entrusted to your care, an example to the church

- Gal. 6:1, Titus 1:9: Very solid spiritually & Biblically so as to be able to understand and teach truth & oppose error, from both a moral character/practical and theological point of view
- I Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, I Peter 5:1-4  
Men of Godly character, Spirit ruled, gentle, not quarrelsome, patient, not greedy, not a drunkard, a one-woman-man, life such that his children respect him, respectable, have a good reputation, eager to serve, faithful, hospitable, an encourager, not a new convert, mature, self-controlled, loves what is good, an example for the church to follow, an imitator of Christ, knowledgeable about the Word, moral, disciplined, not overbearing, reasonable, not greedy, hospitable, humble, sober-minded, courageous, even-tempered, peaceable, “right with God” and others
- I Tim 4:14, Set apart those to work as an evangelist; spiritual gift came by the laying on of hands by Paul, II Tim 1:6
- James 5:14-15, Pray for and comfort the sick