

Elders
IN EVERY CHURCH



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ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

"And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that He had done for Israel (Joshua 24:31)." These words from the Old Testament remind us of that golden time when Israel marched in to possess the promised land. Likewise today, it is a "golden time" for the church. The Spirit of God is moving all over the world. Through evangelism people are being added to the Lord and new churches are birthed. Old churches are being stirred and spiritually renewed. To guide the churches, the Lord Jesus Christ is raising up leaders. How wonderful it is to look around today and see God's faithfulness in calling them forth. However, in this process, a certain type of leadership is often being overlooked: The Elders of the church.

Church history teaches us a very important lesson. It is this: When God visits a land, though many people are brought into the kingdom, there always seems to be a shortage of ministry. There are hardly ever enough apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers for the work that needs to be done. Not because people do not recognize the importance of these leaders. We all acknowledge that churches will grow when they have pastors with dedication to the Lord and a vision for the work. Indeed, the churches cannot afford to be without these men. They are like the "Joshua's"; as long as Israel had a Joshua, she followed the Lord.

God has made a provision for the shortage of leadership. There are many faithful brethren who are not called to the ministry in the sense of Ephesians 4:11. Most of them will never become a Joshua. Most of them will never serve the Lord except in their own local church; yet, God has planned for these men to have a part in leading the local church in spiritual things. These men are the ones the Lord wants to be the elders. It was that way with Israel. Not only

because of Joshua, but because of the elders Israel continued to walk with the Lord. But there is something even more marvelous than that. There was a period of time when Israel did not even have a Joshua. Even then the nation continued to walk with the Lord. As long as they had these elders, they were safely guided as a nation. And not only that, if these faithful brethren are recognized and given a way to fulfill this work, then those who are ministers of the Lord would be free to do more. How important true elders are to the local church!

In some ways churches have realized the significance of this work. They have seen the importance of trustworthy men in the church being involved with the pastor. This is especially true in the handling of finances. It is not seemly for one man to control the finances of the church (2 Corinthians 8:18-21). To compensate for this, a "committee" is set up in the church to work with the pastor. The pastor meets with these committee-members to discuss important decisions. These meetings make the congregation feel more secure than if the pastor were making the decisions by himself, but even this comes short of being an expression of eldership. For in the minds of those men on the committee, the pastor is the spiritual specialist, and they are not. In their thinking they are only qualified to give advice on business matters. Consequently, these men are involved very little with the pastor in praying for the needs of the church or ministering in spiritual matters. Of course, there is some value in such committees, but they do very little to ease the burden of the pastor for overseeing the church.

We should also mention that some churches which have had "elders" have had some difficulties. Sometimes these have been so serious that ministers have become discouraged with having elders. In these churches the elders do not use their office properly. They use their position in such a way that they bring the pastor under their control. When that happens, he

is not really free in preaching the word of God. Many times such pastors will be afraid to speak the convictions of their own heart. Churches in this condition will become spiritually bound and cease to grow. Certainly the Lord does not intend for elders to have a power over the local church like that! The word of God must never become bound!

The opposite extreme of this also exists. In some churches there is a form of eldership, but it does not fulfill some of the needs of the pastor. In cases like this the pastor discusses matters of the church with these men, but they do not disagree with him when they think he is wrong. They are not faithful to speak the convictions of their own heart. Certainly it is not God's will for pastors to come completely under the control of elders. But, neither is it right for elders to come completely under the control of the pastor! It is not always the fault of the elders that this problem exists. In many cases they are truly qualified for the work, they have a good attitude, but the pastor does not make room for them to work closely with him. Perhaps the pastor is afraid, or maybe he does not know how to include these brethren with him in the work. Whatever the reason, in some churches faithful brethren are not being given an opportunity to do a valuable service for the church.

I must also make reference to the concept of multiple-ministry. In some countries churches have grown quite large in number. One of the reasons for this happening is that the work was not done through one man's ministry alone. Wise pastors have realized the importance of this. They have been diligent to have other preachers minister in their church. Not only that, in many cases these churches have invited other ministers to live in their locality and to be a part of the staff. What a blessing this multiple ministry can be to growing churches! However, some people have considered a group of ministers like that to be the same as the eldership of the church. Truly,

the ministers in a local church are PART of the eldership, but the role of these men alone does not fulfill all that the Scriptures speak concerning elders. We should not think that all elders must become ministers in the sense of Ephesians 4:11.

Therefore, let us not be distracted by the abuses or inadequacies of such things as committees, present forms of eldership, or the multiple-ministry. Let us be grateful for whatever measure any of these things fulfill what the Scripture speaks of concerning eldership. Without a doubt, there have been problems in some churches in trying to move into a Biblical expression of eldership. Let us not be discouraged, nor let us be satisfied until we experience all that God intends for us. I am personally convinced that there must be a restoration of eldership in its full meaning! May the Lord grant us again to see what Paul and Barnabas were permitted to see on their first missionary journey: That is, elders in every church.

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I feel a need to say something about the premise upon which many of the concepts for eldership are developed in this book. The example of Moses and the seventy elders as recorded in the eleventh chapter of Numbers plays an important part in this study. This may come as a surprise to some readers. I say this since there are teachings today which imply that the giving of those elders to Moses was not the best thing. It was God's permissive will, they say. The idea in that teaching is that God had a better plan, and Moses should have held out for it. The proof adduced for this "failure" is that the 70-elder system was the beginning of the Sanhedrin - the governing body which gave the Lord Jesus and the apostles such a hard time. I cannot agree with that kind of interpretation of the Moses-and-seventy-elders event!

To point ONLY to the failure of that system in succeeding generations as proof of a "mistake" in the beginning, to me is a very weak argument. It was not only the Sanhedrin that rejected the Lord Jesus; God holds the whole nation accountable for that rejection. Yet, Israel's hardness of heart at the first advent of her Messiah does not prove that the "birth" of the nation during the exodus was a "mistake". Moreover, Christianity today abounds with examples of churches, movements, and even denominations that have degenerated. Does their present-day failure prove that they did not receive something from God in their beginnings?

I think the Moses-seventy-elders event should be treated the same as the example in the early church when they appointed the first deacons (Acts 6:1-6). The similarities of the two events cannot be ignored: The existing leadership became overwhelmed with the needs of the work, they looked to God for the solution, and a new type ministry to ease the burden of the existing ministry was appointed. In both events God's stamp of approval appeared in the climax. In the case of the Old Testament event, the Spirit came upon those 70 men and they prophesied - an event unprecedented in Israel! In the case of the appointment of deacons: "And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.....".

Finally, I should mention that some teachings have confused the Moses-and-seventy-elders event with the event when Moses, at the suggestion of his father-in-law, appointed judges (Exodus 18:13-26). This confusion is understandable since both situations were occasioned by the fact of Moses being overburdened in the work (compare Deuteronomy 1:12-15 with Numbers 11:14-17). I will not attempt to prove or disprove that the system of judges which evolved from Jethro's advice was God's perfect plan. However, I would like to point out that the burden Moses felt at the time of appointing judges was primarily caused

by an administrative workload. The burden which we see when elders were appointed was different. It was a burden for the spiritual condition of the nation - a burden which cannot be relieved by administrative help only.

Distinguishing between these two Old Testament events forces us to regard the latter event with greater seriousness. The form of eldership which resulted on that occasion was not the consequence of man's initiative, or of man's wisdom. It was the wisdom of God given in direct answer to Moses's request. Neither can I regard this event as an expression of God's permissive will. I do not see how the subject of eldership can be adequately addressed without giving due consideration to the principles and concepts illustrated by the Moses-and-seventy-elders event.

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CHAPTER 1 THE WORK OF ELDERS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

To gain a proper idea of a concept, it is important to begin where it began in God's plan. This is certainly the case with the concept of elders. Therefore, as we see this concept emerge in the New Testament, we must realize that it does not have its beginning in the Church. Rather, elders were a part of the government of the nation of Israel. The apostles did not originate a completely new idea, but they used a concept from the Old Testament and gave it its proper application in the Church. Hence, our study must begin in the Old Testament. We will use the first two chapters to look at eldership in Israel. In this first chapter in particular we will not concern ourselves with so much detail, nor will we try to apply it to our situation. Our goal here is to get a brief overview of the work of these men.

Primarily, Israel's elders were representatives. When the congregation was responsible for something, the elders bore that responsibility (Deut. 21:1-9; Lev. 4:15). Also, in times of important decisions, or in times when the congregation needed to act, they represented the people. For example, when God sent Moses down to Egypt he had to first convince the elders of God's promise (Ex. 3:16; 4:29). Also, when Moses came down from Sinai with the law, he presented it to the elders (Ex. 19:7). When it was time for Moses to go before Pharaoh, the elders were supposed to go with him (Ex. 3:18); unfortunately, they did not go. Finally, the elders represented the congregation when they wished to express themselves to their leaders (Deut. 5:23).

Now we have just mentioned that when God spoke to the congregation, the elders stood as their representatives before God. It is interesting that the converse of this is also true. That is, they were representatives of God to the congregation.

Especially during times of correction, their work in this regard was most important. When Korah and 250 princes rebelled against Moses, the elders stood with Moses and confronted the rebels (Num. 16:25). How important it is that Moses did not have to do that alone! Also, when God was charging the congregation with some responsibility, they represented God. The elders, with Moses, commanded the people to keep the law (Deut. 27:1). When the instructions for the passover were given, they were committed to the elders (Ex. 12:21). They also represented God in some of the judicial matters (Deut. 19:12; 22:13-21; 25:7-10).

It is most important to see that the elders sought God for the needs of the nation. When Israel was defeated, Joshua and the elders prayed (Josh. 7:6). During the plague David and the elders cried out to God (1 Chr. 21:16). And during other times of crises it was the elders who were to come before the Lord for the people (Lam. 2:10; Joel 1:14; 2:16; 2 Kin. 6:32). They came not only in prayer, but just in waiting before the Lord. When Israel needed water, the elders stood with Moses before God (Ex. 17:5-6).

Another significant function is that when the nation was going to make some major change or take a new step, it was not seemly for it to be expressed by the desire or authority of their civil leader only. The elders also had a part in those matters. After Israel came out of Egypt, it was a new beginning for the nation. To celebrate this, God invited seventy of the elders to come up with Moses and the priests to the top of the mountain (Ex. 24:1, 9-11). When David was going to set up his tabernacle, he brought the elders and other leaders into this move (1 Chr. 15:25). When Solomon built the temple and set in the furniture, he brought the elders and other leaders into that move (1 Kin. 8:1-3; 2 Chr. 5:2). This participation of the elders is important for two reasons.

First of all, their approval makes the sheep more confident that the new move is truly of God and not just the ambitions of an energetic leader being expressed.

Secondly, their participation helps to keep the changes moving at the right pace. Sometimes zealous pastors feel that working with elders slows things down too much. Unfortunately, they do not realize that their zeal makes the sheep insecure. The participation of the elders is God's way of causing changes to move at a pace that the flock can follow.

This description of the work of Old Testament elders is by no means exhaustive, but this much will suffice for what we are trying to accomplish in this study. Moreover, a few other details of their work will be mentioned as they properly fit into the later chapters. Before going on let us summarize this description. These men are the representatives of the people to the civil leaders over them or to God himself. On the other hand, they stand with the civil leader and represent God's cause to the people. They share the responsibility for the welfare of the nation and especially express this in intercession to God. In general, they are a part of the major events and especially the major moves and changes made in the nation.

CHAPTER 2
TWO KINDS OF ELDERSHIP

There are many expressions in the Old Testament concerning elders. The most common expression is "elders of Israel" (Ex. 3:16,18; 4:29; 17:5,6;). Besides this there are the expressions "elders of the people" (Ex. 19:7; Num. 11:16,24), "elders of the congregation" (Lev. 4:15; Judg. 21:16), "elders of cities" (Deut. 19:12; 21:3-6, 19-20; ...), "elders of tribes" (Deut. 31:28), and "elders of families" (2 Sam. 12:17). Perhaps some of these expressions are talking about the same group of people, but certainly some of these distinctions are significant. When we think of these references to elders we can see that altogether there were thousands of these elders in Israel. Yet later in Scripture we see a time when God set up an eldership which was limited to a much smaller number. However, even after that new eldership was set up, these first elders were still recognized in the nation. What does this mean? I think that it is something like this: There is a special "office" of eldership which is limited to a certain number of men. These have an official recognition and defined authority for performing their work. Besides these "official" elders, there is also a general kind of eldership which is unlimited in number. With this prospect before us we want to devote this chapter to looking briefly at these two kinds of elders. Let us talk first about this general kind of eldership.

Before Israel left Egypt, elders were already in their society. Since the nation was in slavery to the Egyptians, obviously the elders had little to do as far as ruling is concerned. Still, their influence was important for preserving the nation. They qualified for that work in two ways: They were righteous men, and they were the older generation. Thus, there seems to be no limit as to how many of this kind of elders there can be. Potentially every

man in the nation could one day be an elder if he lived long enough and walked in the way of righteousness. There does not seem to be any special way that they came into this work, either. Rather, as the men matured the younger generation began to recognize the good influence of these older ones.

Primarily, these elders were influencing the nation on an individual basis. For most of their work, it was not important that they meet with other elders or leaders of the nation. Rather, as they personally walked with God they influenced that part of the nation in their immediate area (e.g. family, tribe, city). Their godly lives were a strong example to the people. They were like salt which holds back corruption (Matt. 5:13), or they were like leaven (in a good sense) which spreads through the whole loaf. The younger generation respected them for those virtues (Prov. 16:31; 20:29). Not only their personal righteousness, but also their many years of wisdom and experience endeared them to the people. Thus, in very general matters, they were counsellors to the people around them (Ezk. 7:26). They were teachers of the ways of the Lord. They preserved the testimony of the acts and words of God and passed them on to the next generation (Deut. 31:28; 32:7; Ps. 78:1-8).

These elders had to be careful to preserve the harmony in the overall direction of the nation. It was important that they understood the limitations of their influence upon the people. This was especially true since they were not gathering together with the official leaders of the nation and their communication with the official leaders was limited. If these elderly brethren were ambitious to execute some special plan with the people they influenced, there would have been problems. If they were especially interested in gathering a group of people uniquely around themselves, then divisions would have developed. As long as they were faithful and content to influence the people within the limitations of their work, they could be a great blessing to the

nation. Let us look at this in the New Testament.

Similar to Israel of old, some churches today have elderly Christians who have walked many years with the Lord. For them to share with the younger Christians could truly be a great blessing to the church (Titus 2:1-5). However, in this personal fellowship it would not be proper for them to influence the younger sheep so strongly that the younger ones no longer feel a need to counsel with the official leaders of the church. There is a general kind of guidance which older Christians may give to the church, but it is important to see the difference between this general kind of guidance and the more specific way that overseers of the church guide the sheep. If these differences are understood and cooperated with, the church is edified when these older believers are allowed to have this influence in the church.

There were also times that these elders in Israel came together within their area, especially after they entered Canaan. They would gather in the gates of the city (Deut. 22:15; 25:7; Ruth 4:1-2; Prov. 31:23; Lam. 5:14). Also, there were times on special occasions when they came together in even larger bodies and exercised an influence over the events of the nation. They did not have official power in ruling the nation. Nevertheless, their united approval or disapproval was a strong influence upon the actions of men (1 Sam. 15:30). In some ways they had an influence upon who their leaders would be (Judg. 11:5-11; 2 Sam. 5:3; 19:9-15; 1 Chr. 11:3). Consider the significance of this in the Church today.

We must not think that ministry for the church is elected by the congregation. God does not govern His church by democratic process! On the other hand, when God is working to raise up young men to be leaders in the church, these older Christians should be able to discern what is happening. It is true that usually it is those who are in the ministry that are first to see

God placing His hand upon young men to become leaders. Eventually the believers in general must be convinced from the heart that God is truly doing this, and especially these older believers must be convinced. Therefore, when ministers endeavor to see younger men gain acceptance with the people, these leaders will do well to give due consideration to the convictions of the older, faithful believers.

Another function for the older believers occurs when a pastor departs from the ways of the Lord. What if there are not official elders in a church like that? Such a church is not without recourse. The older believers praying and standing together can do much to affect the situation. They can hold the church together until the Lord restores order. The presence of these older believers in the congregation is so important! They are like the general kind of eldership in the Old Testament. May the churches and pastors today persist to find a way for these to have their influence upon the sheep.

Let us turn our thoughts now to consider the office of elders. After Israel left Egypt, God met with a representative group of the elders on Mt. Sinai. The number of elders present on that occasion was limited to seventy (Ex. 24:1). At the time these particular elders were not given an office as such. Nevertheless, the Lord was without a doubt introducing this new order to the nation. Some time after this incident we see Moses greatly in need of help in ruling the nation. At that time the Lord told him again of the seventy and gave him instructions as to how they were to come into that work (Num. 11:24-26). In studying the way this came about we see that this work was different from the general kind of eldership we have just described.

One of the main differences we notice is that these men could not do this work on an individual basis. Their leadership was executed only as they worked together closely with each other and Moses.

Moreover, each man was not over a segment of the nation. Rather, together they were ruling the whole congregation. Thus, these men were rulers with a definite and recognized authority over the nation. Now, let us mention more specifically some of the unique points concerning these seventy.

For one thing, they were set apart from the congregation in three ways. That is, their names were written in an official record (Num. 11:26); they had a special anointing (Num. 11:25); and they were permitted to come closer to God than the rest of the congregation (Ex. 24:11). On the other hand, we notice that there remained a distinction between them and Moses, who was ordained to receive revelation of God's word and permitted to come to the summit of the mount. These elders were not called to come that far up on the mount (Ex. 24:2, 12-14). Also, they were selected from men already recognized in Israel as elders and were officers over the people (Num. 11:16). Furthermore, the work of these seventy was not made available to all the men who qualified for it, but only to this specified number. As we previously said, it came about when there was a real need for more leadership and when Moses himself asked for help. Finally, it is significant that Moses himself chose the men who were to work with him. Now, each of these points I have mentioned has much to teach us and we want to take more time to look at each of them in detail. This we will do in the following chapters, but before going on we should take a moment to recapitulate.

We can summarize this chapter by the following points:

1. In the Old Testament there was a special office of eldership which was limited to a certain number of men and there was also a general kind of eldership which was unlimited in number.

2. The two main qualifications for this general kind of eldership is that they were elderly in age and that they were righteous men.

3. These "general" elders mainly operated on an individual basis in their particular area, and their influence was not so strong upon the people as to conflict with the way the official elders guided the nation.

4. In a similar way there are older Christians in churches today who do not have official recognition or authority for overseeing. If they are wise and careful, there is a general way that they can influence younger Christians which will not conflict with the overseeing of the pastor, but rather strengthen it.

5. Although elders of the general kind did not have official power in ruling, they did have some influence as to who their leaders would be. Likewise, today older Christians should be able to recognize the hand of God in raising up leadership in the Church. seven unique things about this:

- a. Three ways they are set apart from the congregation.

- b. God kept a distinction between them and Moses.

- c. They were chosen from among the men who were already elders.

- d. These men were also officers over the people.

- e. This work was made available only to a specified number.

f. It came about only when there was a real need for it.

g. Moses himself chose these elders.

CHAPTER 3 OVERSEERS

Paul said that if a man desired the office of an overseer, he desired a good work (1 Tim. 3:1). He did not say that all men who desired this might possibly attain it or be permitted to have it. But he did say that it is a good and noble work for faithful brethren. In the verses after that he describes what those men must be like. Also, in Titus 1:5-9 the same work is discussed. Paul begins by calling them "elders" and soon after speaks of them as "overseers". Now the question is; when the New Testament refers to elders, is it speaking of elders in the general sense (like those Israel first had whose number was many), or, is it speaking of a special office for ruling and overseeing churches (like the seventy elders of Israel)?

There may be a few verses in the New Testament which use the word in a general sense. However, most of the usage of the word is not referring just to all elderly, faithful brethren in the church. Rather, it is speaking of specific men who have been officially recognized for this work (e.g. Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). They are chosen for a "good work", a specific job. It is the work of overseeing. Paul says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the Word and doctrine." (1 Tim. 5:17). This verse implies that all elders do some ruling. But, besides that there are some who rule well, and among them are those who are especially devoted to the ministry of the Word. For these, it is seemly that they be financially helped in proportion to their work. There are some elders who are not able to give so much time to the work of the church and mainly support themselves by their own labor. (Also, the church may not be large enough yet to need their time that much). On the other hand, there are those who are devoting all of their time to this in a worthy way. They are dependent upon the gifts of the people

for their livelihood. Whatever the case, all of these men if they are elders are ruling to some degree.

Because of this, we do not refer to just any older brother who has been faithful for a number of years as an "elder" - one in an office of oversight. It is interesting that Paul refers to himself as "elderly" when addressing himself to Philemon (vs 9). There has been divided opinion as to whether he intends to speak of his age, or whether he alludes to an office (as Peter does when speaking of himself - 1 Pet. 5:1). The difficulty is understandable since there is only one word for both meanings. I personally feel that it would not have fit the case here for Paul to address himself to Philemon as one in oversight capacity. The idea of being one more advanced in years fits the appeal to Philemon more suitably. Thus, we have one word with a dual usage. We naturally expect that those in the office of elder are also older brethren. The point is this: All older, faithful brethren are not necessarily in the office we are describing. These older brethren do have an important contribution for the church, but they do not need official recognition (or authority) in order to fulfil this. Rather, the needful thing is for pastors to allow them to have this influence upon the sheep.

Related to this is the fact that we do not refer to all ministers as "elders", either. Truly, the work of the ministry is very important and worthy of respect, but we do not confuse that work with the one Paul is speaking of here (1 Tim. 3:1). Certainly some ministers do also have an oversight in a local church. In that case, of course, they are elders. As I mentioned above, Peter referred to himself as an elder, and truly he was a minister of Christ - an apostle. But we should not think that his ministry is what constituted his eldership. Rather, we observe that in the beginning of the Jerusalem church Peter was the leading overseer. Even in later years when James filled that role, it is reasonable to expect

that Peter continued to stay involved with that flock as one of their elders. Also, we cannot say that because Peter was a minister he automatically assumed with it the office of elder. Rather, in a practical, functional way he was indeed involved with a local flock in a way that he was not involved with other churches. (We will return to this thought in the following chapter).

We are attempting here to get a precise idea about the word elder. We should not equate the eldership office with the older, faithful brethren. Neither should we make it an essential part of the five-fold ministry. If these older brethren or ministers are elders, it is because certain conditions have been fulfilled. Therefore, unless the Holy Spirit in reality has made them overseers of a specific group of people, we should not refer to them as elders.

Therefore, for the churches there are certain faithful men appointed of God for the work of overseeing. There is a special grace from heaven for doing this work; and for that grace to manifest itself upon these men, it is important that they be set apart for this in a specific way. The seventy elders were recognized and recorded by name. That is the recognition that man can give them. Besides that, God put His Spirit upon them. (We will talk more about this anointing later.) Both of these recognitions are important in setting them apart. Probably in the early church elders were set apart by the laying on of hands. (Compare 1 Tim. 3:1 and 5:21-22) Also, the people were instructed to know those who were over them in the Lord (1 Thess. 5:12).*

* For further detail concerning the principles dealt with in this and the following chapters we recommend a study of the book, HIS RULE IN HIS CHURCH.

CHAPTER 4
MINISTERS AND OVERSEERS

In the Old Testament example we considered we noticed that the Lord made a distinction between the elders and the congregation. He also kept a distinction between those seventy and Moses. Besides being the leader of the nation, Moses was a prophet. The Old Testament prophets were a group set apart in a special way to receive revelation from God, especially revelation concerning the Word. Also, they had an authority for delivering that Word to the people. Now I think that was a special office, and normally in the Old Testament only those in that office did prophesy. For that reason when anyone prophesied it was customary to think of them as a prophet (Num. 11:29; 1 Sam. 10:10-11; 19:24). But did the exercising of prophetic utterance - did this function in itself, truly constitute them as "prophets"?

When we study these Old Testament examples more closely, we see there is, in fact, a distinction between the office of prophet and the act of prophesying. After David became king, there were those who devoted themselves to worshipping the Lord with instruments. It was common for them to prophesy (1 Chr. 25:1-3; 2 Chr. 20:14). They were not ministering the Word to the people in the direct, authoritative way that the prophets did. The same thing is true of the seventy elders when the Lord set them apart. When they prophesied there is no reason for us to think that it followed the direct, authoritative style of the Old Testament prophets. We cannot conclude that in the strict meaning of the word they were in the prophetic office. The point is, those seventy were doing some things that Moses and other Old Testament ministers did, but that does not mean they were in the ministry office. In other words, we must not think that it is necessary for men to become ministers in order to be overseers. The work of the ministry and the work of overseeing

mutually complement each other, but we must see each one in a distinct way.

In the New Testament four other types of ministry besides the ministry of prophet are given to the Church (Eph. 4:11). Each of the five expressions of Christ describe a particular anointing those vessels have for speaking the Word of God. When the Lord Jesus sets someone apart for one of the ministries, He is not considering some immediate need that exists in the local church. Rather, He calls them to service in the whole Body of Christ, and not just to one local situation. This means that as ministers these men are not given to some particular group of Christians. Rather, in a general way they are given to the whole Body of Christ. Therefore, there seems to be no limit as to how many the Lord may call into the ministry.

We have said that in the Old Testament there were some who prophesied, but who were not in the ministry of prophet. The same characteristic is true in the New Testament. For example, all Christians should evangelize, but all are not in the office of evangelist. When filled with the Spirit all may prophesy, but all are not prophets (1 Cor. 14:31). Also, there are those who "pastor" that are not in the ministry of pastor. (Since elders are overseers, then of necessity they must "pastor" to fulfil their work. But it does not mean that all of them are in the ministry of pastor. There is a distinction between pastoring a particular group of people and being in the ministry of pastor). Thus, there are similarities between the activities of believers and ministers, but there is a uniqueness about the ministry.

There is also a uniqueness about the work of overseers. We mentioned that the seventy elders were not ordained until the need arose. When this occurred only the number actually needed to do the work were appointed. These two limitations show us an important feature about overseeing; that is, the anointing for this work only occurs when the need for it truly

exists. In the local churches elders were not ordained when the apostles first started the work. For a while the apostles did the pastoring. There was not a real need for elders then. When it was time for the apostles to separate from the churches, it was definitely time to ordain elders. I believe that later more elders were added as the churches grew big enough to need them. Therefore, overseeing is different from the ministry as it is based on need in the local church.

Another characteristic of the grace for overseeing is that it occurs only where the need exists. Peter told the elders to pastor the sheep which were among them (1 Pet. 5:2). Christian leaders should not think that it is God's will for them to oversee every Christian with whom they become involved. This verse is not saying that. But it does mean that if they oversee at all, they can only oversee the ones with whom they are involved. In the next verse Peter makes that clear. He refers to those sheep as the ones whom God has allotted to their charge. Paul was an apostle, but as an overseer he had authority only toward churches he was involved with in a special way. The rule for overseeing reached only to those particular churches (2 Cor. 10:13). Therefore, when overseers are involved with the sheep for which they are responsible, there is a special anointing upon them. When they try to do the same things in other places, that particular grace is not upon them.

There are ministers and there are overseers. Obviously some men are both of these. If a man has a ministry of pastor according to the meaning of Eph. 4:11, that means he has a gift which will be a blessing to all churches to which he travels and ministers. Normally he also has a congregation somewhere that he oversees. Therefore, his relationship to them is different from the one he has to other churches. He has a gift which will edify all the churches he visits. Most of the time, however,

this gift is being expressed by overseeing a particular group of sheep. (There are some men to whom God does not give the ministry gift; who are not to travel to other churches in such capacity. In their own church, however, they are overseers).

Usually in the earliest development of the churches the elders are not men who are called to the ministry, but are faithful qualified men from the local area who develop within the church. It truly may be God's will for some of the elders of that church to be ministers. Time will tell. The point is, their becoming elders is not contingent upon also having a call to the ministry. By the same principle, ministers who come to that church for a visit must qualify themselves if they are to become elders. Their ministry alone does not qualify them to be one of the elders. They do not have this special oversight until it is developed just as in the other elders. Therefore, there are men who are raised up locally and called only to this special work. In some cases there are also ministers to the whole Body of Christ who abide in that local church. In either case, they do not have oversight there until certain conditions are fulfilled. They must submit themselves to one another and to what the Lord is doing there and let the Holy Spirit make them overseers (Acts 20:28).

Now, let us summarize this chapter by mentioning the main points again:

1. There were those in the Old Testament who prophesied, but that does not necessarily mean that they were in the office of prophet.
2. The New Testament has five ministry offices. Believers may perform some functions of each office, but there is a uniqueness about the office.
3. One of the features of the work of overseeing is that it is developed only when there is a need for

it.

4. Another unique feature of overseeing is that it occurs only where the need exists and when it has been developed in that situation.

5. Ministers are called of God before there is a particular need for their work. Also, they are not given to one local situation, but to the whole Body of Christ.

6. Some elders are not called to the ministry, while other elders are also ministers. In both cases they come into the work of overseeing by the same operation of the Spirit.

CHAPTER 5 SHEPHERDS

We have pointed out that elders are overseers who rule the sheep for which they are responsible. But in what specific ways can we describe their work? There is one special word used to describe it. That is, they are pastors - those who feed sheep (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). The concept of shepherding or pastoring first occurs in the Old Testament. There it describes the way God guided the nation through its leaders. God himself is the Shepherd of the nation. From heaven He expresses this work through one particular vessel - the man of His right hand. In this way the nation is shepherded (See Ps. 80:1, 14, 17). When God has His appointed man shepherding the nation, then God is established in His relationship to the people (Ezek. 34:23-24, 30; 37:22-25). Thus, we see an important principle in this way of governing. We see that the main use of this word, shepherd, in the Old Testament describes one person leading the nation.

Israel's shepherds were Moses (Is. 63:11-12), Joshua (Num. 27:17), their judges (1 Chr. 17:6), and the kings (1 Kin. 22:17; 2 Sam. 5:2; Zech. 11:8). We notice that the form of government went through changes throughout Israel's history. For a while it was judges and then later kings. Still, in each change the government went through, there was one person who was the overall leader. This leader was referred to as the shepherd. Therefore, in the New Testament we must continue to follow this principle in the churches. Normally in the churches there will be more than one man pastoring the flock. That does not mean, however, that all of these elders are equal in authority in ruling. The normal thing - the principle which we bring over from the Old Testament - is that in the local church among the elders there is one person who is the leading overseer. Let us look now at some of the things that shepherds do.

One characteristic of their work is that they go in and out before the sheep (Num. 27:17; 2 Sam. 5:2). In going in and out to feeding places there are dangers for sheep. They need to be saved and protected (John 10:9). Thus, a big part of the shepherd's work is to protect the sheep from things that are not good for them (Ezek. 34:5,8,28). They must especially be watchful to protect the sheep from influences (from within or from without) which bring division (Acts 20:29-30). When the sheep are protected in this manner, they are brought into security (Jer. 23:4,6; Zeph. 3:13).

There are many ways in which shepherds give attention to the sheep personally. They strengthen the weak ones, heal the sick ones, search for the lost ones, and bring back the scattered ones (Ezek. 34:4). But one of the main ways they give them attention is in feeding them. Sometimes people require elders to have more teaching ability than is really necessary. Actually, the main picture of sheep being fed is that they feed themselves (Is. 5:17; 11:7; 27:10; 30:23; 49:9; 65:25). Thus the real work of the shepherds is to see that the sheep are where the food is (Ps. 23:2)! Shepherds should not be trying to do all of the instructing themselves, but rather, see that the right ministry is made available to the sheep. On the other hand, lest we get an unbalanced idea of this, we must mention verses which tell us that shepherds themselves feed the sheep by their instruction (Prov. 10:21; Eccl. 12:11; Jer. 3:15; Ezek. 34:2).

We talked before about the distinction between the ministry and overseers. We see this in the matter of feeding sheep. The way overseers speak the word will be different from that of the ministry. In some ways the instructing by the local elders will not be as gifted as the preaching of God's ministers. Even so, elders can affect the lives of the sheep in ways that the ministry cannot. Because of the relationship overseers have with the sheep, the word which they speak will be a means of expressing an

authority for ruling (Heb. 13:7). Therefore, shepherds must through this feeding process reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 2:15). Let us consider this in more detail.

Shepherding must have an authority associated with it. The references to the shepherd's rod speak of this (Ps. 23:4). Most definitely these men were rulers (1 Chr. 11:2; Is. 40:10-11; Mic. 7:14). They were concerned with guiding the sheep into God's will for each of their lives (Ps. 78:72). According to the revealed will of God, there is a seemingly authority toward the sheep for guiding them into those paths. That is one of the purposes of the shepherd's rod. Also, this ruling involves keeping peace and harmony between the sheep (Ezek. 34:17-22). To faithfully fulfil what is necessary in expressing this authority, shepherds must be diligent to commend the faithful sheep and to bring correction to the unruly ones (1 Pet. 2:14). How does this compare with the authority which ministers have?

Remember we said there is a difference between the ministry and the work of overseeing, and they do not necessarily overlap. Isn't it interesting that in the Old Testament prophets are not referred to as shepherds? We must not think that those in the five-fold ministry are necessarily shepherds of the churches. I do believe that to all the ministry of Christ there is given a general kind of authority toward the whole Body of Christ. It is an authority according to the written Word of God, but it is limited in its expression. In the case of shepherds, they also are concerned with the sheep abiding in the standard of God's Word. Not only that, in more specific ways they are involved with God's will for the sheep personally. The authority that they have touches upon more specific areas of the life of the sheep. Therefore, we must not confuse the authority of the ministry of Christ with the authority which God

gives to overseers. So much for the shepherd's rod.

A final thing we see is that shepherds are watchmen (Is. 56:10-11; Acts 20:31; Heb. 13:17). They must be men of prayer. In the hour of crisis they stand before God and intercede for the people (Jer. 49:19; 50:44). Through this kind of praying, God lays upon their hearts a deep, personal concern for the sheep (2 Cor. 11:28; Gal. 4:19). Being exercised before God with this deep concern is one way that shepherds can lay down their lives for the sheep (John 10:11-15). I cannot stress enough how important this prayer life is. We shall see later that it is especially through this kind of praying that the anointing comes upon the elders for their work.

Let us now mention again briefly the main points of this chapter. They are as follows:

1. Elders are also pastors (i.e. those who feed).
2. Israel had many shepherds of the nation, but the main references to this work are to one man who had the overall responsibility.
3. One function of shepherding is to protect the sheep.
4. In different ways shepherds give attention to the sheep, but especially in feeding them.
5. Shepherding has an authority associated with it which is different from the authority of the ministry. It is an authority toward the sheep under their rule and concerns God's will for their lives.
6. Shepherds are watchmen.

In the section on shepherds we mentioned an important principle. That is, God's way is to have one person who is the leading overseer. There are groups who have diligently stressed the need for elders. They have so zealously done this that they minimize the role of the leading overseer. (Some of these groups even say that there is to be no leading overseer, and that all elders are co-equal in authority!) The emphasis of this kind of teaching leaves us with the impression that God somehow works grudgingly through leading overseers today - that he does not really want to do things that way. This is not true! We must not lose sight of the importance of the leading overseer in the local church. Another aspect is this: As much as possible God rules through a body of men rather than through an individual. To understand this better, let us look at the 24 elders before God's throne in heaven.

The first principle we notice is in Revelation 4:4. These elders have on their heads crowns which are symbols of authority, symbols of ruling. It does not appear that these elders are really doing very much. Nevertheless, they have a part in what God is doing. Strange as it may seem, the Almighty takes no delight in doing things by Himself! For example, many Old Testament scriptures describe an age to come of peace on earth. This age is characterized by the reign of a sovereign king - our Lord Jesus Christ (Zech. 14:9). At first it appears from many verses that He will do all ruling by Himself as a monarch, but that is not a complete picture. One verse says, "Behold, a king will reign righteously, and princes will rule justly. And each will be like a refuge from the wind, and a shelter from the storm" (Is. 32:1,2 - NAS). One king and many princes! Concerning this government the true heart of the Lord is revealed in those last words to the disciples (Luke 22:28-30).

Truly, God desires to share His rule with others, with those qualified to use it.

The second principle concerning these elders is that they appreciate the One who is ruling (Rev. 4:10-11). They recognize the virtues of God, and from their heart they genuinely appreciate it. In this case the "appreciation" is actually worship. Now in our situation certainly we are not to worship our leaders! Nevertheless, I think that there is a basic principle here. It is this: A person can share the rule which he has received from the Lord only with those who appreciate him. This does not mean that they must blindly accept everything he says. Nor does it mean that they do not challenge him when they think that he is wrong. Nevertheless, the attitude is most important. If there is not this basic appreciation and acceptance of the ruler, it will not work. Let me illustrate this:

In Numbers 11:10-17 we have the account of the ordination of the seventy elders. On this occasion the burden of the leadership had become too great for Moses. He needed help; and in order for men to help him, they would have to work closely with him. It would mean that they would see his personal life very closely. Would this make any difference? In verse 15 he prayed to the Lord, "... Let me not see my wretchedness." What is he talking about? When a man has the responsibility of overseeing, the Lord lays upon that one the "care" of those sheep. This spiritual burden is very trying. At times this can become a real pressure to the overseer. It manifests his wretchedness. If the brethren are going to help him carry this burden, they must draw close to him in fellowship. How would it be if they saw him impatient sometime? What if they saw him discouraged? These are some very practical considerations.

If these who are to help the overseer do not understand that his trials are unique, it would be hard for them to work in this relationship. Maybe

they would be offended. If the one who is leading cannot safely trust in these men, how can he really open his heart to them? If he thinks they will be offended by seeing his wretchedness, how can he really work closely with them? These men must have a special appreciation for the overseer. When they see him under these pressures they should love and appreciate him all the more. Therefore, if there is not a basic appreciation which results in the kind of closeness I have just described, this relationship will not work. There is a special anointing for group leadership, but it will not manifest itself unless there is this kind of love and trust among the brethren.

We find the third principle in Revelation 11:16-17. Here the elders are appreciating the acts of God. This principle is similar to the second, but a little different. To illustrate, someone may truly appreciate a leader as a person, but not have confidence in his ability to lead the group. Obviously, if they feel that way, they will be skeptical about all his decisions. They will freely challenge everything he does or says. They may be very sincere in doing this, but they will not help the overseer in bearing the burden of the work. In the case of the elders in heaven, it was God doing the ruling and we know that everything God does is right. In the case of men, however, there will not be that kind of perfection in ruling. How are we to look upon these things?

"A divine sentence is in the lips of the king. His mouth transgresses not in judgment." (Prov. 16:10) There is a special grace upon those who rule. This does not mean that kings are always right in their discernment, but it does mean that kings are not doing their work by human ability alone. God is helping them in a special way. Therefore, there are two questions we need to decide concerning a ruler. One - has God put this person into that place of ruling? And, two - generally speaking, is he seeking the Lord for help to do that work? If the answer to these

questions is affirmative, then we are to expect that "his mouth transgresses not in judgment." I repeat, this does not mean that we blindly accept his work as perfect. No true ruler of the Lord Jesus would want that from the people, but attitudes are important. There must be a general acceptance of his work and confidence that God is helping him. Consider one more verse.

"He that loves pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend." (Prov. 22:11) A true ruler has no delight in doing things by himself. He is looking for a "friend". He is looking for people who are understanding and sympathetic of the difficulties of his work. If people do not truly accept him in his position, this "grace" will not be in their lips. A wise ruler will be open to receive challenge (and even criticism) from those whose attitudes are not so good; but when he looks for help, he turns to the ones with this grace in their lips. It cannot but be this way.

The fourth principle is found in Revelation 19:4. When God did something, these elders said, "Amen". That means, "So be it." They are saying in effect, "we agree." The fourth principle is this: The elders present a united expression of approval concerning the issues or decisions for which they are standing. In the case of things in heaven, it does not mean that God does not have the authority (and ability) to act alone. Truly, He does and can. Nevertheless, He has chosen to express government in heaven in this manner as a pattern for things here upon earth.

In Ezra 10:1-5 we read of a time of real spiritual crisis in Israel. Many of the people, even leaders, had sinned and drastic measures were needed to correct the situation. Ezra was greatly exercised before God in prayer concerning this. Faithful ones perceived what was happening, and they told him to arise and lead the way. Obviously he was the Lord's choice of one to make these corrections. How did he

go about it? Before he would do anything he made the faithful men swear that they would stand with him in this move. Likewise, on the day of Pentecost, it was Peter who stood to deliver the Word of God to the people. The message truly came from the lips of Peter, yet many overlook the fact that the other apostles were involved in that sermon in a very important way. For it says that they stood with him (Acts 2:14). The "stand" was a silent witness to their "Amen" to the things that Peter said. How much more effective for it to be that way. Words fail to describe the tremendous strength and stability that is given to a local assembly when there is a united body of elders acting in one accord!

In this chapter we emphasized that it is normal for overseeing to be expressed with one vessel as the main leader. However, as much as possible God uses as many as are qualified and needed to work effectively with this main leader. This was portrayed by the following principles:

1. The elders in the churches are not just figureheads. When their work comes about by the operation of the Spirit there is an authority from the Lord apportioned to them.
2. Elders must develop a special appreciation for the one the Lord has raised up to be the leading overseer.
3. Elders must be able to see more than just the man himself. They must be able to see that the Lord is working with that brother to lead the church.
4. Elders must not use this work to pursue personal goals, but see the importance of being united with the brethren to express one voice and one will for the church.

CHAPTER 7
THE FORMATION OF A BODY OF ELDERS

To gain an understanding of how a body of elders is formed, let us look more closely at the example of the seventy elders (Num. 11:16-17). The first step we notice is that Moses had the right to choose the men who were to help him. When he chose them they were to "stand" with him before God. This illustrates the importance of the things I have already mentioned about the personal relationship between the overseer and those who are going to help him. These men were gathered unto Moses; they spent time together. There was a close, personal fellowship developed between them. This is a very important step in the process, but notice an interesting thing. These men were selected from an already existing group of elders. "Elders" were being selected to become "elders". How are we to understand this?

In the beginning of our study we mentioned a general type of eldership that was not an office. Before Moses selected them, the seventy men were already general elders. That is, they were elders in the sense that they were recognized not on the basis of any particular relationship they had with one another, or with Moses. Rather, as individual men they possessed certain leadership qualities that were good, which would bless the nation and give it stability. It appears that they were more or less working on their own. At least up to this point they had been no particular help to Moses in bearing the burden. Isn't this what we often have today? Often elders come into acceptance in many churches for the same reason. That is, they are recognized primarily because of the mature qualities they possess within themselves. Hardly any consideration is given as to how they will flow in spirit with the rest of the elders or "pastor". As sincere as "elders" like that may be, still the load upon the leading overseer is

not really made lighter.

Another observation is this: Is it not significant that the Lord limited the appointment of the selected elders to a particular number? As we said before, overseeing is "created" and not a gift (like the ministry). It is created according to the need for it. This particular overseeing group did not come into existence until Moses felt a need for it and asked for it. When giving instructions for this, the Lord limited the number of elders to that which was truly needed to get the job done. Today the common practice in many groups is to select as many men for this work as qualify, regardless of what the need is in that group. How unfair for those men! Unnecessary frustrations and unrest develop because of this. They have been appointed for a work which in reality hardly needs to be fulfilled. We wonder if this does not become a system for giving positions to men in order to honor them, rather than for getting a job done in the Lord's work.

The second step by which this group develops is by a special kind of prayer life. These men stood with Moses while God talked with him, and obviously, while Moses also talked with God. There was a communion between God and the overseer. Certainly, this communion concerned the work of overseeing the nation. As Moses poured out his heart to God about the problems and needs of the people, God spoke with him. These men were to be a part of this communion between Moses and God. In the previous step we said that they must be with him on a special fellowship basis, but this prayer-life takes them one step closer. They must be a part of this special kind of prayer-life. For example, consider the Lord in Gethsemane. He invited the three disciples to be with Him. He was hopeful that they would endure. He only asked them to watch with Him. It was not even necessary that they pray, nor did they need to fully understand all of the conflicts of that hour. This may sound like a one-way communication, but it is not.

If they would just have been physically present with him in those dark hours, it would have made a difference. If they would have just stayed spiritually alert, it would have made the load upon his heart lighter! Many people do not see the importance of this point. There are sincere pastors who are greatly burdened for the flock. The way many people think of helping them is to take on some of the pastor's administrative duties, but what pastors are most looking for are friends who will go through the spiritual travail of the work with them.

The third step concerns the giving of the Spirit. At first this may seem like a type of what the Lord promised the believer in the New Testament (Acts 1:8). However, in the ministration of the Spirit the baptizer is the Lord Jesus, not his servants, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father, not man. When we look closely at what is happening with Moses and the elders, we see something different. In this case, in a unique way something is passing from Moses to these brethren. This act of the Spirit passing from Moses to them is an impartation of a special anointing. This is an anointing for the work of overseeing. Truly, the burdens that an overseer feels are from the Chief Shepherd. This burden is related to the anointing of God's Spirit resting upon them in this particular manner. The whole burden was originally upon Moses; but later when these conditions were fulfilled, it could be passed from him to the elders. Hence, without diminishing his own spiritual strength, when this anointing was distributed to others, it made Moses' work lighter.

What a tremendous possibility is set before us in this example! All of these seventy elders had the privilege of speaking positive words of faith by a prophetic anointing. By the Spirit of God they boldly confessed what God would do in behalf of their nation. If that was their privilege under the Old Covenant, what is our privilege today under a better covenant? If they could enjoy experiencing God uniting them like

that, should we expect less today? Unfortunately, we do experience less today. It seems that the churches that have something of an eldership ministry in many cases are not experiencing this kind of anointing for their work. Rather, the stronger their elders are, the more individualistic they tend to become. This is similar to the first kind of elders in Israel (who worked mostly on their own). Elders like that give some kind of strength and stability to the churches, but the Lord has something better for us than that.

In the case of church planting done by the work of apostles, the application is different, but the principle is the same. That is, this process took place quite a bit faster than in many of our situations today. For in the early church this pioneering was done by a team of two ministers. In ministry there appears to be an equality between the two apostles, but when it comes to overseeing we detect a difference. Only one of them was the leader. (See 1 Cor. 4:14-16) Therefore, when elders were appointed, that was not the beginning of the oversight in those churches. One of the apostles (like Moses) was already carrying the burden. That apostle was the leading overseer (the "pastor") of the new church for a season, before elders were appointed. Some groups today overlook this point. They do not see the relation between apostles and elders. (Also, they think the elders are co-equal in ruling). The point is this:

Nearly every church for a while is shepherded by one man. Maybe he started the church or maybe not. Nevertheless, God has already been working through him for a period of time. Therefore, when the Lord is going to add more overseers, he does not do this by working directly in the lives of those new ones. Instead, by the steps which we have discussed, the anointing passes from the overseer to the new ones. There are qualified men in churches who realize that the pastor needs help. These men in a measure want to help, but they are expecting God to work directly with

them. They do not see the importance of these three steps, nor do they seem to have much desire to patiently work at having a closer relationship with the lead brother. Nevertheless, if this anointing for elders is truly going to happen, it will come by this process which we have discussed.

Therefore, let us summarize these three steps:

1. Elders are not ordained until there is a real need for them. Only the number that are really needed are ordained. Also, they are not chosen merely on the basis of qualities they personally possess. They are considered for the way they are able to relate to those through whom the Lord is already ruling.
2. It is important for the elders to travail in prayer with the leading overseer; more important than trying to take on some of his administrative duties.
3. There is a special anointing that is to come upon a ruling body. When that happens the burden of the work is borne by all of them together, and they truly function as a team.

Before concluding this study we should say something about the qualifications for this work. When considering eldership I am sure that the first qualification everyone thinks of is maturity. As with the case of deacons, before accepting men to this office, they should be proven. Stated another way, they must not be men who have newly come into the faith (1 Tim. 3:6-7). Remember we said that before the seventy elders were put into that office, they were elders in the general sense. That is, in the eyes of the people there was already a basic maturity and acceptance. In the New Testament I do not think Paul is saying that they must be the oldest members of the church. Sometimes we require more for this qualification than the Lord does! There truly is a certain amount of maturity that must be required. (That amount is not likely to be the same for every church). Remember, Timothy and Titus were overseers, and many thought that they were too young (1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:15). Also, the elders that Paul and Barnabas ordained on their first trip were newly saved. Therefore, in each situation it must be determined what is appropriate to fulfil this first requirement.

A second qualification is that these men must have a certain amount of righteousness in their lives. As with the first qualification, this standard is relative to the situation. When Timothy was ordaining elders, this standard was high (1 Tim. 3:2-3). On the other hand, it is doubtful that those men Paul and Barnabas ordained in Galatia met a very high standard (Acts 14:23). How do we know what is appropriate? It is abomination for unrighteous men to rule (Prov. 16:12). God puts it in the heart of the people to expect their leaders to measure up to a certain standard. In the case of a new congregation, they may not require so much of their leaders, but in an older

church, they expect more. Therefore, we must not take lightly this expectation of the people. God has put that into their hearts and we must cooperate with it. This is especially important since overseers lead the sheep more by example than by instruction (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3).

The third qualification I will mention concerns a capacity for managing people. In the list of requirements written to Timothy most of the qualities concern a man's character. Paul ends the list by talking about the necessity for a man taking care of his own house. This point does not concern fruit of the Spirit so much as it does ability. One translation of this verse reads as follows: "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity" (1 Tim. 3:4-5). The word we want to notice here is "manage". Management is an inescapable part of the work of overseeing. If people are to be cared for, then there must be a coordinating of the group activity. If they are to be properly guided, the overseers must be able to see things in an overall perspective. They must not be men who can be easily diverted from the main issues to incidental issues. Moreover, they cannot approach these matters lightly and expect things to just automatically flow smoothly. There will always be problems trying to hinder the harmony of group activity. These problems do not just work themselves out. They who rule must do it with diligence (Rom. 12:8).

How much of this ability is acquired and how much is innate? I cannot positively say, but I believe that the ability to do this is related to a man's capacity of soul - a capacity of emotion, intellect, and will. Without this certain capacity, those who attempt to manage the sheep will find it tedious and burdensome. It is not just a matter of learning the techniques of managing people. The overseer must possess a certain ability which enables him to keep the sheep moving together in a coordinated way. I

think that this was an important consideration for selecting those seventy! Not only were they recognized by the people as elders, they also were officers over the people. Therefore, elders must not only have godly lives, they must have a capacity of soul for managing people. The very minimum capacity is demonstrated in the way they manage their family.

The last qualification we will mention concerns an ability to exhort or instruct. One scripture says that overseers must be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). Exactly how much ability is that? Some seem to think that they must be qualified as one of the five-fold ministry of Christ, but I believe that this same passage in Titus explains this for us. It says, ". . . holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9). It is not necessary that overseers in the local church be able to get original thought or revelation of the scriptures as those in the ministry do. Rather, as they have themselves been taught from the Word (by ministers and others), they hold fast that word with understanding; and by the word which they have received, instruct the sheep. When problems arise in the church, they may not be able to open the Bible and minister from cover to cover. They do not have to be so skilled as that, but there is a special grace upon them. They comprehend the most simple and basic teachings of the faith, and by this they are able to convince erring sheep of their need. Obviously, some elders are more capable than others in ministering the Word (1 Tim. 5:17). As we said before, often some of the elders are men who are in the ministry of Christ, but the most basic requirement for all elders is not so great as that. Rather, they are examples to the flock in their love for the Word of God. They love to be taught. Also, they have a certain skill to convince others by those things which they have been taught.

In this chapter the most obvious qualifications for being an elder have been discussed, and can be summarized as follows:

1. There is a certain basic maturity we should expect them to have.
2. There must be a certain amount of the fruit of righteousness in the lives of these men.
3. They must have a certain capacity of emotion, intellect, and will to handle the problems of managing people.
4. They must have a certain amount of comprehension of the basic teachings of the faith, and the ability to convince the sheep of these teachings.

CHAPTER 9 GATHERED ACCORDING TO FUNCTION

For the final part of our study let us look at a gathering of brethren at Antioch. The picture opens in Acts 13 with five brethren, mentioned by name, gathering to minister to the Lord. The climax of the scene is that two of them are singled out to do a particular work with the other three brethren approving of this step. These five men are all mentioned specifically as being one of the five-fold ministry. Not only that, certainly they were a vital part of the church there at Antioch. We assume that they all were a functioning part of the local eldership. If this be so, what lesson can we learn from this?

Some people see in this scene an elders' meeting of that local church. That is, these five men represented the total eldership of that local church, and this meeting was one of the normal gathering of elders. If that be the case, we might logically conclude that the normal thing, or the desirable thing, is that the elders in the local church be men who also are called into one of the ministry offices. We have already mentioned in the introduction how some larger churches have made this the standard. Certainly larger churches need more than one ministry on its staff, and it is reasonable for ministers who reside in a local area for any length of time to become a part of the eldership of that local church. We cannot agree, however, with the conclusion that elders of a local church are only men who are in one of the ministry offices of Christ.

Still others see something else in this scene. Their view is that when Paul and Barnabas went forth from Antioch, technically speaking, they were being sent by this body of brethren and, not particularly by the local church. I think this view is worthy of some serious thought. We have seen in the last few years

the work of the Spirit to bring ministers together into wholesome, close-working relationships. Certainly the purpose of the Spirit in doing this is not intended to be negative, but positive. That is, these ministerial alliances are not intended to be formed in order to exclude other brethren, but rather in a positive way these participating brethren are being joined together in order to get a job done. If this is the picture here in Acts 13, it opens up a tremendous possibility for us to explore. For in the two chapters that follow we see wonderful things happen through the labor of these two brethren. This view we are pondering would mean that the operating base for these brethren was not just their city, or the local church there, but a ministerial fellowship! Surely Paul and Barnabas were strengthened many times on that journey as they remembered that certain brethren back at Antioch were with them in one accord. I believe that the church in this generation is yet to rediscover the full potential of strength which comes when ministers of the Lord are joined by the Spirit into a functional relationship! Yet, as important as that is, can we view the activity of these five men as being exclusive of, or completely separate from the work of the local church? I think not.

For one thing, we notice that when they returned from this missionary journey they returned to the local church where they had been committed to the Lord for His work. The verse immediately following says they gathered the church together and rehearsed with them the triumphs of this journey (Acts 14:26-28). The clear implication of this is that the church there at Antioch had a part in sending forth these brethren and also in some way they felt a part of what they were doing. We certainly see that Paul desired to include the local churches in his missionary endeavors. Listen to this translation of Romans 15:24: ".... I hope to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thither by you, if first in a measure I be satisfied by you" Other translations have for the word "satisfied" the idea of

being "filled". Apparently Paul did not feel a full release in his spirit to extend his work unless there was a certain satisfaction, a certain sense in which the saints shared his vision and felt a part of what the Lord was doing with him. Thus, the concept of ministry relating to local churches and working in and out from local churches is still important today. May we not cease to incorporate that into our vision for doing the work.

However, in discussing these different views of the scene in Acts 13, I think we still have not touched upon a valuable lesson. The point we especially wish to consider is the function of elders at the local church level. In a practical way, how did these men come together to do the business of the church? We have already discussed the importance of elders being gathered around the lead overseer. We considered that one of their greatest functions corporately was to pray with the pastor and share the burden for the sheep. Now we are looking for some example for assembling together to handle some of the business of the local work.

The procedure for many churches is something like the following: The pastor feels the need for help in handling the problems and other business of the church. A time is set up for elders' meetings which, hopefully, will include a season of the brethren praying together. Then the remaining time will be for handling church business and possibly a time for just good fellowship between brethren. Those who attend these meetings are all the elders - those brethren who are also in one of the five-fold ministry and those elders who are not so called, but have been truly given an oversight in that congregation by the Holy Spirit. Some churches see no need to exclude the deacons; thus, in that case, we have altogether three categories of brethren coming together periodically to handle business of the church. The question which naturally arises is this: In the coming together of these brethren at Antioch, where were the elders who

were not in the ministry? And why were the deacons not there also?

I believe that the answer to these questions lies in understanding the business at hand which brought those five men together. It does not seem that those men were coming together just in the general sense of an "elders' meeting" to discuss internal problems of the church. Were that the case, it would be strange indeed that the other elders were not there. Rather, it seems that the business of that gathering was restricted to one item: That is, the men gathered to know the plan of the Lord for carrying the gospel to more remote regions. If this was the real business of the meeting, then it was appropriate that only those men come together who have direct responsibility toward the Lord in that business. I have the impression that the meeting of the Jerusalem council was convened by such a principle as we are now discussing. It says, "And the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter." (Acts 15:6) It was not business in general, but a particular matter that brought them together. I am not saying that general elders' meetings where all those in areas of responsibility in the local church come together is inappropriate, or even that they are not beneficial. Certainly they are profitable. But I am saying that there is a simplicity and practicality in the way the early church conducted its business. In a wholesome and natural way the early church was able to recognize the difference of functions of its leaders. It was according to this function and the particular purpose that determined which men would gather themselves together.

I acknowledge, of course, that there was a uniqueness about the council at Jerusalem. Such a meeting may have never again been convened. In the case of the brethren at Antioch I have the impression that they had come together more than once. The gathering which we are privileged to read about is the climax of their coming together and waiting before the

Lord. If this be so, then we are not dealing with rare exceptions, but are touching upon a normal mode of operation, something which can be a helpful pattern for us today. Having said these things from a look at this event at Antioch, I would like to bring this study to a close with a challenge.

One cannot help but be impressed with the fact that those five men could come together with such ease. By that I mean to say, there appears to be no problem with other men (elders, deacons, or whatever) who were not included in the gathering. There were no hurt feelings or strained relations. Yet, if the idea of appointing men as elders becomes a means of giving honor, or if men's motives for seeking it are to establish their personal identity or gain acceptance or honor - there will be problems in the relationships of the brethren. In such cases it is doubtful that we will experience the freedom for assembly that those men at Antioch had. I realize that the word "elder" naturally has in it the connotation of respect and honor. But we have sought in this study to lift the word "elder" out of the general, broad usage and find the more precise meaning, a meaning which depicts a specific work. Also, in a number of ways we have described eldership in relation to the total picture of ministry and church leadership. I do not want in any way to minimize this important work. Neither should it be exalted out of its rightful place. It should be viewed in the eyes of the people in no way other than being one of the Lord's appointed ways for getting the job done. If we fail to see it this way it will be difficult for those in authority to limit appointments to only the number of men really needed for the work. Without this limitation there is a serious possibility of missing the greater anointing for eldership as we saw it upon the seventy. It would be difficult to conduct any form of spiritual business without always including all of these men. In general, we fail to enjoy the simplicity and practicality which the early church enjoyed in

conducting the affairs of the kingdom.

How exciting are the prospects of what we see here at Antioch! I venture to say that the success of that first journey related very much to the fellowship of those five brethren. Yet, the ability and ease of those five men to do what they did depended upon the other elders, deacons, and the whole church in general. If the members at Antioch were not content and fulfilled with their own calling, it is doubtful that those men could have enjoyed such assembly. Apparently there was such contentment in that church, and a great victory did result on that journey. The local elders there were a part of this total picture. May the Lord enable us today to see it happen again manifold. May He grant us true elders, elders in every church!