

The Church

Elders - The Scriptures and Elders - Part 2

Introduction

It is a mistake to think that elders are exclusive to the church. For more than 1400 years before the church came into existence, Israel had elders in their communities and they were called “zaqen”. Unlike today where there is little respect for age, the ancients wisely appreciated age was held in respect for: “With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding” (Job 12:12). Furthermore, it was a command of the people of God, they were to: “honor the face of the old man” (Lev. 19:32).

Elders in Israel

When Moses and Arron went into Egypt:

- 1) Elders were given the communications from God (Ex. 3:16) and were to instruct the people.
 - a) Then Moses with Aaron and the elders communicated truth to the people (Ex. 4:29-31). At the Passover it seems that Moses spoke to the elders who communicated the needed message to the people. “Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the Passover” (Ex. 12:21). I suggest God spoke to the people through Moses and the elders for they were approximately two million people (Ex. 4:29, 30; 19:7; Deut. 27:1).
- 2) Elders were those who had a deeper intimacy with God.
 - a) “And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off (Ex. 24:1).
- 3) Elders were to lead the people in contrition.
 - a) “And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads” (Josh. 7:6).
- 4) They were responsible for the civic aspects of the nation, some of which were:
 - a) Apprehending murderers who might flee unlawfully to one of the cities of refuge (Deut. 19:11, 12).
 - b) Determining who should be admitted to the cities of refuge (Josh. 20:1-6).
 - c) For determining which city took responsibility for the murder which was committed outside their town (Deut. 21:1-9).
- 5) The elders of Israel had to be very cautious in their judgments because their judgments reflected the judgments of God. Therefore, instructions were given in the assessing of a situation. “Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you” (Deut. 13:14).
- 6) It was only after leading figures like Moses and Joshua had died, the burden of leadership and teaching fell more on the elders (Josh. 23:1-11; 24:1-14).
- 7) Elders led the people in hypocrisy.
 - a) Sadly, elders were not always God fearing men but were false elders, just as Paul spoke about (Acts 20:29-30). Such elders came to Ezekiel: “And it came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to enquire of the LORD, and sat before me” (Ezek. 20:1). However, God would not be enquired of by them, for they had continued the idolatry which they had begun in Egypt.

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Elders In The Church

First mention of church elders is Acts 11:30 when relief was sent to the saints at Judea. There is no mention of how they were appointed, nor at this juncture was there any recorded commanded qualifications for them. One thing is evident, if precise and exacting qualifications were given for the deacons (Acts 6:3), then we can be sure just as exacting were the qualifications for the elders. If there were a number of men who could have been apparently fitted for the work, the mind of God could be more precisely determined by the casting of lots (Acts 1:24-26).

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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