

# In Search of Shepherds - The Pattern

REVIEW: We have begun a study on biblical eldership - or the way in which a church is to be governed. We started this study because in the end, we want to eventually change our form of government to come in line with the biblical model.

It really is important for us to understand what the Bible says in regard to this topic. How a church is governed, and more importantly, by whom, is of utmost importance for every Christian to understand. Given the weight of the task the elders are charged with - that task being keeping watch over the souls of those in their care - it is vital we understand their role in our lives, and the character of those in leadership.

Last week we started our journey toward this end. In the process we pulled two main things from Scripture. First we saw that somewhere between the creation of the Church around 33 AD and the time of the famine around 45 AD, churches had been established in Jerusalem, and it into Samaria, and even as far as Antioch (a very large metropolitan Gentile city). At that same time, we noted that elders had been established in Jerusalem - most likely by the Apostles before the Apostles were sent out to various parts of the world (according to tradition).

The second thing we learned was that James, Jesus' brother was one of those elders, and quite possibly the lead elder in the church at Jerusalem. James wrote a much loved book of the Bible, funnily enough called, "James." He wrote it around this same time of the famine. It tells us, in the timeline of history, one of the first duties of an elder is a ministry of prayer for healing.

INTRO: Today, we continue our journey into what the Bible says on eldership. We will start by looking at Paul's first missionary journey.

## I. The appointment of elders - Acts 13:1-14:23

### A. Acts 13:1-3 - Notice three things that are important in these verses

1. First, these men were in a serious worship session with God
  - a) They were not in a strategy meeting on how to reach the Gentile world
  - b) They were worshipping God, and God answered them
    - (1) The Holy Spirit set up Paul's first missionary journey
2. Second, each of these men were prophets and teachers
  - a) There may have been a mix of these gifts within these men
3. The third thing to take note of is that Barnabas is listed with these men at the church in Antioch
  - a) If you remember, he was the one that left Jerusalem to check out what was taking place in Antioch - and we still find him here, a few years later - the year is about 47 A.D. - about 2 yrs after the famine
  - b) He is listed first, and that could indicate his importance in the church

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- B. It appears at this point that there were no elders in this church in Antioch, and these men were leading the church
  - 1. It was Simeon, Lucius and Manaen who laid their hands on them and sent them out by the Spirit's directive
  - 2. The laying on of hands symbolized the blessing of the church that was sending them out
    - a) That is why, before we leave for mission trips, we will sometimes have prayer for those leaving
    - b) And the laying on of hands is a symbol of blessing
- C. Name order was important in the ancient world - those named first were of more importance
  - 1. So, look at verse 2 again - who is listed first? Look at verse 7. Who is listed first?
  - 2. From verse 7 through verse 12 it tells the story of Paul's confrontation with a sorcerer named Elymas, and how Paul pronounced a curse of blindness on this man because he was opposing them - and immediately the man was blind
  - 3. So this encounter on the island of Cyprus changed the leader of the group
    - a) Barnabas willingly turned over the reins to Paul - no doubt seeing God's call on Paul's life
    - b) Barnabas was a humble man - all of Acts bears this out, so taking the back seat to Paul would have been no big deal
  - 4. Now, read verse 13 - "Paul AND HIS COMPANIONS"
    - a) Complete shift here
    - b) Paul became the leader of this missionary journey
- D. Read Acts 13:13-15
  - 1. After leaving the island of Cyprus, they sailed to Perga, and went north to Antioch of Pisidia (different from the other Antioch)
  - 2. They preached in the synagogue - follow down to verse 43
    - a) Many devout followers of Judaism followed them
    - b) Paul and Barnabas urged them to follow God's grace
  - 3. Now, verse 48 - many Gentiles, and probably some Jews believed
  - 4. Then we come to the end of the chapter and Paul and Barnabas are run out of town
- E. So they go to Iconium
  - 1. Same thing - went to the synagogue, spoke God's Word boldly, got run out of town
- F. They go to Lystra - same thing, minus the synagogue

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1. By the way, they were run out of town by people that were trying to worship them as gods
  2. This time, the crowd was stirred up by people from Antioch and Iconium
    - a) And they stoned Paul, leaving him for dead
    - b) However, he was not dead, got up and went back into Lystra (a gutsy thing to do)
- G. The next day they went to Derbe
1. They preached and many people became followers of Christ
  2. They stayed in Derbe for about a year (so around 48 A.D.), and then they decided to go back by the same route - Lystra, Iconium, Antioch in Pisidia, etc.
- H. Here is where we get to the part about the elders - 14:23 - they appointed elders in each church
1. But this raises questions for us
  2. How did they find qualified leaders after such a brief period of time?
    - a) It was only a year or so after the church began in most of these towns
    - b) Chances are it was those “devout followers” of Judaism that converted to Christianity
      - (1) They probably grew quickly in their faith
      - (2) Having had the tools to understand the Gospel from the Jewish Bible - the OT
  3. A second question: How were these elders chosen?
    - a) Is it possible Paul and Barnabas used their prophetic gifts? Sure, but there is no indication that they did - and considering Luke was championing the acts of the Holy Spirit, they probably did not
    - b) More likely, they used a process similar to how they chose the deacons in Acts 6
      - (1) Laying down certain requirements
      - (2) Observing and confirming that these men did have the abilities to be elders
  4. Third question: Did the church in each city have a say in recommending leaders?
    - a) If we fast forward to Acts 16, Timothy was chosen by Paul because “the brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him” (Acts 16:2)
    - b) Same thing in Acts 6 when the deacons were chosen - it was the Hellenistic Jews that recommended seven men
    - c) So most likely they had some say in recommending men for the role of elder
- II. Next up in the history of the church is the Jerusalem Council - about 49 AD
- A. The background

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1. So Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch and gather the church to tell them all that God had done (Acts 14:26-28)
  2. Paul and Barnabas walk into a storm that was brewing
    - a) Men came from Judea and started to teach that Gentiles had to be circumcised like the law of Moses said to get in on this new movement of God and be in the kingdom
    - b) The text says it began a sharp dispute between the men and Paul and Barnabas
      - (1) The word means they got into a heated argument
      - (2) A lot of people think the early church was all violets and roses - like they never had issues among themselves
  3. Paul and Barnabas could not settle this issue, so they were appointed to gather in Jerusalem with the APOSTLES and ELDERS to answer the question
    - a) Note that Paul, the man that wrote most of the NT, the major policy maker, so to speak, of the Christian world could not settle this disagreement
    - b) Paul and Barnabas together had the gift of prophecy, and yet did not receive direct revelation from God to settle the matter
    - c) So it had to go to a higher body - the apostles and elders
  4. So they are welcomed in to the church at Jerusalem by the church, the apostles and the elders (15:4)
  5. After what surely was a longer debate than verse 5 lets on, the apostles and elders met to discuss
    - a) Peter speaks on his rooftop experience with the animals to eat, and on Cornelius' conversion
    - b) Paul and Barnabas talk about God at work in the Gentile world abroad
    - c) Then James, seemingly the head elder, speaks, and confirms what Peter said, quotes from Amos, and gives his opinion on what the solution should be
      - (1) Notice he did not claim direct revelation from God
      - (2) He gave his judgment based on what God has revealed to them so far
  6. So together they reached a conclusion about not making it hard for the Gentiles to come to Christ
- B. One big question comes up about this episode in the life of the church
1. If Paul and Barnabas, not to mention other leaders in the church, have the gift of prophesy, why didn't the Holy Spirit speak through them in that moment?

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2. The answer is, the Holy Spirit is choosing when to speak directly and clearly, and when to quietly confirm by consensus and affirmation
    - a) It's as if a gradual authority shift is taking place
    - b) From the Holy Spirit being very direct about His guidance, to allowing freedom, and responsibility to be transferred to the leaders to make decisions based on God's previous revelations
  - C. The reason this is so important is because it shows us how God is transferring authority and responsibility to the leaders of the church
    1. Which means they need to be spiritually mature
    2. Knowledgeable of God's revelation and will
    3. Wise and compassionate in its application
- III. Our third story for today only covers 11 verses - Acts 15:36-16:5
- A. To be honest I had never read the story this way before - probably due to the chapter divisions
    1. When you take a step back, and you are being intentional to look for leadership issues, these two stories make sense why they are together in Scripture
    2. The stories are of Paul and Barnabas' argument over John Mark, and Paul's choice of Timothy
  - B. The time frame is about 49-50 AD - shortly after the Jerusalem Council
    1. After the Council, Paul wrote a letter to the Galatians
      - a) If you recall, much of that letter dealt with the law versus grace issue
      - b) No doubt, Paul was inspired and influenced by the question that came to the Jerusalem Council
  - C. Paul now wanted to go back to visit several of the churches that they helped to establish
    1. So Paul approaches Barnabas and floats this suggestion
    2. Barnabas agrees, but he wants to bring John Mark along
      - a) If you remember the story, you remember that John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas at Perga
        - (1) Also, Barnabas had a little bit of a personal stake in the matter as John Mark was his cousin
        - (2) This would be like me telling you that we need to give my cousin Mike another try at it
        - (3) Sure he messed up the first time, but he'll do better this time
    3. The Bible says, depending on your version, that they had no small argument about bringing John Mark along
    4. They could not solve the disagreement, and Paul and Barnabas split up
      - a) Barnabas taking John Mark and going back to Cyprus (so they checked on the cities they first stopped at)

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- b) And Paul selected Silas and headed for Asia Minor
  - (1) Silas was one of the men selected to take the letter of decision from the Jerusalem Council to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cicilia
  - (2) No doubt, that is where Paul got to know Silas quite well
- 5. Paul and Silas did not start back at Perga, this time they started at Derbe, and made their way to Lystra
- D. Which brings us to the second story - Timothy
  - 1. Chances are, Timothy had seen Paul on his first missionary journey, and this is the town Paul was stoned and left for dead, but miraculously recovered
  - 2. Most likely, Timothy accepted Christ on Paul's first journey through Lystra
    - a) Timothy was already a disciple (Acts 16:1)
    - b) AND, the believers spoke well of Timothy - so to have that kind of maturity, chances are good that Timothy probably became a follower of Christ on Paul's first journey
  - 3. So after Paul hears so much about this young man, he naturally finds out more about him
    - a) His mother was a Jewish believer, his father was a Greek
    - b) His mother had taught Timothy the Scriptures from infancy
    - c) He had been influenced by the faith of his grandmother as well
  - 4. So Paul really checked out Timothy's background before allowing this young man to join him on his journey
    - a) God has given Paul the freedom to do so
    - b) Just as God gave Barnabas the freedom to choose John Mark
- E. Now, why is this story so important?
  - 1. This is first of all a contrast of individuals
    - a) John Mark and Timothy - their maturity levels
    - b) Paul and Barnabas - how they handled the situation, and even their maturity levels
  - 2. But what this demonstrates is God's giving out more and more responsibility for godly men to lead the church
  - 3. Barnabas was given the freedom to choose qualities in a person for a ministry partner
  - 4. Paul was allowed freedom to choose as well
    - a) Examining Timothy and seeing what qualities he finds in Timothy
    - b) This, of course would help Paul formulate what the essential qualities would be, when he codified them later in his letter to Timothy and Titus

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- IV. Our final story for today comes from Paul's second missionary journey
- A. Paul and Silas are out on their journey, along with Timothy now
1. They travelled from Lystra to several cities in Asia minor
    - a) The Holy Spirit prevented them twice from going into the province of Asia
  2. Paul has a vision of a man pleading with him to come to Macedonia (a region in Greece)
    - a) From where they were, they would have to cross the Aegean sea to get there
    - b) They took this as a sign from God, and went to Philippi
      - (1) Many of us know the stories about Paul in Philippi
        - (a) Lydia the fashion gal that accepted Christ
        - (b) The slave girl that Paul healed of the demon she had
        - (c) They were thrown in prison
        - (d) They sang praise to God in prison - God sent an earthquake, the doors flew open - the chains fell off, so they were free to go - and yet they stayed
        - (e) The jailer runs in thinking everyone escaped, and just when he is about to end his life, Paul shouts that they are all still there
        - (f) The jailer and his whole family accept Christ
      - (2) These are many of the famous stories about Paul, and you can go back and get the sermons online when I taught through the book of Acts
    - c) After they left Philippi, they came to Thessalonica
    - d) While on their journey through Greece, at some point they sent Timothy to go check on the Thessalonians
      - (1) The persecution got too great there, and they left town
      - (2) They were worried about the believers that lived there because of how they had to leave - this is why they sent Timothy
        - (a) And Timothy returned with a good report of the believers there
  3. Paul then wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians
    - a) Paul addressed concerns he had with the believers there that were being lazy - he even addressed it when he was with them (2 Thess. 3:10)
- B. Here is where we get back to the elders - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
1. Evidently, the elders were working on this same problem with some of the believers there too
  2. Some things to note:
    - a) The spiritual leaders were not called elders in these verses, however it seems as if that is who is in view

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- (1) They are admonishing the believers
  - (2) They are working hard on their behalf - seems like spiritual leaders to me
  - b) Also, this job of admonishing is not a job for the faint of heart, or the spiritually immature
    - (1) I can tell you that I have stood in front of people, trying to convince them of issues that they need to deal with, or seriously look at in their lives, and have faced the cold reception as a result
      - (a) Just who do you think you are to tell me that!
      - (b) The answer is: I think I am the person God put in charge to lead the church spiritually, and the man God placed in your path to make you reconsider some of your behavior
    - (2) Admonition is a difficult task - to try to convince someone of their need to change is never easy
  - c) Paul is supporting their work by asking that these men be acknowledged, because they care for them, and hold them in highest regard in love
- C. A few quick things to learn from this passage and we will call it a day
- 1. The first big question we encounter is, “who appointed the spiritual leaders in Thessalonica?”
    - a) The answer - Not Paul - He was run out of town too fast
    - b) Most likely - Luke.
      - (1) Luke had stayed in Philippi in the same region
      - (2) Chances are he over saw several of the fledgling churches much like Titus did on Crete
  - 2. What were the spiritual leaders called in Thessalonica?
    - a) Answer: We don’t know for sure - the Bible never says
    - b) However, it was most likely the same terms for the leaders in Philippi, assuming that Luke helped establish the leadership in both churches
      - (1) This seems likely
      - (2) So that means they would have been called overseers and deacons
  - 3. Why the term overseer and not elder?
    - a) Answer: because of the mostly Gentile makeup of the church
      - (1) The Gentiles were used to the term overseer as each Roman colony had an overseer
      - (2) The Jews were used to the term elder
    - b) Because this is a Gentile church, overseer seemed more appropriate
      - (1) And because Luke was a Gentile Christian, if he did, in fact, help establish the leadership, that would fit as well



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- V. Why is all of this important
  - A. Please remember that we are laying the groundwork of why the biblical pattern for church government is eldership
  - B. It is vital for us to understand who and why elders are God's design for the church
    - 1. It is also vital to understand that while there is a set pattern for leadership of a church, God gave them leeway to make certain choices about things like
      - a) Theological controversy - as long as we understand that the outcome was based in previous revelation
      - b) Choice of companions for the spread of the gospel
      - c) And even what to call the leadership
  - C. Then we can thrive and flourish under their leadership as we submit to their loving lead