SHEPHERDING GOD'S FLOCK

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Biblical Leadership
in the New Testament and Beyond

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INTRODUCTION

S hepherding God's flock is an important task and a high calling. When Jesus restored the apostle Peter, he was told by the risen Lord to "feed my sheep" (John 21:17). Jesus' words of restoration and acceptance included the mandate to take care of God's people. Shepherding God's flock is important because the sheep belong to God. There are his flock, his people, his church because they were "purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28 NASB). Shepherding is important because there are many dangers that God's people face and shepherds help protect the flock from such dangers. Just as Paul warned the Ephesian elders to "Pay careful attention to yourselves and all the flock," today shepherds must likewise be diligent because it is still the case that "savage wolves" can "come in . . . and will not spare the flock" (Acts 20:28–29 NIV).

Furthermore, shepherds are given a high calling because they serve as "examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). Although ultimately sheep are led by the "chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4), under-shepherds are given to the church to provide godly examples of what it means to be a follower of the "Shepherd and Overseer" of their souls (1 Peter 2:25). Consequently, who leads the church, the type of authority they are given, how they relate to one another, to whom they are accountable, and how they are selected are of utmost importance to the life and health of God's people. We believe that the Scriptures provide us with a solid foundation as to who is to lead the church and how it is to be done.

This book, however, is not intended to provide pithy answers to practical questions on leadership, for there are scores of books and seminars in which such answers are given. This book is designed to take a step back and to consider what the Scriptures teach about leadership. Before answering practical questions, it is imperative to deter-

mine the message of the Scriptures on leadership. As evangelicals, we believe the Scriptures are sufficient and normative for every dimension of life, and thus they have supreme authority. Jim Hamilton seeks to answer the question concerning the relationship of the Old Testament elders and synagogue leaders to leaders in New Testament churches. The following three chapters seek to provide the biblical foundation for church leaders found in the Gospels (Andreas Köstenberger), Acts and Paul's letters to churches (Benjamin Merkle), Paul's letters to individuals and the General Epistles (Thomas Schreiner).

We also recognize, however, that we are not the first ones to think about this matter. Christians throughout history have reflected on the pattern of leadership in individual churches and among all the churches. If we want to dig our roots deep, we must consider those who have gone before us, those who have labored in the Lord's vineyard during previous eras. Thus, we consider the papacy in two chapters (Michael Haykin and Gregg Allison), for the Roman Catholic understanding has exerted an enormous influence throughout church history—an influence which continues to this day. Obviously, many other patterns of leadership could be investigated, but space precludes covering them all, and so we have restricted our study to Presbyterians (Nathan Finn), Anglicans (Jason Duesing), and Baptists (Shawn Wright). By sampling different polity structures, we are introduced to some of the configurations and structures that have played a significant role during the history of the church. The understanding of church leadership among these groups is not only described but also evaluated.

The book before you is not written from a detached and neutral standpoint. All the contributors are Baptists, and we are convinced that the Baptist understanding of church government comports with the Scriptures. Saying that we don't write neutrally should not lead anyone to think that this book is propaganda. It is our contention that a careful consideration of the Scriptures supports a baptistic understanding, and hence the scriptural chapters presented here attempt to make the case for our view biblically. We understand if some disagree, but we do hope that the case made here gets a fair hearing. The intensive study of Scripture and history is the platform for Bruce Ware's essay where he puts together the case we are making biblically and theologically. We hope readers see the beauty and coherency of the view of church lead-

ership defended here. Finally, we believe what we argue here has practical ramifications, for theory must ultimately lead to practice. Andy Davis helps us think about what the study means for us today as we serve and lead God's people.

Our prayer is that God will raise up pastors and leaders who will lead our churches with humility and with vision.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson. 10 vols. 1885. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, reprint, 2004.
AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament
DNTB	*Dictionary of New Testament Background*. Edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1979–1988.
IVPNTCS	IVP New Testament Commentary Series
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KJV	King James Version
LTJ	*Lutheran Theological Journal*
NAC	New American Commentary
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTT	*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Edited by Colin Brown. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–85.

NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis. Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997.*
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIV^{84}	New International Version (1984)
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NPNF^2	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
SBJT	*The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SE	*Studia evangelica*
SP	Sacra pagina
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976.
TEV	Today's English Version
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TrinJ	*Trinity Journal*
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

CHAPTER 1

Did the Church Borrow Leadership Structures from the Old Testament or Synagogue?

James M. Hamilton Jr.[1]

The pastors of the early churches were referred to as elders and overseers. These terms are used interchangeably at several points in the New Testament (see esp. Acts 20:17, 28 and 1 Peter 5:1–2; cf. also Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Phil. 1:1; James 5:14). Why were these men referred to as elders?[2] Were they called elders because there were elders in Old Testament Israel and in the synagogues of the second temple period? Is there a relationship between the leadership structure of the nation of Israel, the synagogue, and the church?

The short answer is yes and no, but less yes than no. The yes part is in the way the church took up a term that the Greek translation of the Old Testament had used to designate a group of leaders that we read about across the Old Testament.[3] There are elders in the Old Testament, and the authors of the New Testament indicate that the early church referred to their leaders as elders, pastors, and overseers. There is less yes than no, though, because the similarities basically end with the fact

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1. James M. Hamilton Jr. (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is Professor of Biblical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

2. And they would have been men, as passages like 1 Timothy 2:12 and 5:17 make clear (cf. also Acts 20:30). See further Thomas R. Schreiner and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); and James M. Hamilton, "What Women Can Do in Ministry: Full Participation Within Biblical Boundaries," in *Women, Ministry and the Gospel: Exploring New Paradigms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 32–52.

3. In the overwhelming majority of instances, the Greek translators rendered the Hebrew term זָקֵן with πρεσβύτερος. For the statistics, see Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 30.

of leadership and the use of the term. The differences between Old and New Testament elders are too significant to permit the conclusion that the elders of the church were a natural development of the elders of Israel. Against G. K. Beale, who writes, "I contend that the office of elder in the church, the new Israel, is to some degree the continuation of the position of elder in Israel,"[4] L. Coenen is correct: "the examples do not permit any direct connection to be drawn between the OT and the later office of episkopos, or bishop."[5]

More extensive treatments of the elders in the Old Testament can be found elsewhere,[6] and Merkle has provided the decisive treatment of the question being considered here, summarizing other positions and outlining positives and negatives.[7]

The existence of this body of work makes it unnecessary for this essay either to present an exhaustive round-up or summarize the various perspectives. Here we need only summarize what we know about elders in the OT and in the synagogue to show that Merkle and others are correct to conclude that the office of elder is "an almost entirely new position."[8] The final section of this essay, however, will consider the Old Testament's major contribution to the New Testament concept of leadership, that of the suffering righteous shepherd.

Elders in the Old Testament

Although elders in the Old Testament are frequently mentioned, they are also easily ignored. There is never an outright definition of who they were, never a set of qualifications or requirements for them, never an overt statement of where they stand in relationship to other leading figures, and only once are individual elders named (Num.

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4. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 929.
5. L. Coenen, "Bishop," *NIDNTT*, 1:190.
6. See Hanoch Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel: A Study of a Biblical Institution* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989); and Timothy M. Willis, *The Elders of the City: A Study of the Elders-Laws in Deuteronomy* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); cf. also John L. McKenzie, "The Elders in the Old Testament," *Biblica* 40 (1959): 522–40. See also M. R. Jacobs, "Leadership, Elders," *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 515–18.
7. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 23–56.
8. Ibid., 65.

11:26). There is nothing like a sustained focus on what particular elders did, when they became elders, or how they functioned as elders.[9] The evidence in the Old Testament indicates that ancient Israel and its neighbors recognized the authority and standing of older males. That is to say, Israel was not the only society that had elders. We read of elders of the house of Pharaoh and of the land of Egypt (Gen. 50:7; cf. Ps. 105:22), of Midian and Moab (Num. 22:4, 7), of Gibeon (Josh. 9:11) and of Gebal (Ezek. 27:9).

Because the elders are never defined and no qualifications are ever given, in order to get any traction on who they were we are left to the meaning of the terms used to describe them and the roles they are called to play. As to the terms used to describe elders, Merkle observes, "The noun [*zaqen*] is derived from the Hebrew term 'beard' [*zaqan*], a relationship that is attested in most Semitic languages."[10] For this reason, F. C. Fensham writes that an "elder" is "An elderly person; also, an authority, or a person with judicial office. It is commonly accepted that the origin of this latter meaning is to be sought in the ancient patriarchal family institution of the Hebrews."[11] Similarly, Kenneth Aitken explains, "The office of elder has its roots in the tribal structure of early Israelite society. Elders were the heads of the families and the leaders and representatives of the tribes. They exercised a patriarchal authority based on kinship and the wisdom of experience."[12]

To see exactly how the elders are presented in the Old Testament, what follows is a summary of the references to the elders in the Old Testament. This review of the evidence lays the foundation for the affir-

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9. Cf. C. J. H. Wright: "the heads of houses acted judicially in the local civic assembly—'the gate.' This was probably their major public function as 'elders' in the everyday life of the community. The OT never spells out exactly the identity of the elders nor their qualifications for eldership, so there has been room for debate among scholars on the matter. But the most likely view is that they were composed of the senior males from each household . . ., who were qualified by their substance—their family and land. . . ." ("Family," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman [Doubleday: New York, 1992], 2:764). Similarly L. Coenen writes, "Although their role was in origin neither religious nor cultic but socio-political, the existence of elders *as an institution* was of considerable significance in the life of Israel and the Jewish synagogue community, as it was among other peoples of the ancient world (cf. the elders of Egypt in Gen. 50:7). The institution was already established when Israel became a people. It is assumed in every strand of OT tradition" ("Bishop," *NIDNTT*, 1:194).

10. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 23.

11. F. C. Fensham, "Elder in the OT," *ISBE*, 2:53.

12. Kenneth T. Aitken, "זָקֵן," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:1137–39.

mation of the conclusion that there is more discontinuity than continuity between the old and new covenant elders.

In accordance with the patriarchal authority the elders held, when the Lord sends Moses back to Egypt, he sends him to gather the elders of Israel (Ex. 3:16). Wegner observes, "It appears that as far back as the Egyptian captivity, the Israelites were led by elders (Ex. 3:16), and it is commonly accepted that this concept originated in the Hebrew patriarchal family institution."[13] We repeatedly read of the elders of Israel or of the people (Ex. 3:16, 18; 4:29; 12:21; 17:5; 18:12; 19:7, etc.).[14] The elders are listed with heads of tribes (e.g., Deut. 5:23; Josh. 24:1) and with officers (Deut. 29:10; 31:28) and judges (Josh. 8:33; 23:2). Moses gave the Torah to the priests, Levites, and elders (Deut. 31:9).

The elders feature prominently in the narrative when seventy of them ascend the mount with Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu (Num. 24:1, 9, 14). Exodus 24:10 says, "They saw the God of Israel," and 24:11 calls them "the chief men of the people of Israel." The only time individual elders are named in the narratives is when Eldad and Medad remained in the camp when the seventy were given some of the Spirit that was upon Moses (Num. 11:16–30, see 11:17, 26). The seventy were thus equipped to bear the burden of the people with Moses (11:17).

As for what the Law required elders to do, if the whole congregation of Israel sinned unintentionally, Leviticus 4:15 called for the elders of the congregation to lay their hands on the head of the bull to be sacrificed. In Deuteronomy 19:23, "the elders of his city" were responsible for punishing a murderer, in 21:2–6, the "elders of the city" handled atonement for unsolved murder, while the man fleeing to a city of refuge had to "explain his case to the elders of the city" (Josh. 20:4). In Deuteronomy 21:19–20, the "elders of his city" take on the punishing of a rebellious son, in 22:15–18, the "elders of the city" examine the evidence of virginity, and in 25:7–9, the "elders of his city" see to the shaming the man who will not do his Levirate duty. In keeping with these instructions, Boaz brought ten of the elders of the city to witness the Levirate interaction between himself and the nearer kinsman regarding Ruth (Ruth 4:2–11). On the basis of

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13. Paul D. Wegner, "זָקֵן," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:1135.
14. See Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 24 n. 4 for a full summary of all the phrases that qualify the term "elders," whether "of Israel" or "of the city" etc.

this evidence, Wegner observes, "Once the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, it appears that each city also had its own elders who sat at the city gate to attend to certain internal matters (Deut. 21:19; 22:15). . . . It does not appear that the elders created laws or established precedents, but were there to administer and maintain societal standards."[15]

The elders of Israel mourned with Joshua after the defeat at Ai (Josh. 7:6), and then after the judgment of Achan, Joshua and the elders led the people back to Ai for victory (8:10). The elders of Joshua's generation apparently helped preserve piety among the people after Joshua's death (24:31). We read of elders at several points in Judges (Judg. 8:14, 16; 11:5–11; 21:16), then in Samuel the elders act foolishly by taking the ark into battle (1 Sam. 4:3) and demanding a king (8:4). The elders are relevant enough to warrant Saul's concern for their opinion (15:30) and for David to send them spoil (30:26).

Abner confers with the elders of Israel to make David king (2 Sam. 3:17), and David covenants with the elders of Israel (5:3) who then anoint him king (1 Chron. 11:3). David and the elders brought the ark into Jerusalem (1 Chron. 15:25), and the elders of David's house try to raise him up from mourning (1 Sam. 12:17).

When Absalom rebelled against David, Ahithophel's advice pleased Absalom and the elders of Israel (2 Sam. 17:4). Hushai overturned Ahithophel's counsel before the same (17:15). The elders of Judah were called to restore David after the rebellion (19:11), and 1 Chronicles 21:16 describes David and the elders clothed in sackcloth when the angel was destroying Jerusalem.

At the dedication of the temple "Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel" (1 Kings 8:1, cf. 8:3; 2 Chron. 5:2, cf. 5:4). Ahab and Jezebel interacted with the elders (1 Kings 20:7–8; 21:8), and the elders sat both with Elisha (2 Kings 6:32) and in exile before Ezekiel (Ezek. 8:1; 14:1; 20:1). Jehu wrote to the rulers, elders, and guardians of Ahab's sons (1 Kings 10:1, 5). Josiah gathered the elders as he initiated reforms (23:1; 2 Chron. 34:29).

When Israel returned to the land after the exile to rebuild temple and city, Ezra 5:5 tells us, "the eye of their God was on the elders of the

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15. Wegner, "זָקֵן," 1135 .

Jews" (cf. Ezra 5:9; 6:7, 8), and 6:14 states "the elders of the Jews built and prospered."[16] When Ezra led the people to confront the mixed marriage crisis, the people were summoned to appear "by order of the officials and the elders" (10:8), and then "the elders and the judges of every city" (10:14) were involved in the process of dealing with the problem.

Psalm 107:32 refers to "the assembly of the elders," and this assembly is probably also in view in Proverbs 31:23, where the husband of the virtuous woman is known among the elders at the gate. Certain elders speak in Jeremiah's defense and appeal to the precedent of Micah of Moresheth (Jer. 26:17–19). Jeremiah addresses the surviving elders in the letter he sends to Babylon (Jer. 29:1).

Various prophetic texts indicate that when the Lord judged his people he held the elders responsible for the failures of the people (Isa. 3:14; Jer. 19:1; cf. Lam. 1:19; 2:10; 4:16; 5:12; Ezek. 7:26; 8:11–12; 9:6; Joel 1:2, 16; 2:16). This reality indicates that the elders were both representative of and responsible for the people.

Perhaps the most unique text on elders in the Old Testament is Isaiah 24:23, which envisions Yahweh reigning on Mount Zion, "and his glory will be before his elders." This description of the Lord's eschatological triumph probably informs the 24 elders on thrones around the throne in Revelation 4:4. Because in Revelation the elders are classed with heavenly beings rather than with humans, it seems that the earthly elders have a heavenly counterpart in the divine council in heaven.

Elders in the Synagogue

Our knowledge of the synagogue is limited.[17] Chilton and Yamauchi comment briefly on the relationship between synagogue and temple: "Before the synagogue was felt to replace the temple, it had complemented it. The official function of receiving taxes for its upkeep is one

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16. These references to elders in Ezra 5–6 are in the Aramaic portion of Ezra (Ezra 4:8–6:18 and 7:12–26 are in Aramaic, with the rest of the book in Hebrew), so the Aramaic equivalent to the Hebrew term for "elders" is used.

17. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 55 n. 127. On the synagogue, see Rainer Riesner, "Synagogues in Jerusalem," in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 179–211.

example. Another is its function as a gathering of elders for the purpose of administering justice."[18]

    As a result of the paucity of evidence, assumptions must be made about its leadership, as can be seen from Schnabel's words: "In regard to the villages of Palestine, we can assume that each one had a spokesperson. Larger villages and smaller towns may have had councils or elders, identical with or closely connected to the leaders of the local synagogues."[19] Similarly, Chilton and Yamauchi tell us what was "probably" the case: "A group of elders would direct the activities of the synagogue. The *archisynagogos* was probably chosen from among them. An almoner would collect and distribute alms. The *hazzan*, or 'attendant,' was the one who took care of the Scripture scrolls."[20] Schnabel nicely summarizes the synagogue functionaries:

> The sources attest the following offices: leaders or presidents of the synagogues (*archisynagogoi*), leaders, officials (*archontes*), council of elders (*gerousia*) and elders (*presbyteroi*), scribes (*grammateis*), readers (*anagnostai*), servants (*diakonoi*), priests (*hiereis*), singers of psalms (*psalmologoi*), finance officials (*phrontistai*) and defenders or benefactors (*prostatai*).[21]

    Emil Schürer writes, "the 'elders' were not looked upon as officials in the technical sense of the word. They were the representatives and advisers of their community, but not officials with specific functions entrusted to them."[22] Sanders states, "According to Philo, Sabbath instruction was led by a priest or elder . . . ."[23] Schnabel comments at more length on the difficulty of knowing whether what we can know about one synagogue would have prevailed more generally:

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18. B. Chilton and E. Yamauchi, "Synagogues," in *DNTB*, 1149.
19. Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 191.
20. Chilton and Yamauchi, "Synagogues," 1146.
21. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 646.
22. Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, trans. John MacPherson, Sophia Taylor, and Peter Christie (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 2.2:249.
23. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 177.

In regard to the leadership of the synagogues, Donald Binder distinguishes between the archon (*prostates, archiprostates*), who was responsible for the legislative and legal concerns of the village and town community, and the *archisynagogos*, who led the religious services; both *archon* and *archisynagogos* were members of a council of elders (*presbyteroi, gerontes, dynatoi*) who functioned as advisers and representatives of the synagogue members. This differentiation can be demonstrated only for a few synagogues, however, and it is too 'neat' to be a valid description for all local situations. . . . The function of the 'elders' (*presbyteroi*) cannot be determined with certainty: the priest Samuel ben Yedaya is the archon of the synagogue in Dura-Europos, but at the same time (in a Greek inscription) he is *presbyteros*. The function of the 'elders' presumably was different, depending on local circumstances: they probably carried out administrative and financial, and perhaps also religious-liturgical, tasks. Small communities probably managed without a council of elders.[24]

The Gospels and Acts in the New Testament provide us with a number of references to synagogues and leadership in Israel, and for the purposes of this investigation, this NT evidence is most relevant. We are asking whether the early church borrowed leadership structures from the Old Testament or synagogue, so the references to the synagogue and to Jewish elders in writings from the early church are most pertinent for our purposes.[25]

What we see of pre-Christian elders in the New Testament is very similar to what we have seen in the Old Testament, with some developments. The centurion sends elders of the Jews to Jesus in Luke 7:3. In Mark (7:3, 5) there are references to the traditions of the elders related to hand-washing (cf. Matt. 15:2). These traditions of the elders indicate

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24. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 193.
25. For a broader survey than will be given here, see Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, who discusses elders in the apocryphal writings (32–35), in writings from Qumran (35–37), in Josephus (38), in the Mishna (38–39), in papyri and inscriptions (39–42), and in Plutarch (42–43).

that the elders have led the way in prescribing how the Mosaic Law was to be lived out.

Jesus repeatedly indicates that he will suffer and be rejected by "the elders and the chief priests and the scribes" (Mark 8:31; cf. 11:27; 14:43; Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:22; 20:1; 22:66). Chief priests and elders challenge the authority of Jesus in Matthew 21:23, then they plot to arrest and kill Jesus in 26:3–4 (cf. Matt. 27:1, 3). They put their plan into action (Luke 22:52). The chief priests and elders accuse Jesus before Pilate in Matthew 27:12 and persuade the crowd against him in 27:20. They bribe the soldiers from Jesus' tomb in Matthew 28:12.

What we see the pre-Christian elders doing in the Gospels matches the role they have played in the Old Testament, particularly the instructions of Deuteronomy, where they are given responsibility to uphold the Torah. Along these lines, Chilton and Yamauchi note, "Offenders could be judged before the elders in the synagogues and flogged forty stripes save one by the *hazzan* (Mark 13:9; 2 Cor. 11:24). Apostates could be excommunicated (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2)."[26] In their actions against Jesus, the elders think (wrongly) that they are upholding Torah.

The elders play a similar role in the book of Acts. When Peter and John are arrested for "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2), the "rulers and elders and scribes gathered" to hear the case against them in Acts 4:5, and Peter addresses them in 4:8. Peter and John report back to the church what "the chief priests and elders had said to them" (4:23). Elders and scribes seized Stephen (6:12; cf. 7:58; 8:1; 22:5). The elders play a similar role later in the book with respect to Paul: the forty plus who conspire to kill Paul report their plan "to the chief priests and elders" (23:14). The high priest Ananias accuses Paul "with some elders" (24:1; cf. 25:15).

ELDERS IN THE CHURCH

Did the church borrow the leadership structure of eldership from Old Testament Israel or the synagogue of early Judaism? As in the introduction, yes and no, but more no than yes. We have seen that eldership was widely established in the ancient world. Israel, as well as Egypt, Midian,

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26. Chilton and Yamauchi, "Synagogues," 1147.

and other nations, all had elders. The evidence in the Old Testament in-dicates that eldership arose from the standing that derives from age and the wisdom and stature that tends to accompany life experience. Being a patriarchal society, in Israel the men of standing who would have been recognized as elders would naturally have been clan and tribal fathers, so the elders would have had an intrinsically familial standing.

The most superficial examination shows that the early church ad-opted a term widely employed in their social environment, a term with a long history of designating male leadership. The question here is whether the church used that term to designate an office that cor-responded to or grew out of the elders we read about in the Old Testa-ment and in the descriptions of early pre-Christian Judaism. In order to gain traction on the issue, we must summarize differences between the old and new covenant peoples of God, and we must consider what the New Testament shows and tells about the elders in the early church.

The first and most significant difference between old and new cov-enant elders is the simple fact that whereas membership in the old cov-enant was based on familial descent, in the new covenant this is not so. The old covenant people of God was a nation, a collection of twelve tribes, with those tribes made up of clans, all descending from Abra-ham through Isaac and Jacob. Thus, the people of God were one ethnic group. They were genealogically connected, and in a very real sense they were a collection of families descending from father Abraham. In such a situation, the heads of fathers' houses would naturally take on leadership. In Old Testament Israel, fathers led families. It takes very little imagination to see how this would result in a situation where the elders in a particular city would be the responsible, engaged, wise, and willing fathers of that city.

The reason no qualifications are explicitly stated probably comes down to the fact that no qualifications were felt to be needed. The re-quirements of the covenant were already there. The book of Proverbs gives dramatized exposition of what it looks like to keep the command-ments. Texts like Psalms 127 and 128 describe the blessed life of the man who walks according to Torah in the context of his family.[27] The

27. For discussion of family relationships in the Old Testament, see James M. Hamilton, "That the Coming Generation Might Praise the Lord," *Journal of Family Ministry* 1 (2010): 10–17;

man who was faithful to his wife, diligent with his children, disciplined in his farming and shepherding, and faithful to his neighbors would be visibly successful as he enjoyed the blessings of the covenant by faith. The virtues and prosperity of such a man would be on display in all areas of his life, as Proverbs 14:24 states, "The crown of the wise is their wealth, but the folly of fools brings folly."[28] Such a man would be easy to get along with, as Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

If we could ask someone like Ezra why no qualifications for the Old Testament's "elders" were ever stated in the books of the Old Testament, Ezra would probably give us a puzzled look and respond that such qualifications are obvious and practically stated on every page of the Scriptures.

The situation changes when the Lord blasts out the ethnic boundaries around his people and Jesus sends his followers out to make disciples of all nations. No longer are the people of God gathered in one land. No longer are they a political entity of clans and tribes forming a patriarchal nation. No longer are the people of God defined by a line of descent. When Jesus sends his followers to make disciples of all nations, the people of God cease to be defined by the fact that they descend from Abraham. Where one was born, who one was born to, these issues no longer determine whether one belongs to God's people. These changed realities affect what we see in the Old Testament and in the synagogue about elders.

If genealogical descent and ethnic identity no longer determine membership in the people of God, what does? The key statement in the Old Testament comes in Jeremiah 31:34, "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord." This means that everyone in the promised new covenant will know God (Jer. 31:31–34). In the New Testament it becomes clear that people are enabled to know God by means of the new birth, and to experience the new birth is to

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idem, "A Biblical Theology of Motherhood," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 2 (2012): 6–13.

28. For discussion of the theology of the Old Testament showing that the Old Testament is not teaching prosperity theology but everywhere assumes that the old covenant was only to operate by faith, see James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 67–353, esp. 107–14, 344.

be made alive or regenerated. The Old Testament refers to this new birth with various circumcision metaphors, whether of the heart or ears (e.g., Deut. 30:6; Jer. 6:10, etc.).[29]

The first difference, then, between the old and new covenant elders is that whereas an Israelite man with much common grace who did not know God might be an elder in old covenant Israel (and if the elders of Jesus' day had known the Father they would have known Jesus, John 14:7), the new covenant church consists of those who have been born again by the Holy Spirit and thereby know God.

Old covenant Israel had stipulations for the wicked being cut off from God's people, but theoretically a man with an uncircumcised heart could stay within the boundaries of the Torah as far as the human eye could see and remain an elder. What I have in mind here are the indications in the New Testament Gospel accounts that there were respected elders among the people of Israel who rejected Jesus and his teachings. These were men who had the outward appearance of keeping the law, but if their hearts had been changed they would have responded to Jesus the way that Simeon did (Luke 2:25–32). The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) seems pointed at just these kinds of people, people who seem to be keeping the law on the outside, but their hearts were foul. Jesus described them as whitewashed tombs full of dead bones (Matt. 23:27). In keeping with the teaching of Jesus in the sermon on the mount, the new covenant church received instructions for the process of disciplining an unrepentant elder (1 Tim. 5:19–25). These instructions go with other instructions given in the New Testament that pertain to the removal of the unrepentant from the congregation (Matt. 18:15–18; 1 Cor. 5:1–13).

This change in what makes people members of the people of God changes the pool of candidates from which the elders will be drawn. Just as the nation is no longer the people of God, the elders are no longer the men of visible standing in the communities within the nation. The making of converts into disciples introduces people into the congregations who have little or no background in the Torah,

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29. For discussion of the regeneration and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, see James M. Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments,* NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H, 2006).

resulting in the need for qualifications to be spelled out more explicitly. This results in the lists of qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9.

We find another difference between old and new covenant elders in these lists of qualifications, most prominently in the requirement that new covenant elders of churches be "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2) and "able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). The change here arises from the fact that while the Torah was entrusted to the priests, Levites, and elders (Deut. 31:9), the priests and Levites seem to have been particularly charged with the responsibility to teach (e.g., Lev. 10:11; 1 Kings 17:27; Ezra 7:10). This is not to say that elders never taught in Israel: all fathers were to teach the Torah to their children (Deut. 6:7), but they don't seem to have a more formal teaching role. In the new covenant church, however, the teaching of the scriptures to the people of God is specifically entrusted to the elders in a way that we do not see in the Old Testament. There are no more Levites. Jesus is the high priest, and all believers constitute God's royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). Moreover, the elders are specifically called to refute those who contradict (Titus 1:9), to shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28), and to do this under Christ the chief-shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), building on the foundation of the church laid down by the apostles (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:10–17).

THE OLD TESTAMENT'S MAJOR CONTRIBUTION

If the new covenant office of elder does not grow directly out of the elders we read about in the Old Testament and in the synagogue, what did the Old Testament contribute to New Testament conceptions of leadership? Focusing on the word "elder" to the exclusion of more thematic issues could keep us from seeing the massive continuity between the Old and New Testaments regarding the righteous sufferer who shepherds God's people.

Far more significant than the contribution of a term to New Testament vocabulary is the typological pattern that the Old Testament provides for New Testament conceptions of leadership. The pattern of leadership the Old Testament contributes to the New can be summarized in the phrase: the suffering righteous shepherd.

The biblical authors themselves noticed and highlighted this pattern, beginning with Moses.[30] Moses noticed certain correspondences between himself and other suffering shepherds who were faithful to Yahweh whom he learned about in the traditions that came down to him. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses then chose to include and frame these details he had noticed in his own narrative in the Pentateuch. The way that Moses selected, arranged, and presented this material made it possible for his audience to notice these correspondences. The audience of Moses included later Old Testament authors, who picked up on the patterns Moses wove through his narrative. These later biblical authors also saw correspondences between those prior suffering righteous shepherds and either themselves or those about whom they wrote. As the patterns piled up on one another, they gained significance and the expectations mounted for an ultimate fulfillment of this pattern.

Thus, all across the Old Testament we find contributions to the pattern of the suffering righteous shepherd. The first instance of this is Abel, "keeper of sheep" (Gen. 4:2), whose offering "the Lord had regard for" (4:4), but for whose life Cain had no regard, killing him (4:8). The next prominent shepherd we meet is Abraham (see Gen. 12:16; 13:5–7). Abraham's life anticipates the exodus from Egypt: he went down to Egypt in response to a famine (Gen. 12:10), the same reason Jacob and his sons will later sojourn there. In Egypt, just as the nation was enslaved, Abraham's wife was taken captive by Pharaoh (12:15), in response to which the Lord plagues Pharaoh (12:17), Abraham plunders Egypt (12:16), then the Lord brings Abraham into the land of promise (13:3–4). Moses invites his audience to connect these correspondences through the similar statements in Genesis 15:7 and Exodus 20:1. In addition to trouble from Pharaoh and Egypt, Abraham has trouble with the Philistines in the land (Gen. 20:1–18; 21:32), again foreshadowing Israel's future. The trouble Isaac has is very similar to what his father Abraham experienced (26:6–11). The similarities in the sister-fib narrative invite readers to note the correspondences between Abraham

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30. This way of approaching the issue reflects my view that biblical theology seeks to understand and embrace the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors, which keeps biblical theology connected to authorial intent—the intent not only of the divine author but of the individual human authors as well.

and Isaac. Just as Abraham and Isaac have the same trouble, they have the same promise: the Lord confirming for Isaac the oath he made to Abraham (26:1–4).[31]

That same oath is passed to Jacob (Gen. 28:4), the next shepherd we meet (30:43), who faces enmity from the seed of the serpent (27:41).[32] Cain murdered Abel; Pharaoh and the Philistines troubled Abraham; Ishmael mocked Isaac; Esau wants to kill Jacob; and then Joseph, who was keeping the flock of his father (37:2), is nearly murdered by his brothers (37:20).[33]

The theme of the suffering righteous shepherd receives yet more treatment in the life of Moses, who was shepherding the flock of his father in law (Ex. 3:1) when Yahweh sent him back to Egypt to face Pharaoh, only to have the Israelites reject him just as Cain had rejected Abel and the older brothers rejected Joseph. Moses learned the pattern of the suffering righteous shepherd from the traditions that he received, which he incorporated in the book of Genesis, and then he interpreted his own experience in light of the pattern, setting the trajectory that would continue through David and find ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

Timothy Laniak observes, "Moses and David are prototypical leaders. More importantly, YHWH reveals himself as the true Shepherd Ruler of Israel."[34] Laniak elaborates on this statement when he writes, "Prototypes are exemplars for phenomenological categories, ideal members that possess the primary attributes by which we define a class." He goes on to say that there are "two prototypical shepherd rulers in biblical literature, Moses and David. To use theological language, these figures 'typologically' anticipate the role of Christ as the ultimate shepherd."[35] Like Joseph, David was shepherding his father's flock, and his father sent him to see about his older brothers (1 Sam. 17:12–15).

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31. On the blessing of Abraham, see James M. Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *TynBul* 58 (2007): 253–73.

32. See further James M. Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (2006): 30–54.

33. For more on Joseph typology, see James M. Hamilton, "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing the Typological Identification Between Joseph, David, and Jesus," *SBJT* 12 (2008): 52–77.

34. Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, NSBT 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 25.

35. Ibid., 34.

Just as Joseph's older brothers did not respond favorably to him, David's brothers were not happy about his arrival (17:28). Just as Abraham and Isaac had trouble with Philistines in the land, David had trouble with them, and the superscription of Psalm 34 identifies Achish king of Gath with Abimelech, forging a connection between the Philistines who troubled Abraham and Isaac and those who troubled David.

The Psalms of the righteous sufferer are heavily Davidic. In fact, this theme of the righteous sufferer receives its major contribution from the Psalms: The one who has been faithful to Yahweh is continually afflicted by those who have set themselves against the Lord and his Messiah (Ps. 2:2). Through persecution and affliction, Yahweh vindicates his anointed one.

Deuteronomy 18:15–18 describes a prophet like Moses whom the Lord would raise up for Israel. The prophets who follow Moses are like him in the sense that they spoke the true word of God, and like Moses they were rejected by Israel, persecuted, afflicted, and ultimately vindicated. Amos depicts himself as a rejected prophet like Moses, and he uses Davidic terms to do so. In Amos 7:10–13, Amos recounts how the false priest of the man-made calf-worshiping cult at Bethel told him not to prophesy—an Israelite rejecting God's true prophet. In his reply to Amaziah, Amos uses Davidic imagery when he says, "The Lord took me from following the flock" (Amos 7:15). This statement is almost an exact quotation of 2 Samuel 7:8, where the Lord tells David, "I took you from the pasture, from following the flock" (my translation). Amos prophesied "in the days of Uzziah" (Amos 1:1, 792–740 BC). The book of Samuel was likely available by then, but even if not, the very significant oracle that Nathan spoke to David in 2 Samuel 7 was probably well known even before the book of Samuel was written. Thus, Amos consciously[36] combines themes of the rejected prophet like Moses, in

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36. I am convinced that the interpretations of the OT found in the NT are largely in keeping with the intentions of the human authors of the OT. Thus, John presents the people recognizing Jesus as the prophet like Moses (John 6:14) after the feeding of the 5,000 (6:4–13), and in response to this John presents Jesus "perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king" (6:15). John here presents the recognition of Jesus as the prophet like Moses leading to the impulse to make him king, as though the Old Testament has swirled these two lines of expectation—prophetic and royal—into one. Passages like Amos 7:10–15 provide Old Testament warrant for the combination of these expectations, and I am convinced that Amos presenting himself

partial fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15–18, and Amos brings in overtones of the Davidic suffering righteous shepherd.

Similar interpretive moves can be seen in the prophesy of Isaiah, where he predicts a shoot from the stump of Jesse (Isa. 11:1). Why would Jesse's line be a stump? Because the nation, depicted as a tree, will be chopped down at the exile (6:9–13; 10:5–15). Isaiah 11 depicts the reigning king from David's line that will grow up after exile, but Isaiah 53:2 describes a root out of dry ground. The tree imagery in Isaiah 11 and 53 is one of the key indicators that the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is a royal figure from David's line. His work of bearing the sins of God's people (53:4–6) fulfills the theme of the righteous sufferer. The fact that the term used in the phrase "the stripes of the sons of men" in 2 Samuel 7:14 appears in Isaiah 53:4 and 8 establishes the suffering servant as a king from David's line. We can also note that God said to Nathan, "thus you shall say to my servant David" (2 Sam. 7:8), which gives the passages about the servant in Isaiah a Davidic overtone as well.

Daniel develops the idea that the fulfillment of the theme of the righteous sufferer will be found in the death of the Messiah when he speaks of the Messiah being cut off in Daniel 9:26, and Zechariah likewise depicts the fulfillment of these themes in passages such as Zechariah 12:10–11 and 13:7. Along these lines, Zechariah presents himself as a type of a shepherd who is rejected and sold out for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:1–17), and the man struck in 13:7 is the Lord's own shepherd. Matthew claims these passages were fulfilled in what happened when Jesus was betrayed and crucified (Matt. 26:15, 31; 27:9).

Both Matthew and Luke present Jesus himself highlighting the theme of the righteous sufferer, summarizing it as one that goes from the beginning to the end of the Old Testament. Matthew presents Jesus pointing to a future that will be just like the whole history of Israel when he says,

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as a rejected prophet like Moses with Davidic language reflects his consciously having made the interpretive move to combine the two lines of interpretation. In other words, I think that Amos intended to communicate to his audience that the expected prophet like Moses was to be understood in Davidic terms and that the coming king and the coming prophet would be the same person (and Amos would have known that David was a prophet).

> Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. (Matt. 23:34–35; cf. Luke 11:49–51)[37]

Here Jesus not only summarizes the theme of the righteous sufferer from Abel to Zechariah, he says that this theme will continue to be enacted by those whom he himself will send.

Jesus himself is the ultimate fulfillment of the typological pattern of the suffering righteous shepherd. The apostles whom Jesus sent also partook in their share of Christ's sufferings. In fact, they seem to understand themselves to be fulfilling the appointed messianic woes, an amount of suffering that must be completed before the return of Christ.[38] As the Apostle Paul appoints elders in every church in the book of Acts, he tells them that the path into the kingdom goes through many tribulations (Acts 14:22–23). Similarly, Peter calls Christians to follow in the footsteps of Jesus by suffering for doing what is right (1 Peter 2:18–25). In addition, the section on church leaders in 1 Peter 4–5 includes the exhortation to "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13).[39]

There are many similarities between the accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus and the martyrdom of Stephen.[40] Luke hereby narrates what John presents Jesus saying in John 15:20, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." G. K. Beale has argued that the churches needed elders precisely because of the tribulation, affliction, and persecution that they would face.[41] Thus, the elders of the churches will

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37. Cf. Hamilton, "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah?," 53.
38. On the messianic woes, see table 6.2 on p. 493 in Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* along with the surrounding discussion.
39. See the exposition in Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC 37 (Nashville: B&H, 2003).
40. On these, see Mitchell L. Chase, "Luke-Acts Parallels Between Jesus and Stephen" (ThM thesis, Southwestern Seminary, 2008).
41. Beale, "The Inaugurated End-Time Tribulation and Its Bearing on the Church Office of Elder and on Christian Living in General," 19.

shepherd the flock of God through the messianic woes,[42] continuing the pattern of the suffering righteous shepherd.

CONCLUSION

Did the early church get their *concept of leadership* from the Old Testament? Absolutely. The pages of the Old Testament are full of righteous sufferers, many of whom were either literal shepherds or figuratively shepherded God's people. This theme finds its fulfillment in Jesus, and those who belong to Jesus follow in his steps, enduring persecution, affliction, and tribulation on the way to the kingdom of God.

Did the early church get the *office of elder* from the Old Testament and/or the synagogue? The word was certainly in common use to refer to leaders who were fatherly males, but the theological and sociological differences between the nation of Israel and the new covenant church are too great to allow the conclusion that the elders of the church were a natural outgrowth of either the elders of the synagogue or the elders of Israel. Moreover, what the elders do in the Old Testament has a good deal to do with the regulation of society at large—judging cases and enforcing the law. By contrast, the elders in the New Testament have authority only within the church, as the church is no longer a civic body in the way that the nation of Israel was. The church transcends all ethnic and political distinctions and has no geographic boundaries. Her elders would do well to heed the call of the Apostle Paul:

> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

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42. Cf. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 527.