

# In Search of Shepherds - The Timeline

INTRO: This morning we are coming to the end of our chronology of elders in the Bible. While the timeline study does a good job pointing out that eldership was the biblical model then, and therefore should be the biblical model now, we have to look at what elders do, and then translate what elders would look like for this congregation. We still have a long road ahead of us, however we will be taking a break for a while, which I will explain in two weeks.

Because the road we have already traveled has been long, and at times disjointed (because of my absence and holidays, etc.), what I want to do is briefly go over the timeline again, and then finish up with the last place we see elders in the Bible in our chronological study.

## I. Review

A. We know that the church was first born at Pentecost - around 33 AD

B. It took twelve years before we get the first mention of elders in the Bible, meaning elders of a church - This would be about 45 AD

1. There were OT elders - in fact the word originally meant “bearded ones”

a) Don’t anyone get any ideas about referring to me as the bearded one

2. There were also elders referred to in the gospels - that was referring to some of the religious leaders

3. What we have been looking at is the first time the Bible refers to elders as the leaders of a church

4. If you recall, there was a famine coming to hit the area around Jerusalem, and the churches in the north were sending aid (money) to help the church in Jerusalem

a) So there had already been churches established in the northern regions, because of the scattering of believers from Jerusalem

b) Because of this famine we get those passages in which poor congregations were pleading with Paul to be able to help too

c) The churches sent their gifts to the elders in the church at Jerusalem

(1) We talked about how they might have gotten elders - but the Bible is silent on that

(2) This appears to be the Biblical model as all other churches, Jewish, Gentile, and mixed congregations are all recorded to have elders

C. The next mention, chronologically we have of elders is found in the book of James

1. James was written about this same time period - around 45 AD

2. What James does is give us the first job of an elder - their job was to pray for healing of the believers in their care

3. James letter is a general letter for all churches that receive it

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- a) This gives us the idea that James' understanding was that elders were established in the churches that may receive his letter
- b) Another clue to understanding that eldership was a supra-cultural principle expected of all churches
- D. The next mention of elders came around 48 AD - It was on Paul's first missionary journey
  - 1. Paul and Barnabas take a year - from 47 AD to 48 AD to establish churches in the province of Galatia
  - 2. When they hit the end of the run, they decide to go back and visit the churches they established
  - 3. And in each of them, they established elders for the churches
    - a) Again, we are not told how they did it
    - b) We are only told that they did establish elders in each church
    - c) More evidence that eldership is the biblical model
- E. We step up to 49 AD and we have the Jerusalem Council
  - 1. Because the issue of Gentiles having to follow the law of Moses could not be settled by Paul and Barnabas alone, they were sent to Jerusalem to meet with "the apostles and elders"
  - 2. In this vignette we also see, but don't have time to go into, the freedom that God is giving the leaders in the church, more and more
    - a) We see this freedom in Paul and Barnabas deciding whether to bring John Mark
    - b) We see this freedom in Paul choosing Timothy for ministry partner
- F. Our next stop in the chronology has us stopping in 51 AD where we see the elders (called spiritual leaders in the passage) struggling to admonish lazy believers
- G. Then we took a long stop in 63 AD where the character description of an elder is finally given by Paul to Timothy and Titus
  - 1. We slowed down there because character is emphasized more in the Bible than is job description
  - 2. In that same year, 63 AD, we looked at Paul's description of the deacons
  - 3. Also, we looked very carefully at the passages about women in ministry
    - a) We spent extra time there to handle that issue with care
  - 4. Also in 63 AD we talked about
    - a) Financial support for elders that do well - particularly at preaching and teaching
    - b) And how God set in place a system of protection for elders, but also a system of discipline for them too
      - (1) Elders are not perfect men

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- (2) When an issue calls for it, there may have to be discipline handed out
- H. Last week, also in 63 AD (that was very busy year elder wise), we looked at the life of Peter and the role of an elder as shepherd
- I. Which finally brings us to today, and the end of our chronology
  - 1. There were other events within the chronology that I have let slip by
  - 2. But these are the main indicators that all point the same direction of eldership being the biblical model
  - 3. So grab your Bible and go to Hebrews 13 (p. 1214)
- II. In our timeline we have hit the date of about 67 AD
  - A. Hebrews is very difficult to come up with a solid date of writing
    - 1. The persecutions that took place seem to set it during or after the persecutions of Claudius and before the severe persecutions of Nero
      - a) That translates to some time after 54 AD
      - b) And probably not before 70 AD
    - 2. The second thing that almost certainly puts the writing of Hebrews before 70 AD is the destruction of the Temple
      - a) The Temple figures in heavily to the author's arguments
      - b) If the Temple had been destroyed, as well as Jerusalem, the book is strangely silent on those things happening
    - 3. That leaves us with a date around 67 AD
  - B. There is a second reason that date is important - Paul was killed in 67 AD
    - 1. There are some that say that Peter and Paul were killed on the same day - in April of 67 AD
      - a) However, I have not found enough independent evidence to support that claim
      - b) They do each seem to have been killed in or around 67 AD
    - 2. In a minute, you will see why this is so important
  - C. Hebrews 13:7 "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."
    - 1. The word for leaders here is a general word
      - a) It could refer to municipal leaders
      - b) It could refer to elders in the church
    - 2. The clue is obviously the next phrase: "who spoke the Word of God to you."
      - a) The word "spoke" is set in the aorist tense, indicative mood
        - (1) Bet you didn't know your words could have moods
      - b) What that translates into is this: the aorist tense is like a snapshot
        - (1) It is like a freeze frame on time of an event

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- c) The indicative mood with the aorist normally means a past event - or the past tense
  - d) That is a lot to tell you that this is in the past tense, and most likely means that the verse is referring to the people that originally shared the gospel with this community of believers
3. Now, the question is, does this refer to Paul or Peter?
- a) If this is written about the same year as Paul and Peter's death, could the author be trying to bolster the faith of the recipients by pointing out how Paul and Peter believed so deeply that they died for this truth?
  - b) Scholars are divided on this
    - (1) Some think that the phrase "the outcome of their faith" is a euphemism for death
    - (2) Others think that it is simply referring to how they lived their lives
  - c) It will remain one of the mysteries of the faith
    - (1) There is no way to know for sure if it is referring to Paul and Peter
    - (2) Or if it refers to their death, or just their way of life
  - d) What we do know, is that the author is trying to get the community to consider those that originally shared the gospel with them, and imitate their faith
    - (1) Remember that this community of believers is immature in their faith
    - (2) The author has not held back on them to say that they "need to leave the elementary teachings of the faith and move on to maturity"
    - (3) Obviously, he is trying to get them grow up by using those that shared Christ with them as the example - whether they were martyred or not
  - e) And let's face it, what better way to teach struggling, immature people but to set up godly models for them
    - (1) That is the essence of discipleship
- D. The next time leaders are mentioned, it seems as if the author has moved from those that came before (past tense) to current leaders in the church (present tense) - Hebrews 13:17
- 1. This is the verse that we have been saying at the beginning of each service for a few months
  - 2. Because this is present tense, we can only assume that the author is referring to elders in the churches of these believers
    - a) And it sounds as if these believers are struggling with submission to their leaders

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3. What is interesting is how and why this is translated the way it is
  - a) The NIV translates it “Have confidence in your leaders...”
    - (1) This is correct
    - (2) The word “obey” is also correct, but the word “obey” is very nuanced in Greek, and the nuance here is of having confidence, or that you have been persuaded that the course of action the leaders have chosen is correct
    - (3) So the NIV nailed it so far
  - b) Then the NIV continues, “and submit to their authority...”
    - (1) PROBLEM!
    - (2) There is nothing in Greek that warrants the words “to their authority”
      - (a) In fact, because they did the right thing and translated it “have confidence”
      - (b) They very much did the wrong thing and translated it “to their authority”
        - i) That would make far more sense if you stuck to a strict translation and said “Obey your leaders”
        - ii) Then authority would be a warranted word
    - (3) The second problem is the word submit is nuanced as well
      - (a) It carries the idea of yield
  - c) How the Greek actually reads is “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to them...”
    - (1) And with that idea of yield, the idea of the verse is this: “Be persuaded that your leaders are on the right course, and yield to their direction”
    - (2) So make sure we understand that this verse in no way sets up an absolute authoritarian rule
    - (3) The leaders do have to have persuasive reasons for the course of actions they lead a church to
4. However, just because those words are actually softer than most English translations make them seem, does not mean that people in the church can ignore or rebel against the leaders either
  - a) The words are still related to the words commonly used in English
    - (1) Obey
    - (2) Submit
  - b) So there is still a respect to be held by those in leadership - the elders
5. AND, the author gives two reason for why you should obey and submit as well
  - a) They keep watch over you

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- (1) The sense in which the Greek word is used is as one that watches carefully, or one that loses sleep to keep watch
- (2) So in other words, leaders (in this passage, their present leaders - we assume elders) should be watching over your lives, even to the point where they lose sleep over those that are struggling
- (3) Elders should be the kind of men that have a sincere concern for the spiritual lives of those they oversee
  - (a) The greatest relationship in our lives is our relationship with Christ
    - i) All other relationships are affected by it
    - ii) Marriage, friendships, family, dating, work, all relationships
  - (b) So to watch someone that is either deliberately or accidentally slipping off into error should be painful to the elders
- b) The second reason the author gives is that these men represent Christ and would have to give an account to him
  - (1) You might be thinking, “Where is that in the verse - they represent Christ?”
  - (2) Because they must give an account, it means they have been sent as representatives of Christ
    - (a) In other words, Christ left, and put people (the apostles first, the new believers at Pentecost, down through the ages) in charge while he was gone
    - (b) Just like if the captain of the ship leaves the bridge and puts the Ex-O in charge, the Ex-O is now representing the captain
      - i) He has been given authority to act in the absence of the captain
      - ii) But he also has to answer for how he acts when the captain returns
  - (3) Same thing ladies and gentlemen - Christ left, and established His church, putting the elders in charge
    - (a) The elders have the authority to act on behalf of Christ
    - (b) Yet, they have to answer for how they act to Christ upon their next meeting with the King
- c) And that gives us kind of another reason for submission
  - (1) “Do this so their work will be a joy”
    - (a) Many of us think we want to make God proud of us
    - (b) Some to the point of thinking that we are holding on to God’s love because we are doing good things
      - i) Which is the anti-gospel, by the way

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- ii) God loves us as much as He ever will love us - believer in Christ or not
- iii) Our behavior, after trusting in Christ for our sins to be forgiven is never about acceptance, but about relationship
  - (1) It is about how close we are
  - (2) It is about fellowship with Christ, not love from Christ
- (2) How many of us think about our Christian lives in terms of making the leaders happy - the elders?
  - (a) We are seeking and actively pursuing Christ, knowing that the elders are thrilled when they see Christ in us
- (3) Turn to Galatians 4:19-20
  - (a) Do you see Paul's angst - teenagers are not the only ones that have angst ya know
  - (b) He deeply desires to see Christ formed in them
  - (c) When I watch some of our teens pursuing Christ apart from the YG, and apart from me checking on them, I am over joyed!
  - (d) I have reconnected with several of my kids from my first church in all of these trips to New England, and each time I see even one of them actively following Christ, you have no idea the amount of joy that brings me
    - i) There is one I did not get to see last November
    - ii) But she is still actively pursuing Christ, dating a good Christian guy, and I am so happy for her - and him, because he was one of mine too
- (4) This is elders folks - overjoyed because they can see Christ being shaped and formed in you
- (5) The flip side is that the elders work can be a burden
  - (a) Like Paul said - he was in the pains of child birth to see Christ formed in them
  - (b) Paul longed deeply to see this happen
  - (c) And when it does not happen, it hurts
  - (d) It hurts when I see kids that have walked out of our YG here that are now living with their BF/GF
    - i) It hurts to see them not in church, not seeking Christ in Bible study
    - ii) It hurts when I see them following after the ways of this world rather than the ways of Christ
- d) And then the author gives us one more reason - "for that would be of no benefit to you."

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- (1) Almost sounds threatening - like the elders get to turn into the mafia for a little bit and help “get you back on the right path”
- (2) I think what the author means is talking about are the results of disobeying
- (3) After describing in great detail what the character of these men should be, and then saying that trusting in them, and obeying and submitting to them is the best course of action, the author of Hebrews describes what the consequences of not following these godly men would be
  - (a) He does not go into detail
  - (b) He simply says that it would not be of advantage to you
- (4) More than likely he simply means there is pain in following the road away from where godly men lead
  - (a) It certainly means being out of fellowship with God
    - i) And that really should be the most terrifying consequence right away
    - ii) But it will probably put you out of genuine fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ
    - iii) Those that may be reaching out to us to help us see our error become our enemies
      - (1) And sadly, it usually drives us deeper into our sin
      - (2) Rather than listening to our leaders, listening to those that love us and try to draw us away from the sin that we are following after
  - (b) In the end, we wind up being miserable because we have made a choice to live outside the will of God
    - i) It destroys relationships
    - ii) And it ruins our relationship with Christ because we want it on our terms, not his

CONCLUSION: My hope is that today, as we finish the chronological part, and the laying out of the biblical model of leadership, we have a clearer understanding of what God intended for the church. As we move forward, we will go into what the Bible says are the roles, or jobs of an elder, and how that translates into the 21st century, and into our church specifically.