

Biblical Theology of Elders

Vern S. Poythress, Ph.D., Th.D.

A. Elders in Israel

Elders: Exodus 3:16

Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt,

Elders: Exodus 12:21

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb.

Genesis 1:26: Creation

Background

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Ruling Creation

GOD



Adam's rule



elders' rule



B. Judges in Israel

Exodus 18:21

Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens.

Exodus 18:22

And let them judge the people at all times. ...

Features of Ruling

- ◆ **Rule over the people of God**
- ◆ **Decide disputes**
- ◆ **Under Moses, under God**
- ◆ **Lessons**
 - **for civil government**
 - **and church government**

Rule of Christ

- ◆ Rule over the people of God
- ◆ Decide disputes
- ◆ Under Moses, under God
- ◆ Lessons
 - for civil government
 - and church government
- ◆ Christ over church
- ◆ Church disputes
- ◆ Under Christ
- ◆ Universal rule of Christ

C. Israelite King

Deuteronomy 17:18 The King

“And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law approved by the Levitical priests.

Deuteronomy 17:19 The King

And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them,

Deuteronomy 17:20 The King

that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

Features of King

- ◆ **A brother to the people**
- ◆ **Wise—learning law**
- ◆ **Just—keeping law**
- ◆ **Humble**

D. Christ the King

Features of Christ the King

OT King

- ◆ A brother
- ◆ Wise—learning law
- ◆ Just—keeping law
- ◆ Humble

Christ the King

- ◆ Brother
- ◆ Wise
- ◆ Just
- ◆ Humble

Kingship Fulfilled in Christ

Christ the King

King under
Moses

elders
(undersheperds)



1 Peter 5:1: Undershepherds

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:

1 Peter 5:2: Undershepherds

shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

1 Peter 5:4: Undershepherds

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.



Christ-like Leader

E. The Church as a Family

1 Timothy 3:15: The Family Principle

if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Features of the Family

- ◆ **God as Father (Matt. 23:9)**
- ◆ **Family relations (1 Tim. 5:1-2)**
- ◆ **Elders as fatherly (1 Tim. 3:4-5; Tit. 1:6)**

1 Timothy 3:4-5: Elders as Family Men

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,
for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

1 Timothy 3:2: Elders as Male

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach the husband of one wife sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable hospitable able to teach,