

**BIBLICAL ELDERS (2)**  
**NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING**

Covenant Fellowship Church  
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**Elders: Discontinuity between Old and New Testaments**

In the OT, there was a close relationship between what we today call “church” and “state.” The Elders had societal and civic tasks, as well as religious duties. So we must distill principles for the work of the OT Elder which have abiding significance today. For example: the death penalty. The principle is one of exclusion from the body, which today is carried out through excommunication.

Below is a comprehensive and detailed summary of New Testament passages (excluding the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) that mention the role, function, and duties of elders. The term “elder” (Greek: *presbyteros*) refers to a leadership role within the Christian church, often associated with oversight, teaching, and shepherding the community. We will focus on the relevant passages from Acts, the General Epistles, and Revelation, providing context, analysis, and key insights.

**Acts**

Acts 11:29–30

**Text:** “So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.”

**Context:** This passage describes the church in Antioch responding to a prophecy about a coming famine by sending financial aid to the believers in Judea. The relief is specifically sent to the “elders,” indicating their role as representatives or leaders responsible for receiving and distributing resources.

**Role/Duties:**

Elders act as *stewards* or *administrators*, managing material support for the community.

They serve as trusted figures who can be relied upon to handle communal needs, suggesting *organizational leadership and authority* within the church.

Acts 14:23

**Text:** “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

**Context:** Paul and Barnabas, during their first missionary journey, established churches in various cities (e.g., Lystra, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia). After preaching and making disciples, they appointed elders in each congregation before moving on.

**Role/Duties:**

Elders are appointed as *local* leaders to oversee the newly formed churches, implying a role in governance and spiritual guidance.

The *process of appointment* with prayer and fasting suggests that *elders are chosen deliberately and consecrated for their responsibilities*, indicating a formal leadership position rooted in faith and communal discernment.

*over, please*

Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22–23

**Text:**

15:2: “And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.”

15:4: “When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.”

15:6: “The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.”

15:22–23: “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas . . . with the following letter: ‘The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.’”

**Context:** This passage recounts the Jerusalem Council, convened to address the debate over whether Gentile converts needed to follow Mosaic Law (e.g., circumcision). Elders are prominently involved alongside apostles in decision-making.

**Role/Duties:**

Elders participate in *theological deliberation and decision-making*, collaborating with apostles to resolve disputes affecting the broader church.

They share authority in issuing a formal decree (the letter), indicating a role in establishing doctrine and maintaining unity across churches.

Their involvement with “the whole church” suggests *they represent and lead the community, balancing authority with collective discernment*.

Acts 20:17, 28–31

**Text:**

20:17: “Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.”

20:28–31: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert . . .”

**Context:** Paul, nearing the end of his third missionary journey, summoned the Ephesian elders for a farewell address. He reflected on his ministry and entrusted them with the care of the church.

**Role/Duties:**

Elders are described as “overseers” (*episkopoi*), tasked with shepherding and protecting the church, likened to a flock.

Their duties include *vigilant oversight, guarding against false teachers* (“fierce wolves”), and *ensuring the spiritual health* of the congregation.

The reference to the Holy Spirit’s appointment underscores their divine calling, while Paul’s exhortation to “pay careful attention” emphasizes personal integrity and diligence in leadership.

Acts 21:18

**Text:** “On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.”

**Context:** Paul arrives in Jerusalem and meets with James (likely Jesus’ brother) and the elders to report on his missionary work among the Gentiles.

**Role/Duties:**

Elders served as a governing body alongside key figures like James, receiving reports and likely advising on church matters. Their presence suggests a role in maintaining continuity and oversight within the Jerusalem church, the early center of Christianity.