



## Editor's Note

It's always a privilege, accompanied by praise to the Lord, to send out a new issue of Elders ShopNotes, but especially so when we can introduce our readers to a beloved and capable author. Ed Anthony and his wife Barb serve the Lord in their home state of Tennessee, but their special calling is to visit smaller, even struggling assemblies for ministry and encouragement whenever they learn of a need and the Lord directs them! Ed has kindly provided a two-part ar-

ticle on the Stewardship of God's House. Pray for Ed and Barb as they travel, serve and write.

My own series on leadership in the book of Acts has grown longer than anticipated, but should be moving toward completion with the next couple of installments. Finally, I know you'll enjoy insights about Deborah in the book of Judges written for Wives Corner by Ruth, my dear wife and helper.

Jack Spender

### Practical Ministry

## Overseers – Stewards of God's House

by Ed Anthony

I came across an ad recently for a household manager. Among other things the ad listed the following information concerning the position: House manager with absolute integrity and discretion needed... will oversee both residences and secure and manage household staff as needed...high level of respect required...family has 3 young adult children...must have high standards, excellent communication skills and professionalism...job duties will include all areas of household management and must have a service-minded heart and be willing to go the extra mile.

It reminds me of Joseph as a steward in Potiphar's house (Ge. 39:1-6). How he must have impressed his master in working diligently and prospering the master. In fact the master shows absolute confidence in Joseph by putting his whole household under him.

What a great position to have whether in the days of Joseph or the modern day one listed above. Yet elders are indeed given such a position in God's house. Titus 1:7 notes, "For the overseer must be free from all charge against him as God's steward; not headstrong, not passionate, not disorderly through wine, not a striker, not seeking gain by base means" (JND). What a position – to be a steward in a house greater than any that has ever been built on earth.

Do we see the wonder of it all? House managers for God! Not surprisingly, the requirements expected of an earthly steward are also expected of God's stewards. As stewards of God, is there the passion, motivation, or zeal today, as demonstrated in the life of Joseph, to see His house function well?

### The Lord and the Father's House

Even the Lord recognized and had a zeal for the proper functioning of God's house.

Remember what came to the disciples' minds when they saw the Lord clear the temple – "And His disciples remembered that it was written, 'the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up'" (Jn. 2:17; from Ps. 69:9). The Lord was jealous for His Father's house. In fact, so much so that the Greek and Hebrew words for "eaten up" have the idea of 'to devour or consume' – and it consumed Him. He wanted to make sure it was holy and used properly for the glory of His Father (Mt. 21:13; Jn. 2:16).

Today, of course, we are not speaking of a physical house or temple but we do have a temple for which we do well to have a similar zeal – for both individually, and as those gathered as an expression of the whole body (1 Co. 3:16; Ep. 2:21-22; 1 Pe. 2:5; He. 3:6).

### Overseers as Stewards

The Lord is looking for men of integrity, honesty, diligence, and excellence to appoint over His house (Tt. 1:5-9). Notice that we say men, as in the plural. Paul, in writing to Titus, notes that multiple individuals are used by God in the stewardship of the house. He makes this connection by using the term "elders" in verse five. So, unlike what would normally be expected where one individual would be the steward, in the church it is a group of men who act as stewards of the house. This is a marvelous design that makes it more difficult to end up with an improper or unjust stewardship (Luke 16:1-13) relating to the house of God.

Also, here we differentiate between the needs of the local assembly together and the individual households that comprise the assembly. That is, the elders not only look to the stewardship of the assembly as a whole but also to assisting the individual families or

(Continued on page 3)

### Elders for the Young Gentile Churches

We continue our meditations in the book of Acts, with particular notice of leadership in the churches. Chapter 14 will be our text, where we find important truths about leadership in assemblies that are newly planted.

Beginning in Acts 13:14 and continuing into chapter 14, we have the record of the travels and labors of Paul and Barnabas during the first missionary journey as they visited several cities in the province of Galatia. Wherever they could find an audience, they spoke the good news of God's saving grace, undeterred by the inevitable persecution that arose against them. Evidently, people were saved and gathered into local assembly fellowships. Toward the end of chapter 14, Luke records in just 3 verses how elders were appointed to carry on the work.

As mentioned earlier, we could wish that the author had devoted more space to this important activity. But perhaps the brevity and simplicity of the record may suggest that Luke was writing something widely known and accepted. Thus, he felt no need to include details as if he were recording actions that were a departure from accepted practice requiring lengthy explanations to convince skeptics.

In any case, there are four main points to take from the passage, which we can summarize before adding further comment:

1. Accord to the record, the missionaries preached the gospel on the first visit to each new area, and strengthened the believers and the church on subsequent visits.
2. Leadership in every church was by a plurality of men called elders.
3. The appointing of elders was apparently based on a recognition of things already in place.
4. The missionaries then departed, leaving those appointed to oversee the church.

### Strengthening the Believers

There is a wonderfully descriptive word in the original language of the Greek New Testament [*ἐπιστηρίζω*], that is used four times in the book of Acts. The first occurrence is here in Acts 14:22, variously translated "confirming" or "strengthening."

This word is never used in connection with the initial visit of missionaries to an area, but only when return visits were made. It is fascinating that this is the word chosen by Luke to describe the motivation for the second and third missionary journeys! [see Acts 15:41 and 18:23], and their work while on "furlough" in Antioch between journeys [see Acts 15:32].

Note carefully the wording of vs. 21 in our text. After preaching the gospel in Derby (initial visit), they "returned again" to cities previously evangelized on this same trip, "strengthening the souls of the disciples . . ." And in what did that strengthening consist? They exhorted the believers and appointed elders!

Incidentally, this is not the only place where Paul followed this order. In reading similar instructions to Titus in Titus 1:5, one may wonder why Paul did not simply appoint elders "in every city" when he himself was there. Why leave Titus to do it? Simply because sufficient time must elapse to see who was doing the shepherding work, and in so doing, manifesting both the inner working of the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28), and the corresponding desire of the person laboring (1 Tim. 3:1).

Regarding these young churches in Galatia, we do not know how much time had elapsed since their inception, but it could not have been more than a few months or a year. Apparently, Paul and Barnabas were already able to discern which men were teaching the word and caring for the flock. This ought to be pondered by those who insist that many years must pass before a man might become an elder. True, we must not lay hands "suddenly" on any man, (1 Tim. 5:22), but perhaps we have a peculiar definition of "suddenly."

### In Every Church - Elders

It is always God's desire that men learn to lead in their families, and this is

reinforced by requiring them to lead in the church. But church leadership is never by one man, no matter how wise he may be, because "in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14).

This statement of leadership plurality is clear enough and repeated in other parts of the New Testament so that anyone seeking to understand what form of government was taught and practiced by the apostles and embraced by the early churches can learn it. And because Scripture is profitable for doctrine (II Tim. 3:16), we can be confident that what is recorded is not simply a "cultural practice." Finally, abundant testimony confirms that it works today!

### Recognizing, not Authorizing

Once again, it is critical that the student carefully observe the wording used to describe the actions of the missionaries in vs. 23. "And when they had appointed elders in every church . . ." refers to something done by Paul and Barnabas, not the people of the church. In fact, the original Greek text literally reads, "And when they had appointed elders for them . . ."

The word rendered "appointed" (KJV "ordained") is a combination of two words "to lift" and "hand," that is, "to lift the hand." Since the action was done by Paul and Barnabas, it is more natural to think of a lifting of the hand to "point out" those suitable, rather than, as some have suggested, a congregational vote in which the people of the church raised their hands.

How instructive that following a brief absence, the missionaries could already discern those who were doing the shepherding work of caring for the saints! Were these elders perfect? Assuredly not, but no Scripture requires perfection of elders. Sheep need shepherds, and Paul and Barnabas wisely pointed out the best men available. In this we see God's faithfulness to provide leadership for His church from the earliest days. In writing to the newly established church in Thessalonica, Paul does not yet use the word "elders," but exhorts the believers to "recognize those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord . . ." (1 Thes. 5:12).

## **Studies in Acts—Part 6** (continued from page 2)

### **Moving On**

The apostles visited the young churches but never settled in as "Pastors" or "resident workers." Certainly both pastors, (as spiritual gifts), and workers as serving saints are wonderful gifts of the Lord, and every assembly needs them. But they are needed as dear believers working along with all the other gifted and serving people in the church, not as titled officials.

Paul would return to this area in later travels, but the idea of taking a "position" of authority in any of the

churches apparently never entered his mind. Was there a risk in entrusting precious young gatherings to ordinary men called elders? No doubt. But the danger of not doing so was much greater.

One cannot help but wonder if Paul had such things in mind when he wrote to Timothy: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." (II Tim. 1:12).

In conclusion, we can thank God

for His wisdom in preserving the account of how the earliest missionaries handled the need for leadership in the churches. The record is clear enough to follow, and attempts to improve upon it have only ended in problems. May the Lord raise up godly men to care for His church who have the heart of the Good Shepherd.

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## **Overseers – Stewards of God’s House** (continued from page 1)

homes that comprise that assembly. The goal is that they might be effective individually as well as when taken together. The skills of the steward apply to both.

So then, without being exhaustive, as God’s stewards, what are some things that we need to be doing to make sure His house functions properly?

### **Communication – A Plan**

Consider having a written, pre-defined basis for the functioning of the assembly, its constitution, expectations, privileges, and responsibilities. When individuals desire to be in fellowship, all will be much clearer and there will be less discord. The believers will all be working from the same basis. One can also see how this would be helpful for individual families. The plan should follow the wishes of the Master (Lk. 12:42; 16:1-8; 1 Co. 4:2).

### **Construction – A Part**

Elders should be sure to help equip the saints for the building up of the body. Identifying and noting the gifts of the saints as well as encouraging the use of gifts are essential in bringing together the whole. Saved children should also be part of this building process and should be involved in helping the assembly.

Every member of the local expression, no matter how young or old, must use the gift that God has given to further the edification of the body – this demonstrates that each is a part of the whole.

We need to be prepared to offer up spiritual sacrifices. When each sees the blessing that comes from being a part of a group that uses their spiritual gifts, zeal for continuing is instilled in each individual (Ro. 12:3; 1 Co. 12:7; Ep. 4:7; 1 Pe. 2:5, 7; 4:10).

### **Contribution – A Provision**

God has given us a great deal to work with. We must have a love and zeal to be with the saints and demonstrate this commitment to hospitality, small group study, encouragement and discipleship (1 Pe. 1:22; 3:8; 4:9). But, consider carefully how the various meetings and outreaches of the church connect to the whole. The more activities and groups, the greater the resources needed to make it work. Quite often separate groups require separate instructors, funds, rooms and additional help which, when reallocated can have a significant impact on the whole and the outreach to those in the world. Stewards seek to have a good return for the Master on the resources given (1 Co. 4:2; Lk. 16:2).

Another practical help is to go house to house (as the apostles did in the early church; Ac. 2:46; 20:20) to encourage and help the families in the local fellowship. By being careful of the stewardship of the families that God has entrusted to the overseers, the assembly of God will function according to the Lord’s design.

### **Giving Account – A Presentation**

The overseers are always conducting themselves with a view to giving an account to the master – always working and awaiting the master’s coming at any moment (Lk. 16:2). We long to be able to show the Lord what we have done with what He has given us. We look forward to an abundant inheritance (2 Pe. 1:11). Further, it is required of stewards, that a man be found faithful (1 Co. 4:2). May we be found as faithful overseers to the Master.

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### **Helpful Links**

**[www.assemblycare.org](http://www.assemblycare.org)  
Assembly Care Ministries**

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Churches**

## Wives' Corner

# Fearless Deborah

by Ruth Spender

Many times we think of ourselves as being very different from our counterparts in Scripture. In reality, we have more in common with them than we might imagine. We would do well to emulate the woman in today's story.

After the death of Joshua, there was a tremendous leadership void in the land of Israel. It was a very dark time in the nation's history. Many people turned back to various forms of idol worship. Strong male leadership was at an all time low. Standing up to the enemy was not for the fainthearted. Real fortitude and courage was needed to set things in order.

Israel's enemies were the brutal, barbaric Canaanites. For some twenty long years, the children of Israel had been terrorized by Jabin's forces with his 900 iron chariots. The feeble Israelites were no match for them. Judges 17:6 reminds us that, "in those days, there was no king in Israel, but everyone did that which was right in his own eyes."

Deborah was the wife of an obscure man by the name of Lapidoth. Little to nothing is known about him. She was a prophetess who sat under the royal palm tree, judging the people who came to her for advice. Before she became a counselor, she was a homemaker, first appearing on the scene in Judges 4.

Her home was along the road which ran from Ramah to Bethel, a well traveled stretch in that day. The rabbi's suggest that

she also had the privilege of keeping the lamps trimmed and burning in the tabernacle. Her indignation grew as she watched her people living in fear. According to tradition, she was the only woman in Scripture who was brought to power by the consent of the people.

In Judges 4:4-5, Deborah advised Barak, the timid leader of the army, to rally the troops for war. She let him know that she was not afraid to go to war, for the Lord had given her strength. As a woman of action, she moved Barak to action as well. She had a tremendous trust in the Lord, and Barak seemed to draw strength from her faith. Often, the men of Israel had faltered in their leadership roles, but the Lord gave Deborah the strength she needed for the work at hand.

In verses 8 – 10, Barak declares that if Deborah is willing to go with him, then he would go. Deborah reminds Barak that the journey that he will embark on would not be for his honor, but for the honor of someone else. Barak calls the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali to go to Kadesh, and they all depart, Deborah with them.

In verses 18-21, at the height of the battle, the Lord used another courageous woman in Israel named Jael. Jael received into her tent the exhausted and fleeing enemy captain named Sisera, and offered him some milk. After he fell fast asleep, Jael used a hammer to drive a large nail through Sisera's temple and he

died. So the Lord subdued Israel's enemy that day.

These women in Scripture did what was needed to spur their men on to victory. Deborah was gifted by the Lord for the work she was called upon to do. In the same way, the Lord would have us rise to the task He has laid before us each day.

There is nothing to suggest that Deborah put herself forward in any way in a leadership role. Instead, she did a beautiful job of encouraging the men of her day to reach their full potential. Let us seek to follow Deborah's wonderful example of encouraging our men in their spiritual walk.

The forces of evil have never been greater than those in our world today. How can we be effective in encouraging our men? Certainly, praying for them is an excellent way to see them grow. We all need to hear the Lord's voice early in the morning as we begin our day. Remember, our prayers know no boundaries. God's throne room is always open to His people.

But through prayer, we also receive strength to face tough challenges. May we as women in the modern era, be sensitive to the work the Lord has given to us. May we, like them, rise up and be to this generation what the greats of old have been for us.



## THE SMALL PRINT

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Specific Bible versions used are indicated at the first quotation in each article.

Note: All words referring to God have the initial letter capitalized. While the original languages of the Bible do not use capitalization, this is the convention in some translations but not in others. So at times there may be inconsistencies in usage in ESN articles.

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