

Introduction: The word elder is used numerous times (78 total occurrences) in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles to describe the leaders or elders of God's people. This word was chosen because the people of the Holy Land were familiar with the example of leaders in responsible positions being older men of demonstrated character (Acts 6.3; 1Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) who represented the people as a whole. They had lived long enough to learn wisdom, to have no distractions of raising a family (this is my own opinion, but I strongly believe it is important) and to have earned the respect and submission of the people they would lead.

Key Aspects of the Elder Model:

1. An older man: Joshua 23.1; Gen 18.11; Luke 1.18
2. A representative of the people as a whole: Ex 4.29, 12.21; Acts 11.30
3. A man who has lived long enough to demonstrate his character: Acts 6.3; 1Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9
4. There is one aspect of elders which the Jews had which Jesus and the Apostles specifically rejected. It is the portrayal of elders as rulers (Acts 4:5-8). Jesus and the Apostles emphasized the idea of elders as rulers, lording their position and authority over the people was NOT to be practiced (Matt 20:25-26; 1Pet 5:3; Rev 4:4,10).
5. When the word elder is used in the Apostolic sense, it models the ideas of leadership through respect, example and service, not authority. (Matt 20.26-28; Acts 20:19-20, 34-35; 1Pet 5.2-3).