

Introduction: The word overseer is used numerous times in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles to describe the leaders or elders of God's people (John 10:1-18). 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. They had lived long enough to learn wisdom, to have no distractions of raising children and to have earned the respect and submission of the people they would lead.

Old Testament Model

1. Oversight implies responsibility with the purpose of caring for, not authority over (Num 4.16; 2Kings 11.18, 12.11;
2. Oversight implies watching carefully to provide care for the one watched (Deut 11.12; Esther 2.11; Job 10.12, 29.4;
3. Oversight implies watching over with the purpose of providing discipline or punishment (Is 10.3, 29.6; Jer 6.15). It also applies for a visitation to provide a good act of care or deliverance (cf Gen 50.24-25; Luke 19.44; 1Pet 2.12 = good for the saints, bad for the lost)
4. To attend to a specific task requiring attentive watching, like counting the people (Ex 30.12; Num 14.29, 26.22)

The New Testament Model

5. It should be the Holy Spirit who appoints overseers, not men - we can only recognize those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed. (Acts 20.28)
2. It is a wonderful thing when any man has developed the servant/shepherd heart to the point where he eagerly desires to serve the flock. (1Tim 3.1; cf 1Tim 6.10 and Heb 11.16)
3. What we normally think of as the "requirements" of an elder, given in 1Tim 3.2-7 and Titus 1.5-9 both specifically mention that these are to be the attributes of an overseer (though the Titus passage uses the word "elder"). I think the reason for this is to emphasize the responsibility of the position. (1Tim 3.2; Titus 1.7)
4. The passage that most clearly displays the root meaning of the word overseer is Heb 12.15. The word clearly stresses the idea of responsibility of watching out for, looking diligently, etc. There is not one hint of ruling or authority in this passage. Notice also that this verse points out that all of us (not just elders!) have the responsibility of watching over one another.
5. Overseers are also elders and shepherds (1Pet 2.25; 5.1-2; Acts 20.17, 28).
6. Overseers are to serve as shepherds, willingly and gently leading (1Pet 5.1-2)