

ELDERS – Vero Essene Yahad

The origination of the order of elders in the economy of Moshe

Num 11:10. Moshe heard the people weeping, each family at the door of its tent. Yahweh's anger was greatly aroused; Moshe too found it disgraceful, 11. and he said to Yahweh: "Why do you treat your servant so badly? . . . 13. Where am I to find meat to give all these people, pestering me with their tears and saying, "Give us meat to eat"? . . . Yahweh said to Moshe, "Collect me seventy of the zaqenim of Israel, men you know to be the people's elders and officers. (officers, scribes, assistants = shoterim = myrt#) Bring them to the Tent of Meeting, and let them stand beside you there. I will come down and talk to you there and will take some of the ruach that is on you and put it on them. Then they will bear the burden of the people along with you, and you will no longer have to bear it on your own. The seventy were family heads, officers, wise men & women, judges, army captains, used car dealers – all made intermediaries between Elohim and the people of Elohim. Moshe went out and told the people what Yahweh had said. Then he collected seventy of the people's elders and stationed them round the Tent. Yahweh descended in the cloud. [Yahweh] spoke to [Moshe] and took some of the ruach that was on him and put it on the seventy zaqenim. When the spirit came on them they prophesied, but only once. Two men had stayed back in the camp; one was called Eldad and the other Medad. The spirit came down on them; though they had not gone to the Tent, their names were enrolled among the rest. These men began to prophesy in the camp. A young man ran to tell Moshe this. "Look," he said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." Yehoshua son of Nun, who had served Moshe since he was a boy, spoke up & said, "Adonai Moshe, stop them!" Moshe replied, "Are you jealous of me? If only all Yahweh's people were prophets, and Yahweh had given them his spirit!" Cf. Mark 9:40ff. For he that is not against us is for us.

There is a tradition of written prophecy connected with Eldad and Medad (or Modad) that is well attested in the writings of Christians up to the 17th century. One point that can be made is that the same anointing, that of Moshe, was distributed to those assembled with Moshe in the tent, while another portion was distributed to at least two others who were not in attendance at all. Some monastic redactor certainly had a problem with the inclusion of these mavericks among the prophets.

Moshe Returns with the Anointed

Number 11: 30. Moshe then went back to the camp with the zaqenim of Israel.

The elders had, through the acts recorded in the story, left the realm of general elders to advance to elders as appointed leaders, then anointed leaders. The Mosaic directive to appoint elders who could administer through inspired speaking (thinking) is followed in each gospel (including that of Thomas). 3/10

The Seventy(-two)

Luke 10: 1. The Master appointed seventy-two (12 x 6) others and sent them out ahead of him in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself would be visiting. And he said to them, "The harvest is rich but the laborers are few, so ask the harvest-master to send laborers to do his harvesting. Start off now; but look, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

These sent ones may not have been of the official age of elders (30), and they are called laborers and lambs; but certainly there is a close correspondence between the acts of Moshe and this passage of Luke (which seems to be a follow-up to the sending of the twelve two-by-two that we find in Matthew 9:36 – 10). These 'elders' were to make their own way, but they were thought to be capable to do so (according to some passages in the AnteNicene Fathers), with some becoming well known in the movement in its later years. The transferrable of spiritual authority (Matthew 10:1), the inbreathing of the spirit (John 20:22), and the outpouring upon the 120 (Acts 2:4), demonstrate the sharing of the spirit of authority that we previously encountered in Numbers 11:17.

The Seven Waiters

The situation Moshe found himself in while trying to bring meat to the people of Israel is similar to the problems the shlichim were dealing with in seeing to the distribution of food to the “Hellenists.”

shlichim = Apostles or Missionaries

Acts 6:1. About this time, when the number of talmidim was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked. 2. So the Twelve called a full meeting of the talmidim and addressed them, “It would not be right for us to neglect the word of El so as to give out food; 3. you, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Ruach and with wisdom, to whom we can hand over this duty.”

Since earlier in Acts we read about the Spirit falling, we can assume these men who were to be chosen had been a part of that outpouring, or had subsequently received Spirit in a way evident to the people.

“We ourselves (the shlichim) will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.” 5. The whole assembly approved of this proposal and elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

It is puzzling that these leaders, chosen out of the assembly of Jerusalem, would ALL have Greek names easily translated for meaning, with one described as a “convert” (This same Nicolaus, according to a few of the ‘Fathers,’ apostatized, becoming the leader of the Nicolaitan sect.) Solving the puzzle of these names would make for a good paper topic. They presented these to the shlichim, and after prayer they laid their hands on them. (See Acts 8:17)

This was the official act of sharing the power and authority of the shlichims’ anointing. But did these ‘appointees’ do the work assigned? Or did they go with their own skill sets and anointing and do the work of Elders? We know of the acts of the aforementioned Nicolaus; and also of Philippos and Stephanos who (perhaps in addition to table-waiting) did the work of Elders (but not necessarily the work of shilchim: see passages such as Acts 8, especially vs. 14-16).

Acts also mentions elders from Antioch, Jerusalem, and Ephesus.

The Qualifications for Elders

Notice the changes in elders’ characteristic between the next two passages, the first, Petrine ~ 60 AD – the Nazorean Assembly; the second, deutero-Pauline ~ 85 AD – the later Gentile Mission.

(The qualifications of elders for each passage are check-marked √.)

Nazorean: 1 Peter 5:1-5. I urge the elders among you, as a fellow-elder myself and a witness to the sufferings of the Anointed, and as one who is to have a share in the glory that is to be revealed: √ give a shepherd's care to the flock of Elohim that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, as Elohim wants;

√ not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it.

√ Do not lord it over the group which is in your charge, but be an example for the flock.

√ When the chief shepherd appears, you will be given the unfading crown of esteem. In the same way, younger people, be subject to the elders. Humility towards one another must be the garment you all wear constantly, because Elohim opposes the proud but accords his favor to the humble.

Gentile Mission: Titus 1:5-9. The reason I left you behind in Crete was for you √ to organize everything that still had to be done and

√ appoint elders in every town, in the way that I told you, that is,

- √ each of them must be a man of irreproachable character,
- √ husband of one wife, and
- √ his children must be believers and not liable to be charged with disorderly conduct or insubordination.
- √ The presiding elder has to be irreproachable since he is Elohim's representative:
- √ never arrogant or hot-tempered, nor a heavy drinker or violent, nor avaricious; but
- √ hospitable and a lover of goodness; sensible, upright, devout and self-controlled; and
- √ he must have a firm grasp of the unchanging message of the tradition, so that he can be counted on both for giving encouragement in sound doctrine and for refuting those who argue against it.

The Evolution of Elder

The Point: Between the time of the final redaction of 1 Peter and Titus, maybe 25 – 40 years, assuming that the far-flung Assemblies of Yahweh were still in some form of doctrinal unity, the Appointed Elder, who possessed numerous administrative skills, took the place of the Anointed Elder, whose primary qualification was not administration, but spirituality and moral. The Presiding Elder of the Titus text, with pomps, titles, and political aptitude, replaced the Providing Elder, of 1 Peter, with his humility, spiritual insight, and servile motivation.

It was not long before the Appointed / Ordained Elder who was a professional Bishop or Pastor, gobbled up all the other Apostolic callings, except perhaps those evangelists or teacher with a penchant for making money or gathering the members of the upper crust.

In our day, especially in assemblies where education and administration are valued, there are relatively few elders who are not officially pastoral ministers (only). A relatively few ordained elders serve as professors, mental health professionals, or chaplains (in health care or the Armed Forces); by far the professional Elder is a church pastor or church administrator. There are very few if any official Apostles, Evangelists, or Prophets (though churches lay claim to the prophetic office on account of the public speaking duties of the pastor).

Finally, for the professional man or woman who is ordained to Elder or consecrated to Bishop in our time – the preferred appellation is that of Doctor (some attaining their post-elder title by dubious means). The trend is currently strong even among those groups who do not necessarily value a critical or liberal arts education.

Contemporary Ministry of Elder

In my way of thinking, Elders are necessary for any assembly, large or small, and the anointed elder is preferred over the appointed. Elders should never be elected, as is the usual practice for denominational bishops, but appointed with much thought and prayer by the presiding spiritual authority.

Potential elders should understand that biblical elders, especially in middle Judaisms, had to wait until they were at least thirty, undergo challenging training, experience a valid sky-walk, battle successfully with unclean, evil spirits, and have an evident pneumatic calling on their lives that includes an essential skill.

They should consider their consecration as though it were proffered by YHWH himself (for it is), and that they must be willing to answer to YHWH before doing that which would sever them from the assembly of their consecration.

They should know their strengths and weaknesses according to both spirit and flesh and work out of their strengths, leaving their weaker points to others who can do a better job.

It is always the privilege of an elder to take part, and sometimes take charge, of a healing or exorcism ministry, and to know their place in that ministry – if it be on the front lines or rear guard. This brings us to my final point regarding the necessity of the elder:

The Elder and the Weak

James 5:14. Any one of you who is asthenei (sick, RSV) should send for the elders of the assembly, and they must anoint the asthenei with oil in the name of Yahweh and pray over him. 15. The prayer of faith will save the asthenei and Yahweh will raise him up again; and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.

I continually wonder why certain words in Scripture are translated as they are. The Greek word sqenei (sthenei) means ‘strong one.’ Adding the negative prefix ‘a’ gives us the word translated as “sick” in James 5:14 & 15; that is asqenei (asthenei) = the non-strong one. Certainly this would include the sick. But this term has been translated in various other places as weak, feeble, powerless, helpless, needy, poor, diseased, impotent & sick. And certainly asthenei could mean any or all of these things.

This being the case, it is all the more essential that elders be appointed by the spiritual leaders of the assembly so they may begin to ‘officially’ address not just sickness (which has become the primary ready of this text), but every one of these other evils with just as much confidence as we address “the sick.”

Elder as Mediators

According once more to James, an elder must cover a lot of spiritual ground and have enough self-knowledge to see himself / herself as an intermediary between Elohim and humankind. Some feel strongly that they should not be mediators, since the following passage implies there is already a mediator.

1 Tim 2:5. For there is only Elohim Echad, and there is only one mediator between Elohim and humanity, himself a human being, Messiah Yahshua . . .

Certainly, the Anointed One is the mediator between humanity and the Creator. However, many times the elder finds him or herself in the place of spiritual mediator, the only Anointed person the others can see. And the potential elder should consider this as to whether he or she has the mettle for it. It is only reasonable to see the elder, who anoints with oil, who administers his hands, who speaks the sacred name, who forgives sins, as a priest in the classical sense and a mediator in fact.

Finally, a personal note: though Yahweh does the calling through Messiah, and though you may be anointed in some gift or ministry, the act of laying on of hands by the authority in the congregation not only adds further chrisim (mishchah) and strength to your ministry, but serves to show others present (and those they will tell), that you have the Mind of Messiah and are available for supernatural ministry. The caveat here is that an elder breaking trust with the covenant people may not lose the favor of the people, but will undoubtedly lose the favor of the Master.

Proposed Consecration of Elders in the Nazorean Yahad

OFFICIAL: Brothers and sisters: You have heard in our readings and preachings how important the office is to which you have been called. I submit to you in the name of Yahshua the Anointed One to never to forget these words as you remember the important work you have been called to do; work that

includes being messengers, observers, and wardens of the Great King. You are to teach and warn, to feed and nurture, and to seek out those sheep scattered among the disobedient peoples of this world, so that all who are called through you might be rescued by you.

Print upon your minds the value of the treasure committed to your charge. The people you serve at any particular time could be a part of the body, even the spouse, of Messiah. They are like sheep that have strayed, many of which were purchased by Messiah's blood. Know that you will be found guilty of a great fault if any of those whom the Master is revealing are hurt or hindered as a result of your negligence. Know that your Elohim will discipline you. So remember always what Yahweh has called you to do. Never cease your careful and diligent labors until you have done all that you possibly can, according to your charity and duty, to bring all committed to your charge to unity in the faith, and maturity in the Savior so that no door is left open to false beliefs or wrong behavior.

Since this office and ministry is both great and hard, you will appreciate your need to be thankful to Elohim for your calling so as to apply yourself carefully to your duties and study. Only Elohim can give you the desire and ability to do that thing to which you are called. You need to pray earnestly for Ruach haQodesh. And because there is no other way of leading others to eventual salvation except by teaching the Scriptures, you must learn them and so as to order your life and those of your family or clan. It is for the sake of your beloved others that you must forsake all worldly cares and concerns that would hinder you from doing your duty and being an example.

We are persuaded that you have carefully considered these things, and that you are determined by the favor of Elohim to give yourselves wholeheartedly to this office and ministry. Therefore pray continuously to your Father by the mediation of our only Savior Yahshua Messiah for the assistance of the Ruach haQodesh so that you will grow in your ministry, sanctify and shape your life and those of your family according to Torah, and be wholesome and worthy examples for others to follow.

And now, so that the Yahad gathered may be assured of your determination to do these things, and so that your public commitment may strengthen your resolve, you will plainly answer the following questions that I put to you in the name of Yahweh Elohim.

Do you believe that you are truly called, according to the will of our Father Yahweh and the order of Messiah's Yahad, to the ministry of zeqen / elder?

Are you persuaded that the Scriptures contain all learning necessary for salvation through faith in Yahshua Messiah?

And are you determined to communicate to those committed to you according to said Scriptures, and to teach nothing as required for salvation except what you are persuaded can be proved by the Scriptures?

Will you carefully and faithfully minister the learning and works of the Shlichim as well as the narrow way of Messiah as Yahweh has commanded and as this Yahad has received them? And will you teach the people committed to your care to keep and observe the Torah carefully?

Will you be ready and careful to drive away all wrong and strange messages that are blatantly contrary to the Scripture by both public and private warning and exhortation, to the sick and to the well, whenever necessity requires it?

Will you be diligent in prayer, in the reading of the Scriptures, and in those studies that help you to a fuller knowledge of them, turning away from worldly and unworthy concerns?

Will you strive to live according to Messiah's teaching so that you and your family will be good examples to the flock and the world?

Will you promote and maintain quietness, peace, and charity among all Believers, and especially among those committed to your charge?

Will you reverently obey the bath qol (heavenly voice) in your Yahad, gladly and willingly accepting righteous counsel and reproof?

Prayer

Yahweh El Shaddai, who has given you the will to do all these things, grant you strength and power to perform them so that he may complete the work he began in you through Yahshua Yahweh Savior and King. Amen.

The candidates bow; the hymn is spoken or sung:

Come, haQodesh, our hearts inspire, and lighten with celestial fire; You the anointing Spirit, You - who does the sev'n-fold gifts imbue.

Your blessed unction from above is comfort, life, and fire of love; Enable with perpetual light the dullness of our blinded sight. Anoint and cheer our soiled faces with the bounty of your graces; Keep foes away, bring peace at home: and be our guide where e'er we roam. Teach us to know the Father, Son, with You, the All, to live as One; That through the ages all along this psalm may be our endless song: Praised be Your name, all you with breath; and You who did away with death.

Let us pray.

Yahweh El Shaddai, by your infinite charity and goodness you have given us your only beloved Son Yahshua ben Yahweh to be our redeemer and the author of long life. After he had secured our redemption he ascended into the sky and sent into the world his shlichim, naviim, malachim, morim, and roheim, by whose ministry he gathered a little flock in the world to proclaim the praise of your set-apart Name. For these good things, and because you have called these your servants to the same office and ministry appointed for the salvation of humankind, we give you heartfelt thanks. We praise and worship you. And we humbly pray that we and all who call upon you're the name Yahweh may be continually thankful for these and all your benefits, that we may daily increase in faith and the knowledge of you and your Son by the Ruach haQodesh, and that through these your elders and those whom they serve your name may be ever esteemed and your kingdom enlarged through your Son Yahshua Messiah our Sovereign, who lives and reigns with you in the Echad. Amein.

The ministers present lay their hands on the head of each candidate, kneeling, and the leader says: Receive the office and work of elder in the Yahad of Yahweh Elohim, now committed to you by the laying on of hands. What sins you forgive are forgiven; what sins you retain are retained. Be a faithful minister of the word of Yahweh, and of his set-apart methods and means of changing the world of the present into the shalom of the future. Take authority to preach the word of Yahweh and to minister in such gifts as you have received and proven here, in the Yahad in which you are appointed, and in the world, where your authority and office will be recognized in your good works. Amein.