

Lesson 1

Old Testament Elders

LESSON OVERVIEW

Every prospective shepherd elder needs good role models to learn from and to follow. God's book, the Bible, provides us with many inspiring examples of godly men and women. In their excellent book on mentoring, Paul Stanley and Robert Clinton call such an example an "Historical Model," meaning "a person now dead whose life or ministry is written in a(n) (auto)biographical form and is used as an example to indirectly impart values, principles, and skills that empower another person."¹

Lesson 1 explores Job's life as a model of the Old Testament elder. We will examine the duties and deficiencies of Israel's elders and will note the failure of Job's colleagues to compassionately and tactfully minister to him during his intense suffering. This lesson will help you think and act like a biblical, Christlike elder.

JOB, A MODEL ELDER

"There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:1).

Read pages 186-202, 227-238. It is assumed that you have previously read pages 9-117.

1. Using a Bible dictionary, encyclopedia, or other reference tool,² briefly describe who Job is and what the book of Job is about.

2. The verses below describe Job's personal character traits and his actions as a community leader.
- As you read each passage, mark with an "E" each reference that substantiates that Job was an elder.
 - Where appropriate, summarize what Job did that a shepherd elder should do.
 - Consider the New Testament qualifications of an elder on the list below and, using the numbers 1 through 11 that correspond to those qualifications, identify each passage that contains similar qualifications.

- 1 Above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2; pp. 188, 228)
- 2 Hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; p. 194)
- 3 Respectable [well-behaved, virtuous] (1 Tim. 3:3; p. 193)
- 4 Gentle [forbearing] (1 Tim. 3:3; p. 197)
- 5 Free from the love of money (1 Tim. 3:3; p. 198)
- 6 Manages his household well (1 Tim. 3:4; p. 199)
- 7 Lover of what is good [kind, virtuous] (Titus 1:8; p. 233)
- 8 Just [righteous conduct, law-abiding] (Titus 1:8; p. 234)
- 9 Devout [holy, pleasing to God, loyal to His Word] (Titus 1:8; p. 235)
- 10 Faithful to God's Word (Titus 1:9; pp. 235, 236)
- 11 Able to teach and exhort, and to refute false teachers (Titus 1:9; pp. 236, 237)

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

Example: b. Job was blameless, God-fearing; c. 1, 8, 9

Job 1:4, 5 And his sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. It came about, when the days of feasting had completed their cycle, that Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Job 4:1-4 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered, "If one ventures a word with you [Job], will you become impatient? But who can refrain from speaking? Behold you [Job] have admonished [instructed] many, and you have strengthened weak hands. Your words have helped the tottering to stand, and you have strengthened feeble knees."

Job 23:11, 12 "My foot [Job's] has held fast to His path; I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

Job 29:7, 8 "When I [Job] went out to the gate of the city, when I took my seat in the square, the young men saw me and hid themselves, and the old men arose and stood."

Job 29:12-17 "Because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the orphan who had no helper. The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me, and I made the widow's heart sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I investigated the case which I did not know. I broke the jaws of the wicked and snatched the prey from his teeth."

Job 29:21 "To me they listened and waited, and kept silent for my counsel."

Job 30:25 "Have I not wept for the one whose life is hard? Was not my soul grieved for the needy?"

Job 31:1 "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze [look lustfully NIV] at a virgin?"

Job 31:24-34 "If I have put my confidence in gold, and called fine gold my trust, if I have gloated because my wealth was great, and because my hand had secured so much; if I have looked at the sun when it shone or the moon going in splendor, and my heart became secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth, that too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, for I would have denied God above. Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy, or exulted when evil befell him? No, I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life in a curse. Have the men of my tent not said, 'Who can find one who has not been satisfied with his meat?' The alien has not lodged outside, for I have opened my doors to the traveler. Have I covered my transgressions like Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom, because I feared the great multitude, and the contempt of families terrified me, and kept silent and did not go out of doors?"

3. In summary, what was Job's attitude toward people?

The following observation is from a letter by Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission and one of the greatest missionaries of all time. He wrote about the lack of tact and sensitivity some missionaries displayed toward the Chinese. May his words remind us of the importance of grace and tact in dealing with people:

"Some persons seem really clever in doing the right thing in the worst possible way, or at the most unfortunate time. Really dull, or rude persons will seldom be out of hot water in China; and though earnest and clever and pious will not effect much. *In nothing do we fail more, as a Mission, than in lack of tact and politeness.*"
—Hudson Taylor³

4. Job complained that his three friends, who may also have been elders, were miserable comforters. "You are all worthless physicians" (Job 13:4). "Sorry comforters are you all" (Job 16:2). Many elders today think and act like Job's friends. So that you will not become a worthless physician of the soul, observe the negative characteristics in Job's friends that shepherds of God's people should avoid. List those that appear in these passages.

Job 6:14, 15 "For the despairing man [Job speaking] there should be kindness from his friend; so that he does not forsake the fear of the Almighty. My brothers [Job's friends] have acted deceitfully like a wadi [a seasonal stream], like the torrents of wadis which vanish."

Example: lack of compassion, inconsistent, useless

Job 12:5a "He who is at ease holds calamity in contempt."

Job 13:4 "But you smear with lies; you are all worthless physicians."

Job 16:1-4 Then Job answered, "I have heard many such things; sorry comforters are you all. Is there no limit to windy words? Or what plagues you that you answer? I too could speak like you, if I were in your place. I could compose words against you and shake my head at you."

Job 19:1-5 Then Job responded, "How long will you torment me, and crush me with words? These ten times you have insulted me; you are not ashamed to wrong me. . . . If indeed you vaunt yourselves against me, and prove my disgrace to me."

5. Restate Job 12:5a in your own words. Why is it important for those who provide spiritual care to understand and remember this text?

ISRAEL'S ELDERS

"And they [the elders] shall bear the burden of the people with you"

(Numbers 11:17).

Read pages 121-124.

6. Practice pronouncing the following Greek words, and give their meanings (see *Biblical Eldership*):

presbyteros [prez BOO tuh rohs] (p. 124)

presbyteroi [prez BOO tuh roy] (p. 124)

presbyterion [prez boo TEH ree ohn] (pp. 123, 205)

gerousia [geh roo SEE uh] (p. 123)

7. Briefly define the eldership structure of government of the Old Testament (p. 39).

8. The divinely inspired New Testament is built on the divinely inspired Old Testament. A major reason why most Christians do not see or understand church eldership as practiced in the New Testament is that they do not know anything about the Old Testament elders. Robert B. Girdlestone (1836-1923), author of the classic *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, echoes this sentiment: "The importance of a right judgment of the position and functions of these [Old Testament] elders cannot well be overrated when we come to discuss the nature of the analogous office of presbyter in the NT."⁴

Elders appear throughout the entire Bible, beginning with Genesis 50:7 and ending with Revelation 4:4, which describes the twenty-four elders who surround the throne of God. Since government by a council of elders has been a fundamental institution among the people of God all through biblical history, a study of New Testament church eldership must begin with an examination of what the Old Testament says about elders.

List the responsibilities of the elders of Israel indicated in these Old Testament passages. Be sure to interpret these verses in their context.

Ex. 19:7, 8

Lev. 4:13-15

Num. 11:16, 17

Deut. 19:11, 12

Deut. 21:18-21

Deut. 27:1

Deut. 31:9-12

2 Sam. 5:3

Job 12:20

Ezek. 7:26

9. Although today's elders do not offer sacrifices, protect manslaughterers, or sit at the city gate, there are important similarities between the responsibilities of the Old and New Testament elders. List some of these similarities.

10. What highly significant lesson for elders do you find in Joshua 24:31?

11. By and large, Israel's elders failed to meet their responsibility to uphold the law of God and protect the people. We also cannot assume that collective leadership will protect us from the consequences of corporate sin.

What were some of the root sins and failures of Israel's elders? Again, be sure to observe the context.

1 Sam. 4:1-11

1 Sam. 8:4-9, 19, 20

1 Sam. 11:1-3

2 Sam. 5:3; 17:1-4

1 Kings 21:5-11

Ezek. 8:7-13

12. In light of your desire to become a godly leader or elder, write brief phrases that summarize the biblical standards for character and conduct for elders that you have gleaned from this study.

I must:

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b.

c.

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SCRIPTURE MEMORY ASSIGNMENT:

"There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:1).

¹ Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationship You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), p. 147.

² We highly recommend that every elder own and use regularly *Talk Thru the Bible*, by Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers). For a good Bible dictionary, we recommend the *New Bible Dictionary*, by Tyndale House Publishers.

³ A. J. Broomhall, *Refiner's Fire* (Robesonia: The Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1985), p. 231.

⁴ Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), p. 269.

