

SPIRITUAL LEADERS: OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS
Compiled by Bob Young

“Neither president nor peon—called to lead but also called to serve”

What do spiritual leaders do? What do elders do? There are 127 references to elders in the Old Testament. Can we understand something of their work and responsibility in the New Testament church by studying their role in the Old Testament?
What did elders do in the Old Testament? What were their responsibilities?

Exodus 3:16-19, 4:29

Spiritual leaders know who God is

They understand God’s characteristics, nature, and purpose

Exodus 12:20-22; 17:5-6; 18:12; 24:1ff; Leviticus 4:14-16

Spiritual leaders lead in the community life of God’s people, lead in worship

Spiritual leaders maintain connection with God, they are people of worship

Exodus 4:28-30; 19:5-8; 24:1-14

Spiritual leaders receive God’s word, apply God’s word, and provide counsel

Spiritual leaders know the Word of God

Exodus 34:6-7

Spiritual leaders give honor to God

A primary aspect of spiritual leadership is the godly influence of the leader on other people, both inside the church and outside the church. This influence is both direct and indirect. As participants committed to the mission of God, spiritual leaders give their lives to bless others through Jesus Christ. By doing this, they give honor to God.

Moses asked to see the kabod (glory or honor, doxa in Greek) of God after an extended conversation with God about the responsibility for the people of Israel (Ex. 33:18). God declared that Moses would see the LORD’s goodness, good name, mercy, compassion, but not his face (33:19-20). The next day, on Mount Sinai, God gave the most complete description of himself in the Bible until the coming of Jesus (34:6-7).

Because every human being is created in the image of God, every person has the capacity to grow toward, to become, to do these things. By doing these things, we honor God. In sin, we fall short of God’s honor (Rom. 3:23), but Christ allows us to reclaim that honor.

Spiritual leaders influence others to reclaim the nature, characteristics, attitude, and actions of God, that is, those things that are consistent with God’s nature, so that we become more and more like him.

Numbers 11:16-17 (vv. 16-30)

Spiritual leaders do not try to do everything by themselves; spiritual leaders need help to serve God faithfully

Spiritual leaders carry the weight and responsibility of the people of God, Numbers 11:16-27

Being a spiritual leader for God is a heavy burden; many leaders feel unprepared for what they are called to do. Many church leaders echo Moses' words, Num. 11:14. God has the ability to take the Spirit that is on the leader and put it on others to help carry the load. If you can do what you do without God's help, you are not a spiritual leader. If you can do what you do without the help of the people, you are not a spiritual leader.

Assumptions for this kind of spiritual leadership

- We become Christians for service, not for safety. Servant leadership requires openness, transparency, vulnerability
- God works through his people (all of his people). Spiritual leadership calls all of God's people to obedience.
- Faithful Christians seek to live by the will of God. Spiritual leadership calls people to faithfulness.

Joshua 20:4-5; Ruth 4:1-11

Spiritual leaders make spiritual judgments and spiritual decisions concerning the application of God's word, they lead the people in spiritual living

Spiritual leaders make decisions; they were seated at the gates (references from Deuteronomy)

The sin of Achan, Joshua 7:6

The Cities of Refuge, Joshua 20:4-6

Ruth 4

1 Sam 8:4ff

Spiritual leaders can make mistakes

Spiritual leaders should be spiritual examples

Spiritual leadership, Joshua 23:2; 24:1,31; Judges 2:7

Spiritual direction, 1 Sam 4:3, 8:4ff; listening to the people, 2 Sam 5:3

Spiritual counsel, 1 Kings 12:6-13 (other texts, especially the parallels in Chronicles)

Ezra 5:5-9; 6:14

Protect the people

See also the case of another decision made by the elders (10:8)