



God's People Need Wise Elders
Deut. 1:9-18

9 " And I spoke to you at that time, saying: 'I alone am not able to bear you.

10 'The LORD your God has multiplied you, and here you are today, as the stars of heaven in multitude.

11 'May the LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you as He has promised you!

12 'How can I alone bear your problems and your burdens and your complaints?

13 'Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.'

14 "And you answered me and said, 'The thing which you have told us to do is good.'

15 "So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes.

16 "Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him.

17 'You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.'

18 "And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.

Moses here in this sermon is recounting the history of Israel in his sermon before the people, he refers here to an events in the Exodus but with a purpose - all of these things that happened in the wilderness happened to teach them lessons, they will teach us lessons as well if we will let them

Now the events he mentions here occurred in Exodus 18:14-27. Soon after they had left Egypt and crossed through the Red Sea, and fought and defeated the Amalekites, Jethro – Moses' father-in-law had visited him and been appalled at the way the people were being governed. The problem wasn't mismanagement, the problem was that the government was entirely centralized around Moses. Jethro had said what are you doing, all day long you sit around hearing cases and all day long the people stand out in the sun waiting to speak to you. What is going on. So Moses told him:

Exodus 18:16 "When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."

Well Jethro recognized that Moses was going to wear himself out and the people as well if this system continued, there was just no way Moses could be the sole Judge and interpreter of the law for over 600,000 people. For as Moses had said while the people had only been 70 when they entered into Egypt, the Lord had kept his promise to Abraham and multiplied them till they were more numerous than the stars of heaven, and it is the hope of Moses that entering in the will become more numerous still.

Now Moses is recounting all of this precisely because as they enter in to Canaan they will need good rulers, they will need good elders, especially because they are people utterly unlike all the other peoples of the surrounding nations. They aren't ruled by human kings, they are ruled by God and his laws. And the job of those elders is to apply God's commandments to God's people. The only authority they have is delegated authority from God, and they are doing their job only when they are applying God's commandments to his people.

Now in that sense, God's church has always been the same. The bible does not say that the people of God are to be lorded over by self-appointed tyrants, whether they style themselves Popes in the case of the Roman Catholics, or Kings as in the case Anglicans, or Patriarchs as is the case of the Orthodox, or Presidents in the case of the Mormon Church, or just the multitude of self-appointed false Messiahs out there the David Koreshes and Jim Jones who claim to be God .

Rather the bible tells us that the people of God are to be shepherded by Elders chosen from their own number, and that these men do not have legislative authority. In other words they don't have the authority to invent new commandments and get people to obey them. The authority is Christ's and his commission to the church is to "make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you"

So Moses tells them the qualities that they should be looking for in elders, and which you should be looking for as well. The church should be above all things a meritocracy, that is the men who are advanced in it to positions of leadership, should be advanced not on the basis of the fact that they are aristocrats or leaders of industry or "well bred and from excellent families" but rather on the basis that God's people acknowledge that they have been gifted for the office. He doesn't say choose celebrities from amongst you, he says choose *wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men*.

How I wish that were always the case in God's church, but too often the elders are picked on the basis not of godliness and wisdom, but on the basis of their standing in the community, or their popularity. In the past at times in God's church, men have simply been appointed based on their connections, and God's people have suffered. Now in Moses' time at least they had the advantage that they were all formerly slaves so none of them could pretend to be better or richer than others. But sadly, no sooner has a man been elevated to an office than he begins to forget where he came from and think that he is somehow a better breed than the people who selected him. Even Moses, who was called the most humble of all men, was not immune to this. We need to remember that he wasn't able to enter into the promised land because he too had disobeyed God's command and pretended he had authority and power. God had said "speak to the rock" and he struck it twice *saying "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"*

Now in verse 16 Moses says that in particular, in judging cases and applying God's law they were to do four things:

- 1) Hear the cases: Hearing is so important brothers and sisters, don't prejudge. Hear both sides and them fully.
- 2) Judge Righteously, be just be impartial, according to the merits of the case. This is something that is almost lost today. We look first at who the parties are and then the matter. We must not judge according to whether one is rich and one is poor. One is a native and one is a stranger, or great or small.
- 3) Don't be a man fearer: So often in the church, we apply God's law wrongly or not at all, because we fear the people

4) Know your limitations, if something is too difficult refer it to another. Moses said he was always willing to hear the difficult cases.

“We must not grudge that God's work be done by other hands than ours, provided it be done by good hands.” – Matthew Henry

APPLICATIONS:

1) The Importance of AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY

Rebellion is at the heart of all sin

Because of course the rebellion starts with the heads *failing to exercise proper authority*

To first submit to what God has told them

To enforce it

ELDERS, FATHERS, HUSBANDS

Instead to either ABDICATE or TYRANIZE

Abdication is not better than TYRANNY, Adam ABDICATED his role and we fell.

We will not have authorities in the church to rule over us

We will decide whether and when we will obey

What parent would tolerate that situation in their own household

The problem is not authority, its misuse of authority.

If it is in keeping with God's law and its within their sphere of authority *you must obey*.

The time of the greatest sorrow in the history of God's people was the time of the judges –

Judges – every man did what was right in his own eyes

2) LAW ALONE THOUGH IS NEVER SUFFICIENT

We are drowning in Laws as a society

The Pharisees show that law alone without a desire to obey will never be sufficient

Unless Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Collapse of our society, no more fathers, man will either be ruled by a conscience captive to God or he will not be ruled by anything

Constitution is *not* sufficient.

We have cast off the Lord's Word and our King

Psalm 2

We will not have this man to rule over us

Application Whole Carnal Christian/Lordship salvation

Coming to Christ involves *submitting* to him as Lord