

Coming To Terms With The Terms



Pastor?
Elder?
Bishop?

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Why Do We Use The Term Pastor When It Is Not In The New Testament?

I believe we are correct in using the term “*pastor*” in our Baptist churches today, even though the term “*pastor*” is not found in the New Testament and the word “*pastors*” (plural) is only found one time.



“They Ordained Elders”

In **Acts 14:23** we read they “*ordained them elders in every church.*” We find the term “*Elder*” or “*Elders*” sixty-nine times in the New Testament. Why do we not use that term today?

Why The Different Terms?

The Bible has different terms for leadership that are used *in the context of the local church*. One is *elder* or *elders*. Another term is *Bishop* or *Bishops* which appear *seven times* and the third term is *pastors* which appears *only one time* in the New Testament.

Why Did The Holy Spirit Inspire The Use Of The Term Elder In The Local Church?

If we use the rule of first mention, we find the word “*elders*” first appears in **Genesis 50:7** where we read about Pharaoh and “*...the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt.*”



The Bible speaks about, “*the elders of Israel,*” in thirty-four verses and refers to elders in connection with countries such as *Midian, Moab, Gilead, Jabesh*, as well as *towns, cities*, and other places.

The Bible says in **Matthew 16:21**, “*Jesus suffered many things at the hand of the elders.*”

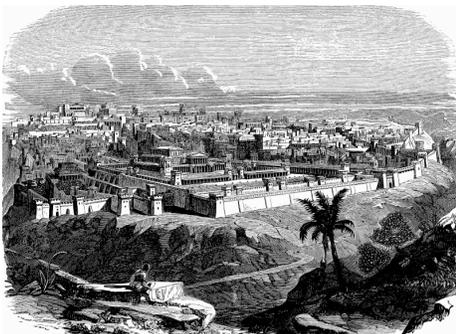
- They challenged His authority.
- They planned His crucifixion.
- They sought false witnesses against Him.
- They gave the 30 pieces of silver to Judas.
- They persuaded the release of Barabbas, and the destruction of Jesus.
- They mocked the Lord when He was on the cross.
- They paid money to the soldiers to lie about the resurrection.
- They persecuted the early Christians.
- They were involved in the stoning of Stephen.
- They sent Paul to Damascus to bring Christians back to Jerusalem to be persecuted.
- They put themselves under a curse to kill Paul.

Why did the Holy Spirit inspire the writers of Scripture to use the term elder? For example, we read that they, “*Ordained them elders in every church*” (Acts 14:23).

Beginning At The Beginning:

(Examining The Term Elder)

The Bible tells us churches were to be structured, “...*decently and in order,*” and elders were being ordained in “*every church.*”



The residents at Jerusalem were mainly *Jewish*, and were familiar with the term “*elder.*” As seen in the Old Testament Scriptures the elders were leaders of cities, households, countries and Jewish synagogues.

The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible to use the term elder in this situation because the *Jews* would know the responsibilities and authority the elders were to have in their local churches.

Using The Term Bishop In Philipians:

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1).

Bishops For The Greeks:

The recipients of this letter were mainly Greeks. The word bishop was a term used by them long before the New Testament was written. When the Greeks or Romans conquered a city or state the emperor would appoint a bishop to take charge of the area.

A Position of Authority:

The bishop was a leader with authority, but was also responsible to a superior power. He was a leader who introduced new things. The Holy Spirit inspired the writer to the Philipians to use the word “bishop” because the people in this environment would know immediately what his responsibilities were in the local church.

Example:

In recent years our church was involved in planting a local church in a jungle village of Venezuela. When the missionary spoke to the people in the jungle about the “*chief*” of the village he did not use the term captain. If he did, the Indians would not know what he was talking about. On the other hand, if he was talking to a football team he would use the term captain when referring to their leader, rather than the term chief.



The Term Elder And Bishop Used In The Same Place:

In the book of Titus the Holy Spirit inspired the writer to use both words in the same paragraph. In **Titus 1:5** we read about ordaining, “*elders in every city.*” Two verses later he said, “*A bishop must be blameless.*” Obviously the terms are referring to the same local church office.

Paul At Ephesus:

In Acts **20:17** we read, Paul, “*...called the elders of the church.*” In verse twenty-eight he referred to them as tending a “*flock.*” He also referred to them as “*overseers.*” We need to keep this in mind as we look at the term “*pastors.*”

“He Gave Some...Pastors:”

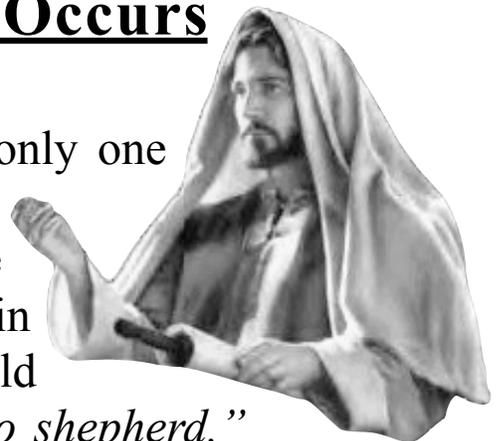
In **Ephesians 4:11** the Holy Spirit inspired the writer to use the term “*pastors.*” Verse twelve says pastors were given, “*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry.*”

God designated “*pastors*” for this responsibility. The place God assigned for perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, is the local church, as it is “*...the pillar and ground of the truth.*”

References To The Pastor Occurs Eighteen Times In The Greek:

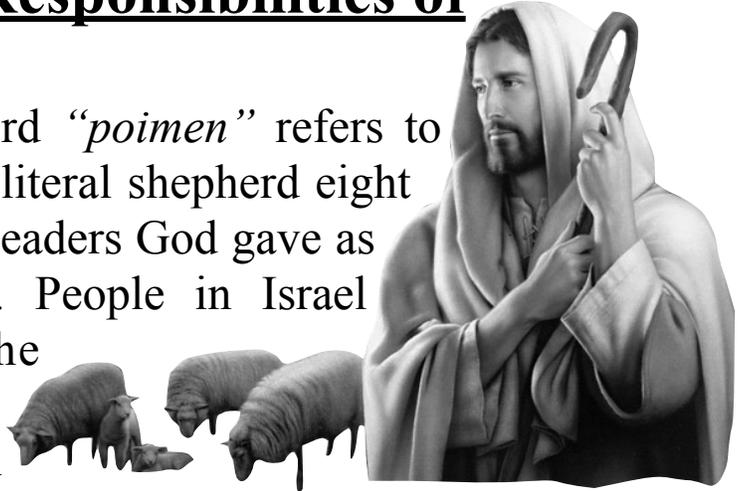
Although the term “*pastors*” is recorded only one time in the King James translation of the New Testament, the Greek word is there eighteen times. The Hebrew word *pastors* is in the Old Testament another eight times. The Old Testament word is “*ra`ah*” and it means “*to shepherd.*”

The New Testament word is “*poimen*” and also means “*to shepherd.*”



Everyone Knew The Responsibilities of A Shepherd:

In the New Testament the word “*poimen*” refers to Jesus nine times. It refers to a literal shepherd eight times and once it refers to the leaders God gave as a gift to the local churches. People in Israel immediately knew what the church leader’s responsibilities were when they heard the word shepherd. The term “*pastors*” in Ephesians 4:11 is obviously used as a type of someone God has chosen to shepherd the sheep.



The Sheep In First Peter:

In **First Peter 5:1-3** we read, “*The elders which are among you I exhort, ...Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*”

To Pastor Means To Shepherd:

Keeping in mind the word “*pastor*” means “*to shepherd,*” consider the instructions given to what is referred to as an “*elder,*” in First Peter 5:1-3.

1. “*Feed the flock of God.*”
2. “*Which is among you,*” (Local Church Setting)
3. “*Taking the oversight thereof*” ... (Leadership)
4. “*Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*”
5. “*And when the chief Shepherd (Christ) shall appear, ye (the shepherd) shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*” (v.4).

Some Teach We Must Have More Than One Pastor To Have A Scriptural Church. What Does The Bible Say?

Paul And Barnabas Establishing Churches:

Paul and Barnabas established churches in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. We read in **Acts 24:23**, “...they ordained them elders (Pastors) in every church.”

There were thousands of people being saved in other places as well. We read in **Acts 15:36**, “And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.”

In **Titus 1:5** we read, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders (Pastors) in every city, as I had appointed thee.”

There were obviously many churches starting needing many pastors. It is also obvious concerning all these churches the word to describe all the pastors would be plural.

Big Churches And Small Churches:

Paul said in **Romans 16:5** “...greet the church that is in their house.” In **First Corinthians 16:19** he referred to, “...the church that is in their house.” In **Colossians 4:15** he referred to “...the church which is in his house.” Also we read in **Philemon 1:2** about, “...the church in thy house.” A church in someone's house would not need more than one pastor. The word church in these references is “ecclesia” and means an “assembly.” The “ecclesia” was an official organized meeting that met in a place, had a person in charge and had a lawful purpose. (See the author’s book on “New Carts – Strange Fire – Wild Grapes Or The Local Church.”)

These references do not give license to people holding meetings in their homes, because they can't handle the God-given authority in the local church! It is interesting that when the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write about the qualifications for the office of pastors and deacons. He used the singular term when referring to the pastors and the plural term when referring to the deacons.

Pastors - Note The Singular References:

First Timothy 3:1-13,

*“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of **a** bishop, **he** desireth a good work. A **bishop** then must be blameless, the **husband** of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a **brawler**, not covetous; **One** that ruleth well **his** own house, having **his** children in subjection with all gravity; (For if **a man** know not how to rule **his** own house, how shall **he** take care of the church of God?) Not **a novice**, lest being lifted up with pride **he** fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover **he** must have a good report of them which are without; lest **he** fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”*

Deacons - Note The Plural References:

*Likewise must the **deacons** be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let **these** also first be proved; then let **them** use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must **their** wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the **deacons** be the **husbands** of one wife, ruling **their** children and **their** own houses well. For **they** that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to **themselves** a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”*

First Peter 5:1-4

1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

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