THE QUESTION

# How did the early church govern itself through elders, and what made it work well?

*Asked by a THF member on September 9, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 15 numbered quotations · the 48 early Christian passages and 184 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.*

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/how-did-the-early-church-govern-itself-through-elders-and-what-made-it-work

## The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

The early church was led by bishops, presbyters (elders) and deacons, appointed in an orderly line from the apostles. It worked well when leaders were proven by character rather than ambition or money, cared for the people's growth like shepherds, settled serious matters by common counsel, and when the people honored them and stayed united.

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POINT 1 OF 8

## The apostles appointed leaders and their successors

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Clement of Rome says the apostles tested their first converts and appointed them as bishops and deacons. He adds that they gave instructions for other approved men to take over when those leaders died, so the order of leadership would continue.

**1** "Thus, preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits of their labors, having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who would later believe."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 46, page 9** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

**2** "For this reason, considering that they had obtained perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed the ministers previously mentioned, and subsequently instructed that when these ministers passed away, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 45, page 9** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 2 OF 8

## Bishop, presbyters and deacons worked together

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Ignatius describes each local church as led by one bishop, a council of presbyters, and deacons. He compares the presbyters to the gathering of the apostles and says that without these three there is no church.

**3** "Let your bishop lead in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons who are very dear to me and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Magnesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 8, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

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**4** “In the same way, let everyone honor the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God, and assembly of the apostles. Without these, there is no Church.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Trallians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 7, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 3 OF 8

## Leaders were chosen for character, not ambition

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Tertullian says elders earned their place by proven character, never by payment. Origen says the church urged blameless people to lead and turned away those who were eager for power.

**5** “Proven men of our elders preside over us. They gain that honor not by purchase, but by established character. There is no buying or selling of any kind in the things of God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Apology* 39 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 16, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

**6** “And we urge those who are powerful in speech and blameless in life to rule over churches. We reject those who are ambitious to rule.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 75 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 21, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 4 OF 8

## The goal of elders is the people's growth

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Clement of Alexandria says the elders' part is the improvement of the people, while deacons serve. Origen says church leaders care for members so that they live better lives day by day, and also reach those outside.

**7** “In the same way also, in the Church, the elders attend to the part whose object is improvement, and the deacons to the work of ministry.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 7.1 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 14, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

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**8** “They take charge of everyone—those who are within, so that day by day they may live better lives, and those who are outside, so that they may come to abound in holy words and deeds of piety.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Against Celsus* 75 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 21, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 5 OF 8

## A bishop should correct like a loving parent

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

The Apostolic Constitutions tell the bishop to love his people as his own children. He must correct those who need it, but always to heal and restore them, never to crush them.

**9** “In the same way, let the bishop love the laity as his children, caring for them and cherishing them with loving diligence: like eggs, so that young may hatch; or like young birds, taking them in his arms so that they may be raised into birds.”

*later in the same passage*

“He must reprove, but not strike; bring them low so that they may be ashamed, but not ruin them; warn them so that they may be converted; and rebuke them so that they may be reformed and live better lives.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 32, page 9** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 6 OF 8

## Serious matters were settled by common counsel

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Cyprian says elders and bishops met every year so that weightier matters could be decided together. Clement of Rome mentions leaders appointed with the consent of the whole church, which suggests the people also had a voice.

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**10** “Because of this, it necessarily happens among us that, year by year, we elders and prelates assemble together to arrange the matters committed to our care, so that if any matters are more serious, they may be directed by common counsel.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 24, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

**11** “We believe, therefore, that those appointed by them, or later by other distinguished men with the consent of the whole Church, who have served the flock of Christ blamelessly in a humble, peaceful, and selfless spirit, and have long enjoyed a good reputation with everyone, cannot be justly removed from the ministry.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 45, page 9** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 7 OF 8

## The people honored leaders and kept unity

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Clement of Rome praises a church that obeyed its leaders and honored its elders. Ignatius urges believers to submit to the bishop and to one another, so that the whole church stays united before God.

**12** “For you did all things without favoritism, and walked in the commandments of God, being obedient to those who led you, and giving all appropriate honor to the elders among you.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 47, page 9** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

**13** “Be subject to the bishop, and to one another, as Christ is to the Father, so that there may be unity according to God among you.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Magnesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 6, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

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POINT 8 OF 8

## Shepherds will answer for their flock

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Tertullian reminds leaders that a good shepherd gives his life for the sheep, using Christ's words. Hermas warns that shepherds will have to answer to the Lord if their sheep wander off or the shepherds stray themselves.

**14** “Certainly, a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, according to the word of Moses, when the Lord Christ had not yet been revealed, but was already foreshadowed in Moses himself: "If You destroy this people," he says, "destroy me also along with it.""

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *De Fuga in Persecutione* 11 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 17, page 8** Read it in the library ›
*THF's updated English*

**15** “But if He finds any of these sheep wandering away, woe to the shepherds! And if the shepherds themselves have wandered away, what answer will they give Him about their flock?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD) **Source 1, page 7** Read it in the library ›
*THF's updated English*

THE LIMITS

## What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages describe offices and ideals; they do not give a step-by-step program for running a church today.
- Some sources, such as the Apostolic Constitutions, reflect a later and more detailed church order than the first-century letters.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

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WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

# The Sources

The 48 early Christian passages and 184 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–48, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 49–140, in Bible order), then 92 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

## EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *48 passages from 14 writers*

### **Hermas**, *c. 90–150 AD · sources 1–2*

**1** *Shepherd* **Quote 15, page 6** and if none of you has perished. But if He finds any of these sheep wandering away, woe to the shepherds! And if the shepherds themselves have wandered away, what… [continues online] **read ›**

**2** *Shepherd* (1885 English; on point 8) "will tell, therefore, those who preside over the Church, to direct their ways in righteousness, that they may receive in full the promises with great glory… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Ignatius of Antioch**, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 3–9*

**3** *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (on point 2) "deacons to the presbyters; the presbyters to the bishop… [continues online] **read ›**

**4** *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* (1885 English; on point 7) "ye, beloved, be careful to be subject to the bishop, and the presbyters and the deacons… [continues online] **read ›**

**5** *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (on point 2) that you all follow the bishop, just as Christ Jesus does the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles. Also, show reverence to the deacons, as those who… [continues online] **read ›**

**6** *Epistle to the Magnesians* (1885 English) **Quote 13, page 5** "therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, that so all things, whatsoever ye do, may prosper, both in the flesh and spirit, in faith… [continues online] **read ›**

**7** *Epistle to the Trallians* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "like manner, let all reverence the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the presbyters as… [continues online] **read ›**

**8** *Epistle to the Magnesians* **Quote 3, page 2** "being begotten by the Father before the beginning of time, was God the Word, the only-begotten Son, and… [continues online] **read ›**

**9** *Epistles of Ignatius* (1885 English; on point 7) presbyters, "feed the flock which is among you," till God shall show who is to hold the rule over you… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Polycarp**, *c. 100–155 AD · source 10*

**10** *Epistle to the Philippians* (1885 English; on point 7) "it is needful to abstain from all these things, being subject to the presbyters and deacons, as unto God and Christ… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Tatian**, *c. 150–180 AD · source 11*

**11** *Diatessaron* 37 (on point 8) But I came that they might have life, and that they might have the better thing. I am the good shepherd, and the good shepherd gives himself for his sheep… [continues online] **read ›**

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**Irenaeus**, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 12–13*

**12** *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English; on point 2) “heed, therefore, both to yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has placed you as bishops, to rule the Church of the Lord, which He has… [continues online] **read ›**

**13** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English; on point 3) “Such presbyters does the Church nourish, of whom also the prophet says: “I will give thy rulers in peace, and thy bishops in righteousness.” Of whom also did the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

**Clement of Alexandria**, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 14–15*

**14** *Stromata* 7.1 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 3** “also, in the Church, the elders attend to the department which has improvement for its object… [continues online] **read ›**

**15** *Instructor* 1.7 “is called Jesus. Sometimes He calls Himself a shepherd and says, "I am the good Shepherd," in John 10:11. By a metaphor taken from shepherds, who lead sheep, this… [continues online] **read ›**

**Tertullian**, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 16–19*

**16** *Apology* 39 (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 3** “tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honour not by purchase, but by established character… [continues online] **read ›**

**17** *De Fuga in Persecutione* 11 **Quote 14, page 6** the common people will hope to persuade others to stand firm in the battle? Certainly, a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, according to the word of… [continues online] **read ›**

**18** *On Baptism* 17 (1885 English; on point 2) “giving it, the chief priest (who is the bishop) has the right: in the next place, the presbyters and deacons, yet not without the bishop's authority, on account of… [continues online] **read ›**

**19** *De Fuga in Persecutione* 13 (1885 English; on point 8) “the apostles, with so much foresight, make the office of overseer of this type, that the occupants might be able to enjoy their rule free from anxiety, under color of… [continues online] **read ›**

**Origen**, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 20–21*

**20** *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (on point 3) the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded," 1 Timothy 3:1-2, and so on. And about deacons he says, "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife… [continues online] **read ›**

**21** *Against Celsus* 75 **Quotes 6, 8, pages 3, 4** “if those who govern in the Church, and are called rulers of the divine nation—that is, the… [continues online] **read ›**

**Cyprian**, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 22–31*

**22** *Epistles* (on point 3) up with the arrogance and stupidity of swollen pride. He has always been known there among the bishops by a bad reputation. He has always been condemned by the judgment… [continues online] **read ›**

**23** *Epistles* (on point 1) lies of malicious people and slanderers, but from the judgment of the Lord God, who made him a bishop, and from the testimony of his fellow bishops, whose whole number… [continues online] **read ›**

**24** *Epistles* (1885 English) **Quote 10, page 5** “which reason it happens of necessity among us, that year by year we, the elders and prelates, assemble together to arrange those matters which are committed to our care, so… [continues online] **read ›**

**25** *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 7) “certainly behooves those over whom we are placed not to run about nor to break up the harmonious agreement of the bishops with their crafty and deceitful rashness, but there… [continues online] **read ›**

**26** *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 6) “this is suitable to the modesty and the discipline, and even the life of all of us, that the chief officers meeting together with the clergy in the presence also… [continues online] **read ›**

**27** *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 6) “that an assembly for counsel being gathered together, with bishop, presbyters, deacons, and confessors, as well as with the laity who stand fast, we should deal with the case of… [continues online] **read ›**

**28** *Epistles* (on point 2) Lord, whose commands and warnings we ought to keep, describes the honor of a bishop and the order of His Church in the Gospel. He says to Peter: “I say… [continues online] **read ›**

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**29** *Epistles* (on point 7) to the priest, and the flock that holds fast to its pastor. Therefore you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop… [continues online] **read ›**

**30** *Epistles* (on point 8) “it is the duty of those placed over them to keep the… [continues online] **read ›**

**31** *Epistles* (on point 1) 10:30. Bringing His Church into that unity, He says again, "And there shall be one flock and one shepherd," John 10:16. But if the flock is one, how… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Apostolic Constitutions**, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 32–41*

**32** *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 9, page 4** “for a good shepherd, let the lay person honor him, love him, and respect him as his lord, as his master, as the high priest of God, and as a… [continues online] **read ›**

**33** *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 2) vestries on both sides at the east end, and then it will be like a ship. In the middle let the bishop's throne be placed, and on each side… [continues online] **read ›**

**34** *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 1) “if there be occasion for him, he must be ordained a bishop, or a presbyter, or a deacon… [continues online] **read ›**

**35** *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 2) the canons, I also make this constitution. A bishop gives the blessing, but does not receive the blessing. He lays on hands, ordains, offers, and receives the blessing from bishops… [continues online] **read ›**

**36** *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 3) a one a bishop ought to be, who has been the husband of one wife… [continues online] **read ›**

**37** *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 3) have already said, that a bishop, a presbyter, and a deacon, when they are constituted, must be but once married, whether their wives be alive or whether they be dead… [continues online] **read ›**

**38** *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 1) “command that a bishop be ordained by three bishops, or at least by two. But it is not lawful for him to be placed over you by one bishop alone… [continues online] **read ›**

**39** *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 8) “in the like manner a presbyter and a deacon… [continues online] **read ›**

**40** *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 2) now the deacon is to you what Aaron was, and the bishop what Moses was. If, therefore, Moses was called a god by the Lord, let the bishop be honored… [continues online] **read ›**

**41** *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 1) “A presbyter by one bishop, as also a deacon, and the rest of the clergy” **read ›**

### **Archelaus**, *c. 270–300 AD · source 42*

**42** *Disputation with Manes* 1 “further, that best master-builder of His, Paul himself, has laid our foundation, that is, the foundation of the Church, and has put us… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Peter of Alexandria**, *c. 300–311 AD · source 43*

**43** *Canonical Epistle* (on point 8) pay the heavier penalty of losing, as far as he is concerned, the flock of which he was appointed shepherd by the great and chief Shepherd and High Priest. But… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Anonymous** · *source 44*

**44** *Treatise Against the Heretic Novatian* 1 (on point 8) intent to destroy the flock of Christ? As we read in Zechariah: “Look, I am raising up a shepherd in the land who will not care for what has gone… [continues online] **read ›**

### **Clement of Rome** · *sources 45–48*

**45** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English) **Quotes 2, 11, pages 2, 5** “are of opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole Church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of… [continues online] **read ›**

**46** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 1, page 2** “Thus, preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits of… [continues online] **read ›**

**47** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English) **Quote 12, page 5** “ye did all things without respect of persons, and walked in the commandments of God, being obedient to those who had the rule over you, and giving all fitting honour… [continues online] **read ›**

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**48** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1885 English; on point 7) us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us; let us esteem those who have the rule over us… [continues online] **read ›**

## THE BIBLE *92 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

**49** **Exodus 18:21** And you yourself select able men from all the people, God-fearing, righteous men who hate arrogance, and set them over the people as captains of thousands, captains of hundreds, captains of fifties, and captains of tens. **read ›**

**50** **Exodus 24:14** And they said to the elders, “Stay quietly here until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; if anyone has a case to be judged, let him go to them.” **read ›**

**51** **Leviticus 4:15** The elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the calf before the Lord, and they shall slaughter the calf before the Lord. **read ›**

**52** **Leviticus 16:32** The priest whom they anoint, and whose hands they consecrate to serve as priest after his father, shall make atonement; he shall put on the linen garment, the holy garment. **read ›**

**53** **Leviticus 21:10** And the high priest among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured, and who has been consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor tear his garments; **read ›**

**54** **Numbers 11:16** Then the Lord said to Moses, “Gather to me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you yourself know to be elders of the people and their scribes; and bring them to the tabernacle of witness, and they shall stand there with you. **read ›**

**55** **Numbers 11:24** So Moses went out and spoke the words of the Lord to the people; and he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and set them all around the tabernacle. **read ›**

**56** **Numbers 27:16** “Let the Lord God of the spirits and of all flesh select a man over this congregation, **read ›**

**57** **Numbers 27:17** who shall go out before them and who shall come in before them, who shall lead them out and who shall bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep that have no shepherd.” **read ›**

**58** **Deuteronomy 20:9** And when the scribes have finished speaking to the people, they shall appoint commanders of the army to lead the people. **read ›**

**59** **1 Chronicles 9:13** and their brothers, heads of the houses of their families, one thousand seven hundred and sixty, mighty men of valor for the work of the service of the house of God. **read ›**

**60** **2 Chronicles 31:16** besides the offspring of the males from three years old and upward, to every one who entered the house of the Lord, by a daily account, for ministry in the daily courses of their arrangement. **read ›**

**61** **Ezra 1:2** “Thus says Cyrus king of the Persians: The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he himself has charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judea. **read ›**

**62** **Ezra 7:2** the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, **read ›**

**63** **Ezra 9:4** Then everyone who followed the word of the God of Israel gathered to me because of the faithlessness of the exiles; and I sat still in silence until the evening sacrifice. **read ›**

**64** **Proverbs 8:15** By me kings reign, and rulers write decrees of righteousness. **read ›**

**65** **Proverbs 14:19** The evil will fall before the good, and the ungodly will wait at the doors of the righteous. **read ›**

**66** **Proverbs 14:35** A servant with understanding is acceptable to a king, and by his good conduct he removes dishonor. **read ›**

**67** **Isaiah 15:3** Wrap yourselves in sackcloth in her squares, and lament on her rooftops and in her lanes; all of you, wail with weeping. **read ›**

**68** **Isaiah 40:11** Like a shepherd he will shepherd his flock, and with his arm he will gather the lambs, and he will comfort those that are with young. **read ›**

**69** **Jeremiah 23:1** Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of their pasture! **read ›**

**70** **Jeremiah 23:2** Therefore thus says the Lord against those who shepherd my people: You have scattered my sheep and driven them out, and you have not cared for them; behold, I will take vengeance on you according to your evil practices. **read ›**

**71** **Jeremiah 23:4** And I will raise up shepherds for them, who will shepherd them; and they will no longer fear or be dismayed, says the Lord. **read ›**

**72** **Ezekiel 24:2** Son of man, write down for yourself a day, from this day on which the king of Babylon leaned against Jerusalem, from this very day. **read ›**

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73 **Ezekiel 34:2** Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: O shepherds of Israel, do shepherds feed themselves? Do not the shepherds feed the sheep? **read ›**

74 **Ezekiel 34:9** therefore, O shepherds, **read ›**

75 **Amos 9:2** If they hide themselves in Hades, from there my hand shall drag them up; and if they go up to heaven, from there I will bring them down. **read ›**

76 **Obadiah 1:1** The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God to Idumea: I have heard a report from the Lord, and he has sent out a summons to siege among the nations: “Arise, and let us rise up against her to war.” **read ›**

77 **Micah 7:14** Shepherd your people with your rod, the sheep of your inheritance, dwelling by themselves in a forest in the midst of Carmel; they will graze the land of Bashan and the land of Gilead, as in the days of old. **read ›**

78 **1 Esdras 1:2** having set the priests in their robes by their daily courses in the temple of the Lord. **read ›**

79 **1 Esdras 1:10** And when these things had been done, the priests and the Levites stood in good order, **read ›**

80 **1 Esdras 5:39** When the record of the descent of these men was sought in the register and was not found, they were excluded from serving as priests. **read ›**

81 **1 Esdras 5:40** And Nehemiah and Attharias told them not to share in the holy things until a high priest should arise clothed with the Manifestation and the Truth. **read ›**

82 **1 Esdras 7:2** supervised the holy works very carefully, working together with the elders of the Jews and the temple officials. **read ›**

83 **1 Esdras 8:46** commanding them to speak to Loddaeus and his brothers and the treasurers at that place, to send us men to serve as priests in the house of our Lord. **read ›**

84 **1 Esdras 9:4** and that whoever did not come within two or three days, according to the judgment of the ruling elders, should have his cattle given over to the temple, and he himself should be cut off from the multitude of the captivity. **read ›**

85 **Wisdom of Solomon 9:2** and by your wisdom formed man, to have dominion over the creatures made by you, **read ›**

86 **Wisdom of Sirach 1:1** Since many great things have been given to us through the Law and the Prophets and the others who followed after them, for which Israel ought to be praised for its instruction and wisdom; and since not only must those who read become knowledgeable themselves, but lovers of learning must also be able to be of use to those outside, both by speaking and by writing: my grandfather Jesus, having given himself more and more to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our fathers, and having gained considerable skill in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom, so that lovers of learning, having become devoted to these things as well, might make still greater progress by living according to the law. You are urged, therefore, to read with goodwill and attention, and to be forgiving wherever, despite our diligent labor in translating, we may seem to fall short in some of the expressions; for what is said in Hebrew does not have the same force when it is brought over into another language. And not only these things, but the Law itself and the prophecies and the rest of the books differ not a little when they are spoken in their own language. For in the thirty-eighth year, in the reign of King Euergetes, having come into Egypt and stayed there some time, I found a copy of no small instruction; and I myself thought it most necessary to apply some diligence and labor to the translation of this book, bringing much watchfulness and skill to it in that space of time, in order to complete the book and publish it also for those living abroad who wish to love learning, preparing their character beforehand to live according to the law. All wisdom is from the Lord, and is with him forever. **read ›**

87 **Wisdom of Sirach 7:14** Do not babble in a multitude of elders, and do not repeat a word in your prayer. **read ›**

88 **Wisdom of Sirach 8:9** Do not miss the talk of the elders, for they themselves learned from their fathers; because from them you will learn understanding, and how to give an answer in time of need. **read ›**

89 **Wisdom of Sirach 10:20** Among brothers their leader is honored, and those who fear the Lord in his eyes. **read ›**

90 **Wisdom of Sirach 37:23** A wise man will instruct his own people, and the fruits of his understanding are trustworthy. **read ›**

91 **Wisdom of Sirach 44:4** leaders of the people by their counsels, and by understanding of the people’s learning; wise words were in their instruction; **read ›**

92 **Susanna 1:34** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

93 **Susanna 1:50** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

94 **1 Maccabees 2:65** And behold, Simeon your brother—I know that he is a man of counsel; listen to him always; he shall be a father to you. **read ›**

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95 **1 Maccabees 3:55** After this Judas appointed leaders of the people, commanders of thousands and of hundreds and of fifties and of tens. **read ›**

96 **1 Maccabees 8:15** And they have made a senate house for themselves, and every day three hundred and twenty counselors deliberate continually about the people, to keep them in good order; **read ›**

97 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

98 **1 Maccabees 14:35** The people saw Simon’s deeds and the glory he planned to bring to his nation, and they made him their leader and high priest, because he had done all these things, and for the righteousness and the faithfulness he had kept toward his nation, and because he sought in every way to exalt his people. **read ›**

99 **1 Maccabees 14:38** And King Demetrius confirmed him in the high priesthood accordingly, **read ›**

100 **4 Maccabees 15:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

101 **1 Enoch 89:18** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

102 **1 Enoch 89:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

103 **1 Enoch 89:22** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

104 **1 Enoch 89:29** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

105 **1 Enoch 89:33** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

106 **1 Enoch 89:35** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

107 **1 Enoch 89:36** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

108 **1 Enoch 89:45** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

109 **1 Enoch 89:49** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

110 **1 Enoch 89:53** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

111 **1 Enoch 89:59** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

112 **1 Enoch 89:65** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

113 **1 Enoch 90:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

114 **1 Enoch 90:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

115 **1 Enoch 90:22** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

116 **Luke 11:4** And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’” **read ›**

117 **Luke 11:16** Others, testing him, sought from him a sign from heaven. **read ›**

118 **Acts 3:2** A man lame from his mother’s womb was being carried. They laid him daily at the temple gate called Beautiful to ask alms from those entering the temple. **read ›**

119 **Acts 3:14** But you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, **read ›**

120 **Acts 9:14** Here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” **read ›**

121 **Acts 14:23** They appointed elders for them in every church and, after prayer with fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. **read ›**

122 **Acts 15:22** Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brothers. **read ›**

123 **Acts 20:17** From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and summoned the elders of the church. **read ›**

124 **Romans 3:15** their feet are swift to shed blood; **read ›**

125 **1 Corinthians 12:28** God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, and kinds of tongues. **read ›**

126 **1 Timothy 3:1** The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a good work. **read ›**

127 **1 Timothy 3:2** The bishop therefore must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, orderly, hospitable, able to teach; **read ›**

128 **1 Timothy 3:4** one who rules his own house well, having children in subjection with all reverence; **read ›**

129 **1 Timothy 3:12** Let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. **read ›**

130 **1 Timothy 3:13** For those who have served well gain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in faithfulness in Christ Jesus. **read ›**

131 **1 Timothy 5:17** Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching. **read ›**

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**132** **1 Timothy 5:19** Do not receive an accusation against an elder except at the word of two or three witnesses. **read ›**

**133** **Titus 1:5** I left you in Crete for this reason, that you would set in order the things that were lacking and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you— **read ›**

**134** **Titus 1:7** For a bishop must be blameless as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for dishonest gain, **read ›**

**135** **Titus 2:2** that older men be temperate, dignified, sober-minded, sound in faithfulness, love, and perseverance; **read ›**

**136** **Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they watch on behalf of your souls, as those who will give account, that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be unprofitable for you. **read ›**

**137** **1 Peter 2:25** For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. **read ›**

**138** **1 Peter 5:1** I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings, and a partaker of the glory to be revealed: **read ›**

**139** **1 Peter 5:2** shepherd the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion, but voluntarily; not for dishonest gain, but willingly; **read ›**

**140** **1 Peter 5:3** not as lording it over those entrusted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock. **read ›**

## ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *92 verses, by reference*

*Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.*

**Exodus** 32:32

**1 Kings** 6:17

**Song of Solomon** 2:16

**Isaiah** 60:17 · 63:3 · 66:2

**Jeremiah** 1:5

**Matthew** 5:6 · 5:42 · 9:2 · 9:12 · 9:13 · 10:5 · 10:19 · 10:33 · 10:39 · 12:31 · 13:27 · 18:3 · 18:12 · 18:22 · 19:14 · 20:25 · 20:28 · 22:39 · 24:5

**Mark** 5:34 · 7:9 · 8:38 · 9:50 · 10:43

**Luke** 5:20 · 8:18 · 10:16 · 11:23 · 12:47 · 12:50 · 14:11 · 14:26 · 15:4 · 16:9 · 16:15 · 19:10 · 21:14

**John** 7:37 · 10:11 · 10:12 · 10:16 · 15:1 · 15:12 · 20:22 · 21:17

**Acts** 1:8 · 20:28 · 20:29

**Romans** 2:4

**1 Corinthians** 6:9 · 6:10 · 9:25 · 10:23 · 10:33 · 12:3 · 14:34

**Galatians** 1:10 · 2:17 · 3:27 · 5:16 · 6:7

**Ephesians** 4:2 · 4:27 · 6:4

**Philippians** 1:18 · 1:27 · 4:8

**1 Thessalonians** 5:12

**2 Thessalonians** 2:3 · 3:6

**1 Timothy** 2:4 · 3:6 · 3:8 · 5:9 · 5:21

**2 Timothy** 2:12 · 4:6

**Titus** 1:6

**James** 1:12

**1 Peter** 1:19 · 2:9 · 2:11

**1 John** 2:27

**Revelation** 2:5 · 3:12

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*Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.*

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “How did the early church govern itself through elders, and what made it work well?” on September 9, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

**Library only.** This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed above, with a link to read it.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY