

## Who Judges?

*I commanded your judges at that time: Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge rightly between a man and his brother or a foreign resident. Do not show partiality when rendering judgment; listen to small and great alike. Do not be intimidated by anyone, for judgment belongs to God. Bring me any case too difficult for you, and I will hear it. - Deuteronomy 1:16-17 HCSB*



When Kadosh Yisra'el (the Holy One of Israel<sup>1</sup>) told His people to appoint judges, He gave them very specific requirements. They were to be able to judge righteously, impartially and fearlessly.<sup>2</sup> Their goal was the establishment of justice and justice alone.

Since Hashem is so just that Justice is actually one of His names,<sup>3</sup> obviously the only possible way for the elders to be just was if they were themselves obedient to the Word of the Lord.<sup>4</sup> Further, it implies that the decisions of the elders can be considered valid and authoritative only if they conform to the principles and precepts presented in the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup>

The Scriptures also allow for the concept of a higher and lower court system. Those doctrinal issues too thorny for one elder may be referred to another more knowledgeable elder. Hopefully, the senior elder (generally referred to as the church's pastor) should have the best scriptural knowledge and be able to judge the matter.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, in order to be able to lead God's church, have oversight of what may at times be huge budgets and ministries, and judge all the intricacies of interpersonal conflict, an elder must have a certain amount of intelligence tempered by wisdom.<sup>7</sup> However, God's primary concern in the church's selection of elders is their character.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the issue of whether or not women may belong to the eldership, considering the numerous biblical examples of godly female leadership, we do not believe that the eldership is restricted to male believers. For instance, Miriam was a prophetess and worship leader placed on equal footing with Moses and Aaron by God.<sup>9</sup> Deborah was a prophetess and a judge who could command armies to march.<sup>10</sup> Junia was an apostle that Paul declared to be outstanding.<sup>11</sup> Philip's four daughters all were prophetesses.<sup>12</sup> Priscilla and her husband started a number of churches and taught an apostle.<sup>13</sup>

In view of these and many more practical examples, and Paul's proclamation of sexual equality in Christ,<sup>14</sup> we believe Paul's prohibition against women teachers<sup>15</sup> was that they should not "usurp" authority. They must not take authority to speak and teach in the church without submitting to the same character requirements that all the other elders have to.

For a more detailed study on the issue of the role of women in church ministry go to [www.fromthebible.net](http://www.fromthebible.net), click on the Topical Studies and turn to "Women, role in church".

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 19:22; Psalm 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isaiah 1:4; 5:19; 5:24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11-12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 48:17

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:16-17; 16:18-20; Psalm 58:1; 72:2, 4

<sup>3</sup> Yahweh Mishpat, Justice/Judgment; Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 30:18

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 3:9

<sup>5</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:12-13

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 1:16-17; 17:8-11

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 1:13

<sup>8</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 15:20; Micah 6:4

<sup>10</sup> Judges 4:4-8

<sup>11</sup> Romans 16:7

<sup>12</sup> Acts 21:8-9

<sup>13</sup> Acts 18:24-28; 1 Corinthians 16:19

<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:11-12; Galatians 3:28 cp Colossians 3:11

<sup>15</sup> 1 Timothy 2:12-14