

USHERING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

by Bill Scheidler

THE BIBLICAL BASIS

Every Believer has a calling into ministry in the Body of Christ. “Any act of Christian service which helps direct men and women into fellowship with Jesus Christ is a ministry.”

In the Old Testament Tabernacle of David (which is a type of the New Testament Church), there were four prominent ministries that functioned in relation to ministry in the house of God among the people of God. These ministries include ***the priests, the Levites, the singers and the porters (ushers)***. These four ministries are often mentioned together as if they were equally important (See: Ezra 2:42, 70; 7:7, 24, Nehemiah 7:1, 73; 10:28, 39).

The Ministry of Porters

The name ‘porter’ in the Hebrew means “a gatekeeper”. A word that is often associated with this ministry means “to hedge about, guard, protect, attend to”. While this ministry in the Old Testament was a “background-type” ministry, it was considered one of great importance for the service of the house of God. So important was this ministry that at times it was the leadership that was involved in this ministry (II Chronicles 23:4).

The ministry of the porter is described in detail in II Chronicles 9:19-32. It is here where we discover a great deal about this ministry. In relation to the Tabernacle:

- Porters were keepers of the door.
- Porters were 212 in number.
- Porters had to have a proper genealogy (in Christ).
- Porters had authority and oversight at the gates.
- Porters were stationed at all the doors (II Chronicles 8:14; 35:15).
- There were four chief porters.
- Porters were over the chambers (storehouses) and treasuries.
- Porters lived around the temple (proper life orientation).
- Porters opened things up every day.
- Porters had charge of the ministering vessels to bring them in and out.
- Porters were to oversee the vessels, instruments, flour, wine, oil and spices.
- Porters made the ointment.
- Porters were over the table of the Lord and prepared the Shewbread every Sabbath.

Other verses point out additional responsibilities:

- Porters were to make sure nothing unclean entered (II Chronicles 23:19).
- Porters were responsible for the gathering of money (II Chronicles 34:9; 31:14, II Kings 12:9-11; 22:4).
- Porters carried out the directives of the leadership (II Kings 23:4).

As can clearly be seen, the ministry of a porter was not a peripheral ministry. It was a very important one both in the Tabernacle of David (I Chronicles 15:18; 16:38, 42) and the

temple of Solomon (Note: The temple of Solomon had 4,000 porters). History tells us that this was a position of some dignity and honor (II Kings 25:18).

There was much care and detail given to this ministry. There was an official division of the porters (I Chronicles 26:1-19). The porters had to be consecrated and separated like all the other ministries (Nehemiah 13:22).

In the New Testament

In the New Testament Jesus seems to have used His disciples occasionally in the function of ushers.

- They prepared the way for His coming at certain places.
- They introduced people to Him.
- They directed people to Him who came with different needs.
- They seated the people when Jesus so desired.
- They helped in the distribution of food to the multitudes.

The Importance of Ushers

There are four reasons why the ministry of ushering needs to have an important place in the local church.

1. The usher is often the first official representative of Jesus Christ seen by the people entering the building or auditorium.
2. The usher is able to minister to individuals.

Preachers, teachers and musicians minister to people in groups while ushers minister to people as individuals. A spirit-directed word of encouragement, reassurance or kindness may be the most significant ministry some people receive in their entire church attendance experience.

3. The usher is the only person whose functions cannot be replaced or omitted.
 - At times preaching may be omitted in an unusual move of the Spirit.
 - At times classes can be dismissed.
 - At times the choir may not sing.
 - BUT at all times the ushers must be on duty to maintain order in the assembly.
4. The usher is a forerunner.

It is his or her attitude that will play a big part in preparing the hearts of people for their whole experience in the House of the Lord.