

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bible-student\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php)

# BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS

H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

## The Organization of Society (*contd.*)

### Justice

In a society ruled by custom and precedent where change came slowly the chief task of the *zegenim* was the administration of justice. The side of law that is most before the public mind today is criminal law, and common law is ever increasingly being displaced by statute law. It is questionable whether one can speak of criminal proceedings in ancient Israel and statute law was at the most rudimentary. Passages like Dt. 13:9, 17:7 make it clear that offences which we should consider to be against the state were always primarily against the individual and local community.

In a community all of whose adult members knew the law, where the problem was to establish the facts and not to quibble about ancient statutes, and where the rich and strong could generally be relied on to look after their own interests, most of the cases that would come before the elders would be such where the weak in the community were threatened with wrong. Note that in Job 29 it is his actions as judge that are stressed (vv. 11-17) and that in his intervention for the weak.

*shapat*, translated almost invariably 'to judge', really means 'to decide between'. So more often than not the *shopet* (judge) was nearer the modern jurymen than the modern judge. The facts having been settled the verdict would be pronounced according to the general principles of the Law of Moses. It is questionable whether we can speak of punishment at all, it is rather satisfaction to the injured party, whether God or man.

We can hardly quote Dt. 16:18 against the view expressed of justice by the local elders. *shoter* (officer) is a word whose exact meaning it is hard to fix. Here and 1 Chr. 23:4, 26:29 it stands parallel to *shopet*, in Num. 11:16 to *zagen* and in Dt. 1:15, 1 Chr. 27:1 to *sar* (prince or captain). Since etymologically it seems linked with the concept of 'scribe', it is likely that *shoter* simply stresses the organizational side. In that case Dt. 16:18 is merely stressing the need for organized society, especially in the aspect where it was most needed, justice between man and man.

Normally the local priest or Levite would be simply one of the *zeqenim*, but there were occasions, when reference would have to be made to him. In Ex. 22:7 ff. we are dealing with a case where the facts cannot be established; it is brought to God (RV correctly as against AV). The priest would establish the facts by lot or oath. This is the position envisaged in Dt. 19:15-19.

One reason why the prophets denounced landgrabbing, e.g., Am. 2:7; Is. 5:8, Mic. 2:2, and link it with injustice, is that it both automatically lessened the number of *zeqenim* in a community and gave these rich landowners a virtual control of justice, when charges were made against them.

The great weakness of the judicial system sketched is that its authority stretched no further than the community itself. In practice there was probably before the setting up of the monarchy sufficient coherence within a tribe to guarantee that in a quarrel between two men from communities within the same tribe the matter would be settled either by the elders of the two communities concerned, or by the tribal elders (outstanding men from the various communities in the tribe). The latter will have been particularly accessible at the great pilgrimage festivals. (Whatever the correct interpretation of the law of the central sanctuary, it is certain that *one* sanctuary, as in New Testament times, did not exist until the reformation of Josiah). The tragic story in Jdg. 19-21 illustrates how difficult it might be to obtain justice, if the offender were a member of another tribe. Doubtless, however, in normal times inter-tribal quarrels were settled at the amphictyonic sanctuary at Shiloh at the great festivals there.

The judicial functions of the king will probably have lain predominantly in the field of those cases that could not be dealt with locally. Note that as local justice began to become uncertain Jehoshaphat not only set up a central court in Jerusalem, doubtless to relieve the burden on himself, but also local courts in the main towns to counteract the uncertain justice of the big landowners (2 Chr. 19:4-11). 2 Sa. 14:3-11 shows that the king exercised a certain appellate jurisdiction, though it is to be noted that the woman claimed to be appealing from the action of her family, not from the decision of the local elders. As a purely family matter

it would not have been brought before them. This appellate power derived above all from his position as Jehovah's delegate and representative. Jehovah is not only the judge of all the world (Gen. 18:25), but also the supreme court of appeal of all that are wronged and have none on earth to help (Ex. 22:21-24, 26f). Though we often miss it, much of the language of the psalms in its cry for help is the cry for help to the judge of the wronged; Ps. 7 is as good an example as any, vv. 3ff. being a regular type of protestation of not guilty, cf. Job 31.

The title *shopet* given to rulers in Israel between Joshua and Saul derives from the fact that *shapat* means not only to decide between but also to help a person to his right. The *shopetim* helped Israel to its right, when it was oppressed by its enemies. Doubtless after they had delivered Israel they were constantly turned to because of their influence and because they had shown that God's spirit was on them to 'judge' in cases that could not be settled within a community.

#### The Unprivileged

Those who depended on the *zeqenim* for their rights were first of all the dependent members of their families, wife, children, slaves. It could be assumed that the family heads would care for them. There were in addition the hired servant (*sakir*), cf. Vol. XXVI p. 183 and Dt. 24:14f, the widow (*'almanah*) and the orphan (*yatom*), and the *ger*. Although *'almanah* and *yatom* mean precisely what their equivalents do in English, it is quite clear that whenever they are used in contexts like Ex. 22:22 or 1 King 17:9, it implies that for some reason or another they could not claim the help of any recognized family of position in the community. Normally the widow could either return to her old home or be taken into the family of a brother-in-law; equally her children could rely on the care of an uncle. There was doubtless nothing exceptional in the behaviour of Boaz to Naomi and Ruth. The price of the purchase of their land (Ruth 4:3ff) was doubtless their maintenance for the rest of their life. The gradual breakdown of society under the monarchy and the large-scale alienation of men's property will steadily have increased the number of the unprivileged in the average community.

The *ger* stands in Ex. 22:21 for all who have no prescriptive right to be in the community at all. The foreigner was the *nokri* or the *nekar* both normally translated strange or stranger. This is a pity, for not only are expressions like 'strange gods' or 'strange woman' (Pr. 6:24, etc.) misleading in modern English, but it prevents a distinction being made with *zar*, which means a stranger, but not necessarily a foreigner, e.g. Ex. 29:33, Lev. 22:10,13, where non-members of a priestly family are meant, cf. Num. 16:40, 1 Ki. 3:18, Job 19:15. Moffatt and RSV (with the strange exception of Dt. 31:16) translate *nokri* and *nekar* foreigner and alien, etc., and deal with *zar* according to the context. In Proverbs they regard these words as terms of abuse for a harlot and translate accordingly. There is nothing in the Law about the treatment of the alien, for he had no right to enter the country without a promise of safe transit.

But there were certain categories of foreigners who had a right to be in the country. Ex. 12:45 is proof that the *sakir* (hired labourer) was often a non-Israelite, for there can be no question of an Israelite who hired out his labour being debarred from the Passover. The other categories are the '*ezrach*, *toshab* and *ger*.

'*ezrach*' is translated by 'homeborn' (RV) or 'native' (RSV, Moffatt). It is almost always used in close linkage with *ger* and is traditionally interpreted as a name of honour for the Israelite in contrast to the foreigner who has been allowed to settle in the land. It is, however, almost impossible to interpret it so in Jos. 8:33, and in Ex. 12:49, Lev. 16:29, 17:15, 18:26, 19:34, 23:42; 24:16, 22, Num. 15:13, 29, 30 there is no compulsion to render it in the traditional sense. The only passage where this must hold is Ezek. 47:22. It seems probable that '*ezrach*' refers to non-Israelites who had a right to live in the land because they had been born there. This right involved their keeping Israelite law in its entirety and they were therefore entitled to its full protection. The members of the Gibeonite tetrapolis (Jos. 9:17) were doubtless in this category 2 Sa. 21:4 (RV) shows that after several centuries that had not obtained the status of full citizens. It is likely that the son or grandson of the *toshab* would become legally an '*ezrach*', though *ger* seems to have been the popular term for any resident alien.

Linguistically there is no great difference between *ger* and *toshab* and we can only distinguish between them by usage. The latter is one who settles down in a strange place (root *yashab*, to sit down), the former is one who moves to another place and lives there on toleration without full citizen rights. *ger* can be used popularly of the traveller in Job 31:32 (there is no suggestion that he is a foreigner). In Jdg. the verb *gur* is used of an Ephraimite living in Benjamin, and it is used of Levites in Jdg. 17:7ff., 19:1, note the linking of the Levite with the underprivileged in Dt. 16:11 etc. The Beerothites (2 Sa. 4:3) became continual *gerim* by their move to another community, where they were allowed to settle.

Though AV, RV normally render *gur* by 'to sojourn', consequently they prefer 'stranger' for *ger*; RSV has normally the more logical 'sojourner', though in some combinations 'stranger'. Moffatt has no standard rendering, though he inclines to '(resident) alien'. We have in fact no satisfactory rendering. The three qualities implied by *ger* are that he is from another community (Israelite or non-Israelite), that he has settled in his new community by permission, and that he is not a full citizen. If he was a non-Israelite, he was permitted to become a member of the Israelite religious community (Ex. 12:48), and he doubtless normally did. As a result in the New Testament period *ger* was a common term for the proselyte, and it is often so translated in LXX. The number of *gerim* must have been considerable; Canaanites, freed slaves, men who had made their own community too hot for them and foreign labourers will have accounted for the bulk of them.

With the exception of Lev. 22:10, very well rendered by Moffatt 'one lodging with a priest', and Ex. 12:45, Lev. 25:40, where the context makes the meaning clear, *toshab* is always linked with *ger*. It may have had another nuance now lost, but there seems little doubt that it makes clear that the *ger* is in fact an alien. It is a pity that AV, RV, RSV, however etymologically correct, agree in rendering *toshab* by 'sojourner' which gives a completely false impression. Moffatt normally uses 'foreigner'. Note the use of *ger* and *toshab* in Lev. 25:23, 1 Chr. 29:15, Ps. 39:12.

The remarkable level of justice demanded for the *ger*, both foreign and Israelite, is shown by the demand in Lev. 25:35, 40 that the Israelite who has fallen on evil days shall be treated as generously as the *ger*, the *toshab* and the *sakir*.

(To be Continued)

## ‘THINE IS THE KINGDOM, THE POWER AND THE GLORY’

J. H. TODD

In the prayer given by our Lord to His disciples in Matthew 6, the above words form the doxology. The phrase is omitted in the Revised Version as it is not found in several MSS. Embodied as it is in the Authorized Version it has certainly some authority, and seeing that we do not intend to deal with it critically but rather to recognize in it a message to the individual believer, we will take it as belonging to the text.

A close study of the Scriptures convinces one that not only are the words of the Sacred Writings inspired and so given by God, but also that the very order in which they are found is of God. The structure of the Bible is Divine, each book having its own particular plan, and place, and divisions. And just as surely as the words are of God so is the arrangement of them. In the doxology before us the order of the words is not only significant but necessary; and in noticing the message each word brings, it is the order that we desire to emphasize.

### ‘Thine is the Kingdom’

We acknowledge that this prayer will have a very real fulfilment in the coming kingdom of the Lord, and that its primary interpretation concerns Israel. Every clause in it, however, may be applied to the believer in a spiritual way, and it is this application that we wish to set forth.

The kingdom must come first before there can be the realization of the power of the King, and it is the manifesting of His power that brings glory to Him. A kingdom means authority