

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 Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

OFFICERS.

THE officers of the children of Israel, mentioned in Exodus v. as being under the taskmasters of Pharaoh, are called *shoterim*. Now *satarā* is "to write" in Arabic, and the *shoterim* are simply mentioned as if they were elders or heads of clans. Yet, if the circumstances be well considered, they were really scribes, for the Septuagint calls them in all the passages, whether in the Pentateuch, in Joshua, or in Chronicles, *γραμματεῖς*; the taskmasters are in LXX. *ἐργοδιῶκται*, "work-drivers." The sense attached by the Septuagint translators may be judged of from the Athenian *γραμματεῖς*. These were certainly scribes who were appointed by the senate to keep the public records and the decrees passed by the public assembly, as well as to deliver the decrees of the senate to the six Thesmothetæ or legislators who sat in the supreme council, presided over by the archons. The scribes at Rome kept the public accounts, copied out laws, and recorded the proceedings of the public functionaries. They formed companies of ten, and were employed by the quæstor, or treasurer; by the ædiles, who had charge of temples, streets, and public buildings; and by the prætors, who, in the absence of the consul, governed the city, or led the army, as the case might be.

On account of the elliptical character of the Hebrew histories, which never profess to give a complete and exhaustive narrative, the *shoterim* disappear after the time of the Pentateuch and of Joshua till they occur again in the Books of Chronicles. Still without change the word "officers" is used in the English translations.¹ The Septuagint, however, holds to the word scribe, *γραμματεῖς*, or else the verb *γραμματεύειν* is used—act as a scribe. The reason would be

¹ The Bishops' Bible has "overseers" in Chronicles.

twofold. The translators residing at Alexandria would be familiar with the office and duties of scribes in Greek cities. They would also be aware that *shatar* meant to write as a verb, and scribe as a noun. The Syriac rendering shows that this was the case, for it is *sofro*, the same with the Hebrew סֵפֶר, *sefer*, book. This is sufficient proof that *shatar*, so favourite a word in the Pentateuch, really means scribe, though translated officer. The versions of Aquila, about A.D. 120, and of Symmachus, with the Samaritan, also favour the name scribe. In Numbers xvi. *shoterim* are among the seventy elders who were appointed by Divine command, and who received a portion of the Spirit of God in order that they might be competent to share the work of Moses in judging causes. In Deuteronomy xvi. 18 Israel is commanded to appoint judges and officers in every city throughout all the tribes, that they might judge the people with righteous judgment. When Israel went out to fight, it was these officers who were commanded to announce to the faint-hearted that they should not proceed to the battlefield for fear of spreading the contagion of fear. They also proclaimed that the newly married, and those who had recently built a house, or planted a vineyard, were excused from service in the army. In Joshua the *shoterim* are staff officers who communicate the orders of the general to the army on its march. They helped in the passage of the Jordan, telling the people to follow the ark at a distance of 2,000 feet. Having such information regarding the *shoterim* and their duties, we read with great interest in 1 Chronicles that in chap. xxvi. 29 they were Levites appointed in the cities of Israel to manage in conjunction with the judges, who were also Levites, matters belonging not to the temple, but to outward business. Both judges and officers were of the family of Izhar, whose elder brother was Amram, the father of Moses and Aaron. Both the judges (*shofetim*) and the officers (*shoterim*) were Levites in the time of King

David. We are told in 1 Chronicles xxiii. 4 that, while there were 24,000 Levites to oversee the work of the house of the Lord, there were 6,000 officers and judges. These 6,000 magistrates were the old scribes of Egyptian days, who by legislative changes have become limited to the tribe of Levi. This we learn from the rich genealogical stores of the first book of Chronicles. That is a post-exilic book made up from records taken to Babylon at the captivity. The King of Babylon and his officers prized books, and were glad to have them go, because libraries were one of the fundamental institutions of the Babylonish monarchy. For two thousand years they had been students of books. The book of Daniel tells us of what a noble eloquence the Chaldee language was capable as the result of these long continued studies in astronomical science and rhetoric. Palestine, too, was a land where genealogy had been assiduously cultivated. The tribal constitution, the Levitical laws and family pride, were concurring causes which forced the people to pay great attention to their genealogies. The Chronicles are in large part made up of genealogical histories, partly royal and partly belonging to the chief families of Israel, especially the Levites. This explains the allusions to the officers or *shoterim* in 1 Chronicles. So great are the historical omissions of the Hebrew Bible, that the *shoterim* are mentioned nowhere in Judges, in the books of Samuel and Kings, or in the Prophets. Only once in Proverbs vi. 7 does the word occur: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no judge, officer,¹ or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." At that time the scribes of ancient times had become officers, and another class of scribes had grown up in Israel whose name is allied etymologically to the word *sepher*, book. The new scribes of the time of the Hagiographa were "book-men."

¹ Bishops' Bible, "governor." In A. V. and R. V., "overseer."

The old scribes of the Egyptian domination were officers or overseers.

In the New Testament in the Sermon on the Mount we have the *shofetim* and the *shoterim* mentioned again by our Lord himself. The *κριτής* is the *shofet*, and the *ὑπηρέτης* is the *shoter*. "Lest the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." Great severity marked the administration of the provincial courts of Palestine in the time of our Lord. The judge and the officer are both here. It is the same court of twenty-three that had so long existed in the land.

JOSEPH EDKINS.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

WHEN we compare the theology of the Fourth Gospel with that of the others, there are three passages in the Synoptic Gospels that attract especial attention, and are often referred to in this connexion. They are Matthew xi. 25-30, "At that time Jesus answered," etc.; Matthew xiii. 16, 17, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see," etc.; Luke x. 21-24, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit," etc.

The tone of these passages bears a striking resemblance to that of the Fourth Gospel, and they are often cited as showing that the theology of the Synoptics is, after all, the same as the Johannine. This, however, is not exactly what they prove. The very fact that they are so unanimously selected for comparison with the Fourth Gospel shows that their resemblance to it is peculiar to them, and distinguishes them from the other Synoptic matter. They are apparently fragments derived from some earlier source, different from those which supplied the rest of the Synoptic material, and