

## Justice (Elders at the Gate) Ecclesiastes 12:11

The Words of the wise *are* as goads, and as nails fastened *by* the masters of assemblies, *which* are given from one shepherd.



In the Eastern countries, there are three kinds of justice available. There are the judges, the Elders at the Gate, and the daysman. Now we will focus on the Elders at the Gate.

Elders at the Gate, sometimes called the masters of assemblies, are a local type of justice for each village. The name comes from the Sanskrit word "panchayat". These elders are elected. They are the "government of the people, by the people and for the people", so described many centuries ago in India before Abraham Lincoln made this phrase a by-word on the lips of American school children. They sit in judgment on minor offenses which may arise.

In Ecclesiastes 12:11 there is a phrase referring to this type of justice:

The Words of the wise *are* as goads, and as nails fastened *by* the masters of assemblies, *which* are given from one shepherd.

"Word of the wise" always refers to the Word of God: Easterners say there is only one who is all-wise. "Goads" are the nails fastened at the end of a stick which the plowman uses to correct the oxen. If they go straight down the furrow, they are not touched, but if they stray from the right path, they are pricked with the goad.

The "nails fastened by the masters of assemblies" should be "spears". The nails go with the "goads" in the translation; the objects fastened by the masters of assemblies are

spears. When the place is built for the Elders to sit in judgment, the area is surrounded by a line of upright spears which are the traditional symbol of justice. These spears are brought into the judgment place by the shepherds from the surrounding areas; no shepherd may bring more than one or two spears so that all of them will be represented in the place of justice.

This verse is saying, however, that God's Word acts as a correction to us and His righteousness and justice are made available to us through one shepherd; Christ is the Good Shepherd through whom God's righteousness comes to us.

When complaints are brought before the Elders at the Gate the offender's name is placed at the top of a notice and his offense or the amount of his delinquent debt is written beneath and this is placed at the gates of the village for all who pass through to read.

When the debt has been repaid, or the wrong some how made right, the page is folded up double so that it is now hidden from the eyes of the public. This explains the puzzling phrase in Isaiah 40:2: "...for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins." Not a double measure, as some have thought, but folded double: hidden: forgiven as in the notice at the gates of the village when folded double.

Bishop K.C. Pillai, D.D.