ON THE MEANING OF ŚĀḌAQ

Jerome P. Justesen
Fresno, California

Among common words which a student of Hebrew encounters in his early studies belong those of the śāḍaq group, for they occur in various forms over five hundred times in the Old Testament.

The verb śāḍaq, “to be just, righteous” occurs 41 times, i.e. in Qal, 22 times; in Niph‘al, once; in Pi‘el, five times; in Hiph‘il, twelve times; and in Hithpa‘el, once. The adjective śaddiq, having 208 occurrences, is usually translated by either “just,” or “righteous.” The masculine noun śedeq, “righteousness” has 117 occurrences. It commonly stresses an abstract quality, as for example in Jer 23:6, “the Lord our righteousness.” Finally there is the feminine noun šedāqāh. While similar in meaning to śedeq, it often stresses more the active deed of righteousness, e.g. Gn 15:6 records that Abraham “believed the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Again, Is 64:6 reads, “all our righteousness (i.e. pious deeds, acts of virtue) are as filthy rags.” This word has 155 occurrences in the Old Testament.

From a study of Hebrew lexicons and English Bible translations it seems obvious that the general opinion is that the basic meaning underlying śāḍaq is simply to be “just” or “right.” Indeed, a study of śāḍaq in cognate languages tends to support this conclusion. While not occurring in Akkadian, this root is found in other Semitic languages.

Śāḍaq’s earliest cognate forms can be found as elements of Amorite personal names,1 but they give little conclusive evi-

---

dence as to its meaning. However, the Amarna Letter No. 287 contains the adjective *saduq* as a gloss meaning “right.” In this letter Abdiheba, the king of Jerusalem, claims that he is “right in respect to the Kaši-people.” The same adjective occurs with the meaning “the just one” in the Mari letters. In Ugaritic texts *sdq* occurs with the meaning “right,” or “uprightness.”

Aramaic inscriptions also have this root. The nouns מַדַּע, “loyalty,” and הָמַדְע, “righteousness” or “justice” can there be found. In Palmyrene the root *sdq* occurs with the meaning “godly, pious,” and in Nabataean it means “qualified, entitled.”

Phoenician texts use the verb מַדַּע in the active sense meaning “to be just,” and in the causative sense, “to vindicate,” the noun in the sense of “justice” or “legality,” and the adjective מַדַּע, which corresponds to Hebrew מַדַּע, in the sense of “just” and “righteous.” In Phoenician inscriptions מַדַּע occurs as “legitimate heir,” and מַדַּע תִּמְחֵר as “legitimate offspring.”

In South Arabic the verb means “to favor or endow.” The adjective “just, excellent” occurs as an epitaph of a king. In Classical Arabic *sdq* is a very common root. Its verb forms have a host of meanings, the basic ones being “to be truthful, sincere; to tell the truth; to prove true.” A variety of nouns derived from *sdq*, meaning “truth, sincerity,” can also be found.

---

Finally there is Ethiopic where this root word is also very common. The verb's simple form means "to be just," the causative "to declare just," and the passive, "to see oneself justified." Both the participle and the adjective mean "just, true," and the noun "justice" also occurs.  

Obviously the concept of šādaq implying "to be just" in the sense of being "true" or "right" is constant throughout the West Semitic and South Semitic languages. Certain Biblical passages also bear this idea out. Job 9:2 records the desperate cry, "How should a man be just with God?" Šādaq here clearly implies "to be in the right." Similarly the Hebrew phrase "balances of righteousness" in Lev 19:36 simply means right balances that would indicate true measure.  

Yet one wonders: Is this the only concept basic to šādaq? Surely in a root occurring over five hundred times there are more nuances of meaning than just this. A careful study of the context of each occurrence of this root as well as a comparison with each corresponding Septuagint passage indicates that there are.  

A concept that is evident even to the superficial reader is that šādaq has a definite forensic sense. The Hiph‘îl of the verb is used to describe the activity of a judge, or a king, dispensing justice from his throne. 2 Sa 15:4 tells that when Absalom revolted, he went to the gate and cried, "Oh that I were made a judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice (יְדֵי הָדוּשׁ)." Solomon prayed to God, "Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked . . . and justifying (יְדֵי הָדוּשׁ) the righteous." 10 Is 5:23 uses the verb to refer to unjust judges who acquit criminals for a bribe, and in ch. 50:8 it is used synonymously with the

---

10 1 Ki 8:32. Cf. also 2 Chr 6:23; Ex 23:7; Ps 82:3; Dt 25:1; also the usage of the Qal in Is 43:9.
verb ἰπζ “to contend or plead a lawsuit.” In Pr 17 : 15 the LXX translates the verb by κρίνω, “to judge.”

Of the 117 occurrences of the masculine noun σεδεq, 67 times (57 per cent) the root is used in some connection with jurisprudence. Of these 67 instances, it is used directly synonymous with judgment (ὑπ' ἴπζα) 6 times 11 and the KJV interestingly translates it “justice” 10 times. 12 In fact, the LXX translates σεδεq in Is 51 : 7 by κρίσις, “judgment.” Similarly, of the 155 occurrences of the feminine noun σεδαqάh, 45 times (29 per cent) the root is used in connection with jurisprudence. Ten of these instances have σεδαqάh synonymous with judgment 13 and in 14 places the KJV has appropriately rendered it “justice.” 14 Jer 51 : 10 has the reading κρίμα “judgment” in the LXX.

Closely joined to the concepts of righteousness and judgment in the Old Testament is the added concept of salvation. After deciding a case, the judge was supposed to go on to reward the innocent and punish the guilty. Thus he would bring salvation to the injured party. Watson agrees that Skinner’s remark is apropos here. He writes, “The word righteousness as applied to a judge denotes not merely the neutral impartial attitude of mind which decides fairly between rival interests. It denotes rather a positive energy on the side of the right.” 15 The righteous judge was expected to take the side of the innocent party and see that all was well with him. Thus eight times the noun righteousness is used synonymously with “salvation.” For example in Is 56 : 1 God

11 Job 8 : 3; 29 : 14; Ps 37 : 6; 73 : 2; Ec 3 : 16; Is 32 : 1.
12 Dt 16 : 20 (KJV margin); Job 8 : 3; Ps 17 : 1 (margin); 119 : 121; Pr 8 : 15; Ec 5 : 8; Is 58 : 2; 59 : 4; Jer 31 : 23; 50 : 7.
13 Ps 72 : 1; 106 : 3; Pr 8 : 20; Is 1 : 27; 5 : 16; 28 : 17; 32 : 16; 59 : 14; Amos 5 : 7, 24.
14 Gn 18 : 19; Dt 33 : 21; 2 Sa 8 : 15; 1 Ki 10 : 9; 1 Chr 18 : 14; 2 Chr 9 : 8; Job 37 : 23; Pr 21 : 3; Is 9 : 7; 56 : 1; 59 : 9, 14; Jer 22 : 15; Eze 45 : 9.
promised, "my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed." 16 Thus Watson concludes, "As used of God, the words of the ἴλασσα group approximate, especially in Judges, Deutero-Isaiah, and the Psalms, to the meanings, 'save', 'saving', 'salvation.'" 17

Again, ἱδαᾳq also is definitely associated with the concept of mercy. Ps 103:17 uses "righteousness" and "mercy" as parallel synonyms saying, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children." 18 The LXX renders ἱδαᾳqά by ἐλεος, "mercy," in three places, 19 and by ἐλημοσύνη "kind deeds, acts of mercy" in eight places. 20

Ḫiḏaḇ also when applied to God is often used to apply to the marvelous acts God does in behalf of His people. In Jgs 5:11, Deborah and Barak sing of God's righteousness, i.e. His marvelous acts in delivering them from the Canaanites. Samuel also uses this expression (1 Sa 12:7) referring to the marvelous benefits God had bestowed upon those who made a covenant with Him. Ps 88:12 uses righteousness synonymously with God's wonders, and Ps 145:7 makes ἱδαᾳqά parallel to God's great goodness.

Again, ἱḏaḇ is closely associated with the concept of ἱλόν, "material peace, wealth, prosperity." When God promised to vindicate Israel He promised to give them this type of peace. Isaiah wrote, "Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." 21 Elsewhere Isaiah says this type of peace shall be the outcome of righteousness. 22

Finally within the context of vindication is the concept of

16 Cf. also Ps 71:15; 98:2; Is 46:13; 51:6, 8; 59:16; 61:10.
17 Watson, loc. cit.
18 Cf. Hos 10:12; Ps 36:10 (KJV has "loving kindness" for "mercy"); 145:17 (KJV reads "holy" for "merciful").
19 Is 56:1; Eze 18:19, 21.
21 Is 48:18; cf. also 60:17; Ps 72:3.
22 Is 32:17.
a removal from sin. Is 53:11 reads, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify (Hiph‘îl of ḫôṣ) many, for he shall bear their iniquities." Here the Messiah shall make people sâddîq by removing (carrying away) their sins. In Gn 38:26 Judah says of Tamar, "She hath been more righteous than I," i.e. because of the levirate marriage laws, Tamar in her deception, was more free from guilt or sin than Judah in his lust. Later in Gn 44:16 Judah cries concerning the crime against Joseph, "How shall we clear ourselves?" i.e. how shall we remove our guilt. Obviously, therefore, something is made sâddîq when its sins or guilt are removed.

Similarly a "just" person then is one whose sin has been removed and who is therefore "free from sin." When occurring as an adjective, sâdîq thus often means a "just one," a "pious one," the antithesis of râšâ' a "wicked or lawless one." On several occasions the adjective sâddîq is translated in the LXX by εὐσεβής, "a devout, godly one." Within this frame of reference other concepts thus emerge. Sâdaq often implies the concepts of being perfect, innocent and morally pure. The following texts should be examined. Many of them take the form of identical synonymous parallelism where the second half of the line restates in exact synonyms the idea of the first half.

(1) Job 9:20. "If I justify (MT = ḫôṣ; LXX = δίκαιος) myself, my own mouth shall condemn me. If I say I am perfect (MT = ṣâdîq; LXX = ἁμεμπτος), it shall also prove me perverse." Here sâdaq is synonymous with tam which means completely perfect, morally innocent. The LXX interprets this as "blameless."

(2) Job 12:4. "The just upright (MT = ṣâdîq Ḫôṣ; LXX =

23 Cf. 1 Sa 24:17; Jer 3:11; Eze 16:51, 52.
24 Cf. Ps 1:5, 6; Pr 3:33; 10:3-32; 11:8-31; 12:3-36 etc. The LXX here makes the "just one," the antithesis of ἀσέβης, "the ungodly."
26 Abbreviation for "Masoretic Text."
δίκαιος ἁμεμπτός) man is laughed to scorn.’ Here the plural of tam is grammatically placed in apposition to the adjective ‘just’ and therefore synonymous with it.

(3) Ps 51:4. ‘That thou mightest be justified (MT = יְשָׁע; LXX = δίκαιόω) when thou speakest, and be clear (MT = נָל; LXX = νικάω) when thou judgest.’ Here šādaq is directly parallel to zākāh which means ‘to be pure, clean, innocent.’

(4) Job 15:14. ‘What is man that he should be clean (MT = נָל; LXX = ἁμεμπτός), and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous (MT = יְשָׁע; LXX = δίκαιος).’ Again šādaq is parallel to zākāh which the LXX here translates as blameless.

(5) Job 22:3. ‘Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous (MT = יְשָׁע; LXX = δίκαιος)?’ In previously mentioned texts ἁμεμπτός has been used to translate only those words parallel to šādaq. Here, however, the LXX translates šādaq with this term, and thus provides an added proof that these words, יְשָׁע and נוֹם, were sometimes considered to be synonyms.

(6) Job 25:4. ‘How can man be justified (MT = יְשָׁע; LXX = δίκαιος) with God? or, how can he be clean (MT = נָל; LXX = ἁποκαθαρίζω) that is born of a woman?’ Again šādaq is synonymous with zākāh.

(7) Job 22:19. ‘The righteous (MT = יְשָׁע; LXX = δίκαιος) see it and are glad; and the innocent (MT = רָפָא; LXX = ἁμεμπτός) laugh them to scorn.’ This is not identical synonymous parallelism but is close to it. Here the adjective ‘just,” ‘righteous,” is closely associated with the adjective נאצי which comes from the verb נאצָה, meaning ‘to be pure, innocent.’

(8) Ps 94:21. ‘They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous (MT = יְשָׁע; LXX = δίκαιος) and condemn the innocent (MT = רָפָא; LXX = ἁθοῦν) blood.’ According to Lev 17:11 the soul (KJV = life) is the blood.
Thus ṣaddiq and nāqi are here parallel expressions. The LXX renders nāqi by "guiltless."

(9) Job 4:17. "Shall mortal man be more just (MT = ֶפֶת; LXX = καθαρός) than God? Shall a man be more pure (MT = הנֵח; LXX = ἁμαρτωλός) than his maker?" This time sādaq is synonymous with tāhar which means to be "pure, clean," often in a ritualistic sense, e.g. ṭāher in the Pi‘el is used to describe the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. Significantly the LXX here translates ṣādaq as "pure."

(10) Job 17:9. "The righteous (MT = ֶפֶת; LXX = πιστός) also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean (MT = הנֵח; LXX = καθαρός) hands shall be stronger and stronger." Again the concepts of ṣādaq and tāhar are closely related.

(11) Ps 18:20. "The Lord reward me according to my righteousness (MT = ֶפֶת; LXX = δικαιοσύνη), according to the cleanness (MT = הנֵח; LXX = καθαριότης) of my hands hath he recompensed me." This is very similar in idea to the previous text. Righteousness is synonymous with the concept of cleanness. Bōr in Hebrew and καθαριότης in Greek both mean "purity."

(12) Ps 18:24; 2 Sa 22:21, 25, all have the same wording as Ps 18:20.

(13) Dan 8:14. "Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed (MT = ֶפֶת; LXX and Theodotion = καθαρίζω)." In several passages already quoted the Greek words belonging to the same root as καθαρίζω have been associated with expressions parallel to ṣādaq. Here, however, as well as in Job 4:17 it is used to translate ṣādaq itself. καθαρίζω, basically meaning "to cleanse, to free from dirt or uncleanness," was evidently understood by the translators of Daniel as a term which could accurately also convey the meaning of the Hebrew ṣādaq.

---

28 [The translators may also have been influenced by recent events]
From these texts it is obvious that frequently the Hebrew concepts of עק, ת, ט, י, ר, ו, as well as δικαιος, δικαιοσύνη, ἀμεμπτος, ἁθων, καθαρίζω, ἀποκαθαρίζω, καθάρος, καθαριότης in the Septuagint are closely related and often blend into one.

Therefore these lines of evidence make it clear that שבdaq is a broad root significantly rich in meaning. Its central thrust is to describe a judicial and soteriological process of judging, acquitting and saving. When applied to the initiator of such action it assumes the concepts of merciful, compassionate, benevolent and good. Conversely, when שבdaq modifies the recipient of this action it becomes equated with perfection, innocence, moral purity. The vindicated party has been cleared from guilt and has been cleansed. Thus to maintain that in translating שבdaq one must keep in mind only the basic ideas of being “just” or “right” is to oversimplify the matter and to miss the theological import of this root in the Old Testament.

in Jerusalem. They may conceivably have applied the prophecy of Dan 8 to the religious crisis created by Antiochus IV when he polluted the Temple and to its cleansing by the Maccabees a few years later, and may thus have been influenced to render the Hebrew ниsdaq by the Greek καθαρισθησαν. S.H.H.]