ON THE MEANING OF ṢĀḎAQ

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

The verb ṣāḏaq, "to be just, righteous" occurs 41 times, i.e. in Qal, 22 times; in Niphʻal, once; in Piʻel, five times; in Hiphʻil, twelve times; and in Hithpaʻel, once. The adjective ṣaddîq, having 208 occurrences, is usually translated by either "just," or "righteous." The masculine noun ṣeḏeq, "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 ṣᵉḏāqāh. While similar in meaning to ṣeḏeq, 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 ṣāḏaq is simply to be "just" or "right." Indeed, a study of ṣāḏaq in cognate languages tends to support this conclusion. While not occurring in Akkadian, this root is found in other Semitic languages.

Ṣāḏaq's earliest cognate forms can be found as elements of Amorite personal names,[1] but they give little conclusive evi-

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[1] This root can be detected as a noun form in the names A-ḫi-ṣa-du-uq, Am-mi-ṣa-du-qa, [Su]-mu-ṣi-id-qum-(ditāna), and Sa-du-qum. In Ya-aš-du-qum it occurs as a verbal form. Cf. Theo Bauer, Die Ostkanaanäer (Leipzig, 1926), p. 80.

dence as to its meaning. However, the Amarna Letter No. 287 contains the adjective *ṣaduq* as a gloss meaning "right." In this letter Abdiḫeba, the king of Jerusalem, claims that he is "right in respect to the Kaši-people." [2] The same adjective occurs with the meaning "the just one" in the Mari letters.[3] In Ugaritic texts *ṣdq* occurs with the meaning "right," or "uprightness." [4]

Aramaic inscriptions also have this root. The nouns צדק, "loyalty," and צדקה, "righteousness" or "justice" can there be found. In Palmyrene the root *ṣdq* occurs with the meaning "godly, pious," and in Nabataean it means "qualified, entitled." [5]

Phoenician texts use the verb צדק 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 צדק, which corresponds to Hebrew צדיק, in the sense of "just" and "righteous." In Phoenician inscriptions בן צדק occurs as "legitimate heir," and צמח צדק as "legitimate offspring." [6]

In South Arabic the verb means "to favor or endow." The adjective "just, excellent" occurs as an epitaph of a king.[7] In Classical Arabic *ṣdq* 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 *ṣdq*, meaning "truth, sincerity," can also be found.[8]

[2] Samuel Mercer, *The Tell El-Amarna Tablets* (Toronto, 1939), II, 711.

[3] Georges Dossin, *Correspondance de Šamši-Addu* (Paris, 1950), pp. 178, 179.

[4] Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Manual* (Rome, 1955), p. 315.

[5] Mark Lidzbarski, *Handbuch der nordsemitischen Epigraphik* (Weimar, 1898), p. 357.

[6] Zellig S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language* (New Haven, Conn., 1936), pp. 140, 141.

[7] G. Ryckmans, *Les noms propres sud-sémitiques* (Louvain, 1934-35), I, 182.

[8] F. J. Steingass, *The Student's Arabic-English Dictionary* (London, [1884]), pp. 576, 577.

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.[9]

Obviously the concept of ṣdq 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?" Ṣādaq 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 ṣādaq? 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 ṣādaq has a definite forensic sense. The Hiphʿil 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 (הִצְדַּקְתִּיו)." Solomon prayed to God, "Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked . . . and justifying (לְהַצְדִּיק) 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

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[9] C. F. A. Dillmann, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae* (New York, 1955), cols 1311-1313.

[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 *rîḇ* "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 *ṣedeq*, 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 (מִשְׁפָּט) 6 times [11] and the KJV interestingly translates it "justice" 10 times.[12] In fact, the LXX translates *ṣedeq* in Is 51 : 7 by κρίσις, "judgment." Similarly, of the 155 occurrences of the feminine noun *ṣedāqāh*, 45 times (29 per cent) the root is used in connection with jurisprudence. Ten of these instances have *ṣedāqāh* synonymous with judgment[13] and in 14 places the KJV has appropriately rendered it "justice." [14] Jer 51 : 10 has the reading κρῖμα "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

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[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.

[15] Nigel M. Watson, "Some Observations on the Use of ΔΙΚΑΙΟΩ in the Septuagint," *JBL*, LXXIX (1960), 256.

promised, "my salvation is near to come, and my righteous-
ness to be revealed." [16] Thus Watson concludes, "As used of
God, the words of the צדק group approximate, especially
in Judges, Deutero-Isaiah, and the Psalms, to the meanings,
'save', 'saving', 'salvation.' " [17]

Again, ṣādaq 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 ṣᵉḏāqāh by ἔλεος, "mercy," in three places,[19] and by
ἐλεημοσύνη "kind deeds, acts of mercy" in eight places.[20]

Ṣādaq 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 synonym-
ously with God's wonders, and Ps 145 : 7 makes ṣᵉḏāqāh
parallel to God's great goodness.

Again, ṣādaq is closely associated with the concept of šālôm,
"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

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[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.
[20] Dt 6 : 25; 24 : 13; Ps 24(23) : 5; 33 (32) : 5; 103 (102) : 6; Is
1 : 27; 28 : 17; 59 : 16.
[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'il of צדק) many, for he shall bear their iniquities." Here the Messiah shall make people *ṣaddîq* 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.[23] 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 *ṣaddîq* 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, *ṣdq* thus often means a "just one," a "pious one," the antithesis of *rāšāʿ* a "wicked or lawless one." [24] On several occasions the adjective *ṣaddîq* is translated in the LXX by εὐσεβής, "a devout, godly one." [25]

Within this frame of reference other concepts thus emerge. *Ṣāḏaq* 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 [26] = צדק; LXX = δίκαιος) myself, my own mouth shall condemn me. If I say I am perfect (MT = תָּם; LXX = ἄμεμπτος), it shall also prove me perverse." Here *ṣāḏaq* is synonymous with *tam* which means completely perfect, morally innocent. The LXX interprets this as "blameless."

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

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[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 ἀσεβής, "the ungodly."
[25] Pr 12 : 12; Is 24 : 16; 26 : 7.
[26] Abbreviation for "Masoretic Text."

δίκαιος ἄμεμπτος) 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 = צדק; LXX = δικαιόω) when thou speakest, and be clear (MT = זָכָה; LXX = νικάω) when thou judgest." Here *ṣādaq* 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 = זָכָה; LXX = ἄμεμπτος), and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous (MT = צדק; LXX = δίκαιος)." Again *ṣādaq* 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 = צדק; LXX = ἄμεμπτος)?" In previously mentioned texts ἄμεμπτος has been used to translate only those words parallel to *ṣādaq*. Here, however, the LXX translates *ṣādaq* with this term, and thus provides an added proof that these words, צדק and זכה, were sometimes considered to be synonyms.

(6) Job 25 : 4. "How can man be justified (MT = צדק; LXX = δίκαιος) with God? or, how can he be clean (MT = זכה; LXX = ἀποκαθαρίζω) that is born of a woman?" Again *ṣādaq* is synonymous with *zākāh*.

(7) Job 22 : 19. "The righteous (MT = צַדִּיק; LXX = δίκαιος) see it and are glad; and the innocent (MT = נָקִי; LXX = ἄμεμπτος) 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 *nāqî* which comes from the verb *nāqah*, meaning "to be pure, innocent."

(8) Ps 94 : 21. "They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous (MT = צַדִּיק; LXX = δίκαιος) and condemn the innocent (MT = נָקִי; LXX = ἀθῶον) blood." According to Lev 17 : 11 the soul (KJV = life) is the blood.

Thus *ṣaddîq* and *nāqî* are here parallel expressions. The LXX renders *nāqî* by "guiltless."

(9) Job 4 : 17. "Shall mortal man be more just (MT = צדק; LXX = καθαρός) than God? Shall a man be more pure (MT = טָהַר; LXX = ἄμεμπτος) than his maker?" This time *ṣādaq* is synonymous with *ṭāhar* 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 = צַדִּיק; LXX = πιστός) also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean (MT = טָהָר; LXX = καθαρός) hands shall be stronger and stronger." Again the concepts of *ṣādaq* and *ṭāhar* are closely related.

(11) Ps 18 : 20. "The Lord reward me according to my righteousness (MT = צֶדֶק; LXX = δικαιοσύνη), according to the cleanness (MT = בֹּר; 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 = וְנִצְדַּק; 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*.[27] 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]

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[27] Job 25 : 4; Ps 18(17) : 20, 24; 2 Sa 22 : 21, 25.
[28] [The translators may also have been influenced by recent events

From these texts it is obvious that frequently the Hebrew concepts of צָדַק, זָכָה, טָהַר, נָקִי, תָּם, בֹּר, as well as δίκαιος, δικαιοσύνη, ἄμεμπτος, ἄθων, καθαρίζω, ἀποκαθαρίζω, καθαρός, and καθαριότης in the Septuagint are closely related and often blend into one.

Therefore these lines of evidence make it clear that ṣāḏaq 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 ṣāḏaq 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 ṣāḏaq 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 niṣdaq by the Greek καθαρισθήσεται. S.H.H.]