A NEGLECTED CONNOTATION OF THREE
HEBREW VERBS

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INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of Ez. xxvi 12 wa’a‘abânayk wê‘êşayk wa’a‘opârêk betôk mayîm yâšîmû has occasioned some hesitancy on the part of both ancient and modern versions. The difficulty is not so much betôk mayîm, “in the midst of the water”,—instead of which most scholars agree to read betôk hayyâm (cp. Ez. xxvi 5 and xxvii 32 and the ancient versions)—, as the meaning of yâšîmû. The normal meaning of the verb is “to put, to lay, to place” or the like, but this does not suit the context. Note G. A. Cooke’s less felicitous translation of the line: “And thy stones and timber and dust they shall lay in the midst of water” 2), whereas W. Zimmerli, commenting on the use of yâšîmû here, speaks of “eine unschöne Prosaisierung” 3). The truth is that fîm here signifies “to cast, to shed”, as was pointed out by Gesenius-Buhl for Lev. vi 3 (with ‘dpdr!) and for Ez. xxiv 7 (with “blood” 4). Rightly, therefore, RSV translates yâšîmû as “they will cast”.

Not only fîm sometimes denotes “to cast, to shed”, nîtan and šît seem to share this meaning. Since this feature has been overlooked in quite a few cases, it may be useful to study the implications of this question. First a few words will be said on the score of ballast-prepositions, then it will be shown that the sense of “to cast, to shed, to bring down” for nîtan, fîm and šît is likely to occur with abstract nouns or with liquids like (a) spirit, (b) blood, rain, hail, (c) fear,

1) But M. Dahood, “Ugaritic Studies and the Bible”, Gregorianum 43 (1962) pp. 65-66, has correctly seen, that one is dealing here with a case of enclitic mem in the construct chain betôk-m yâm. Accordingly no change of the consonantal text is involved.


jealousy, shame, (d) wonders, portents, signs, and (e) sins. Some Ugaritic and Aramaic parallels will be adduced in corroboration of our arguments. Not in each of the cases discussed below an altogether new interpretation is aimed at, but the style of the traditional versions may be improved.

**Ballast Prepositions**

This matter is highly instructive for a correct understanding of the suggestions to come. Sometimes names of parts of the body are used in connection with prepositions in order to form so-called compound- or ballast prepositions. So in Ugaritic one has lriš, “on the head of = on, upon”, lgr, “on the back of = on top of, upon”, lkīm, “on the shoulder of = upon”, bqr, “in the bowels of = in, within”, lkb, “to the liver of = upon, over”. The phenomenon is well attested in Hebrew too. bqreb corresponds to Ugaritic bqr. Further one has betok, “in the entrails of = within, in”, mittok, “from within = from”, lipně, “in the face of = before”, ’al pene, “on the surface of = upon, over”, beleb and bileb, “at the heart of = within, in”.

As is known, the use of such compound prepositions is not restricted to Ugaritic and Hebrew, nor to Semitic languages at large. Often ballast prepositions are employed for the sake of higher expressiveness (so betok in Ez. xxvi 5), or they just serve stylistic reasons. This is evident in the case of parallelism. Note in Ugaritic l and lgr in UT 51: II: 8-9 1); b and bqr in 51: V: 123-124, 126-127; 51: VII: 17-18; in Hebrew be and betok in Is. lxi 9; Mi. iii 3; Prv. vii 20; xxii 13; min and mittok in Is. xxiv 18; Ez. xxviii 16; Am. vi 4; Prv. v 15; min and nippeně in Pss. xlv 17; lv 4; le and lipně in Prv. iv 3; be and beleb in Prv. xxx 19. In all these texts the value of the compound prepositions is that of the related uncompounded prepositions. Finally the use of compound prepositions is not seldom redundant: they replace the simple prepositions, since the force of these uncompounded prepositions appears to have worn off. This redundant use was noted by C. Brockelmann for betok in Gen. ix 21; Ex. xi 4 and Num. xiii 32 2), and these examples can easily be multiplied. Ezekiel alone uses betok over one hundred times. The same can be maintained for bqreb in Is. v 8; vi 12; vii 22; xix 24; xxiv 13. However

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