THE USE AND MEANING OF THE WORDS LEBAÅREK AND BERÅKÅH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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I

The purpose of this study is to clarify the connections and the extent to which the verbal and nominal expressions for "benediction" are used in the OT and what shades of meaning they reveal. In other words, this is not a study of the OT conception of benediction, even if the fields of the two subjects largely coincide. The difference appears in the first place in the circumstance that we pay no attention to the question whether the linguistic usage is fully adequate an expression of the idea conceived in different periods, nor to the cognate or related ideas in neighbouring milieus. On the other hand, neither is this a study of the Semitic root brk, since attention is concentrated on the OT. Even the etymology of the words is discussed only in order to discover what shade of meaning is the primary one in the OT, and how other meanings eventually have developed from it. The study of the whole root brk would have demanded a similar study in the other Semitic languages in which this or cognate roots appear, which is beyond the present writer's interests and resources to-day, and the same applies, mutatis mutandis, to the study of the corresponding conception.

II

In accordance with the definition of the subject, we do not begin with the etymology of the words, since its treatment presupposes acquaintance with the different shades of meaning. Furthermore, a systematic investigation of all the OT data seems to give a good starting point for the treatment of the etymology also, since it is—at least in principle—free from all foreign influence. Therefore we must find another suitable starting point for our study.

If we look first at the statistics, we find that the number of pas-
sages 1) in which these expressions appear is very unequally distributed. There are books in which their average occurrence is in almost every chapter, while in others they appear very rarely or not at all. The distribution is: Gn 45, Ex 7, Lv 2, Nm 8, Dt 37, Jos 7, Jd 6, 1 S 11, 2 S 12, 1 K 9, 2 K 4, Is 9, Jer 4, Ez 3, Joel 1, Hag 1, Zech 2, Mal 2, Ps 58, Job 9, Pr 13, Ruth 4, Ezr 1, Neh 4, 1 Ch 11, 2 Ch 7.

The great number in Genesis is largely due to the copious use of these words in the stories about Patriarchs, in which they are inextricably linked with the promise of offspring and the land of Canaan. The central position of these promises 2) considered, we may safely assume that they provide us with a scope sufficiently large to begin with.

The first of these promises is recorded in Gn xii 2 sq., and there we also find the root brk, probably in four different shades of meaning. The passage runs: "And I will 3) make thee a great nation and will bless thee, and I will make thy name great and thou shalt be blessing, and I will bless them that bless thee and I shall curse them that imprecate thee, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in thee". In the first and third instance the character and contents of the blessing cannot be more exactly defined than the general context allows; it may mean prosperity in general. The fourth one seems to denote friendliness and respect as a contrast to the imprecation, the subject of the action being men. In the second instance it is impossible to decide whether the word is used in the sense of Zech viii 13 to mean that Abraham's name shall be used as a blessing (so LXX; the word whyh could be pointed as a consecutive perfect, too, in which case šimkā would be subject and this interpretation certain, but the Samaritans pronounce here an imperative also) or in the sense of Is xix 24 where Israel appears as a source of benediction between Egypt and Assyria. In the last instance the translation follows LXX, and there are reasons to suppose that this was the original sense of the word, to judge from the structure of the passage, which seems to be an example of the so-called "Steigerungsformel" 4):

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1) As a passage we count a statement or story, where one and the same subject is dealt with, whether it be a part of a verse or a whole chapter.


3) The word "will" is employed to render a cohortative.

4) Cf. also Kautzsch-Socin, Genesis, ad loc. and ad xxii 18; further Johns Pedersen, Der Eid bei den Semiten, p. 73: "Wenn es heisst, dass Abraham ein Segen und Glück werden solle... bedeutet das soviel, dass er... es auch auf andere ausstrahlen soll (vgl. Jes 19a)".