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Psalm 119

meditation 1— Introductory

Psalm 119 has never been one of my favorite psalms. To be honest, it has not been in my top 140 favorite psalms. Over the couple of months that I have spent translating it off and on (something I had been putting off for quite some time), it has grown on me. A little. This might seem like feint praise and a strange way to begin a meditation on a psalm, let alone a whole series of meditations. Perhaps, one thinks, this does not bode well for the series. Perhaps the reader should just skip it.

But the composer of this psalm does have something to say. And whatever one may think of what he says or how he says it, one cannot question his enthusiasm for his subject. It is unbounded. He is intensely grateful for God's willingness to reveal Himself and to communicate something of His own character and the character that He wishes His people to have. He is enthusiastic about studying and applying God's revelation of self and humankind. If we can do nothing else but appreciate the Psalmist's gratitude and enthusiasm for his subject and find a little of that gratitude and appreciation seeping into our own hearts and minds... well, perhaps that is enough reason to stick with it and see where Psalm 119 leads us.

From reading others' translations and commentaries, it is obvious that I am not alone in my lack of enthusiasm for this psalm. I will not attempt to speak for others, but I can identify my own reasons for my past lack of enthusiasm for this psalm.

I should say, first, that my lack of enthusiasm has had nothing to do with the Psalm's length or structure. Coming in at 176 verses divided into 22 sections, it is the longest of the 150 psalms found in the Hebrew Bible. Each 8-verse section corresponds to one of 22 letters found in the Hebrew alphabet, so that each verse of the first section (vss. 1-8) begins with a word that starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *'ālep*; each verse of the second section (vss. 9-16) begins with a word that starts with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *bêt*; and so on until the last section, where each verse (vss. 169-176) begins with the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *tāw*.

This organization by the alphabet is called "acrostic." The somewhat slavish adherence to this form can seem at times to limit the composer's options and stifle free expression of thought. Still, the Psalmist's skill is such that he seems able to say all that he wishes to say, while the form likely brought a certain "entertainment" value to ancient hearers and readers and served as a useful mnemonic devise for those who wished to memorize and recite it again and again.

So, what is it that has caused my lack of enthusiasm for Psalm 119, and might account for other's lack of enthusiasm? This psalm is often assigned to the literary genre, "wisdom literature." This type of literature is found all over the ancient Near East. There are other psalms so classified—Psalms 1 and 37, for example. The classic example of wisdom literature found in the Bible is the Book of Proverbs. Others are welcome to enjoy and be inspired by wisdom literature. I appreciate such people's insights into such writings. But I do not enjoy wisdom literature. Proverbs is without question my least favorite book of scripture. I'll read Leviticus over it any day. When I read Proverbs, I feel that I am sitting on a porch with grandpa as he rocks back and forth in his rocker and dispenses a lifetime of wisdom in the form of short aphorisms—a pleasant pastime, no doubt, but reading scripture is for me much more than a way to pass time.

But perhaps a bigger reason for my lack of enthusiasm for Psalm 119 might be found in its vocabulary. This may seem petty, but let me explain. Psalm 119 is both a celebration of God's willingness to speak to

His people and a commitment to cherish and be guided by it. It is a celebration of the word of God. The divine grace of the word of God is worthy of celebration. I too celebrate this Divine largesse. What I celebrate less, perhaps, are the forms that God's words take in Psalm 119. In English translations of this Psalm, God's communication comes in the form of "law," "laws," "statutes," "stipulations," "rules," "regulations," "command," "commandments," "ordinances," "precepts," "judgments," and "decrees." These are all English words that are used to translate seven Hebrew words that appear to be, essentially, synonymous.¹ Such language can come across as very legalistic. Through it, God can come across as obsessed with legislation, demanding in character, and maybe even just a tad dictatorial.

Now, I do not doubt that God possesses hopes for and expectations of us. I can imagine and believe that He wishes to see us improve and progress in a whole host of ways so that we can abide in a cosmos of unknown and unimaginable challenges and even dangers. But I do not believe God is our "Legislator in heaven." Nor do I believe that He, having a perfect understanding of human nature, thinks that through legislation He can assist humans in advancing so as to endure in that unimaginable cosmos. While humans, with all their great limitations, must, it seems, of necessity rely upon legislation to order and improve society, God is not so limited.

I can be, then, put off by this Psalm's legalism and its focus on God's word as primarily legislative. It is not simply the legalism and legislative focus inherent in just one word, or in a series of words, but in a series of words repeated over, and over, and over, and over, and over again: "law," "laws," "statutes," "stipulations," "rules," "regulations," "command," "commandments," "ordinances," "precepts," "judgments," and "decrees." I sense that I am not the only one that finds this apparent legalism off-putting.

It might seem that this lack of enthusiasm for God as legislator and "commander in chief" or for God's word as legislation and command is a purely modern reaction; that ancient readers would be more inclined to understand and appreciate this legislative feature of Divinity. But, we have ancient sayings that suggest otherwise.

Take Peter, for example. With the conversion and subsequent missions of Paul, evangelizing among gentiles, which had first been intimated through Peter, began in earnest. As more and more gentiles accepted Jesus as the Christ and adopted his moral and ethical worldview, questions arose concerning the necessity of gentiles observing the Law of Moses. These questions caused conflict and schism in the movement. Finally, leaders of the movement, or "those who seemed to be somewhat,"² gathered to iron out differences and make a determination about the relationship between the law and gentile converts. In the course of this gathering, Peter addressed the issue. Among other things, he had this to say about the law, itself.

"Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, *which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*"³

It would seem that in including "our fathers," Peter was not simply expressing his view of the law as it had come to be through recent rabbinic interpretation and imposition. The law had been a problem, a burden, from the earliest of times. We could fill pages with Paul's similar views.

Many Christians today feel much the same about Christian legalism and any too-focused view on "law"

¹ These Hebrew words are: *tôrâ*, *'ēdūt*, *piqqûdîm*, *hōq*, *mišwâ*, *mišpāt*, and *huqâ*. One might conceivably add the Hebrew words, *derek* and *'ōrah* to this list.

² See Galatians 2.⁶

³ Acts 15.¹⁰, emphasis added.

and “commandments.” Such a view can very easily become a burden. They anticipate something more from God than the demands of law. Such expectations are not unreasonable. Probably, it is none other than Jesus who creates such expectations. Jesus claimed that those who saw, watched, and listened to him would find a revelation of God and His character. Jesus was anything but a legalist, so that those who saw, watched, and listened to Jesus could reasonably conclude that God was not a legalist.

Christians, however, are not the only group to be skeptical of legalism. Increasingly, many in our secular society seem to find the legislation of behavior and morality to be both objectionable and impotent. One can see, for example, the modern objection to law in the multitudinous and vociferous objections so many had toward mask and vaccine mandates during the most recent global COVID pandemic. Intended to protect the public, such “laws” were, instead, seen as constraints and impositions on personal freedoms. Examples of the modern misunderstanding about the nature and purpose of “laws” seem to grow with each passing day. At the same time, many find “law” to be impotent. One thinks of the many and varied “gun laws,” which have done little to stop private violence and mass murder. Though law need not be viewed as a hindrance to freedom, but, in fact, quite the opposite, it does seem increasingly clear that law cannot create moral individuals or a moral society.

Now, one can assert that modern skepticism of and even antagonism toward law, commandments, stipulations, rules, regulations, etc., is a misunderstanding—perhaps a sociopathic one—of the purpose and meaning of them. Maybe so. Still, we must face reality. Our culture is not the same as that in which Psalm 119 was written. Modern cultures’ attitudes toward law and divine legislation are different than those of that psalm’s composer. Modern individuals are less deferential to authority. If we are to understand Psalm 119; if we are to appreciate God’s desire to order/ structure society; if we are to appreciate God’s desire to advance and progress individual humans and humanity as a whole; we must, it seems to me, come at the Psalm differently than we have traditionally. This includes our translations of it.

One can translate texts that claim to speak of and for God as they did in its original setting. Such an antiquarian concern is legitimate and useful. This type of translation requires great skill and insight. But this is not my aim in translating Psalm 119 or any other portion of the sacred text. I wish to translate the sacred text in such a way as to have it understood in today’s setting. To do so, I must try to meet the reader where they are. In translating Psalm 119 in such a way as to imbue the reader not only with understanding of the composer’s insights but also of his appreciation for God’s willingness to speak and direct human beings, I must use language and vocabulary that speaks to the reader and is true to his or her experiences and sentiments.

I like to think that I can do so while, at the same time, being true to the original intent of the author and the text he gifted to us—that intent being, as I understand it, to show appreciation for God’s willing communication with and direction to Israel and to express a commitment to be true to that communication and direction. The reader will have to decide for him or herself how well I do as I try to bridge the gap between the ancient composer and his culture and the modern reader and his or her culture.

As with all scripture, but particularly with a text such as Psalm 119, this bridging the gap begins with vocabulary. As we mentioned earlier, there are seven Hebrew words that are used repeatedly throughout Psalm 113 to describe and characterize God’s words spoken to Israel. These words have traditionally been translated in legalistic and legislative ways—“law,” “laws,” “statutes,” “stipulations,” “rules,” “regulations,” “command,” “commandments,” “ordinances,” “precepts,” “judgments,” “decrees,” etc. In the case of some of these Hebrew words this may have been the original thrust of the words. But in our next meditation, we will examine these nearly synonymous words and see whether we can understand them in a less legalistic manner and in a manner more in line with the less legalistic God Jesus revealed throughout his short life. This is no small challenge.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: june 13, 2024)

meditation 2— Introductory

As we noted in our first introductory meditation, we understand Psalm 119 to be 1) an expression of gratitude to God for His willingness to direct Israel through the words He spoke to them and 2) an expression of commitment—the commitment to closely study and apply the words God had revealed.

The composer of this psalm principally utilizes seven essentially synonymous words, repeated over and over again, to characterize God’s word. In order of appearance, these seven words are: *tôrâ*, *‘ēdūt*, *piqqûdîm*, *hōq*, *mišwâ*, *mišpāt*, and *huqâ*. We might add two other words more loosely used as synonyms for God’s words: *derek* (literally, “way”) and *’ōrah* (literally, “path”). If we add Hebrew, *dābār*, “word,” then we are presented ten essentially synonymous words to characterize God’s words spoken to Israel.

While our seven principle words—*tôrâ*, *‘ēdūt*, *piqqûdîm*, *hōq*, *mišwâ*, *mišpāt*, and *huqâ*—are essentially synonymous, the exact nuance of each word is not always clear. These words are variously translated into English in Psalm 119 and, indeed, throughout the Hebrew Bible. Just how imprecise our understanding of each word’s nuance is can be seen in the great variety of ways each word is translated in various translations. While the following examples are not exhaustive, they provide a clear picture of the uncertainty of each word’s exact nuance.

In Psalm 119 alone, *tôrâ* is translated as “teaching,”¹ “law,”² and “instruction.”³ *‘ēdūt* is translated as “testimonies,”⁴ “decrees,”⁵ “statutes,”⁶ “precepts,”⁷ and “stipulations;”⁸ *piqqûdîm* as “decrees,”⁹ “precepts,”¹⁰ and “ordinances.”¹¹ *hōq* as “statute,”¹² “laws,”¹³ and “decrees;”¹⁴ *mišwâ*, as “commands,”¹⁵ and “commandments;”¹⁶ *mišpāt* as “judgments,”¹⁷ “rules,”¹⁸ “laws,”¹⁹ “ordinances,”²⁰ and “regulations.”²¹

In our examples, then, English “law” can stand for Hebrew *tôrâ*, *hōq*, and *mišpāt*; English “statute,” for Hebrew *‘ēdūt* and *hōq*; and English “decrees” for Hebrew *‘ēdūt*, *piqqûdîm*, and *hōq*.

While the exact nuance of each of these Hebrew words is uncertain and their translation varied, there can be little doubt of the nature of the traditional English words with which they are translated. They are

¹ Tanakh and Alter

² KJV, RSV, NIV, ESV, Dahood, and Eaton

³ Kraus

⁴ KJV, RSV, ESV, Eaton, and Kraus

⁵ Tanakh

⁶ NIV

⁷ Alter

⁸ Dahood

⁹ Alter

¹⁰ KJV, Tanakh, RSV, NIV, ESV Dahood, and Eaton

¹¹ Kraus

¹² KJV, RSV, ESV Alter, Dahood, Eaton, and Kraus

¹³ Tanakh

¹⁴ NIV

¹⁵ NIV and Alter

¹⁶ KJV, RSV, ESV, Tanakh, Dahood, Eaton, and Kraus

¹⁷ KJV, ESV, and Eaton

¹⁸ Tanakh

¹⁹ NIV, and Alter

²⁰ RSV, and Dahood

²¹ Kraus

predominantly, as we discussed in our first meditation legalistic and “legislative:” “law,” “rules,” “stipulations,” “statutes,” “regulations,” “decrees,” “ordinances,” etc.

Such translation makes God very much a lawgiver. He is, of course, that. It is entirely possible that this was the view of God that dominated the ancient mind. But the fact is, God is not just that, Lawgiver. If human beings didn’t know it before Jesus, they knew it after him. Jesus came, according to the Gospel witness, to reveal or introduce God. In doing so, Jesus declared Him to be something more, someone more intimate, than Lawgiver. Jesus declared God “Abba.” As Abba, God does more than set out house rules that are to be robotically obeyed. God rears. God nourishes. God instructs. God teaches. God guides. Jesus’ revelation of God as Abba has, appropriately, directed the modern believer’s mind to think of God in terms of Father rather than, or at least equal to Legislator.

In my translation of Psalm 119, I have attempted to bring out the Abba in God rather than the Legislator. The question becomes, is such a translation legitimate? More pertinent to this meditation, can we, based on the vocabular traditionally translated legalistically and legislatively, justify a less legalistic and legislative reading of Psalm 119? Can we find in this Psalm a God who guides and directs humanity and human life less through legislation and more through instruction?

In order to address such questions and provide justification for our own translation decisions, we will briefly consider each of the seven words that this Psalm uses to describe the words that God spoke to Israel anciently and speaks to all the world today. There is a great deal of detail in the discussion of each word. Therefore, before our detailed discussion, we provide the reader with the translation choices we finally made for each word along with a few concluding remarks. Here, then, is a list of each Hebrew word and our translation of it. The varying translation of certain individual Hebrew words is strictly stylistic.

Tôrâ... “instruction” and “teachings”

Ēdūt... “sworn truths”

Piqqûdîm... “ordering precepts”

Hōq... “norms,” “standards”

Miṣwâ... “directives” and “direction/s.”

Miṣpāt... “sovereign viewpoint,” and “sovereign decision/s”

Huqâ... “norms”

Derek... “principles” (where it is used in association with, parallel with, or as a synonym of the preceding list of words)

Several of these words used to characterize the nature of God’s words spoken to Israel, can be understood and translated with legalistic and legislative overtones. One can legitimately translate “law” and “commandments” and “regulations.” Ancient readers of Psalm 119 may very well have understood them in this way. Ancient readers of Psalm 119 may have felt themselves to have a more legalistic and legislative than intimate and tutorial relationship with Him. But the opposite is true today. And for good reason. Jesus revealed a more intimate and personable God. We have, then, attempted to have the language of Psalm 119 reflect the less legalistic and legislative God we encounter in Jesus’ revelation of Divinity.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: june 19, 2024*)

Tôrâ

We begin with *tôrâ*. *Tôrâ* can be understood in at least three ways. Firstly, and most famously, *tôrâ* came to refer to the first five Books of the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). It is uncertain that *tôrâ* had this meaning at the time of this psalm’s composition, and so unlikely that we should understand *tôrâ* to narrowly reference only the Pentateuch in this psalm.²² *Tôrâ* can, in some cases, refer to the entire Hebrew Bible. But this usage is extremely late, postdating the likely composition of Psalm 119. We should not translate *tôrâ* something like, “scripture.” Finally, *tôrâ* might be understood in the general sense of “teaching”/ “instruction.” This final way of understanding *tôrâ* seems to be inherit within the Hebrew root, itself.

The noun, *tôrâ*, comes from the root *yrh*, verb, *yârâ*. The basic idea of the verb is “to throw/shoot/ guide/ direct” an arrow or rock. Figuratively, the verb can mean “to point out,” “direct one’s attention,” and “to teach, instruct.” “The three most frequent uses of this root deal with shooting/ throwing arrows/rocks, sending rain, and teaching.”²³ “The semantic development is from ‘throw’ to ‘stretch out a finger or hand, point in a direction,’ and finally to ‘show the way.’”²⁴ “Instruction” or “teaching” have long been viewed as *tôrâ*’s primary meaning. We accept this more general meaning of *tôrâ* in Psalm 119, and have been guided by it in our translation. Thus, in our translation, *tôrâ* is “instruction” or “teaching/s.” God’s teaching is not meant simply to educate. *Tôrâ* is teaching intended to guide and direct one’s life for the better, just as an archer guides or directs his arrow to its target.

Ēdût

Hebrew, *ĕdût*, comes from *ûd*, “to bear witness, warn, remind.” *ĕdût* is constructed from *ĕd*, “witness” (person), and the abstract affix, *-ût*, to create, “witness, testimony, attestation.” The LXX translates, *martýrion*, “witness, evidence, proof.”²⁵

In considering this word in the Hebrew Bible, we first note that in the Pentateuch, it often refers to the tablets that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai, which were then deposited in the tabernacle. Within the tabernacle, God had the *ĕdût* placed inside the ark. The ark was often referred to as the “ark of the *ĕdût*, or the “chest of the tablets.” It goes without saying, however, that *ĕdût* is not the physical object of the tablet itself—this is *luhot ha ĕdut*, “tablets of the *ĕdût*”²⁶—but that which is written on the tablets, *ĕdût* becoming yet another word used by the composer of Psalm 119 for words God had spoken to Israel.

Because *ĕdût* is so often associated with the tablets on which God wrote the “Ten Commandments,” or the “Ten Imperatives”—each statement is presented with imperative verbs—“imperatives” is a tempting translation. However, the consistency with which the LXX translates *martýrion* has weight and must be taken seriously. This is so, especially, 1) in light of the common Hebrew use of Hebrew

²² Though *tôrâ* is not to be associated exclusively with the Pentateuch in this Psalm, *tôrâ* can refer to the Pentateuch outside of it. But even there, it seems to me that the Pentateuch should not be thought of principally as “law” or as a “law book.” While there are portions of the Pentateuch that comprise law codes (ethical and cultic), great chunks of it are made up of “historical” narrative. However, these chunks of text, devoid of “law” or “law codes,” can be utilized to draw out principles and practices for a more fulfilled and enduring life. The Pentateuch, then, “teaches” “instructs,” and “guides” the reader independent of laws or law codes.

²³ *TWOT*, Vol. I. p. 403

²⁴ *TDOT*, Vol. XV, p. 611

²⁵ *TDOT*, mentions the following words as possibly related to Hebrew, *ĕdût*. Aramaic possesses, *dy*, “contract, pact,” “contractual terms,” “oath, agreement secured through an oath.” Arabic possesses, *wa’ada*, which means “to promise,” “arrange to meet.” Syriac possesses. *hd*, “remember,” Arabic possesses, *ahd*, “alliance, contract”, and *hd*, “make an alliance, obligate oneself.”

²⁶ See, for example, Eodus. 32.¹⁵

‘*ûd*, “to bear witness, warn, remind,” and ‘*êd*, “witness” (person); and 2) in light of the fact that Psalm 119 seems more likely than not to be a rather late composition and so more inclined to Hellenistic influences. Most basically, *martyrion* is a “sworn statement of fact” made by a witness in court. In the eyes of the witness, at least an honest one, their sworn statement is “the truth.” In late Jewish and then in Christianity the testimony of the martyr served not only to witness to truth but served as a warning and admonition to those who witnessed or heard of the martyrdom.

Many translations and translators have settled on “testimony, witness.” Witnesses do not generally issue “imperatives,” though their testimony can direct the verdict of the case in which they act as witness. After considering the varied and nuanced meanings of ‘*êdût*, I finally settled on “sworn truths” for each occurrence of the word in Psalm 119.

Piqqûdîm

This word appears 24 times in the Hebrew Bible, 21 of those being in this Psalm. *TWOT* quotes Speiser’s estimation that “There is probably no other Hebrew verb that has caused translators as much trouble as [*pāqad*].”²⁷ The verb, *pāqad*, has a wide range of meaning: “to muster,” “to count/ number,” “care for, look after, take an interest in, commit someone/ something to safekeeping,” “entrust, appoint, commission,” “pronounce judgment, condemn.” The various nouns formed from this root, represents aspects of the verb, for example, *pāqîd*, means, “appointee, overseer,” *p^equddâ* “assignment, task,” etc.

In Psalm 119, LXX most often translates, *entolê*. *Entolê* is used for both the “commands” of rulers, and the “teachings” of a teacher—“teachings” being, as was the case with *tôrâ*, intended as direction rather than simply “education.”

In considering the evidence, we note that *pāqad*, is used in the context of mustering an army, of taking a census, in appointing individuals, and in forensic judgment, among others. In all these settings we sense an interest in “regulating” and “ordering”—the regulation/ordering of the military and other social institutions, indeed of society itself. Also, there is an interest in regulating individuals’ behavior and their place in society. It would be fair to say that the ruler engaged in *entolê* seeks to order/ regulate society, while the teacher engaged in *entolê* seeks to help their student regulate or order their life appropriately.

Thus, we understand in YHWH’s *piqqûdîm* an attempt to “regulate” or “order” human behavior and institutions, not because he is on a power trip, but because he knows what is best for human beings. To regulate comes from Latin *regulatus* and means “to control by rule, to direct.” So, though it might sound somewhat strange to modern ears, we can speak of *piqqûdîm* as “regulation/s, with the proviso that God’s regulation of the individual and society is not selfish or dictatorial but benevolent, reflecting His knowledge of what is best for humanity and its endurance.

In our translation, we have adopted the traditional, “precepts” with the perhaps somewhat redundant modifying, “ordering” as an appropriate translation (“ordering precepts”).

Hōq

TDOT notes that the verb “can be assigned to three semantic groups: (1) “carve out, engrave”... (2) “in parallelism with *kātab*, ‘write’... (3) “fix, determine.”²⁸ In its concrete sense the verb, *hāqaq*, means, “to engrave, carve, hollow out, and, perhaps, sculpt.” The participle *meḥuqqeh* means “carved work” or

²⁷ Vol. II, p. 731

²⁸ Vol. V, p. 141

“reliefs.” Thus, in Psalm 119 as well as elsewhere, we can think of *hōq* at the concrete level as that which God engraved or wrote. This reminds us of the Pentateuch’s concrete use of ‘*ēdūt*, for the physical tablets upon which God wrote with His finger and gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. However, just as ‘*ēdūt* moves from the concrete to the abstract, coming to mean not the physical tablets themselves but that which is written on them, so too does *hōq* move from the concrete act of engraving to the abstract idea of that which is engraved.

In discussing *hōq*, *TDOT* mentions a possible “connection between a special meaning of Arab. *haqqa*, ‘be incumbent upon,’ and Heb. *hōq*, in the sense “that which is incumbent on someone.” There are indications elsewhere of it being thought of in terms of something that is “legally binding,” and as a “law” or “precept.”

There is a strange story in Judges about one of Israel judges, Jephthah. In going to war against Ammon, he made a vow that if God gave him victory then “whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’s and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.”²⁹ As it turns out, his daughter was the first to greet him and so she was sacrificed in line with the vow. What does this have to do with our word, *hōq*? Each year after the young woman’s death a four-day festival was conducted to commemorate the girl’s sacrifice. This festival became a “*hōq* in Israel.”³⁰ The King James translates “custom.” We might translate “tradition.” This example, among others, suggest that “law” or “commandment” or “edict,” even are a bit too strong for *hōq*. It can have the feeling of “policy” “assignment,” “custom,” “precedent,” “decision,” etc.³¹

The LXX translated, *dikaiōma*, which can mean, “ordinance,” “legally appropriate action,” After considering all the evidence, we finally settled on “rules of behavior” and “code of conduct.”

Miṣwâ

“The etymology of *miṣwâ* is unequivocal: It derives from the verb → צוה *ṣiwwâ*, ‘to appoint, order, direct,’ and evokes the same connotations. It is a nominal construction of the *miqtāl*-type and means literally ‘command, order,’ though like other nouns of this pattern it designates both the action itself and its consequences or results. It thus means ‘that which is ordered, the commandment,’ and from the perspective of the person so addressed it implies ‘duty, obligation.’”³² The LXX most often translated, *entolē*. To be sure, the Greek word, like *miṣwâ*, can be translated “commandment, order,” especially when used in reference to kings. However, “the [Greek] term has also the sense b. of ‘pedagogic Instruction.’”³³

Commands can be capricious and inspired by a thirst for power and control. They can be more about advancing the individual issuing the orders than about the needs or advancement of the individuals or groups commanded. This is not the nature or purpose of God’s “commands.” His “commands” are given only to benefit those to whom they are given. For this reason—and in harmony with the sense of “pedagogic instruction”—I choose to translate *miṣwâ* as “directive” and “direction.”

Miṣpāṭ

The reader should see my extended discussion of this very versatile word in *Index of Meaning and Translation of Common and Significant Words* found on the *Psalm Translation* page of this site. There is probably no Hebrew word that I translate with more variety than *miṣpāṭ*. Most fundamentally, I

²⁹ Judges 11.³¹

³⁰ Judges 11.³⁹

³¹ See, for example, Genesis 47.²⁶, Exodus 5.¹⁴, Exodus 12.²⁴, Exodus 15.²⁵, and Exodus 18.¹⁶, 1 Samuel 30.²⁵

³² *TDOT*, Vol. VIII, p. 505-506

³³ *TDNT*, Vol. II, p. 546

understand it to encompass everything having to do with decisions making in governance, including but not limited to such things as the act of instituting laws, the act of adjudicating laws, the consequences of such decisions, the place where such decisions are made, etc. *Miṣpāṭ*, then, can stand for such concepts as “governance,” “case/ hearing,” “judgement,” “justice,” “place of governance,” etc.

Huqā

This is the feminine form of masculine *ḥōq*. There is no discernable difference in meaning between the two words formed from the same root.