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נכּוּן

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In three passages of the Bible the word נכּוּן is used in a peculiar sense. I Sam. 23:23 reads: וּרְאוּ וּדְעוּ מִכָּל הַמַּחְבְּאִים; I Sam. 26:4 reads: וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד מַרְגְּלִים וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי בֵּא שְׂאוּל אֶל נִכּוּן; II Sam. 6:6 reads: וַיָּבֵאוּ עַד גֶּרֶן נִכּוּן.

The expression has always occasioned difficulty, and has received manifold renderings. Appreciating the fact that in II Sam. 6:6 a proper name undoubtedly stood in the original text, the Chronicler has substituted כִּידָן for the to him unintelligible נִכּוּן (I Chron. 13.9). This is unquestionably a textual emendation, and scarcely represents the original reading. \mathfrak{G}^B reads Νωδάβ for נִכּוּן, while \mathfrak{G}^{Bb} reads ᾽Ωδάβ , and \mathfrak{G}^A reads Ναχών as a proper name. \mathfrak{G}^L reads $\text{᾽Ορνὰ τοῦ ᾽Ιεβουσαίου}$, clearly a harmonistic emendation. Aquila reads $\text{ἕως ἄλωνος ἐτοιμῆς}$, a literal translation of נִכּוּן as a Niphal participle of כּוּן. Other Hexapla versions read variously Ναχώρ and ᾽Αχώρ . The Targum to this passage renders נִכּוּן גֶּרֶן by אַתֵּר מִתְקַן, literally "a prepared place," just as does Aquila.

For נִכּוּן in I Sam. 23:23 \mathfrak{G}^A reads ἔτοιμον , while \mathfrak{G}^B omits the entire clause from מִכָּל הַמַּחְבְּאִים through נִכּוּן. The Targum renders נִכּוּן אֶל by מִן קִשְׁט, "of a certainty," as does also Symmachus, ἐπὶ βεβαίῳ . נִכּוּן in I Sam. 26:4 \mathfrak{G}^{AB} renders ἔτοιμος , i. e. it translates נִכּוּן literally as a Niphal participle of כּוּן, regardless of the meaning of the passage, just as Targum and Aquila do to II Sam. 6:6. Apparently, feeling also the need of the mention of some exact location, \mathfrak{G}^{AB} has added ἐκ Κεειλά . \mathfrak{G}^L reads εἰς Σεκελάγ , again evidently a harmonistic emendation. Here also the Targum renders נִכּוּן by מִן קִשְׁט.

Among modern commentators an even wider range of interpretation is manifest. Keil and Delitzsch (English edition, 189) render גֶּרֶן נִכּוּן in II Sam. 6:6 "the threshing-floor of the stroke," deriving נִכּוּן from נִכָּה. Reuss (German edition, I, 241) offers a similar interpretation. Klostermann (152) trans-

lates, "bis zu einer bestimmten Tenne," and remarks, "ein Ausdruck, der von der Benennung geflissentl. absieht, indem er die Sache setzt; denn der Ort soll erst einen Eigennamen erhalten, u. es genügt, auf die abschüssige Glätte des Tennenbodens aufmerksam gemacht zu haben, um den folgenden Vorfall zu begreifen." Commenting upon נָכוֹן in II Sam. 6:6 Smith says (294), "evidently a proper name; the endeavor of some of the commentators to make it mean indefinitely, a *certain* threshing-floor, is not sustained by usage, nor is Th.'s interpretation *fixed* or *permanent* in distinction from a temporary floor used only for a particular field or during one season. Whether Nachon is the correct name, or whether we should read כִּירֶן with Chr., or Νωδάβ with G^B , cannot be determined." Budde (Marti, *Hand Commentar*, 229 and *Polychrome Bible*, 82) seems fairly content with the כִּירֶן of Chr. Nowack (*Handkommentar*, 173) says that the context clearly demands a proper name, and agrees with Budde that the כִּירֶן of Chr. is the best authenticated emendation that can be made. However, in his translation of the text he leaves a blank space for the name. Kittel (in Kautzsch, *Die Heilige Schrift des A. T.*,² 323) does likewise. (Cf. also Driver, *Notes*,² 267 and Wellhausen, *T.B.S.*) The latest interpretation of the word, and one completely at variance with those usually given is that of Arnold (*Ephod and Ark* (1917), 62). He says, "נָכוֹן is of course not a proper name; which could serve no purpose here. Neither the author nor his readers would be familiar with the name of the owner of every threshing-floor between Kiriath-jearim and Jerusalem. Obviously the adjective, like the substantive נָרָן itself, has some bearing on the misadventure about to be narrated. I have taken נָכוֹן to signify in this connection, *firm, hard, permanent*, that is, a threshing-floor of bare rock, as distinguished from one made of levelled and hardened earth. It is possible, to be sure, that the author intends נָכוֹן in the alternative sense of *prepared*, that is, smoothed and swept, and made ready for the season's threshing. In the latter case the description would fix the season of the year as late in June or early in July. For the rest, the phrase וַיֵּבְאוּ עַר seems to imply that the procession had not travelled very far when the accident happened. Nor was a threshing-floor likely to lie across the path when once the highway had been gained."

For **אל-נכון** in I Sam. 23:23 Smith proposes (215) to read **על-נכון**, and interprets the expression with the Targum and Symmachus, "of a certainty," i. e. the Ziphites were to return to Saul with information resting on a certainty. Driver (*Notes*,² 189) offers the same interpretation. Budde (159) proposes the omission of **אל**, and the change of **וישבתם** to **והשבתם**, and translates "and bring me positive information." Nowack (120) interprets the passage in the same way, although he does not emend the text to the same extent as does Budde. Kittel (309), too, interprets the passage in the same manner. Klostermann (103) renders **אל-נכון** "nach der Verabredung."

אל-נכון in I Sam. 26:4, Smith feels (231) must designate some particular place. He hesitatingly proposes to substitute **אר-נכחו**, "to the point just in front of him." This reading is rejected by Budde (169), who seems to prefer, with Wellhausen, the reading of \mathfrak{G}^{AB} **מקעילה**. However, he admits that this reading, too, is open to very serious objection. Nowack (130) rejects the readings of both \mathfrak{G}^{AB} and \mathfrak{G}^L , and holds that a place name is clearly required, and also that Smith's suggestion, **אל-נכחו**, is worthy of consideration. In his translation he leaves a blank space for the word, as does also Kittel (312) (cf. also Driver, *Notes*,² 205). Klostermann (113) feels that **אל-נכון** may designate the time quite as well as the place, and so renders "auf eine bestimmte Zeit."

This great variety of interpretations shows clearly the difficulties under which the versions and commentators labored. And yet a simple explanation may well solve the difficulty. All modern commentators (with the single exception of Arnold to II Sam. 6:6) agree that the contexts of both I Sam. 26:4 and II Sam. 6:6 require a proper name for **נכון**. And a moment's consideration shows that the interpretation of **אל-נכון** in I Sam. 23:23, "of a certainty," involves far-fetched, unauthenticated, and altogether unnecessary textual emendation. Vv. 24 and 25 make it clear that after coming to a definite understanding with Saul, the Ziphites set out in advance of Saul and his men, to locate the hiding-place of David. Knowing the country well, and being unencumbered with the usual military and camp equipment, they can move more rapidly than Saul and his

soldiers, and are therefore able to play the rôle of scouts and spies. But Saul and his men do not remain where they had been encamped, awaiting a report from the Ziphites. As v. 25 states explicitly, they, too, move on, though naturally more slowly, in the general direction of the district in which, it is known, David is in hiding. What more natural, and even necessary, therefore, than that, when sending the Ziphites forth, Saul should have agreed with them upon some definite spot in the immediate vicinity of David's supposed place of concealment, where they were to meet him, and there report to him the results of their search? In other words, here, too, just as in the other two passages, נכון probably stands for a place name, which has been lost. Saul says to the Ziphites, "Observe and take note of all the hiding-places where he conceals himself, then return to me at, and I will go with you, etc."¹

This being the case, the only satisfactory explanation of the word must be one which will account for its use in all three passages. An explanation lies ready to hand, so simple and natural that it is surprising that it has not occurred to commentators before this. Sebastian Schmid² seems to have been on the right track when he translated אל-נכון of I Sam. 26:4 *ad certum (locum)*. Klostermann, too, has rendered גרן נכון of II Sam. 6:6 "a certain threshing-floor." It is beyond question that in each of the three passages a proper name stood originally in the place now occupied by נכון, and that these three proper names were lost or became unrecognizable, and נכון was substituted to supply the deficiency. נכון would then be a synonym of the more customary פלוני, and would be equivalent both literally and idiomatically to our English "certain" in the

¹ While the locative may be used more frequently with place names, none the less the use of אל likewise in such connection is amply attested; cf. Zach. 8:3; II Chron. 20:27. Or, not impossibly, the original may have used the locative, and אל may be the result of dittography with the preceding אל. Or it may be that the original text had the locative of the place name, but when this was lost and נכון was substituted, אל was substituted with it to avoid the building up of the form נכונה with the locative ה, which might have been easily confused with the feminine of the participle.

² *In Libros Samuelis Commentarius*, Argentorati, 1687, '89 (quoted from Smith, 231).

expression, "a certain place," for a place the name of which is unknown or has been forgotten. This translation, "certain," for נכון accords perfectly with the context of all three passages.

It may be that the original authors themselves were no longer acquainted with the actual names in question, and themselves employed נכון in these three passages. More probably, however, the original text gave the names correctly, but when these became illegible, or, for one reason or another, were lost, later scribes inserted the indefinite and idiomatic נכון.

While this hypothesis can not, of course, be proved positively, it has in its favor at least that it accounts with one explanation for the use of נכון in all three passages, something which no other explanation hitherto offered, has succeeded in doing.