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Mishpat and Zedeq in the Eighth-Century Prophets

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MISHPAT AND ZEDEQ IN THE
EIGHTH-CENTURY PROPHETS

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most striking period of theological development in the Old Testament was the eighth century, marked by the work of Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, and Micah. Here were men who abhorred conditions as they found them among the people chosen by God. There was a nearly complete lack of all the virtues and God-centeredness which should have been expected of the people. Thus these prophets had the task of pointing the people back to a God-pleasing and God-thinking life. In doing so, they made use of two particularly important terms: mishpat and zedeq.¹ By using justice and righteousness as they did, the eighth-century prophets, under God's guidance, made a great advancement in theological thinking over the men who had gone before them. This advance was in complete agreement with the methods God has always used in continually revealing more of Himself. The word "advance" continually presents itself, and as the material used was studied, including the passages in their contexts, it was always apparent that God was using these men to increase the meaning and understanding of mishpat and zedeq. This is progressive revelation in its best and truest sense. Because of the importance of these two terms, we will endeavor to show how both mishpat and zedeq were used by the eighth-century prophets and show the manner in which they advanced their meaning.

That there was an advance in understanding of mishpat and zedeq

¹For the sake of convenience this will be the transliteration used. Otherwise they would be: mishpat and tsedeq or gedeq.

through the centuries preceeding the eighth century is obvious to all who read the Old Testament. Both terms were present in the vocabularies of the people, but with different significance to different ages. An example of this is found in this statement of Patterson:

The lawgivers tried to embody in their specific requirements the demands of righteousness, and the sages saw a close connection between right conduct and correct thinking in regard to the problems of everyday living. The priests, as a rule, defined goodness in terms of obedience to law with special reference to its ritualistic requirements. The prophets generally were opposed to this conception of goodness for, as they saw it, the most important thing about goodness was the motive from which particular acts were derived.²

Thus were the older generations more concerned with the ritual life than with the inner spiritual life of the individual.

With the eighth-century prophets we find a great revolt against this attitude. The effect is seen in the association of Holiness and Righteousness, but it is Righteousness with a special emphasis.³ It has been shown that justice and righteousness are perhaps the most important concepts to come from the eighth century. To those words are applied new meanings, new in that God apparently had not thus far so very closely associated such terms with the life of the people. That He was just and righteous had been held from the very beginning by the religious leaders, but it was here a continuation of the age-old battle to make the people see that they applied this to daily living. This change in application

²Charles E. Patterson, The Philosophy of the Old Testament (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1953), p. 22.

³Norman E. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 63.

can be seen in the fact that

At the time of the Exodus, justice is conceived in terms of equality and it is believed that the punishment should be made equal to the crime. This conception of justice seems primitive in comparison with later ideals but we should not forget that it denotes considerable progress from that early song of revenge which was attributed to Lamech.⁴

We have attempted, in this thesis, to find the sources and authorities most competent to lead us along the way toward understanding what progression of revelation actually did take place in the writings as we have them from the eighth century. That there are other authorities which perhaps should have been consulted should not be denied; but we feel that the presentation as it is here sufficiently proves that these prophets were truly led by God to make a great advance over their predecessors.

⁴Patterson, op. cit., p. 89.

CHAPTER II

ETYMOLOGY

Etymology of Mishpat

We learn first that Mishpat finds its root in the verb שָׁפַט, a verb used to designate the action of judging, governing. This word is generally held to be Hebrew in derivation; with the Phoenecian root שָׁפַט being the same, as it also finds its equal in nouns and pronouns. Among the cognate languages we find in Punic the word sufet; in Biblical Aramaic the word שָׁפַט. In Assyrian the word šapātu (t equal to ט), and its synonym dūnu (דן), meaning "judge"; the word šiptu (ש), which is probably the word for "judgment"; and the word sapitu, meaning captain.¹

With this as a basis we now turn to other opinions on its meaning and use among the Hebrews. First of all

The root has to do with the verdict given by a judge (cf. the Latin judicium), and it is used of every phase of a judge's work, discriminating the truth, Zech. 7:9; deciding controversies, vindicating or condemning, and even, in the niphal form, of entering into a controversy to see who is in the right, Isaiah 43:26. The noun mishpat means the judgment which is given by the shofet (judge), whence the word can mean justice, ordinance, legal right, and so forth.²

This explanation is a general one and speaks of almost purely civil juridicial matters. The common man of the area would have heard the word and applied it to the local court procedure. To the Hebrew, however,

¹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, Reprint 1955), p. 1047.

²Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 93-4.

the word had a definite religious connotation.

The Hebrew's mind held mishpat or judgment to mean the demands of God's law, and God's justice. It is a common characteristic of religions and peoples in the early stages of their development that justice should have a close contact with, and should be closely intertwined with, religion.³ This process of development as based on religious feeling is to be seen in the study of the Old Testament's total theology. In this area we are presented with this thought:

[The Jews] were prevented from following the normal line of development because of their continued insistence on the personal activity of God in the common affairs of this world. They never lost the connection between God and the Law. This was due to that theocentric emphasis on the part of the 8th century prophets on which we are taking such pains to insist.⁴

In reading this opinion, one can never forget that whether or not the Jews were prevented from following the normal development, their understanding of mishpat was the direct result of God. He it was who caused that theocentric emphasis in those prophets.

As the Jews progressed in their understanding of mishpat, they were led also to a growth in understanding God and His revelation. This can be seen in the fact that both mishpat and torah were regarded in Old Israel as being the definite word of Jehovah. "The two words are synonymous to the extent that both are the declared word of God. They are different in that torah, at this early stage, meant an original pronouncement, whilst mishpat meant a decision according to precedent. But both

³Ibid., p. 94.

⁴Ibid., p. 94.

equally are the word of God.⁵ With this background we are already able to see that mishpat, to the Hebrew, was an extremely important thing. Simply by being the word of God it held an extremely high position in every facet of their living.

Etymology of Zedeq

We find that zedeq is also a word which is Hebrew or Aramaic in derivation. In the Arabic the general meaning was to "speak the truth," (and also meant "hard, even, straight, perfect"). To the Sabeian it could have the meaning of "just," and usually meant "excellent"; though there was also the verb to favour, endow (one with something). In Phoenecian $\rho\tau\chi$ was the adjective "just, right." The writings found at Tel-el-Amarna present the word gaduk bearing the meaning "innocent." Old Aramaic brings us $\rho\tau\chi$ as a noun for "righteousness, loyalty." Nabataean literature has the adjective $\rho\tau\chi\chi$ meaning "authorized." The Palmyrene translation of $\chi\tau\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma$ is $\rho\tau\chi\chi$. Saho uses gaduk as "to be true, clear"; while the Ethiopic carries the meaning of "just, righteous," as does the New Hebrew $\rho\tau\chi$ in the Piel and Hiphil, and as also does the Aramaic $\rho\tau\chi$.⁶

The older studies of the Old Testament and its language gave fewer meanings to the word in its history. We see this demonstrated when we read in the mid-nineteenth century: "The word means straightness, justice, righteousness, and nothing more (from tsadaq, to be hard, firm, extended, straight, e.g., rumh-un-tsadaq, a hard, firm, and straight lance.). . ."⁷

⁵ Ibid., pp. 94-5.

⁶ Brown, Driver, Briggs, op. cit., p. 841.

⁷ Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah,

In another of these older studies we find Oehler closely following the Arabic meaning of being straight. He applies it more specifically to the activities of God, bringing it into close connection with nishpat, thus:

The root meaning of קָטַל is (according to the Arabic) "to be straight"; and thus, according to its original meaning, the expression corresponds most nearly with קָטַל . The word קָטַל expresses what is straight and right, in the sense that God in His government always does what is suitable. . . . Specially, but not exclusively, the sphere in which קָטַל manifests itself is the judicial activity of God.⁸

Davidson points to yet another meaning of the same Arabic root when he says: "In Arabic the root means "to be true," i.e., to correspond to the idea and reality."⁹ This once again departs from a purely theological definition, but is one which most certainly may be applied to God. While several men, especially Nöldeke and Delitzsch, hold the original meaning of the Arabic to have been "to be straight, firm," Skinner holds to the idea of hardness. We also find this type of reasoning: "In the last analysis, it would seem better to take the first meaning, for it accounts better for the later developments of the root in Semitic languages. It

translated by Rev. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. P. Berdmans Pub. Co., 1954), II, 159. Delitzsch somewhat amends the statement by continuing: "but it has a double aspect, because justice consists, according to circumstances, of either wrath or favor, and therefore has sometimes the idea of the strict execution of justice, as in this instance Is. 41:2, sometimes of a manifestation of justice in fidelity to promises, as in verse 10."

⁸Gustave F. Oehler, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by George E. Day (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, Reprint of edition of 1883), p. 113.

⁹A. B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 265. He adds: "The lexicographers, with some subtlety, say that a man to speak sidiq must not only say what conforms to the reality, but at the same time what conforms to the idea in his own mind."

found a place in the vocabulary of ethics in those languages."¹⁰

Davidson is one of the authors who feel that the real etymological meaning of the root קטל may not be now ascertainable. His reasoning is this:

Like קדש , holy, the word, no doubt, once expressed a physical action; but in usage it seems now to occur only in a moral sense, or when used in the sense of our word "right." It has been suggested that the Hebrew idea of "right" was what was conformable to a standard; but there seems to be little in this. It was not conformity to a standard that made things right, but conformity to a right standard.¹¹

The same author maintains that before there could be any expressions of judgment on conduct, the mind passing them must have had some sort of instruction as to right and wrong. His argument for this is:

long before we find judgments on conduct passed, the person or mind passing them had already the ideas of right and wrong, and the further ideas what things were right and what things were wrong in the particular spheres to which his judgment applied. And long before judgments are passed and predications of righteousness or unrighteousness made, whether in regard to God or man, the persons making them were already so far morally educated.¹²

This theory fits very neatly with the fact that God has revealed somewhat of the knowledge of right and wrong to all men.

As the whole meaning of zedeq is applied to Israel, we must confront the fact that God was active in that people. So also do we find a close connection between the ideas of God and the moral order of the people.

This statement is made concerning that relationship:

Ordinarily the ideas of God and the moral order of life coincide. And to be righteous is to be found in practical harmony in one's conduct with this moral order. Hence on the widest scale Israel is

¹⁰Snaitch, op. cit., p. 91.

¹¹Davidson, op. cit., pp. 129-30.

¹²Ibid., p. 130.

the righteous nation in opposition to the heathen nations. And God's deeds in behalf of Israel are righteous acts. . . . On a smaller scale, those who live in harmony with the public laws and customs of Israel are called "righteous," in opposition to those whose life is not governed by such principles-- who are wicked (יָשָׁר).¹³

This brings up another method of determining the original meaning of zedeq, that of checking the word's antithesis. Therefore the original meaning is most easily found by contrasting zedeq-zedeqah with that antithesis, which is resha'-rishah (wickedness).¹⁴

An entirely different meaning also is presented. That is, sometimes zedeqah means "salvation"; and it can even be paralleled with "wealth" as we see in Proverbs 8:18, or "prosperity" as seen in Joel 2:23. In such a way the deliverance from Egypt was called a zedeqah in I Samuel 12:7 f. and in Micah 6:5.¹⁵

After these considerations, it would seem best to take the original meaning of the word zedeq to have been "to be straight." It thus very easily comes to be used as a figure for that which is, or ought to be, firmly established, successful and enduring in human affairs. It then stands for that norm in the affairs of the world to which men and things should conform and by which they can be measured. An instance of this is the declaring of just balances and measures in Deut. 25:15; Lev. 19:36; Ez. 45:10; Job 31:6. So also the sacrifices of Deut. 33:19, Psalm 4:5(6) and 51:19(21) are the correct and proper sacrifices, those that

¹³Ibid., pp. 273-74.

¹⁴Snaith, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 90.

conform to the regulations.¹⁶ Finally, in discussing etymology, we can only agree with Lofthouse: "All that we can do, when we turn to the Old Testament writings, is to collect the outstanding instances, attempt to classify them, and ask what meaning best suits the different classes."¹⁷ But in so doing one can never lose sight of the fact that there seems to be a definite progression of thought on the part of the Old Testament writers. Each was led to speak to his own situation with a fuller revelation of the meaning of words which had been with the people already for ages.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁷W. F. Lofthouse, "The Righteousness of Jahweh," Expository Times, XV (October, 1938-September, 1939), 341-45.

CHAPTER III

CONCORDANCE STUDY

Mishpat

In the following chapter the total number of occurrences of mishpat and zedeq are derived from the monumental concordance of Solomon Mandelkern.¹ The divisions made under separate headings are done by the author as a result of his study of those passages. He has divided the basic list for each into those referring to God, His command, His nature, etc., and has applied them to man and his life. From these the passages are taken which seem to have a forensic meaning, whether of God or of man.

The word mishpat, in its various forms, is found a total of fifty-three times in the eighth-century prophets. This total is heavily overbalanced by Isaiah, who uses the word thirty-eight times. We find it in Hosea six times, in Amos four times, and in Micah five times.

In Isaiah we find these passages referring to God twenty-seven times:

1:27	26:8	34:5	50:8
3:14	26:9	40:14	51:4
4:4	28:6	41:1	53:8
5:7	28:17	42:1	56:1
5:16	28:6	42:3	58:2
9:7	30:18	42:4	61:8
16:5	33:5	49:4	

The same book has only eleven passages with mishpat referring to man:

1:17	32:1	59:8	59:14
1:21	32:7	59:9	59:15
10:2	40:27	59:11	

¹Solomon Mandelkern, Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraicae atque Chaldaicae, 2 Vols. (Leipzig: Veit, 1896).

From this total of thirty-eight, ten of the passages in Isaiah have an apparently forensic meaning:

1:17	16:5	32:7	53:8
5:14	28:6	34:5	
10:2	28:6	50:8	

Of the six passages in Hosea only one seems to have its major emphasis placed on God: 2:19. The other five all refer to man:

5:1	6:5	12:6
5:11	10:4	

Of these only two, which is a rather high percentage, have a forensic connotation: 5:1, 10:4.

Mishpat occurs only four times in Amos. Of these two, 5:7 and 5:15, refer to man; and 5:24 and 6:12 refer to God. The only one with a forensic connotation is 6:12.

Micah has four of its five passages referring to man: 3:1, 3:8, 3:9, and 6:8. The one passage referring to God is 7:9. This same one, 7:9, is the only one with a forensic meaning.

Zedeq

By far the greatest number of the zedeq passages occur in Isaiah. Of the total number of eighty found in the eighth-century prophets, Isaiah uses the word seventy-one times. Hosea uses the word four times, Amos five times, and strangely enough the word seems to be missing in Micah. Here, in zedeq, we find that there are only nine occurrences which seem to have some sort of forensic meaning. All of these are found in Isaiah, and only one of them is concerned with man. The adjective form, zaddiq, appears with the translation "just, justice" ten times in Isaiah, once each in Hosea and Amos.

In Isaiah zedeq is found in reference to God forty times:

1:27	33:5	45:19	54:14
5:16	41:10	45:21	54:17
9:7	41:26	45:23	56:1
11:4	42:6	45:24	59:16
11:5	42:21	46:13	59:17
16:5	43:9	49:24	60:17
24:16	43:26	51:5	60:21
32:1	45:8	51:6	61:10
32:16	45:8	51:8	61:11
32:17	45:13	53:11	63:1

There are thirty-one occurrences of zedeq referring to man:

1:21	26:7	48:1	59:4
1:26	26:7	51:1	59:9
3:10	26:9	51:7	59:14
5:7	26:10	56:1	62:1
5:23	29:21	57:1	62:2
5:23	33:15	57:12	64:5
10:22	41:2	58:2	64:5
26:2	46:12	58:8	

The nine passages with a forensic idea are:

11:4	43:9	45:13	45:23
11:5	43:26	45:19	48:1
41:26			

The passages in Hosea referring to God are 2:19 and 10:12; while those referring to man are 10:12 and 14:9.

Amos has only one zedeq passage referring to God; with 2:6, 5:7, 5:12, and 6:12 referring to man. This would lend accent to the fact that Amos seems to stress that the people must continue to live in zedeq, must follow the norms and will of God.

Among all these passages containing nishpat and zedeq twelve of them demonstrate the close affinity of the words in Isaiah.

1:21	5:16	32:1	54:17
1:27	16:5	32:16	56:1
5:7	28:17	33:5	58:2

The passage in Hosea showing this is 2:19, that in Micah is 7:9. Three are found in Amos: 5:7, 5:24, and 6:12.

One of the most interesting aspects of this is the number of times the two words appear to have a forensic meaning. Rowley maintains that the words are often used forensically in Hebrew. He says: "Their use in relation to God means that he is utterly blameless, and that if there were a court before which he could be arraigned, his acts would stand the utmost scrutiny."² One says that these passages refer to the reliability of witnesses who are trustworthy in the sense of their statements being verified by events, or by the defendant getting the verdict.³

However, another completely disagrees with the theory that any of the passages could have such a forensic meaning:

to make the forensic aspect of sedekah central is to emphasize the impersonality of the judge. He is there to pronounce sentence and nothing more. He must feel no emotion, and, as the judge, he has nothing further to do with the accused. But Jahweh is never impersonal. He is just what the good judge, according to our forensic standards, is not. He is an 'el kanna'; he reacts strongly, both in love and hate.⁴

Further to emphasize this thought, he says that the Hebrew mind is not really forensic at all.

We are able already to see how these prophets of the eighth century had progressed beyond the thinking of the previous religious leaders in regard to the relationship between the people and God. Being right or righteous before God, following Him and His character is vitally important.

²H. H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1956), p. 65.

³Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 113-14.

⁴W. F. Lofthouse, "The Righteousness of Jahweh," Expository Times, XV (October, 1938-September, 1939), p. 343.

CHAPTER IV

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION OF MISHPAT AND ZEDEQ

Mishpat

Norm and Character of God

The Old Testament is a vast and complicated book, through which one can see the hand of God at work as He continually reveals more and more of Himself and His kingdom to His people. With this progress in revelation there comes a fuller understanding of the relationship between God and the people. The first giant step in this was taken through the person of Moses and the leading of the Israelites to Canaan. God kept on with His revelation, becoming more specific and detailed. We find this expressed in this way:

Jahwe ist geradezu ein Gott des Rechtes und der Sittlichkeit, nicht nur Quelle und Hüter beider, und so bleibt es seit Mose die Eigentümlichkeit Israels anderen Völkern gegenüber, dass Recht und Religion bei ihm in viel engerer Verbindung stehen als anderwärts.¹

So do we come to mishpat and zedeq as we find them in the eighth century. Here we first discuss mishpat, or justice, in relation to God. The God of the Israelites was the God in whom the Israelite blessing and holiness were rooted, and it was determined by the Israelitish character and its usage of mishpat. The character and nature of God in the minds of the people was reflected in their daily lives. We see this in Isaiah

¹Rudolf Kittel, Die Religion des Volkes Israel (Leipzig: Verlag Quelle & Meyer, 1921), p. 74.

28:26: "For his God doth instruct him to discretion (Heb. mishpat) and doth teach him." The Israelite felt that guidance to mishpat came from God.

Concerning this we read:

The nature of the god may be said to be formed according to the psychic character of the people, but the Israelites were not in doubt that the reverse was the case. They were Yahweh's children, brought up by him. Their psychic content took its special colouring from the source whence it flowed, and all their mishpat was derived from Yahweh. This applied not only to the holy acts which Yahweh demanded, but also to the feelings of the heart and all the work of daily life, for all Israelite action was an expression of Israelite mishpat. When the farmer cultivated his soil, sowing the different kinds of corn in the proper way, this too, was the mishpat which his God had taught him.²

Thus all things done by the Israelite were done under the instruction of Yahweh who continually pointed out the just, right and proper way, Isaiah 28:26.

Because of this, when the great prophets of the eighth century de-claimed against the social injustice of their age, their message was born of their perception of the character of God. It was because they realized that God was a God of justice and righteousness that they demanded justice and righteousness from men. Here was something deeper than an abstract theology. It was a vital theology, a demand that men should reflect the character that God was perceived to have. And that character was the character that he revealed in his acts.³ So Isaiah says (26:9) "for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."

²John. Pederson, Israel, Its Life and Culture (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), III-IV, p. 501.

³H. H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1956), p. 60.

The advancing moralization of the idea of God is chiefly brought to us in the writing prophets of the eighth century, especially Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. These three prophets are all concerned with the moral relation between Jahweh and Israel, but each of them emphasizes a different aspect of that relation, and thus a characteristic idea of God.⁴

For Amos, the central thought is the absolute justice of the divine sovereignty. Jahweh is righteous, and has the will and power to administer the government of the world by the standard of His character.⁵ The sins He punishes are mainly those of social injustice: 5:12, "For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just. . . ." The only fit offering to a moral ruler is morality; as He demands that judgment should run down as waters.⁶ In his conception of Jahweh as universal justice, Amos went beyond the thinking of any of his predecessors. He saw something like the reign of moral law illustrated in the course of events.⁷ In regard to Jahweh's nishpat, we know that it was closely connected with His love, as Rowley says:

it is clear that the justice and the love of God are not attributes to be set over against one another, between which there was a tension. His discipline of Israel was not simply the expression of God's justice, overcoming and setting aside his love for the time being. It was as much the expression of his love as of his justice.⁸

This is seen in Amos 3:2, where he tells the people that the reason He

⁴H. Wheeler Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1952), p. 67.

⁵Ibid., p. 67.

⁶Amos 5:12.

⁷Charles H. Patterson, The Philosophy of the Old Testament (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1953), p. 172.

⁸Rowley, op. cit., p. 64.

punishes them so is because He loves them so.

In Micah it is shown that it is necessary to think of doing mishpat as meaning "doing God's will as it has been made clear in past experience." According to this line of development, then, mishpat is of God, being His declared will.⁹ This we see clearly in Micah 6:8: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Isaiah, too, was keenly aware that mishpat was one of the major characteristics of Jahweh. He also realized that this made itself felt in every facet of the life of the people. We read that

Because he knew Jahweh was a righteous god whose principles of justice are involved in the affairs of all nations, Isaiah was sure that only one course of action could make a country safe and that was to bring the policies of government into harmony with the requirements of justice and social righteousness.¹⁰

This is demonstrated in Isaiah 51:1-5. Again we are able to see the great steps that were taken by these prophets of the eighth century beyond the theological thinking of their predecessors.

The major new idea of these prophets was their emphasis on nationalism, and to this they applied the mishpat of God. This was their reason for preaching, and in doing so they unfolded God's moral purpose for the whole world. When Israel did not reflect His character in her internal life, but by the evils that were rampant revealed her sorry state, then her way could not prosper.¹¹ Jahweh is a god of justice and for that

⁹Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 95-6.

¹⁰Patterson, op. cit., p. 209.

¹¹Rowley, op. cit., p. 63.

reason He could not support a nation whose policies were contrary to the principles which belonged to His nature.¹² This is clearly evident in Amos 2:6-8. Isaiah goes even farther, and lifts the idea of God's mishpat to a new majesty by closely connecting it to His holiness.¹³

Perhaps the most typical passage regarding God's mishpat as it was His character and norm, and as that norm was to be reflected in the lives of the people, is still Micah 6:8. There it tells us that the requirements of Jahweh are not defined in terms of ritual or ceremonies, but in the possession on the part of human beings of those moral qualities which make for kindness, justice, and the spirit of humility.¹⁴ Jahweh truly was a God of justice to the eighth-century prophets, and they never ceased telling the people that as God was just, so He required them to be just.

God's Mishpat in the Lives of the People

When we consider mishpat in the lives of the people, we immediately notice that the word receives a different connotation than being strictly God's norm and character. We are told that in Hosea mishpat is understood as what is fitting for an Israelite community.¹⁵ But we can never forget that such was also the norm of God; something which He gave

¹²Fatterson, op. cit., p. 170.

¹³Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, pp. 69-70.

¹⁴Fatterson, op. cit., p. 301.

¹⁵Pedersen, op. cit., pp. 540-41

the people by which they could guide their daily living. Sometimes it almost seemed as though the laws were un-Israelitish; but the prophet said they were the very laws that should be observed (Hosea 8:12). Another consideration is that this is true religion regarded on its practical side, as the rule and authority for life in all its relations. It is in this way that Isaiah 42:1, "he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles," is used.¹⁶ And thus Robinson also says: "Isaiah describes Him as a God of mishpat, i.e., not simply One who passes sentence and says the last word, but One whose last word will conform to the strictest rectitude."¹⁷ Therefore, God is just, His words and actions follow that justice closely in dealing with man, and man must guide his living by that justice.

It is through this definition and understanding of mishpat that we come to man's sin. Here we learn that the idea of sin in the Old Testament is that of the prophets--disobedience to the moral requirements of God.¹⁸ In other words, to sin is to cease following the mishpat of God, to go off on one's own tangent and live apart from Him and His norms. This was the sin of Israel, and this was the malady being fought by the prophets: the people had forsaken the mishpat of God. We see this demonstrated in Amos and Hosea, of which we are told:

Jahweh's judgments are those of a God of a pronounced Israelite type.

¹⁶Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah, translated by Rev. James Martin, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), II p. 175.

¹⁷Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 86.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 161.

The ruling God on Zion is the same as the old God of the people, the guardian of Israelite sedhaka and mishpat. . . . The mishpat which as Israelites they ought to love and practice they have thus changed into a poison, and they have thrown justice to the ground, Hosea 2:6, 4:1, 5:7, 11 ff, 15, 6:12, 8:4 ff. All this shows a contempt for Jahweh's torah and his laws.¹⁹

Truly Jahweh considered it a sin for the people to forsake His mishpat. The words were harsh for Ephraim in Hosea 5:11: "Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment." As Israel dealt falsely with its neighbors, it fell away from God's own mishpat, and in doing so their lives turned poisonous, as we learn from Hosea 10:4: "They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field." Laetsch tells us that here mishpat is used in the sense of right, law and order, which the people have turned to poison.²⁰ The people addressed by Amos had the same failing, completely mishandling mishpat and making their life nothing but bitterness: (6:12) "Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow the sea with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock."

Thus we learn that the eighth-century prophets told the people they had sinned greatly in forsaking God's mishpat. But that makes us check the results of such a forgetting of mishpat. We see first: "Jahweh is aware of the fact that whenever men go contrary to the principles of justice they will bring about their own destruction. A nation cannot

¹⁹ Pedersen, op. cit., p. 545.

²⁰ Theo. Laetsch, The Minor Prophets (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 81.

ignore the principles of righteousness and hope to survive."²¹ The fierce anger of God and the prophets is generated because the sin of the people is not a simple thing. Thus Micah declares the reproach of God to Israel for their rebellion after He has shown them what He desires, (Micah 6:8). One need not wonder that mishpat becomes poison when it is a true rebellion against God. This is the reason why punishment is in store for the people.

This is the basis for Robinson's statement: "Not less fundamental to the prophetic religion is the idea of suffering as the just recompense and reward of sin, its necessary accompaniment in the moral government of the world by Jahweh."²² Hosea 6:5 tells us the feelings of God in regard to punishment for sin: "Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth." We can see what the prophets thought of the mishpat of God in relationship to themselves as they proclaim the sinfulness of the people from Micah 3:8: "But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgressions, and to Israel his sin."

In all of this we are able to see that there was a definite advance in understanding mishpat on the part of these prophets. Not only was the mishpat of God spread to include all nations; at the same time it was narrowed to more implicate the individual in his rebellion against that mishpat. This is quite evident, as we see: "A fuller recognition of

²¹ Patterson, op. cit., p. 283.

²² Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 161.

the claims of individuality was implied in the moral appeals of the eighth-century prophets, but it does not become explicit until the publication of the Deuteronomic law, a century later.²³ The individual nature of sin gained in recognition as opposed to the national consideration previously given to it. And this extended not just to the laymen of the country; the leaders were implicated to an almost greater extent. The leaders, especially, gave proof that they wanted nothing to do with the norms of mishpat as God had set them up. We learn this from Micah 3:9: "Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity."

Thus are we able to see that there was no doubt among these prophets that God was just, and that His mishpat was important as the rule and guide for the people. Not simply important, but completely inescapable. Men were commanded to acknowledge the mishpat of God toward them, and to use that same mishpat in their dealings with the people around them. When the people refused to recognize this obligation, which came with being the people of the God of mishpat, the prophets became active in proclaiming the fact that God, in punishing the people, was also acting according to His mishpat. In fact, it was the punishment surrounding them and seemingly endless which caused the people the greatest concern. We learn that

The greatest problem which arose for it [the Hebrew religion] was not as to the existence but as to the righteousness of God. This means that there is a standard to which He is expected to conform (zedeq), just as there are standard weights and measures to which the tradesman ought to conform. But it does not mean that there

²³Ibid., p. 89.

is an abstract righteousness existing "in the air;" the will of God is felt to be supreme. Faith wrestles hard to maintain its conviction that the divine will is fundamentally and intrinsically righteous, even if, in its higher ranges, sometimes incomprehensible by our human standards of righteousness.²⁴

There can be no doubt that to the eighth-century prophets there was an extremely close relationship between justice and righteousness. They had to face the question every time they spoke to sinful people. Therefore we turn now to a consideration of zedeq.

Zedeq as God's Norm

Although there are many instances in which mishpat apparently is used to denote a norm set up by God, it would seem that this word was more closely connected to the courts. It is zedeq which now appears to be the norm upon which God's mishpat is based and which guides Him in the use of it. The two words are extremely close in their meaning, and in their use by the eighth-century prophets. We see this emphasized thus:

Mishpat is zedeq in that men can learn what is God's norm through common experience or by the repeated declaration of those through whom He speaks and declares His sovereign will. Mishpat, however, tends always to be more closely connected with the law-courts than zedeq, though not to the extent which the Septuagint equivalent dikaion or the Vulgate judicium would suggest.²⁵

To give a definition of the word we might look to Isaiah 41:26:

"Who hath declared from the beginning, that we may know? and beforetime, that we may say, He is righteous? yea, there is none that sheweth, yea, there is none that declareth, yea, there is none that heareth your words."

²⁴H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 253.

²⁵Snaitch, op. cit., p. 96.

Delitzsch takes zedeq here as signifying either "he is right," i.e. in the right; or in a neuter sense, "it is right" (true), i.e. the claim to divine honours is really founded upon divine performances.²⁶ We also look to him for a further definition of zedeq as God's norm:

The righteousness of God is the stringency with which He acts, in accordance with the will of His holiness. This will of holiness is, so far as the human race is concerned, and apart from the counsels of salvation, a will of wrath; but from the standpoint of these counsels it is a will of love, which is only changed into a will of wrath towards those who despise the grace thus offered to them.²⁷

This is speaking of zedeq as God's norm only. Davidson maintains that the word first gets its meaning from whatever is right according to an understood standard, and only then deepens within the individual and is applied to God.²⁸

Snaith is very definite in his opinion that in these prophets zedeq really is the norm of God:

zedeq-zedeqah must be understood as that which God has established, or will establish in this world. . . . Zedeq is that which God Himself established as the proper norm, and which, on that account, is firm and straight, steady and immovable. It is the norm which God set up in the beginning, by which also He will judge the world, (Ps. 98:9).²⁹

He also shows that this norm of God had to be reflected in the people who worshipped Him:

²⁶Delitzsch, op. cit., II, 172.

²⁷Ibid., p. 178.

²⁸A. B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 269. He says here, "The standard may be propriety, popular custom, what is due socially, or what is required in morals or religion. . . . As the standard deepens in its idea, righteousness will also acquire more inwardness and condensation."

²⁹Snaith, op. cit., p. 96.

All four prophets combine into a solid unanimity in repeatedly reiterating the fact that Jehovah by His very Nature demands right conduct from His worshippers and will be content with nothing else. The specific and clearly expressed connection between qodesh (holiness) and zedeqah (righteousness) is found twice, both instances being in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, 5:16 and 6:1-5.³⁰

We can clearly see this effect as we look at the way in which worshippers give honor and glory to God in Isaiah 5:16: "But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness."

Wherever the prophets looked, they could see that God's will and actions coincided with righteousness, and to them God's will was the norm of righteousness on that account practically, without its being the source of it absolutely, or to be identified with it. When God's actions, therefore, were estimated, they were naturally judged by the same standard as was applied when the actions of men were judged. Because of this, it very often appeared that God's righteousness was what is called retributive righteousness.³¹ We must remember, however, that the prophets spoke of God's zedeq in those terms because that was the message God wanted the people to hear and understand. That zedeq was expressed in human terms was necessitated by the fact that it was spoken to human beings.

Though there are very many who maintain that zedeq was used by the eighth-century prophets as referring to a norm of God, or as an inherent part of His character, we find that there are some who do not hold this opinion. Bollier tells us: "The concept of righteousness as presented by

³⁰Ibid., p. 65.

³¹Davidson, op. cit., p. 270.

the eighth-century prophets does not describe man's relation to a norm of conduct, but rather his relation to God within the Covenant.³² Davidson looks at Isaiah 54:12 ff. and 51:4-5 and tells us that zedeq is an independent entity, apart from God. He says:

righteousness is not a Divine attribute. It is a Divine effect-- it is something produced in the world by God, a condition of the world produced by God, a condition of righteousness, called His not only because He produces it, but also because when it is produced men and the world will be in attributes that which He is. This righteousness of God appears to the prophet to be something in itself, something independent and eternal, Isaiah 51:6.³³

Looking at these passages to see what gives Davidson reason for this opinion, we see that there is a possible support for it. But, as we read them, we must remember that they are from what is called Deutero-Isaiah, in which the theological thinking is held to be farther advanced than the men of the eighth century.

In Isaiah 51:5 we read: "My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust." Here is truly eschatological speech, pointing to the Day all men have been hopefully anticipating. In the next verse the language changes to demonstrate the eternal nature of God's zedeq: "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be

³²J. A. Bollier, "The Righteousness of God: a word study," Interpretation, VIII (1954), 406.

³³Davidson, op. cit., p. 143.

abolished." It would appear that zedeq is referred to here as something independent in nature.

In spite of these arguments against zedeq being God's norm, those in favor of the idea of the norm would seem to carry the greater weight. Witness what we read of this as found in Amos:

Jahweh is righteous, and has both will and power to administer the government of the world by the standard of His own character. The moral revulsion of Amos from the immoral religion and the religious immorality of the Northern Kingdom became his divine call to prophecy. So the offended righteousness of God was central in the thought of Amos.³⁴

This is reflected in the statement of Amos to the people of his own nation who followed those immoral religious practises, Amos 6:12: "Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow the sea with oxen? for ye have turned judgment into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock." That zedeq is God's norm may be inferred from Micah 6:8, where Micah seems to combine the ideas of Amos and Moses.³⁵ It is the desire of God that His people live and move in mispat and zedeq, as they see these in Him.

Zedeq and the People

When God and His zedeq are lined up before the people, we have the situation described in Isaiah 26:19: "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." God is going to make His zedeq the guide and rule to be followed by the people.

³⁴Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 68.

³⁵Davidson, op. cit., p. 261.

Zedeq will be that with which He measures and estimates the people; and all His judgments of them are done in zedeq.³⁶

As we think of those who would rule out the possibility of zedeq being the norm of God, we must look to this statement by Davidson: "His being God of Israel does not invalidate the general principle of His righteous dealing with men. So far from invalidating it, it rather confirms it, (Amos 3:3)."³⁷ There we read that two cannot travel together unless they are agreed. And so must men agree with God in zedeq. This zedeq continually is the norm God uses as He deals with the people; nothing He does steps outside that line drawn by Him. As far as the other nations were concerned, the zedeq of God was an automatic lack of immunity for Israel against the inroads made by those nations. In fact, zedeq in the actions of God used those nations as means of pointing Israel back to Him. We find this statement:

So far from Israel being insured against the nations because it was in name His people, the nations are represented as being used as instruments in chastening the people. And these chastisements are an illustration of God's righteousness.³⁸

It is in Isaiah 5:16 and 10:22 that we are able to see that such was the case. In the first we see that "the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness." Back of all the destructive decrees coming from God one can see His ever-present zedeq. Even when the chosen people will be so decimated that they

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 134-35.

³⁷ Loc. cit.

³⁸ Loc. cit.

will be only a remnant zedeq will be overflowing: (10:22) "For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness." Not even in the most hopeless times are the people to be allowed to forget that this is God's zedeq in action.

Yet zedeq did not find its expression only in punishing the people. It was also exercised in their favor. This even led the people to complain that He had forgotten their rights:

Jehovah's interposition therefore for His people was claimed as right: it was righteous. Hence in the second part of Isaiah Israel complains that her God has forgotten her right: Isaiah 40:27, 58:2, 59:9, i.e., they do not enjoy God's interposition, which would be on His part righteousness. Hence, in general, God's interpositions to save His people are called His righteousness.³⁹

Typical of such a lament of the part of the people is Isaiah 59:9:

"Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness." One is led to think that such an attitude was still to be found in the minds of the people when Christ appeared on the scene. They could not recognize the zedeq of God in the carpenter's son.

We see, also in the second part of Isaiah, that zedeq was at times referred to as a possession of the people. We are told:

This righteousness is thus sometimes called the people's and sometimes God's, [Isaiah 60:21, 54:13, 61:10]. It is the people's because they possess it, though it has been freely given to them. . . . this righteousness of God which He bestows upon the people is not mere forensic justification. Besides the forgiveness of sins, it includes inward righteousness of heart, and the outward felicity which reflects God's favour, and is the seal of it to the people.⁴⁰

³⁹Ibid., p. 136.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 142.

Isaiah 61:10 clearly shows this: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness. . ."

Zedeq as Salvation

The aspect of salvation is intimately connected with the people. It appears when we begin to notice that one aspect of the people's use of zedeq is in their relations with the poor. We find it pointed out:

Because it is God's concern to establish zedeq in the land, He must perforce pay particular attention to the cause of the poor and out-cast, the widow and the orphan. . . . Already in the eighth century the word zedeq is invading the salvation vocabulary.⁴¹

This nearness of salvation in respect to zedeq is found expressed in Isaiah 56:1: "Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed." In fact, it would seem to be almost parallel with salvation.

Davidson makes the point that it is inherent with the zedeq of God to be equated with salvation:

Only by the knowledge of Him can it [zedeq] be attained. When attained it is salvation: Isaiah 41:22. The antithesis which in dogmatics we are familiar with is a righteous or just God and yet a Savior. The Old Testament puts it differently--a righteous God, and therefore a Savior. It is His own righteousness that causes Him to bring in righteousness. All His redemptive operations are performed in the sphere of this righteousness. Israel's first call, 42:6, His raising up of Cyrus, 45:13, and all His operations have for their goal the condition of men and the world, and all are performed with a view to it. And when the great movement has reached its final goal, righteousness on earth is the issue: 65:17.⁴²

⁴¹Smith, op. cit., p. 87.

⁴²Davidson, op. cit., p. 144.

This opinion is strengthened by Snaith: "In Second-Isaiah the word means 'vindication' and even 'salvation' to a far greater extent than 'ethical rightness.' The meaning is now chiefly soteriological, and only to a slight extent ethical. The word forms part of Second-Isaiah's salvation vocabulary."⁴³

In fact, Snaith maintains that only very infrequently in Second-Isaiah does zedeq come close to the eighth-century ethical meaning. Even in Isaiah 54:14 he says it probably refers definitely to the salvation which God is about to accomplish.⁴⁴ The only exceptions to the salvation concepts are listed thus by him: 51:1 and 7, where zedeq is having God's Law in the heart; 44:17, where it is victory and general prosperity; 53:11, where it is victory or triumph.⁴⁵

It is claimed that this salvation must be as characteristic with God as His zedeq, because it is the result of that zedeq. This would almost return to the idea of God's norm:

He acts in zedeq when He acts as it becomes God in covenant with Israel. As the covenant was a redemptive one, this comes to much the same thing as to say that He acts as the God of salvation. The interesting point, however, is whether the idea of the prophet has not gone so far as to rise to this as the true conception of God. The purpose of salvation is not a purpose which He has formed, but is the expression of His very Being. It is His characteristic as God, (Isaiah 45:13).⁴⁶

That this is the prophecy concerning Cyrus has no effect, in the various

⁴³Snaith, op. cit., p. 109.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 115.

⁴⁶Davidson, op. cit., p. 270.

discussions which center around the whole Cyrus difficulty, on the fact that it is the zedeq of God which is to aid the people.

In this concept of salvation, it would appear that the chief task of God is the reestablishing of judgment and righteousness on earth among those who have lost them. Thus it was to be a returning of all people to the covenant relationship once enjoyed only by Israel. The whole earth is to be the object of the zedeq of God. It affected each individual in every part of his life. For that reason we also must look to the relation between God's zedeq and the sin of men.

Zedeq and Sin

To speak of sin brings into the picture the idea of moral standards and ethical codes on the part of men. Even among these zedeq as used by the prophets finds an important place, as we discover:

There appears in the mind of the prophets, when they speak even of God, the general feeling that there is a moral standard which is not merely God's will. Probably a difference between this standard and God's will rarely occurred to them--the two coincided. But there appears the feeling of the existence of such a standard.⁴⁷

There truly was such a standard, and we have seen that it was the zedeq of God. The moral standard in the hearts of men is much too often said to be that of God for one to easily pass over it.

This can be seen in the eighth-century prophets. For Amos the prevailing conception is that of zedeq. Jahweh is the righteous ruler of men, who vindicates on all, Israel and the heathen alike, the law of mor-

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 257.

ality. What the prophet therefore demands from the people is zedeq, that is, just dealing with one another.⁴⁸ In Amos 5:24 we can see such an emphasis: "But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." The people are to follow the zedeq of God in all things.

As for Hosea, the accent is slightly different. He seems to abandon the region of law and right, and enters the region of affection. Jahweh is not to him the righteous King, but the loving father of Israel. He complains not of the want of righteousness among the people to one another, but of the want of mercy.⁴⁹ Yet one must admit that to be merciful is also an expression of zedeq, especially when it is placed in a close relationship with God.

When one reads the eighth-century prophets, he notices a striking amount of thought given to the poor when the word zedeq is used. Snaith says: "There is a deep-seated and fundamental bias at the root of their ethical teaching. This element is a special consideration for the poor and down-trodden. . . . They made particular charges against the wealthy on behalf of the poor."⁵⁰ This isn't to insist that the depressed classes ought to receive different treatment than the rest of the community; not that they receive better things. Wrong actions condemned in the rich are not condoned in the poor.⁵¹ Robinson says the Ten Commandments identify morality with religion, in the spirit of the eighth-century prophets; but

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 260.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 261.

⁵⁰Snaith, op. cit., p. 86.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 86-7.

the morality is negative, the sins are crimes, and there is a want of that inwardness of obedience which is the life-breath of that deepest righteousness.⁵²

Zedeq, to the eighth-century prophets, was very nearly a code of ethics for the people of Israel. It has been said that "these religious prophets of the eighth century were ethical prophets because their knowledge of God demanded it."⁵³ Isaiah shows this by saying that the sin of the people was in reality a rebellion against God. In Isaiah 1:2 it would seem to be the breaking of some kind of code, and when God speaks it means man has rebelled against His zedeqah. When Amos says: (2:6) "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes," he says the people have refused to observe the zedeq he has been called to proclaim. The sin was a rebellion against those living in zedeqah.

Hosea seems to have felt the same way as Amos in respect to God and sin. In Micah, too, the people are condemned for rebelling against that which was the will of God.⁵⁴ The prophets had only one reason for working, and that was to proclaim that will of God. We can see that zedeq is in all probability the highest expression of God's will in the minds of the prophets, and it was to that zedeq they continually pointed the people.

In spite of this preaching, "Israel, though as compared with other

⁵²Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 155.

⁵³Smith, op. cit., p. 76.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 78.

nations it may be in the right, is not justified before Jahweh. Through the nation, as the prophets know it, He cannot accomplish His purpose; that will be accomplished through the "righteous remnant."⁵⁵ Isaiah 1:26 points us to this application of zedeq: "And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city." Through the righteous remnant, and because of their faith, there is the promise that Israel shall be wholly righteous, (Isaiah 60:21): "Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified."

Thus we are able to see that zedeq in the eighth-century prophets covers the whole area of theology, from God in His highest purity, to man in his meanest sin. The people as a nation, the people as individuals, are shown in the light of zedeq and what it must mean to them. In the end we can close this chapter in no better language than that used by Federsen as he says: "Zion survives and forms the foundation of a new building, that which is built with mishpat and zedeqah and which is the refuge of him "who believes."⁵⁶ So Kittel informs us that the prophets had a new outlook from what had gone before:

Um so bedeutsamer ist es, dass bei den Propheten das Verhältniss von Recht und Religion in ganz eigenartiger Weise geregelt wird. Was Mose angeregt hatte, wird hier zur Vollendung gebracht.⁵⁷

Here we close the consideration of zedeq in its theological aspects

⁵⁵Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 197.

⁵⁶Federsen, op. cit., p. 554.

⁵⁷Kittel, op. cit., p. 78.

as presented by the eighth-century prophets. In it we must come to the conclusion that God led them to a great advance in understanding and articulating what was His will. Therefore we must agree with this:

Righteousness then emerges as less concerned with the formal or legal than with the personal. It is not the act which must be punished that is the concern of Jahweh's zedeqah; it is the person who must by all possible means be put right. This will be clearer when we turn to the conception of the covenant. . . .⁵⁸

⁵⁸. F. Lofthouse, "The Righteousness of Jahweh," Expository Times, XV (October, 1958-September, 1959), 344.

CHAPTER V

MISHPAT, ZEDEQ, AND THE COVENANT

Sin

Previously we spoke of sin as a rebellion against God through a disregard of His mishpat and zedeq. These both are expressions of the will of God toward the people. It was the chosen people of Israel who were affected by this, and here the Covenant enters. We are told that

Sin as rebellion against God can be understood only within the Covenant, for apart from the Covenant sin would be only the transgression of a norm of behavior. God, when entering into the Covenant with Israel, gave the Law the condition of the Covenant.¹

Thus when an Assyrian would live without mishpat or zedeq, it would be simply a life outside his particular moral conceptions of those two terms. When an Israelite lived in that way, it was a serious thing, for it was a breach in the Covenant made between God and Israel.

The eighth-century prophets were filled with the horror of such a breaking of the Covenant, and many of their words were warnings of impending punishment. But it was not a punishment which never permitted the punished to return to some sort of good grace with the Punisher.

It is more characteristic of the thought of the Old Testament to regard punishment of sin as disciplinary than as penal, though both figure in its pages. When it is merely penal, it is the indication that discipline can have no effect of the disciplined, since moral decay has gone too far. Nowhere is sin thought of as atoned for by punishment, so that by the mere fact of punishment fellowship is

¹J. A. Bollier, "The Righteousness of God: a word study," Interpretation, VIII (1954), 407.

restored. It is when punishment has wrought its work of chastening the spirit that fellowship is restored.²

This is what the prophets were trying to get the people to understand as they pointed out the lack of mishpat and zedeq. One writer says it was evident in their speech that they believed that the Old Testament idea of God satisfies the deepest demands of religion by bringing God and man face to face in a moral relation.³

The righteousness of the whole community, that is its standing before God, was, according to the prophets, to be measured by the degree to which internal zedeq, the rightful due of each member of it, was recognized and discharged. We see this when we read Isaiah 16:5: "And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness." Not taking into consideration the various opinions of the Messianic nature of this passage, we see that: "The king is to realize the early Israelite mishpat and zedeqah; he is to restore the order of society which the monarchy itself had dissolved, and put down its spoilers who followed in his own footsteps."⁴

Mishpat and the Covenant

The Covenant was no new idea to the prophets of the eighth century.

²H. H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1956), p. 90.

³H. Wheeler Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1952), p. 74.

⁴John. Pedersen, Israel, Its Life and Culture (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), III-IV, 91.

Their preaching was to people who had long since forgotten the implications of that Covenant. They remembered that Moses was responsible for the idea of a covenant relationship between Jahweh and the people of Israel. What they had forgotten were the ethical standards which were connected with the Covenant. Among these was the elemental sense of mishpat on the part of individuals in dealing with members of their own group.⁵ For the people "the laws contained in the Book of the Covenant were designed largely for the purpose of making clear the demands of justice with reference to particular problems which would arise within their own borders."⁶

Mishpat seems to be one of the most important parts of the Covenant relationship, because it was God using and following His mishpat who set it up. But in the lives of the people mishpat played an almost greater part, for on it was based any peace which should exist between the several classes. "There is no part of the Old Testament which does not recognize that justice belongs essentially to the good life. It is not prescribed merely for rulers and judges, but for all classes and in all relations of life."⁷ As harsh as was the language used by the prophets toward those who had forsaken mishpat and broken the Covenant, they were not unfeeling toward the people. They were vitally concerned with the spiritual welfare of their fellow Israelites. As Rowley says: "The justice to which the prophets summoned men was no hard and unfeeling inflexibility, but a justice which was tempered with compassion, and

⁵Charles H. Patterson, The Philosophy of the Old Testament (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1953), p. 70.

⁶Ibid., p. 172.

⁷Rowley, op. cit., p. 128.

which reflected the divine compassion for Israel."⁸

We are able to see, in Isaiah 56:1, how both Jahweh and Israel have an objective standard in the covenant relation into which they have entered. There God tells the people: "Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed." Thus we see that the message of the prophet was one of comfort as well as of doom. All the people have to do is return to a life of nishpat, and God will return with His part of the Covenant. Thus Pedersen points out the relationship between God and the people:

The covenant finds expression in the nature and customs of the people. By observing this nishpat Israel maintains the covenant, but a departure from true custom, to which in the first place would belong intercourse with other gods, is a breach of the covenant. Jahweh maintains the covenant by acting as the God of Israel.⁹

Thus it was not until Amos had observed the economic and social injustices of his time that the real significance of the ideas of the nishpat of God became clear to him.¹⁰ This increased understanding of nishpat led him to point out that the people had a very special connection with God in the Covenant. As he says, 3:2: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." The special relation that exists between the nation and God carries with it a higher moral demand, and severer penalties.¹¹

While Amos stressed the nishpat or severe justice of God, Hosea

⁸Ibid., p. 129.

⁹Pedersen, op. cit., p. 612.

¹⁰Patterson, op. cit., p. 172.

¹¹Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, pp. 67-8.

proclaimed the mishpat which came from a loving God. It was the God who would freely forgive and take back into the Covenant relationship His people. He pointed to all of the many things which God had done for them and connected this with the mishpat which ought to have been found active in their daily lives. Pedersen tells us: "The duty of the people is to preserve the covenant with him by observing Israelitish mishpat, otherwise receiving everything from him."¹²

God was continually active with mishpat in dealing with the people. We see in Second-Isaiah that there was a great lack of closeness to the Covenant on the part of the people, and their situation was a dark one indeed. In Isaiah 59:9 and 11 that picture is painted: "Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness." And: "We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us." And here we are led to say with Delitzsch: "By mishpat we understand a solution of existing inequalities or incongruities through the judicial interposition of God."¹³

A fitting summation of the condition of the Covenant on the side of the people, as seen by the prophets, is given us by Pedersen after he discusses the parable of the vineyard, (Isaiah 5:1-7): "This means that Israel has become estranged from her God, that she has abandoned his

¹²Pedersen, op. cit., p. 542.

¹³Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah, translated by Rev. James Martin, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), II, 599.

zedeqa and mishpat. The Israelites were sons of Jahweh, fostered by Him, and then they forgot Him and deserted Him, a thing not even done by domestic animals (Isaiah 1:2-4).¹⁴

Zedeq and the Covenant

We look immediately to Delitzsch for a definition of zedeq as it seems to fit here: "By zedeqah [we mean] the manifestation of justice, which bestows upon Israel grace as its right in accordance with the plan of salvation after the long continuance of punishment, and pours out merited punishment upon the instruments employed in punishing Israel, [Isaiah 59:9 and 11]."¹⁵ There is a further refinement of the definition to be found in Davidson:

this covenant had for its fundamental principle that for sine of infirmity, sine not done wilfully against the covenant itself, there was forgiveness. It is this which they call the righteousness of God. Righteousness and grace really did not differ within the covenant relation. . . . God's covenant meant that He would be gracious to men's infirmities; and He was righteous when He verified in men's experiences the ideas and principles of the covenant which was founded on His grace.¹⁶

This is what God was telling the people through the prophets, and we are able to see that there was a very definite advance in their thinking over that of the preceeding centuries. It was a new study on their part of that Covenant which had very nearly been forgotten by the people.

That forgetting of the Covenant and its implications was the great mistake of the people and came to a head in the eighth century. The

¹⁴Federsen, op. cit., p. 550.

¹⁵Delitzsch, op. cit., II, 339.

¹⁶Davidson, op. cit., p. 275.

Covenant was still there, but there was an absence of an inner, personal covenant. The people had lost touch with zedeq, both that of God toward them and that of them toward God, in the Covenant. Robinson adds a note on the forensic quality of zedeq when he says:

the one ultimate test of forgiveness was that of "righteousness," i.e. the prosperity which showed divine approval. The idea of righteousness is not to be confused with that of "morality," or that of "holiness." Morality is properly actual "righteousness of conduct," judged by the customs of the society. Holiness is properly the unapproachableness of God. But the primary conception in the idea of righteousness is not actual rightness, nor Godlikeness; it is forensic, a product of the primitive court of justice.¹⁷

However, there are some passages which seem to show that Jahweh's actions, which are in zedeq, were anterior to His relation to Israel, and that His forming this covenant relation illustrated His zedeq. For instance, He says to Israel (Isaiah 42:6): "I have called thee in righteousness"; the entering into covenant with Israel was in zedeq.¹⁸ But, when God makes a covenant with Israel, its simplest form will be a statement of God's requirements from Israel, and one of those requirements is zedeq on their part.¹⁹

Truly, much was required by God in the Covenant, much zedeq on the part of the people. Isaiah 56:1, speaking of the close relation between zedeq and salvation, leads Delitzsch to say:

¹⁷ Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 168.

¹⁸ Davidson, op. cit., p. 271.

¹⁹ Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, pp. 187-8. He says there: "That the covenant implies conditions on both sides is explicitly brought out in the form it assumes in Deuteronomy 26:17,18. Here the idea of a compact between Jahweh and Israel involving mutual rights and obligations is fully developed."

Zedakah (righteousness) is on both sides such personal activity as is in accordance with the covenant relation, or what is the same thing, with the purpose and plan of salvation. The nearer the full realization on the part of Jahweh of what He has promised, the more faithful ought Israel to be in everything to which it is bound by its relation to Jahweh.²⁰

We see that by the very nature of the term, the covenant is between God and the people. The fact that it required religious prophets to preach the breaking of the Covenant by the people shows that the people themselves regarded all things from the religious point of view. Civil government and the conduct of men to one another alike belonged to the religious sphere, with the more direct acts of divine service.²¹ And this was the nature of the Covenant and the reason for the importance of zedeq on both sides.

The great prophets of the eighth century considered Jahweh as Israel's Father, actively concerned to maintain the covenantal relation, even when it had been broken by Israel's sin. What He seeks, above all else, is the restoration of that relation by Israel's penitence and renewed righteousness.²² And this forgiveness of sins, like so very many of the other Old Testament ideas, can be understood only from the standpoint of the covenantal relation between Jahweh and Israel; for it was the means by which the zedeq of Jahweh was extended to Israel.²³

It is because of this that we can agree with Davidson:

²⁰Dolitzsch, op. cit., II, 361.

²¹Davidson, op. cit., pp. 259-60.

²²Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 164.

²³Loc. cit.

The word that describes the proper condition of the people on their side of the covenant relation is righteous. "Holy," qadosh, is a term that expresses being in the covenant, belonging to God, i.e., being His people. But righteous expresses the condition morally of those who are His people.²⁴

Therefore we look once again to Amos 3:2, in which we see that the special relation that exists between the nation and Himself carries with it a higher moral demand, and severer penalties.²⁵ And that moral demand is expressed in the one word zedeq.

When Amos speaks of zedeq and the Covenant, it is always connected with judgment. Thus, "When the judges accept bribes from the rich and do not set right the oppression of the poor by the rich, righteousness has vanished, for the judges are not obeying the law of the Covenant."²⁶

However, there is a slightly different emphasis on zedeq and the covenant in Hosea:

In Hosea, righteousness is associated with loving-kindness and mercy as well as with judgment. . . . Hosea's use of righteousness shows that the concept in no way conflicted with mercy on the one hand or judgment on the other, for in accordance with his Covenant promise, God's righteousness is manifested in his preserving his people and in condemning their enemies.²⁷

The use of zedeq in the other of the three who wrote less than Isaiah is rather slender:

Micah uses righteousness only twice and both instances refer to God's righteousness rather than man's righteousness. . . . The repentant Israelite as a member of God's Covenant people is confident that God

²⁴Davidson, op. cit., p. 264.

²⁵Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, p. 68.

²⁶J. A. Bollier, op. cit., p. 405.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 405-6.

will manifest his righteousness in restoring him in accordance with the promise made in the Covenant.²⁸

It was in the Covenant that the people felt particularly close to the God of their fathers. That the Covenant was not only a privilege, but also an obligation, seems to have been lost to the Israelites. We have seen that the obligation of the Covenant was both mishpat and zedeq on the part of the people. Though the people who heard the words of God through the mouths of the eighth-century prophets broke their part of the Covenant, it never was completely severed. The mishpat and zedeq were still there, being exercised by God in dealing with Israel. The promise that they would always be there is found in Hosea 2:19: "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies." So we now say:

Because of the unswerving love of God, the Covenant can never be finally and completely broken. It takes two to make a covenant, and it also takes two to break it. Israel may have rejected God, but God has not rejected Israel. He will allure her back once more to the wilderness, back to the scene of their first love. There He will make love to her again, as He did in the former time. This He will do with righteousness and justice.²⁹

²⁸Ibid., p. 406.

²⁹Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 142.

CHAPTER VI

LATER USAGES OF ZEDeq

Zedeqah as Victory

When we come to the subject of later usages for our words, we discover that there is hardly any change in the understanding of the term mishpat. There appears to be nothing in the way of significant development of the word as it appears in later Biblical literature. The situation concerning zedeq, however, is nearly the direct opposite. There have been some rather decided changes in the word which originally meant the righteousness both of God and of man.

This change seems to begin already in that section of Isaiah called Second-Isaiah. In fact, it is partly because of changes like this that scholars have been led to think that this section really is of a later date. It is from this section of Isaiah that Snaith gets the opinion that zedeq is used as "victory." He says zedeq here is an ethical thing, in that it is not always of God, except that the triumph is regarded as being ultimately God's will.¹ Snaith then uses Isaiah 41:2, 41:10, and 42:6 as having the idea of the eighth-century prophets of favor toward the helpless; 45:24 where the source of strength is Jahweh; and 49:24 where zedeq refers to the victor. But these passages bear only the inference of victory, not the definite meaning as held by Snaith. The first three do follow the typical eighth-century prophetic style. There is yet

¹Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), pp. 114-15.

a more obviously later development in the meaning of zedeq.

Zedeqah as Charity

The outstanding changing in meaning is that of the change in zedeqah from "righteousness" as a norm for God's actions and the life of man to "charity." Rosenthal, who has done most of the work along this line, says: "Isaiah used the root zdg as a fundamental moral term to a greater extent than others (Psalms and Proverbs). It was no longer an abstract quality, but something as material as well-being (peace), help, strength, or blessing."² The examples he uses are all from Second-Isaiah. These are: Isaiah 46:13, 48:18, 54:17, 59:16, 60:17, and 61:10. Very typical of this idea of zedeq as an entity in itself could well be that found in Isaiah 48:18: "O thou that hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

Previously we had seen that zedeqah had meant righteousness in the way of proper behavior on the part of the people. When one turns to the later book of Daniel, he finds a different meaning. As Rosenthal says of this: "Thus zedeqah in Daniel [4:24] must mean something more tangible than "proper behavior." "Giving charity" indeed seems well indicated as its meaning there. Here, we thus have the first Jewish testimony for the use of the word in the meaning of "alms, charity."³

But when did this new meaning begin in the minds of the people? It

²Franz Rosenthal, "Sedeka, Charity," Hebrew Union College Annual, XXIII (1950-1951), 430.

³Ibid., pp. 427-28.

could possibly have been during the terrible times of the Maccabeans as the people were faced by all kinds of trouble and had to fend for one another. However, Rosenthal is of the opinion that the idea of "charity" began at a much earlier date.

Rather than during the Maccabean struggles, it might have been in the course of the resettlement of Israel in the fifth century which required great financial contributions for the success of the whole and for the support of those of small means, that the Aramaic word came into use for the stipulated sums which were levied upon the people first for the common welfare, and then for that of indigent individuals.⁴

We are able to see that in later literature, particularly the commentaries written by the Jews, the term zedeqah meant such charity. In the Targum and Talmud, the Hebrew zedeqah and the Aramaic zidqah most frequently mean "almsgiving" and "benevolence."⁵ When one realizes that such actions are befitting an individual living in true zedeq, it is very easy to understand how the new meaning could arrive. And as one notices this fact, it would almost seem that a type of work-righteousness had entered the thinking of the people.

However, it seems that in post-Biblical Judaism the charity which a Jew is required by law to give to the poor is called zedeqah in Hebrew.⁶ Thus what God would have come from the heart of a man living in the shadow of His zedeq had become something fixed in the law of the people. So one could say that zedeq had degenerated from the religious connotation held by the eighth-century prophets. One wonders just how a word meaning

⁴Ibid., p. 430.

⁵Snaitch, op. cit., p. 90.

⁶Rosenthal, op. cit., p. 411.

primarily "justice, righteousness" came to signify such charity demanded by law. Several theories have been advanced, and they amount to a type of philosophical progression, perhaps a faulty one. However, let us look at an example of such thinking:

The opinion of the few who have studied this say that justice (righteousness) is an action of religious merit, that charity also is an action of religious merit, and that, consequently, justice (righteousness) could be used and was used as a synonym of charity.⁷

Later, in the New Testament, the obvious translation used for zidqah is ἐλεημοσύνη and is firmly established in the meaning of "alms." But this was not necessarily the dominant meaning of the first translator.⁸ There is the possibility that zidqah, having the religious connotation of being right and righteous, later was used to cover actions which could fit into the category of religious righteousness. A possible solution is offered by Rosenthal:

The root zdg in the Semitic languages, developed connotations which can approximately be rendered by right-privilege-grant-gift. Aramaic zidqah in this meaning was used by the Jews, and, in a time of social and religious fermentation, combined with the usual Hebrew meaning of zedeqah to yield a term which expressed the idea of giving a stipulated gift as the appropriate course of action.⁹

At any rate, it is incontestable that the term zedeq came to mean some sort of charity or almsgiving. It may well be that this could be called the normal progress over the prophets of the eighth century, as their use of the term was a decided advance over that of their predecessors.

⁷Ibid., p. 412.

⁸Ibid., p. 428.

⁹Ibid., p. 415.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY

When one considers the prophetic work of the eighth century, the outstanding thing is the fact that there was so much in the way of advancement in theological thinking over the previous centuries. This is particularly evident in the clarification and formulation of the two important words mishpat and zedeq. Thus the summarization of this whole topic could be contained in one word: advancement, under the guidance of God. We must always consider this as God's progressive revelation.

This is evident as one studies the etymology of the words, for there appear the various ways in which different people used them. The prophets of the eighth century greatly added meaning to mishpat and zedeq by virtue of the theological implications they gave the words. Whereas previously these words apparently had only a lightly theological inference, now they acquire a deeply God-centered significance. They are attributes and qualities of God Himself, guiding Him as He acts in the world of men. However, this means that the words were in the minds of men with secular connotations. Now the prophets appeared to point out that, on the part of man, mishpat and zedeq are to demonstrate their dependence on God and willingness to live as God's mishpat and zedeq demand.

Here it is impossible to forget the idea of the Covenant. Long before the eighth century, God had appeared to the people and made an important agreement with them, an agreement saying that He would stand by them if they would follow Him. Both mishpat and zedeq were of primary importance in this relation between God and Israel. After centuries of

being buried, the prophets have appeared to point them to a deeper understanding of what justice and righteousness must mean in their lives.

Only when the people make these into living parts of their daily living before God and man will the Covenant relationship be as firm and fruitful as it ought to be.

It is impossible to deny that this marked a tremendous advance over the prophets and religious leaders of the previous centuries. And just as the eighth century brought progress in the understanding of religious concepts, so also did later centuries continue that forward movement at the control of God. The culmination of such movement came in the change in the meaning of zedeq from the general righteousness of God and man to the more specific giving of alms and charity. No one has ever denied that God chose to reveal Himself gradually to man, and this study has given an example of such increased revelation. Behind it all was God, leading His people to a greater understanding of His will.

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