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## BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

## II SAMUEL 23:6-7

These two verses contain unmistakably deep-rooted corruptions, which render their meaning uncertain. In consequence translators and commentators from the earliest times to the present day have ventured all manner of hypothetical and uncertain emendations, too many to be recounted in a brief notice.

It is clear that in the poem or psalm the author contrasts the righteous ruler and the beneficent and productive effects of his reign, and his consequently happy state, with the uselessness of the unrighteous and their eventual destruction. Cf. Psalm 1. V. 4 seems to liken the righteous king to the warm, life-giving sun, which causes the herbage to sprout forth from the earth. Verses 6-7 by contrast liken the unrighteous to the unproductive and almost useless thorns of the wilderness.

I believe that one main difficulty lies in insufficient appreciation of the point of comparison of the unrighteous with thorns. Thus H. P. Smith says (*International Critical Commentary, Samuel*, 383), "The worthlessness of the thorns is seen in the fact that no one cares to gather them." In contrast to this I recently came across the following interesting passage, which suggests a simple and very plausible explanation of these two verses: "One does not have to go far to reach the wilderness. It is any uncultivated place. It is the pasture for flocks, the wild of rocks and short, thorny bushes. The thorns are gathered every other year to build fires in the lime-kilns, where the abundant lime-rock of the country is burned. When the men gather them for the lime-kilns the thorns are piled in great heaps with heavy stones on them to hold them down. When needed the heap is pierced with a long pole and carried over the shoulder as on a huge pitchfork" (Elihu Grant, *The Peasant of Palestine*, 35f.). From this it appears that the thorns of the wilderness are gathered every other year to be burned in great fires, and that, for obvious reasons, they are not taken in the bare hand, but are carried on and handled by means of long poles.

Now the suggestion of H. P. Smith, that **כִּי לֹא יִצְמִיחוּ** at the end of v. 5 should be transferred to the beginning of v. 6 with a slight emendation there, has been generally accepted, as also the reading **מְדַבֵּר** for **מְדַבֵּר**, and also the omission of **בְּשֵׁבֶת** at the end of v. 7. In v. 7 **יִמְלֵא** is very difficult, if not altogether impossible, and the suggested emendations, many of them very radical, have been as numerous as the translators and commentators themselves. Therefore one additional proposed emendation, far slighter than the majority, may not be amiss. For **יִמְלֵא** I would read **יִכְלֵא** (or **יִכְלֵה**), and make this verb a denominative from **כָּלֵה** in the sense of "to be equipped (with an instrument or utensil)." I must admit that I have been unable to find the word used in this sense in any Semitic language; yet I cannot help feeling that the form and meaning are not far-fetched nor impossible. I would suggest therefore the following reconstruction of the two verses, with only a very limited, in fact quite the minimum, number of textual emendations:

<b>כְּקוֹץ מְדַבֵּר כֻּלָּהֶם</b> <b>וְאִישׁ יִגַּע בָּהֶם</b> <b>וּבְאִשׁ שָׂרֹף יִשְׂרָפוּ</b>	<b>כִּי לֹא יִצְמִיחוּ בְנֵי בְלִיעַל</b> <b>כִּי לֹא בִיד יִקָּחוּ</b> <b>יִכְלֵא בְרוֹזל וְעֵץ חֲנִית</b>
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But the unrighteous are not productive;  
 They are like the thorns of the wilderness altogether.  
 For they cannot be taken by the hand;  
 And if a man would handle them,  
 He must be equipped with iron or a wooden pole.  
 And in fire they must be burned.

For **יִצְמִיחוּ** in the sense, "to cause to sprout," "to be productive," without a directly expressed object, cf. Deut. 29:22; just as the thorns of the wilderness are unproductive, yield no fruit of immediate use and value, so, too, the unrighteous; and in direct contrast to the productiveness and beneficence of the righteous ruler, v. 4.

"They cannot be taken by the hand"; just as the thorns of the wilderness cannot be handled freely, but wound the hand that touches them, so, too, the unrighteous. **יִקָּחוּ** used impersonally, unless we should read **יִקָּחוּ**.

“And in fire they must be burned”; hardly a reference to the late, theological conception of the fires of Gehenna as the end of the unrighteous, but rather still the comparison with the thorns. Just as these are good for nothing but to be burned, and leave naught behind but useless ashes, so, too, the unrighteous are fit for nothing but to be consumed and leave naught behind them. Thus the comparison of the unrighteous with the thorns of the wilderness runs through the entire two verses, and brings out most graphically the contrast with the righteous king of the first half of the poem.

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### HINNOM AND KIDRON

In the prototype of *Gehenna*, Heb. *gê-hinnôm* (cf. RE<sup>3</sup> 6, 421, 12)<sup>1</sup> *Hinnôm* is generally supposed to be a proper name. Both the Valley of Hinnom and the Kidron valley seem to have been ancient burial-grounds. According to 2 K 23:6 the *graves of the children of the people* (i. e. the common people; cf. Jer. 26:23) were in the Kidron valley, and 𐤂 has for the *Valley of Hinnom* in Jer. 2:23; 19:2.6 the rendering *πολύνδριον*, a burial-place for many (cf. 2 Macc. 8:4 and IJG<sup>5</sup> 308, n. 2). In Jer. 31:40 we find after *uē-kol ha-‘émq*, the whole Valley (of Hinnom) the addition *hap-pěġarîm uē-had-däšn*, the dead bodies and the offal (JBL 35, 322, below). The explanation given in GK § 127, g, is unsatisfactory; we must insert before *hap-pěġarîm* the preposition ‘*im*, with = despite; cf. ‘*im-zê*, Neh. 5:18 and Arab. *má‘a hādā* (WdG 2, 164, D). 𐤂 has *ἐξ ἐκλεκτῶν λίθων*, and *ἐξ* may be a mistake for *ἐν* (cf. *καὶ ἐν τοσοῦτῳ πλῆθει, in summa copia*; Heb. *bē-kol zôt*, GB<sup>16</sup> 80<sup>b</sup>, below). According to Cornill 𐤂 may have read *ābanîm* for *dēšanîm*, and *baĥûrîm* for *pěġarîm* (for the confusion of *b* and *p* cf. JBL 35, 280). It should, of course, be *ābanîm baĥûrôt*, but *baĥûrôt* may have been written *baĥûr’* (JBL 34, 81). *Haš-šëremôt* (𐤂 *ασαρημοθ*) might be explained to mean *dumps* = places of deposit for offal and rubbish; it could be a transposition of *šëmerôt* or *šëmarôt*, a feminine form of *šëmarîm*, lees, dregs (JSOR 1, 91, l. 5) in the sense of *waste* or worthless matter, sweepings, refuse;

<sup>1</sup> For the abbreviations see vol. 36 of this JOURNAL, p. 75.