CLARIFYING
BAFFLING
BIBLICAL PASSAGES

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE GOOD SAMARITAN
NAMED ODED IN
II CHRONICLES 28: 5–15

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XII

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INTRODUCTION

According to Isa 7:1–17, the Syro-Ephramite war against Judah created terror in the royal house of David, precipitating Isaiah's pronouncement to King Ahaz of the sign of Immanuel: "God is with us." But nothing in Isa 7:1–8:15 hinted at the heavy casualties suffered in Judah at the hands of King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel.[1] They were simply dismissed by Isaiah as "two smoldering stumps of firebrands" (7:4) who would shortly be snuffed out. Similarly, II Kings 16:5 spoke only of Jerusalem's having been besieged by Pekah and Rezin, neither of whom could conquer Judah or Jerusalem—with no reference to the heavy casualties inflicted upon Ahaz' family and kingdom.

But in II Chron 28:6–8 it is stated that following Rezin's defeat of Ahaz (with no casualty figures given), Pekah killed 120,000 (מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים אֶלֶף) men in Judah in one day and captured 200,000 (מָאתַיִם אֶלֶף)[2] men, women, and children who were taken to Samaria to be enslaved by their victorious northern kinfolk.[3] The Ephraimite hero Zichri killed Ahaz' son, Maaseiah, as well as the governor (נְגִיד הַבָּיִת) Azrikam and Elkanah who was "second to the king" (מִשְׁנֵה הַמֶּלֶךְ).[4]

However, the אלף in these verses need not mean "thousand" but could be a singular masculine *collective* noun[5] like

the *collective* שִׁבְיָה "captives, a body of captives," found in verses 5, 11, 13, 14, and 15, and the בִּזָּה "spoil, spoils," found in verse 14. The אלף here could mean "units" or "contingents," and could be related to the Arabic الف (ʾilf) "a constant companion or associate; a mate, a fellow, a yoke-fellow, a comrade" (Lane 1863: 80; Wehr 1979: 28–29).[6] Because the fallen defenders were identified in II Chron 28:6 as בְּנֵי־חָיִל "men of valor," the collective noun אלף could have been a synonym of גְּדוּדִים used elsewhere for military units of unspecified size. The narrator's choice of the collective אֶלֶף "unit" may well have been due to its approximation in sound to אֶלֶף "thousand," the overtones of which could have suggested an unbelievably large number of casualties sustained by the 120 military *units* defending Judah and Jerusalem, as well as countless women and children—presumably surviving family members of Judah's and Benjamin's slain defenders—who had been divided into 200 *bands* of captives and taken to Samaria to become the slaves.[7]

Oded, the Samaritan prophet of Yahweh, confronted the victorious Samaritans and Ephraimites upon their return from Judah and Jerusalem with a *command*, "Return the captives you took from your brothers!" and a *threat*, "Otherwise the violent wrath of God will fall upon you!" (28:11). Four Ephraimite leaders reiterated Oded's *imperative*, "You must not bring the captives here!" followed by the *accusation*, "You propose to multiply our sin and our guilt although our guilt is now sufficient to bring violent wrath upon Israel."

Faced with this opposition of Oded and his colleagues, the Ephraimite army officers—who killed and captured at will in Judah—acceded to the demands of Oded, Amasa, Azariah,

Berechiah, and Jehizkiah: "so the soldiers[8] left the captives and the booty before the officials and all the assembly" (הַשָּׂרִים וְכָל־הַקָּהָל) (II Chron 28:14, NRS).

According to Josephus, the confrontation of Oded with the booty-laden soldiers occurred before the city walls. This reflects Josephus' reading the השרים of 28:14 as הַשֻּׁרִים "the walls"[9] (rather than as הַשָּׂרִים "the princes"), which he transposed to the start of Oded's confrontation to indicate Oded's location. In light of the collocation of "people" congregated at the "wall" when Rabshakeh confronted Eliakim and his colleagues (II Kings 18: 26; Isa 36:11), reading the השרים as הַשֻּׁרִים, in agreement with Josephus, remains an attractive option: "the captives were released outside the city-walls in front of all the assembled (townsmen)."

The phrase הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־נִקְּבוּ בְּשֵׁמוֹת, meaning literally "the men who were pricked off by names,"[10] is thought to mean "the men who were designated/mentioned by name," a reference to Amasa, Azariah, Berechiah, and Jehizkiah, appearing in 28:12. Having only these four men responsible for the repatriation of 200,00 captives (or 200 bands of captives) reinforces the conclusion of some readers that this narrative is a midrashic fiction rather than a historical recollection.

However, two Arabic cognates permit a more realistic reading of 28:15a. First, the נִקְּבוּ of אֲשֶׁר־נִקְּבוּ בְּשֵׁמוֹת, though commonly derived from נקב "to pierce, to prick off" (BDB 666), is more likely a *Niphᶜal* denominative of קבב, the cognate of Arabic قب (*qabb*) "a head, chief, ruler . . . or elder upon [the control of] whom the affairs of the people, or

party, turn" (Lane 1885: 2478). With this cognate in mind, נִקְּבוּ would mean "they were designated to be in charge."[11]

Secondly, the plural שֵׁמוֹת "names" may well be a homograph of another noun which would be the cognate of Arabic سومة (*sûmat*) and سيمة (*sîmat*) "a mark, sign, token, or badge, by which a thing/person is known . . . such as is used in war or battle," and تسوم (*tasawim*) "he set a mark, badge, upon himself, whereby he might be known [in war etc.]" (Lane 1872: 1475–1476). With these two definitions in focus, the MT וַיָּקֻמוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־נִקְּבוּ בְשֵׁמוֹת can be translated "the men, who were designated by badges to be in charge, arose." These clearly identifiable relief workers appropriated the booty for distribution to the victims, precluding any cheating by combatants pretending to have legitimate access to the spoils. In a remarkable act of charity inspired by Amasa, Azariah, Berechiah, and Jehizkiah, and Oded the relief workers took their kinsfolk down to Jericho and then returned to Samaria.

THE PROPHET ODED

Jewish and Christian traditions have generally ignored this Samaritan prophet of Yahweh, for Oded goes virtually unnoticed in the literature of the church and synagogue.[12] In the 515 page index volume of Louis Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews*, Oded is not even listed among the approximately 25,000 entries of names, places, and topics. Commentators have paid him scant attention. Curtis and Madsen (1910: 458–459), for example, covered II Chron 28:9–15 with just twenty lines of general commentary, and Myers (1965: 162–163)

covered the Oded passage in seventeen lines of text. Spencer (1984: 317–349) provided, by contrast, an excellent study of the Oded tradition and has convinced this writer that Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan recorded in Luke 10: 30–35 was no doubt grounded in this story of the Samaritan Oded.

MEANINGS OF THE NAME ODED

The Ugaritic ʿdd "to narrate, to repeat" or ġdd "to rejoice, to surge" (KBS II: 789; UT 463: 1947) and the Phoenician עדד "envoyer, quelque sorte devin," used as a synonym of חזין "seer, prophet" (Jean and Hoftijzer 1965: 204; Donner and Röllig 1962: 208) could be cognates of עוֹדֵד. However, in light of the close relationship of ע״ע and ע״ו stems, like מוּךְ and מָכַךְ "to be low," מוּשׁ and מָשַׁשׁ "to feel, to grope," and נוּד and נָדַד "to flee" (GKC § 77ᵇ), the following Arabic roots are also likely to be the cognates of Hebrew עוּד / עָדַד and relevant for our understanding the multiple nuances of Oded's name which underlie this narrative.

The first cognate is عود (ʿawd) and عادى (ʿâdiy) "old, ancient," as in the phrases زاحم بعود أودع (zâḥim biʿawdi ʾawdaʿ) "ask thou aid of a person of age and knowledge" and عود على عود على عود خلق (ʿawd ʿlay ʿawd ʿlay ʿawd ḫalaq) "an old man upon an old camel upon an old worn road" (Lane 1874: 2190).

This cognate of עָדַד (= Oded "the elder") suggests that "Oded" may have been a title for the prophet rather than the name given at birth.[13] As an elder prophet his authority would have been at its maximum. Along with Amasa, Azariah, Berechiah, and Jehizkiah (the רָאשֵׁי בְנֵי אֶפְרַיִם "the chiefs of the Ephraimites") Oded was among Samaria's elders who

had enough political clout to demand obedience from general officers, conscripts, and volunteers.[14] This interpretation finds some support from Josephus (*Antiquities* 9: 250; Naber 1889, II: 310) who recognized Berechiah as εὐδοκιμούντων ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ "one of high reputation in the government [of Samaria]."

The second cognate, noted in BDB (728–729) and KBS (II: 795–796), is عود (ʿawd) "he returned, restored," a synonym of رد (radda) "he made, or caused, to return, go back, or revert; sent, turned, or put, back, or away . . . anything returned after it has been taken," corresponding exactly to أعاده (ʾaʿâdhu) "he returned it; he restored it," form IV of عود (ʿawd) (Lane 1874: 2189). This cognate of עֹדֵד (= "Oded" = "Restorer") suggests that *Oded*, as a *Pōlēl* infinitive of עוד or the *Qal* participle of עדד, was comparable to the *Pōlēl* participle מְשׁוֹבֵב "restorer" appearing as a name in I Chron 4:34.

As Curtis and Madsen (1910: 459) noted, "One Hebrew might hold another in bondage for a limited period, but such wholesale slavery of fellow-countrymen by reprisal in war was never contemplated."[15] The innovative violation of the Torah at the expense of fellow Israelites (which included Judah and Benjamin) was more than Oded and his colleagues could tolerate. Their demand was absolute and non-negotiable. Noah may well have initiated slavery in his family with his curse upon Canaan, but Oded would not sanction slavery in his extended family which included Benjamin and Judah. Oded's "brethren" (with אַחִים including women and children) had to be set free to avoid the wrath of God. Moreover, the *Elder* (עדד / עוד) Oded lived up to the second nuance of his name (*Restorer*) when he *caused* the captives from Jerusalem and Judah *to be sent home* (עדד / עוד).

The third cognate of עדר is Arabic عائد (ᶜâᵓid) "a visitor of one who is sick" along with its feminine عائدة (ᶜâᵓidat) "kindness, pity, compassion, or mercy, a benefit, an act of beneficence or kindness" (Lane 1874: 2191), which suggests that עדר could also be a synonym of חסד "mercy, kindness." With this cognate in focus—and paraphrasing the text—the prophet Oded can be recognized as (1) the "*senior seer*" (העדר העדד) of Samaria who became (2) the "*merciful emancipator*" (העדר העדד) of Jews consigned to slavery.

CONCLUSION

It is a bit ironic that the fictional good Samaritan of Jesus' parable, who rescued one Jewish victim of highway robbery, has become proverbial, whereas the historical good Samari-tans Amasa, Azariah, Berechiah, Jehizkiah, and Oded—who rescued 200 אלף (= "thousand"/"bands") of Jewish victims of war—remain virtually unknown. It would be equally ironic if the mere misreading of אלף as אֶלֶף "a thousand" rather than as אַלֶף "a unit, band, group, contingent" precipitated the transformation of II Chron 28: 9–15 from a short but memo-rable historical notice into an exaggerated and incredulous midrashic fiction.

Once אלף is read as אַלֶף "unit" rather than אֶלֶף "thou-sand," the exaggerated midrashic features of the Oded narra-tive disappear. The one hundred twenty military *units* and two hundred *bands* of captives fall well within historical and logical boundaries. Oded appears only in verses 9–11, but his presence is felt throughout the entire story. What the narrative lacks in length is compensated for by high drama. Led by Oded and his four colleagues, a goodly number of godly Samaritans and Ephraimites fulfilled the commandment:

"You shall love your kin (רֵעַ) as yourself . . . and not incur guilt on account of him" (Lev 19:18).

NOTES

1. Compare Josephus, *Antiquities* 9: 245 (Whiston, 1974, III: 42; Naber 1889, II: 309):

> when the king of Syria had taken the city Elath, upon the Red Sea, and had slain the inhabitants, he peopled it with Syrians; and when he had slain those in the [other] garrisons, and the Jews in their neighborhood, and had driven away much prey, he returned with his army back to Damascus . . . .

2. The Greek text reads τριακοσίας χιλιάδας "300,000," perhaps due to a partial dittography in the *Vorlage* of the Septuagint in which the MT מאתים appeared as מאת מאתים (100 + 200) which were then added together for a total of 300,000. The dittography of the מאת could have come from an error involving the מאת of מאחיהם "from their brethren" in which the ת and ח were confused. For the confusion of ת and ח , see Delitzsch, 1920: 110 §106[d-e]. Curtis and Madsen (1910: 459) noted this Greek variant, but offered no explanation; Myers (1965: 162–163) made no reference to the Greek text or the variants in Josephus.

3. The Hittite and Egyptian combatants in the famed Battle of Kadesh numbered only 40,000 (Breasted, 1906, III: 130). When it is realized that Yankee Stadium in New York has a seating capacity of just under 58,000 and Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia can hold just under 63,000, it is obvious that the numbers in II Chron 28:6–8 are either exaggerated or mean something other than "thousands." The אלף could be an acronym rather than a number per se, in which (1) the א = אלוף or איל "chief" (the ראש אלף), (2) the ל = לחמים = אנשי המלחמה "the fighting men" (Ps 35:1) or the ל = 30 = שלשים = "the officers," and (3) the פ = פקידים "the officers" (2 Kgs 25:19) or the פ = פלני "unnamed others" =

"rank-and-file." Note also BDB (48–49) for references to אָלַף "to learn, אֶלֶף "cattle," אַלּוּף "tame," אַלּוּף "friend," and אַלּוּף "chief."

4.   Josephus (*Antiquities,* 9: 246–247; Whiston, 1974 III: 42; Naber 1889, II: 309) has several variations with respect to what happened to whom. His account reads as follows.

> Accordingly there were slain by the Israelites one hundred and twenty thousand of his men that day, whose general, Amaziah by name, slew Zechariah the king's son, in his conflict with Ahaz, as well as the governor of the kingdom, whose name was Azricam. He also carried Elkanah, the general of the troops of the tribe of Judah, into captivity. They also carried the women and children of the tribe of Benjamin captives; and when they had gotten a great deal of prey, they returned to Samaria.

5.   See GKC §123[a][b].

6.   Note the ambiguity of ألوف (ʾulûf) (= אלף) in the *Qurʾan* (*Sura* 2: 244) which has been interpreted as "thousands" or as "united bands" (Lane 1863: 80; Bell 1937, I: 35, note 1).

7.   Compare I Kings 20:28–30, where it is alleged that the Israelites killed 100,000 foot soldiers of the Syrians in one day, followed by 27,000 other soldiers being crushed when the wall of Aphek fell upon them. Following the figures cited above in footnote 3, it would take fewer than 29,000 people to half-fill Yankee Stadium in New York, suggesting that the אלף "thousand" in this narrative requires an alternative definition, such as the one proposed here.

8.   The term חָלוּץ "equipped for war" is used here, suggesting that Oded and his colleagues had bravely approached soldiers who were more ready for battle than for a victory parade.

9. In Arabic سور (*sûr*) is used exclusively for the wall of a city or town (Lane 1872: 1464).

10. The phrase appears also in Num 1:17; I Chron 12:31; 16:41; and II Chron 31:19. For its derivation, see BDB 666.

11. The stems קבב, קוב, and נקב may be interrelated like their Arabic counterparts: (1) قب (*qabb*) "a head, chief, ruler; (2) أقتابه (*ʾaqtâbahu*) "he chose, selected, elected, or preferred him"; and (3) نقيب (*naqîb*) "the intendant, superintendent, overseer, inspector" (Lane 1885: 2478, 2570; 1893: 2834).

12. In forty five years of ministry as a pastor, an educational missionary, and a seminary professor, the author found few students, fellow pastors, or faculty colleagues who had ever heard of Oded.

13. The prophetess Huldah may also have been called upon by King Josiah, rather than Jeremiah, because of her age. (See Chapter XI above.)

14. Conrad (1980: 127) wrote concerning those who were recognized as elders

> City elders exercised extensive authority well into the early period of the Israelite state. They are the guardians of the internal order of their community, and therefore exercised local jurisdiction. . . . . During the course of the monarchy, the elders of the two capitals, Jerusalem and Samaria, became part of the upper stratum in the increasingly centralized government, so that they now appear alongside other dignitaries, especially royal officials (2 K. 10:1, 5; Lam 1:19; 2:9f.; 4:16; 5:12). They have thus been divested of their original autonomy; but their power has probably increased significantly, to the extent that in their new role they influence the entire body politic.

15. Curtis and Madsen (1910: 459) cited Exo 21:2ff, Lev 25:39–43, and Deut 15:12–18 as relevant texts dealing with slavery.