

Item #22 (Jeremias 23,5a)

This was Entry #13 in my previous website. It is unchanged here. The whole question of “legitimacy” needs more attention, as I said in the original article and continue to maintain today.

In 1965 I published a study of the meaning of the word צדיק in Jeremias 23,5a. I argued that the word could mean “legitimate” (§18). In this I was following the opinion of others, but added new texts in support of the argument. The article has occasionally been cited in connection with attempts to understand the meaning of the verse (cf. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*). The late Cyrus Gordon thought that the meaning “legitimate” for the root צדק might have relevance for Ugaritic lexicography. The article remains a rather isolated foray of mine in the (for me) uncharted but fascinating realm of Semitic linguistics. It still seems to me to have value. Of course the idea of “legitimacy” has different meanings in different cultures, but the underlying human desire to be assured that some person or some action is in accord with some publicly agreed-on norm to serve as a “bottom line” seems to be a permanent part of the state of being human. It certainly seems to me to have figured in a major way in the thought world of the Bible. The true (i.e., legitimate) descendants of Abraham is not without a certain importance in Pauline thought. And it seems to me that the basic idea of the legitimacy or non-legitimacy of Jesus is one of the major disputes between Jesus and his Jewish adversaries in Matthew, and underlies his entire gospel. It also figures in Mark, Luke and John. Much has been written on what it means to be “just”, of course, and “justification” in Scripture was a central problem of the Reformers (and counter-Reformers). Not only the root צדק but also the whole notion of “being just” needs much more thought and study. **(25 November 2008; 30 July 2019)**