

BUILDING OUR VOCABULARY OF FAITH

Water from Rock, March 21, 2017, Tim Smith

¹³*You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, high your right hand.* ¹⁴*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.*

Psalm 89:13-14

1. “Since the Gospel was meant to be a universal message addressed to everyone, universal, the most natural thing we could expect to happen, was that the New Testament should be written in a language spoken practically everywhere. At that time this language was Greek...The adoption of a foreign language and even the conversion of non-Jewish believers could never eradicate the strong Hebrew roots of the Christian faith. Hebrew was the background of the ministry of Jesus and of the apostles. Hebrew (and Aramaic) was their native language. Hebrew was their culture, their faith, their mind. So strong was the influence of the Jewish language and thought in the Gospels, the epistles and the book of Revelation. Greek was simply used to express Semitic concepts and ideas – which remained dominant.” (Giuseppe Guarino, *Hebrew Language and Culture in the New Testament*)
2. The Hebrew language comes from the Canaanite group of languages spoken by the Phoenicians, Amorites, Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites. Hebrew is related to the Aramaic language of the Assyrians and Babylonians.
3. The word “Hebrew” comes from a verb meaning “to cross over”. “Abraham the Hebrew” came to the Canaanites as a man who “crossed over” the Euphrates (Genesis 14:13).

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

1. The Hebrew word translated as righteousness is tsedaqah. Tsedaqah is translated in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) and the Greek New Testament as dikaioisune.
2. Tsedaqah is not an abstract idea of justice or virtue but God acting “to restore his own and to sustain them within the covenant.” (James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*)
3. Tsedaqah is God’s fidelity to His covenant.
4. God acts “righteously” when He performs saving deeds for His people and by delivering them places them in right relationship to Himself.

5. God's righteousness is the reason why His people expect deliverance from Him: He has committed Himself by covenant to do so.
6. In the Hebrew Scriptures God's righteousness is synonymous with salvation, vindication, victory, and deliverance of the oppressed. God's righteousness is often associated with mercy, compassion, mercy, grace, forgiveness and goodness.

PRAYERFUL REFLECTION ON GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Psalm 143:1-2, 11

¹Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness. ²Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you... ¹¹For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life. In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.

Psalm 35:27-28

*²⁷ Let those who desire my vindication shout for joy and be glad, and say evermore, 'Great is the Lord, who delights in the welfare of his servant.'
²⁸ Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all day long.*

Psalm 71:15-19

¹⁵My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all day long, though their number is past my knowledge. ¹⁶I will come praising the mighty deeds of the Lord God, I will praise your righteousness, yours alone. ¹⁷O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. ¹⁸So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come. Your power ¹⁹and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?

Isaiah 45:8

*Showers, O heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation may spring up,
and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also;
I the Lord have created it.*

ROMANS 1:16-17

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'

1. "For a reader of the Septuagint... the righteousness of God' would have one obvious meaning: God's own faithfulness to his promises, to the covenant. God's 'righteousness', especially in Isaiah 40-55, is that aspect of God's character because of which he saves Israel, despite Israel's perversity and lostness. God has made promises; Israel can trust those promises. God's righteousness is thus cognate with his trustworthiness on the one hand, and Israel's salvation on the other... At the heart of 'God's righteousness' is his covenant with Israel, the covenant through which he will address and solve the problems of evil in and for the whole world." (N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*)
2. "God's righteousness is, for Paul, God's saving activity in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his Son. It is activity that is directly in line with the saving activity of God in the Old Testament." (*New Dictionary of Theology*, David F. Wright, Sinclair B. Ferguson, J.I. Packer)
3. [The righteousness of God] "is a saving activity grounded in the attribute of God's covenant loyalty that results in the gift of deliverance." (Don Garlington, "A 'New Perspective' Reading on Central Texts of Romans 1-4)