

## CRITICAL NOTES

THE ADVERBIAL USE OF *KĪ ṬŌB*

It is well known that *kī* in Hebrew often has the force of an intensifier or asseverative.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes it is prefixed to adjectives or stative verbs to signify "very" or "how!"—thus Gen 18:20, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is very great (*kī rābbā*);" Jer 30:7, "Oh, how great is that day (*kī gādōl!*)" etc.<sup>2</sup> One very common combination of this sort is the expression *kī ṭōb*, which, from an early period,<sup>3</sup> seems to have acquired specialized use as an idiomatic adverbial phrase.

Thus the expression *kī ṭōb* is used particularly with verbs of saying and singing, as in the familiar line of the Psalmist:

*hōdū lyhwh kī ṭōb kī lē'ōlām ḥasdō*

(Pss 106:1, 107:1, 118:1, 29; 136:1)

Taking the phrase *kī ṭōb* here as referring to "the Lord" (viz. "for he is good," or even, "how good he is!") is of course possible,<sup>4</sup> and what is more, traditional. Hebrew has no distinct adverbial form,<sup>5</sup> and it is equally possible to suppose the phrase *kī ṭōb* is intended to describe the manner of praising—"in a goodly fashion," or perhaps even, "greatly, loudly."<sup>6</sup> The whole verse might thus be rendered, "Praise the Lord greatly, for (or perhaps, 'yea') his loving-kindness is forever."

This translation is somewhat more likely in view of the frequent use of *kī ṭōb* with just such verbs of singing etc. Thus Ps 54:8—

*bindābā 'ezbēhā lāk 'ōdeh šimkā yhwh kī ṭōb*

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., M. Dahood, *Psalms III* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), who translates either "how!" (pp. 278-79) or "indeed" (see p. 157 n. 10 for references). W. F. Albright discussed Amarna *kī* (= "how" in both interrogative and exclamatory senses); see *EASOR* 89 (1943) p. 1; n. 17, and "The Refrain 'And God Saw *Ki Tob* . . ." in *Mélanges . . . A. Robert* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1957) 22-26. (On the refrain which is the subject of the latter article, Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and which Albright rendered "And God saw that it was very good," see below.) The usage ought to be connected with asseverative *k-* in such verses as Num 11:1, Cant 1:8.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 2 Sam 23:19 (*hakī nikkād*), discussed by Albright in "The Refrain . . ." p. 25. J. A. Montgomery ("Ras Shamra Notes VII." in *JAOS* 62 [1942] 49-51) adduced Ugaritic *kypt* ("how fair!") which he compared to Gen 18:20. Cf. also Isa 22:9 and Lam 3:22, cited by Albright.

<sup>3</sup> On the expression *kī damqi kī ṭāb* ("how fine, how good!") found in a cuneiform letter at Ugarit: see Albright, "The Refrain . . ." p. 25. He dates the letter "probably in the thirteenth century."

<sup>4</sup> Provided it is a stative verb. However, one would normally expect adjectival *kī ṭōb hū'*, thus Gen 6:2, *kī ṭōbōt hēnnā*, Gen 12:14, *kī yāpā hī' mē'ōd*, etc. etc.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible the *textus receptus* conceals here and there an old adverbial accusative; this of course makes no difference to our thesis.

<sup>6</sup> In this meaning it ought perhaps to be compared with Aramaic *ṭōbā'* = much, many, very.

The second half might be translated simply: "I will praise your name greatly, Lord." "I will praise your name O Lord for it is good" (*RSV*) is somewhat awkward in meaning, less parallelistic, ambiguous (is the praising good? the name? the Lord?) and, as with the previous verse (see note 4), somewhat strange grammatically. Similarly, the latter half of Ps 52:11,

*'ôdêkâ lē 'ôlām kî-'āsūtâ wa'āqawweh šimkâ kî jôb neged ḥāsîdêkâ*

means, "I will call loudly on your name in the midst of your faithful ones."

Ps 147:1 joins both *kî jôb* (greatly) and *kî na'im* (sweetly)<sup>7</sup> with verbs of singing:

*kî jôb zammerâ 'ēdhênû kî nâ'im nâ'wâ tēhillâ*

These are not, as some have had to argue,<sup>8</sup> infinitives, but imperatives, viz. "Greatly sing of our God, sweetly make hymns of praise."

Finally, one might adduce here a midrashic passage in which the omission of an expected *kî jôb* is explained. The verse in question is 2 Chron 20:21, where it is reported that, prior to a sortie against the Ammonites and Moabites, Jehosaphat appoints singers to lead in the song *hōdû lyhwh kî lē'ôlām ḥasdô*. The midrashic text comments:

How different is this song of thanks from all others in Scripture! For in all other songs of thanks it is said *hōdû lyhwh kî jôb kî lē'ôlām ḥasdô*, whereas here it says *hōdû lyhwh kî lē'ôlām ḥasdô*. It is that there was, as it were, no rejoicing before Him on high over the destruction of wicked men.<sup>9</sup>

The omission of *kî jôb* is equated with the song's lack of "rejoicing" (*šimhâ*). Apparently the midrashist understands *kî jôb* as referring not to God, but to the singing! Perhaps as well we ought to see a trace of this adverbial understanding of *kî jôb* in the wording of the standing prayer (*'amidâ*) preserved in most Sephardic and Oriental rituals, where the penultimate blessing concludes:

*wihalēlû wîbārêkû 'et šimkâ haggādôl bē'ēmet lē'ôlām kî jôb*

May they praise and bless your great name, faithfully, eternally, greatly. . .

The point of the last phrase was to tie in with the theme of the benediction, God's goodness; yet the phrase itself is adverbial, doubtless modeled on the biblical examples seen above.

The same *kî jôb* is used with verbs of sensation to convey enjoyment. Thus Prov 24:13—

*'ēkol-bēnî dēbaš kî jôb wēnōpet mâtôq 'al-ḥikkekâ kēn dē'eh ḥokmâ lenapšekâ*

Eating, my son, honey with pleasure, and wild-honey sweet on the palate—so is knowing wisdom to your soul. . .

Similarly, Prov 31:18—

*ṭā'āmâ kî jôb soḥrâh lō'-yikbeh ballaylâ nērâh*

<sup>7</sup> On the conventional apposition of *jôb* and *nâ'im* see Ps 133:1 and, in Ugaritic, C. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967) 'Anath I 19:20. (The apposition in Gen 49:15 is discussed below.)

<sup>8</sup> Thus Dahood, *Psalms III*, p. 344.

<sup>9</sup> J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933) 2, 5–6.

might be rendered: "She delights in her (daily) occupations,<sup>10</sup> nor does her candle go out at night." The misunderstanding of *kî jôb*'s adverbial nature has forced commentators to literalize *ṭā'āmâ* to "taste" and to misconstrue *soḥrâh* (MT *soḥrân*) as "merchandise," leaving the ideal woman of this passage in charge of a soup-kitchen!

We come then to the expression *râ'â kî jôb*. The word *râ'â* sometimes has the meaning of enjoy. Thus Eccl 9:9 *rē'ēh ḥayyim 'im-'iššâ 'āšer 'āhabtâ* "Enjoy life with a woman whom you love." In this same sense the verb is often coupled with *jôb*:<sup>11</sup>

*mi-hâ 'is heḥāpēs ḥayyim 'chēb yāmim lūr'ôr jôb*

Who is the man who enjoys life, loves (his) days (and) takes pleasure (in them)?  
(Ps 34:13)

*kol hâ'ādām šeyō'kal wēšātâ werâ'â jôb bēkol 'āmâlô*

Every man that eats and drinks and takes pleasure in his toil.

(Eccl 3:13)

The phrase *râ'â kî jôb* should be connected with such usages. Thus, in the same Psalm 34, the much-debated phrase in verse 9:

*ṭā'āmû ūr'û kî jôb yhwh āsrē haggeber yeḥseh bô*

ought to be rendered: "Delight and take pleasure in the Lord, happy the man whose refuge is in him." The phrase *kî jôb* applies equally to both verbs (for the former see Prov 31:18 above).

The refrain of the first chapter of Genesis thus has nothing to do with seeing, still less with seeing "that it was good." The phrase *wayyar' 'ēlōhîm kî-jôb* means simply, "And God was most pleased." It is noteworthy that each time this refrain occurs it comes at the end of a series of actions: construed as an adjective or stative verb, *jôb* has no clear referent, and translators are forced into the ambiguous "it was good." But for such an idea one would more likely expect *kî jôb 'āsâ* (cf Gen. 40:16 *kî jôb pātar*). In our case, therefore, it seems better to construe *kî jôb* adverbially and understand the idea to be, as in Eccl 3:13 above, that of taking pleasure in one's work. However, even where there is a clear possible referent, as in Gen 1:4, *wayyar' 'ēlōhîm 'et hâ'ôr kî-jôb*, it might be better to translate, "And God was very pleased with the light." A similar use of the expression with an object might be Gen 49:15—

*wayyar' mēnuhâ kî jôb wē'et hâ'āreš kî nâ'emâ*

which would mean, "and he was very pleased with (the) place. . ."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Her "rounds," one might say, as per this root's meaning of "go around" in Gen 34:10, 21; 42:34, etc. Cf. Akkadian *saḥaru(m)*. (W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* [Weisbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1966] translates "sich wenden, herum gehen, suchen; such aufhalten").

<sup>11</sup> Note also *râ'â bējôb* [or *bējûb*]: Jer 29:32, Pss 27:13, 128:5, Eccl 2:1.

<sup>12</sup> This translation implies the second *kî* is to be taken quite differently from the first. For just as the lack of a feminine ending on *jôb* indicates it must be construed adverbially, so the apparent feminine form *nâ'emâ* argues that the second clause's *kî* means "And [he was pleased] with the land for it was pleasant," or even zeugmatically, "and he saw the land, how pleasant it was." Such non-parallelism in two successive uses of *kî* is visible elsewhere, e.g. Lam 3:22, and might conceivably be argued for Ps 147:1 (discussed above).