"GLORY OF YAHWEH"

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Old Testament Interpretation
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"Kabod denotes the revealed being or character of Yahweh, and also a physical phenomenon whereby Yahweh's presence is made known, and scholars have not been agreed as to the priority in time of one or another of these views."[1] However, to Ramsey's statement must be added the meaning of kabod which is used to describe the differing relationships between men and also between nations. Scholars give different origins for the word kabod. Eichrodt claimed that the origen lay in the experience of the people with the thunderstorm. Von Rad agreed with Eichrodt, and further stated that these meteorological appearances give men the impression of God's weight. Yet Gray and Abrahams would reject this explanation as the only one, and they would further claim that this meteorological conception of kabod is not unconnected with the more inward character and purpose of Yahweh. Kittel says that the idea of Yahweh's power is connected with the word, kabod. Ramsey states that the Biblical record shows that kabod is connected in pre-exilic times with the thunderstorm theophany but also with the presence of Yahweh. Then it is developed further by God's acts in history and by his character. Thus, in our study of the phrase, "glory of Yahweh", let us first seek the root meaning of the word glory as it is associated with this phrase; let us see in a brief sketch how this word and phrase is treated in Isaiah 1-55 and Ezekiel, and then let us attempt to see the full meaning of the phrase in the light of these scriptures.

The root meaning of the word, glory,(kabod) is traced back to the Hebrew word, the root 'KBD'. This root can mean to be heavy,

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1 A.M. Ramsey, The Glory of God, p. 10.

to be weighty, burdensome, troublesome, dull, insensible, and to be honored. Richardson points out that the primary meaning of kabod in relation to the phrase, "glory of Yahweh", is that of weight and substance. God's external appearnace, or as in the growth of the phrase or word among the people, man's appearance, demanded and compelled respect and honor from his fellows. This, too, among men in relation with each other was called honor or glory or kabod. Hence weight, substance, wealth, dignity, noble bearing and honor contributed to its meaning.[2] Thus, we shall see the growth from its untheological meaning to its theological meaning, or at least see the distictions between the two categories and the strong similarities.

The untheological passages referring to the root, kabod, are found in Isaiah 8:7; 10:3; 10:16,18; 14:18; 16:14; 17:3; 17:4; 21:16; 22:18; 22: 24; 35:2; and Ezekiel 31:18. The basic root of this word is shown clearly in Isaiah 22:24. This passage points to weight or burden as the meaning of his father's house being thrown upon him; the K.J.V. says glory, the R.S.V. says that they shall hang on him the whole weight of his family, and Moffatt says that through him the whole family will rise to honor; his whole family shall depend on his support. The I.C.C. says that the word glory plays on the root meaning of kabod, meaning all the weightiness of his family. the rest of the verse developes the idea of the burdensome family. Also, the word, glory, branches out further in the meaning of weight, riches or reputation. In Isaiah 10:3, glory refers to wealth, valuable possessions or plunder. In 8:7 glory refers to that which

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2 A. Richardson, Theological Word Book of the Bible, p. 175.

belongs to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria and all his array is mentioned. This untheological trend of glory is continued further in the expression of reputation as meaning splendor, distinction, or honor. Isiah 10:16; 10:18; 16:14; 17:4; 21:16; 35:2; and Ezekiel 31:18 portray this type of splendor. Pedersen points out that property makes a man great. The soul becomes great or heavy through wealth. Kabod, generally, in these particular cases, is translated honor, but strictly means 'heaviness'; it indicates the heavy substance of the soul and is most particularly used about wealth.[3] He continues that when wealth is honor, it is because it is strength. It is not only kabod, heaviness, but also hayil, strength. The word comprises both blessing and honor. It designates the capability of the soul, its strength and efficiency, its valor. It also designates the nobility, those possessed of great property and having great obligations.[4] Isaiah 16:14; 17:4; 21:16; and 35:2 are representative of a group of verses which describe the nations. Ramsey claims that the kabod of a nation is its property, and more than that, it is the distinction amid the world of nations which its property expresses.[5] These nations referred to are Moab, Jacob, Lebanon and Kedar. With reference to Moab, Jacob and Kedar, the glory will be brought low or contemned or come to an end. The I.C.C. comments that the nation is personified as a man whose glory, meaning reputation and splendor, among his neighbors will become slight.

Isaiah 10:16 is interpreted differently by scholars; for instance Moffatt translates glory as glitter; the I.B. says that under his glory may mean "in his inward parts" or "his honor(which he has heap-

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3 Pedersen, Israel, vol. I and II, p. 228.

4 Ibid., p. 230.

5 Ramsey, op. cit., p. 9.

ed up) will be set all ablaze as when a fire is kindled." The I.C.C. offers the explanations that Assyria like Israel is compared to a human body; Assyria is conceived not only as a man fat and strong, but gloriously apparelled. It can do with outward glory or the splendid raiment. Other definitions of glory in this verse are that it refers to the improving military might of Assyria regarded as a mass of inflamable material; it may mean the nobility of Assyria who are to be burnt up with the fire of war. At any rate, the interpretation of glory in this verse has to do with honor or distinction. There are other verses in this area of untheological meaning which can only be named at this time. Isaiah 10:18 refers to reputation and splendor; 14:18 are words of honor, referring to the nations or kings sleeping in their own tombs(honor); 17:3 refers to honor and distinction. Thus, before coming to the concrete phrase, "glory of Yahweh", we have seen the varied and adaptable meanings which the word kabod can have in the relation of man to man, of nation to nation, and of God to nation. Seemingly, kabod has referred much more to the external lustre of the nations and has meant the honor or distinction or reputation which the nation has enjoyed in the eyes of others, an exemplified by their great possessions and wealth. Yet, as Israel Abrahams points out, kabod, glory, as applied to men, often represents much more than this external lustre. A man's glory in some passages has seemed to refer even to the seat of character, or the inward spirit of a man, the thing wherein his weight or worth is believed to consist.[6] It is true that as these verses in which the glory of the nations or kings has called down the judgment of God,

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6 Israel Abrahams, The Glory of God, p. 20.

there has been something much more than the external raiment referred to. But we must now face the phrase, "glory of Yahweh".

"The 'glory of God' is, in effect, the term used to express that which men can apprehend, originally by sight, of the presence of God on earth."[7] Richardson says that Ezekiel first used it, and then the priestly writers took it over from him. There is a tension running throughout between the physical manifestation of the glory of God and the glory referring to the transcendent God. In Ezekiel 1:28; 3:12; 3:23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:18,19; 11:22,23; 43:1-5; and 44:4 the glory of God is shown to have elements of movements, of volume, yet of a mysterious secrecy and hiddeness. Such descriptions as, the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord(using materialistic or symbolic language); the glory of God arose; it was there; it had gone; it was over them; it stood upon a mountain; the return of the glory of God to the temple; it filled the temple(reveals both the physical manifestations and the transcendency of the glory of God). Ezekiel uses the word 'likeness' in description of this phrase; this casts a highly mysterious interpretation to this concept of glory, and it is not easily fathomed. Especially is this true in all the movements ascribed to it by Ezekiel. There is more to be said on the temple experience. Pedersen states that the creation of blessedness by the holy place is due to the divine spirit which dwells in it. God's name has been pronounced over the sanctuary; this means that his kabod, his honor is in the temple; his name, his eyes, and his heart are there; Pedersen says that these are the literal equivalents of the soul of Yahweh. He is present in the sanctuary himself and has

7 Richardson, op. cit., p. 175.

his dwelling there.[8] Ezekiel 43:1-5 and Isaiah 6:1-3 convey somewhat the same meaning. In speaking of Isaiah, Ramsey says that, "the glory of Yahweh is linked with is his holiness, and if the holiness means a remoteness from all that is unrighteous, the glory is that union of sovereignty and righteousness which is the essence of the divine character."[9] The K.J.V. and the R.S.V. translate Isaiah 6:1-3 as "the whole earth is full of his glory", whereas Moffatt translates it as "his majestic splendor fills the whole earth." The I.B. states that while holiness is the essential quality of deity, glory is the manifestation of deity in the natural world; the I.C.C. comments that glory is God's self-revelation in dealing with men. Abrahams says, too, that the divine quality, which resides in God as glory, shows itself in acts of glory in nature and in the soul.[10]

Moving out of the immediate experiences of Ezekiel and Isaiah with the glory of God as revealed presence, though clothed in vivid symbolism and raiment, this concept is seen in other meanings by other people, and is used to describe differing actions of God. In Isaiah 4:5 glory represents a presence, a filling by God. The I.C.C. explains that over the city Jerusalem, already purified at this time, will rest the same physical phenomenon that marked Yahweh's presence at the Exodus. The creation of the flame by night and the cloud by day is parallel to the return of the glory of Yahweh after the exile to the holy city which becomes in consequence the city of Yahweh's presence(Ezek. 43:1-5). This same thought is continued in Isaiah 43:7; 42:8; 12; and 48:11. Yahweh's name is given to those whom

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8 Pedersen, op. cit., vol. III and IV, p. 261.

9 Ramsey, op. cit., p. 13.

10 Abrahams, op. cit., p. 29.

he has created for his glory. He gives his glory to no other, yet he expects those to whom he has given it to praise him and to give ~~and to give~~ this glory back to him. Pedersen explains that like any other soul, the soul of Yahweh has its honor, identical with its content, which fills it, gives it weight, and constitutes the basis of its claims. Yahweh's honor, his kabod, is determined by his power and activity; Yahweh himself and his sanctuary are Israel's glory. The people is Yahweh's glory, because he has created it himself and called it by his name. Also, all the fulness of the earth enters into his glory. His unique glory is raised above all times.[11] The I.B. comments that God's glory and praise are the ultimate categories of revelation and response, and the I.C.C. comments that Israel's hope and expectation lie solely and finally in the glory of God, to which it is her task to witness and which it is her privilege to praise and worship.

The glory of God will, also, be revealed among the nations, and all flesh shall see it(Isaiah 40:5 and Ezekiel 39:21). The I.B. says that Yahweh is to manifest himself in unparalleled revelation. The common belief of the exile was that the glory of the Lord had left the temple at the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, but that it would return again in God's time(Ezek. 1:28 etc.). The glory that once appeared on the sacred mount(Ex. 24:15f.) and later tabernacled in the sacred precincts of the holy of holies, is now to appear in a final epiphany. This is not merely another theophany which belongs to a series of divine appearances in the O.T.; it is final and decisive, universal and all inclusive. It fills time and space. It is a world theophany and comes at the turn of the ages as the fulfill-

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11 Pedersen, op. cit., Vol. III and IV, p. 616.

ment of the divine purpose in history. Thus, in examining the different connatations of the specific phrase, "glory of Yahweh", it is seen that it can be both an active and a passive phrase. Isaiah 42:12 presents the idea of giving glory to Yahweh, while 43:7 and other passages present Yahweh as giving glory to his people and revealing it to the nations. It is also seen in the context of meaning honor, reputation, presence, and in the areas of God's creation and redemption. A conclusion of this brief study, especially of only Isaiah and Ezekiel, has its limitations. For it would be most enlightening as a study to see the meaning of doxa in the N.T. in refering to Jesus Christ as the revealed glory of God, seeing this both in the context of the incarnation or the physical appearance, and yet the mysterious and hidden and transcendent meaning of this glory in the nature of Jesus Christ. Yet, within the more than thirty passages which have been touched upon, the conclusion is reached that agrees with the earlier assertion of Ramsey that kabod denotes both the revealed being and character of God, and also a physical phenomenon whereby God's presence is made known. And yet from this study, I think I see a real connection between God and man as each participates in this glory 'experience'. The people contribute to God's honor or glory or kabod by subordinating themselves entirely to his will and purpose. And those who do honor God are in return honored by him, and are even honored by him because of his creation. Thus, I see a real connection between the concept of the "glory of Yahweh" or kabod and the concepts of creation and redemption by God of his people. God's being, nature and character, his purpose in creation and his fulfillment in redemption, and the people's vital participation in

this experience of the glory of God are reflected in the phrase "glory of Yahweh". Ramsey states my conclusion in this way: "in the Kabod of Yahweh, radiance, power, and righteous character are inextricably blended; and the word thus tells of a theology in which the attributes of God in Himself are inseparable from His attractiveness and saving activity in the world."[12]

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12 Ramsey, op. cit., p. 14.

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This is a most thorough and comprehensive job. I hope you have grasped the significance of tracing one word's actual usage in the OT and its meaning for interpretation.