

## HEBRAIC ANTECEDENTS TO THE EUCHARISTIC ANAMNΗΣΙΣ FORMULA

By David W. A. Gregg

The current strengthening of the speculation that Jesus may have spoken in Hebrew at the Last Supper<sup>1/</sup> gives added stimulus to the quest for possible Hebraic antecedents to the formulae that we find in the Greek New Testament. Material for this quest in respect of the ἀνάμνησις formula has, however, proved particularly elusive.

If we begin, as we must nowadays, with Jeremias's standard work, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*,<sup>2/</sup> we find, despite his championing of the longer text of Luke 22, no reference at all to this formula in the section on 'Semitisms' (pp. 173-186), nor in that on 'The Original Language' (pp. 196-203). In the section '... That God may Remember Me' (pp. 237-255), however, he does extend a modicum of help. On p. 249 he first proposes splitting the sentence between the command (τοῦτο ποιεῖτε) and the purposive clause (εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν) which parts he then treats separately.

For the former he offers as antecedents Ex. 29:35; Num. 15:11-13; Deut. 25:9 (cf. Mishnah, Yeb. 12:3). However he himself acknowledges, in a footnote, that these are all examples in LXX of the adverb οὕτως with a form of ποιεῖν, rendering the Hebrew כִּכְּרִי with a jussive of עָשָׂה, which he identifies as 'an established expression for the repetition of a rite'. But since the eucharistic formula has, instead, the demonstrative pronoun τοῦτο used as the direct object, these are rather unconvincing as antecedents, and hardly justify the closing of the question whether the command here is to repeat a rite (i.e. breaking and eating/drinking), or to manipulate an

1. Cf. e.g. J. Barr, 'Which Language did Jesus speak?', *BJRL* 53 (1970) 9-29; J. A. Emerton, 'The Problem of Vernacular Hebrew in the First Century AD and the language of Jesus', *JTS* 24 (1973) 1-23.
2. *ET*, London: SCM, 1966.

object (i.e. the bread/cup), as a commemorative act. One might even argue that, in the light of these suggested antecedents, the absence of οὕτως (the 'established expression'), and the alternative use of τοῦτο, make the latter interpretation rather more likely than the former!

For the latter half of the formula Jeremias makes no allusion to any Hebrew equivalents,<sup>/3/</sup> but he does give a lead in footnote 3 on p. 251, where he offers eighteen examples to show that 'An objective genitive with ἀνάμνησις, μνημόσυνον is the established usage'. Of those he gives, we possess the underlying Hebrew for only eight, all of which, surprisingly, are from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, the Wisdom of Ben Sira. But every single one of these is (a) an example of μνημόσυνον rather than ἀνάμνησις, (b) an example of the direct object, whereas the formula has εἰς with the accusative, and (c) renders from the Hebrew the noun זָכָר, the one nominal form from the root זָכַר for which μνημόσυνον is always used in LXX, and for which, unlike אָזְכִּיר/<sup>4/</sup> אֶזְכְּרָה/<sup>5/</sup> וְזָכַרְתִּי/<sup>6/</sup> there is no example rendered by ἀνάμνησις! It is obvious therefore that these are most unpromising as pointing to Hebraic antecedents of the ἀνάμνησις formula, and indeed Jeremias advances no such claim for them.

His selection does suggest, however, a far more promising possibility. The Wisdom of Ben Sira is arguably the nearest LXX book to New Testament times for which we possess portions of the original Hebrew, which would suggest that scrutiny of it in our quest might prove particularly profitable. And we are not disappointed.

If we rejoin the two parts of the ἀνάμνησις formula and enumerate the features noted above, we find, in τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν, the following sequence:

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3. Though he does discount the Aramaic יָזַךְ, *op. cit.*, 251, n.2.
  4. Lev. 24:7.
  5. Ps. 38 and Ps. 70 titles.
  6. Numbers 10:10.

direct object - form of ποιεῖν - εἰς + accusative from root μνησκεῖν. And an examination of the forms from μνησκεῖν found in Ben Sira yields two examples of exactly this sequence, viz.:

45:9 ἀκουσθὲν ποιῆσαι ἦχον ἐν ναβ εἰς μνημόσυνον υἱοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ.

50:16 ἀκουσθὲν ἐποίησαν φωνὴν μεγάλην εἰς μνημόσυνον ἐναντι ὑψίστου.

And, happily, for both these examples we possess the original Hebrew, viz.:

45:9 וישמע בדביר קולו לזכרון לבני עמי

50:16 וישמעו קול אדיר להזכיר לפני עליון

From this we may note the following points:

- (a) ποιεῖν corresponds to the Hiphil element of the Hebrew verb in each case; i.e. it has a causative significance.
- (b) In conjunction with εἰς it renders the Hiphil plus ל in each case.
- (c) The forms from the root זכר which occur are both found elsewhere rendered by ἀνάμνησις. In Numbers 10:10 (זכרון) and in the titles of Psalms 37 (38), and 69 (70), where להזכיר is rendered εἰς ἀνάμνησιν, as in the eucharistic formula.
- (d) The absence of an objective genitive to μνημόσυνον should not measurably detract from the value of these examples as antecedents. They themselves contain distinctive elements outside the sequence we are looking for. And the status of the possessive adjective ἐμὴν in the ἀνάμνησις formula is quite undecided anyway. It does, in any case, appear to be the distinctive, novel and emphatic feature of the whole, for which one would perhaps hardly expect to find antecedents.
- (e) Both examples in Ben Sira are in a most markedly 'cultic' context.

One might argue that these two occurrences in Ben Sira, therefore, furnish impressive possible antecedents for the ἀνάμνησις formula, and they have suggested to the writer several further lines of enquiry, the fruits of which must await later publication (see Postscript below).

Meanwhile however, the following tentative conclusions are offered:

- (a) They fortify the case for considering Hebrew as the original language of the eucharistic formulae, particularly when one bears in mind the provenance of Ben Sira.
- (b) Their existence may be seen, therefore, to strengthen the case for the authenticity of the ἀνάμνησις formula as an integral part of the original ordinance by Christ.
- (c) They seem to considerably improve the possibility of offering a reasonable reconstruction of this.
- (d) Most important, they may provide important pointers to the correct interpretation of what precisely τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν is meant to command, and what it reveals about the intended relationship between the bread and the wine and the body and blood of Christ. They add weight, for instance, to the case against מִן, with its attendant notion of 'keeping alive the memory' of a person, as a hermeneutical key,<sup>7</sup> and point instead to מִן, with its 'material' and 'cultic' associations.

#### POSTSCRIPT

Since this note was written (in 1975) the author's further researches have resulted in the publication of *Anamnesis in the Eucharist* (Grove Liturgical Study 5. Nottingham: Grove Books, 1976). The latter work furnishes some detailed elaboration of points made above, but also contains some important modifications. The main point of this note, however, has survived this detailed scrutiny.

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- 7. Contra, e.g., S. B. Frost, 'The Memorial of the Childless Man', *Interpretation* 26 (1972) 437-450.