

## **The Notion of Anathema in the Septuagint**

This will be a cursory—that is, quick and dirty collection of exegetical notes on the Greek word anathema (ἀναθεμα) as used in the LXX, with regard to suggesting alternative meanings for that same word as used in the New Testament:

There is a Hebrew word, **מִנְחָה**, which is often but not always translated into Greek using the Greek anathema, but I will not attempt to survey these Hebrew uses of this word. New Testament authors were familiar with the Old Testament writings in Greek and did regularly use the LXX, and if the LXX imposes some theological distinctions in this area, I would prefer to argue that New Testament writers, in effect, accept those LXX word-meaning distinctions also.

In the LXX then, I do suggest the following approach to the meaning of this word: The word anathema would seem to obtain its primary or essential meaning with respect to temple-building-holiness rather than with respect to rite-holiness or clean/unclean-holiness. In the classical-era Greek meaning of this word as well, anathema would mean the donation specified (publicly or formally) as being in/for the temple, the temple as temple building, and such a gift then is to be distinguished from animals, grain, etc., given to be used and/or incinerated or eaten within a rite, a sacrifice. (I expect that this same difference of meanings will be found in the Hebrew even if not as explicitly or clearly demarcated.) This specific type of donation would primarily mean thus a valuable and material thing which is then dedicate (as in good Old English usage) to the temple; although as will become apparent in later uses in the LXX, person, land, city,

can be dedicate also, and dedicate (dangerously) to the wrong gods...

But the first use of this Greek word in the LXX is in a final chapter of Leviticus, subsequent to the Holiness Code which would end in Lev 26. While other taxes, sacrificial obligations are transferable, exchangeable for money, this one is not. I suggest that this will later connect with the fixed quality of a temple-architecture... But in Lev 27:28 at least, where this type of gift is first mentioned, the anathema gift cannot be returned, redeemed, but is holy always, irrevocably.

Next, Numbers 18 seems to enumerate for both Levi and Aaron what each may be authorized to receive as being their share of the religious gifts coming in... and this chapter includes the broad statement: "Everything in Israel which has been devoted (as anathema-gift) to God shall be yours—i.e., Aaron's(?)."

Numbers 21 contains another surprisingly general use of the word anathema. A certain chief of Canaan interferes with the Israelites at a time when they are vulnerable and traveling through the desert to the south-east of Canaan, and they pray to their God for help. Israel says that if God puts this people subject to him, he, Israel, will dedicate as anathema-gift him, the chief of Canaan, and his/their cities. "And God gave Canaan (the chief) to be subject to him (Israel), and him and his cities as anathema-gift (to God himself, it seems) and he (God) called the name of the place—(Canaan, that is) Anathema." [Num 21:3 LXX]

But it would be in Deuteronomy that this type of donation would find its primary meaning—as relating to temple architecture, though Deut itself never uses the word temple. But Deut

does have regard to a civic religion primarily ( a city and home religion and temple as civic-center...) rather than a rite and holiness-defined religion.

In the earlier exhortation of Deuteronomy and before the more specific regulations, laws, the carved idols (or engravings to other gods) when encountered in the land—are to be burned (Deut 7:25-26). To introduce such a thing into one's home on account of the precious metals... would be to bring something abominable, disgusting, into one's home, as well as put that home in danger. This use of anathema-gift to mean dangerous thing is understandable, because these things are anathema-gifts previously specified as sacrosanct to foreign deities.

A similar if more extreme use of the word is found within the later law section of Deuteronomy, chapter 13. First it is the false-prophet, then the apostate individual that is to be stoned, and then in verses 12-18, the apostate city which has been led astray to other gods (since it is assumed that all cities in the future within the land will finally be dedicate to the true God...?) but this apostate city of Jews is to be dedicate to complete destruction, is to become a mound of ruins not to be rebuilt. (The sense here must be that this city was once dedicate irrevocably to the true God and cannot be allowed to become re-dedicate to another..?) Nothing must stick to your hands; the city and its belongings are to be reduced to nothing. [The double use of anathema as phrase, "this certainly worthless thing, (city, person)" is also employed in Acts to describe the Jews of Jerusalem as they conspire against the apostle Paul; they plan to eat nothing until they have destroyed him, apparently since Paul had interfered

with their favored notions of Judaism, of Jerusalem as capital city...]

In Deut 20:17, within martial regulations, within laws of conquest, cities outside may be despoiled after conquest, but for cities belonging to the other tribes within the immediate land, (apparently these tribes are liable to the same rule as was specified for the chief of Canaan in Numbers..) these cities are to be completely and materially destroyed. There can be no cultural-religious tolerance or accommodation at all during conquest. Apparently these people and cities are to be dedicate/anathema-gifts unto destruction; they cannot be materially re-dedicate to good use.

The next use of the Greek word within the LXX involves a city also, a first and paradigmatic city conquered within the promised territories. The prostitute Rahab and her relation are to be kept, but everything else from Jericho, its people as well as all of its valuables must be consigned to being worthless. On the seventh time around Joshua says: "Cry out. For God has given you the city. And the city will be anathema-gift, she and all that is in her, to the Lord of Sabaoth. " All gold, silver, bronze, iron, Joshua further specifies, is "treasure" to be brought in to the Lord.

When one individual within the conquering army then decides to take some of the silver of Jericho for his own use, the next chapter describes the consequent disaster. No temple is mentioned, but temple-treasury is loosely implied as context for the meaning here of this word, anathema. Some goods are specified as belonging to God, in effect to God's temple, and some plausibility is given as to why other goods or things or persons may not

be re-dedicate but must be physically destroyed. This is war-time.

Much later in the Israelite history, the anathema-gift comes into play—and at a somewhat climactic juncture within the Judith story. The Assyrian ruler is ticked-off, it seems, by subject peoples to his west, and he decides to teach these people a lesson. As this army approaches Israel, a still attractive widow decides she will pretend she has been turned away by her people. She returns with her nurse and the commander's head in a bag, and the army, since they have lost their commander of great prowess, run.

Judith is given the tent and valuables of this invading commander as spoil of war and deservedly won by her. The religious officials also praise this action done in defense of the country—and in fact without detriment to her virtue. She then gives this tent and its furnishings from her own possession as anathema-gift for / to the temple treasury.

I have skipped over six or seven Septuagint instances of the word after the story of Achen / Achar in Judges, but there is a final use at the close of Zechariah, 14:11, which I myself would translate: "... and there will be anathema-gift no longer..." This phrase is within a sentence which describes a Jerusalem of the future which is at complete peace. Where all is holy the holy / unholy distinction has no place; where all is dedicate appropriately, then the anathema concept as well, one might say, is moot.