In three passages of the Bible the word נבון is used in a peculiar sense. I Sam. 23: 23 reads: נבון ומכל המחבאים נבון ומכל המחבאים אלא נבון ומכל המחבאים: 26: 4 reads: נבון ומכל המחבאים אלא נבון ומכל המחבאים; II Sam. 6: 6 reads: נבון ומכל המחבאים אלא נבון ומכל המחבאים.

The expression has always occasioned difficulty, and has received manifold renderings. Appreciating the fact that in II Sam. 6: 6 a proper name undoubtedly stood in the original text, the Chronicler has substituted יבר for the to him unintelligible נבון (I Chron. 13. 9). This is unquestionably a textual emendation, and scarcely represents the original reading. גא reads נַנַּבּוֹ for נבון, while גב reads 'ונַבּוֹ, and גא reads נַבּוֹ as a proper name. גל reads 'וֹנַבּוֹ for נבון, 'וֹנַבּוֹ, clearly a harmonistic emendation. Aquila reads חָבַל חָבַל חָבַל חָבַל חָבַל, a literal translation of נבון as a Niphal participle of נבון. Other Hexapla versions read variously נבון כן and גלפ. The Targum to this passage renders נבון לַחַדְלִי, literally “a prepared place,” just as does Aquila.

For נבון in I Sam. 23: 23 גא reads נבון, while גב omits the entire clause from נבון ומכל המחבאים. The Targum renders נבון לַחַדְלִי by כְּלָחַדְלִי, “of a certainty,” as does also Symmachus, כְּלָחַדְלִי. גא in I Sam. 26: 4 גב reads נבון כן, i.e. it translates נבון literarily as a Niphal participle of נבון, regardless of the meaning of the passage, just as Targum and Aquila do to II Sam. 6: 6. Apparently, feeling also the need of the mention of some exact location, גב has added כְּלָחַדְלִי. גל reads כְּלָחַדְלִי, again evidently a harmonistic emendation. Here also the Targum renders כְּלָחַדְלִי by כְּלָחַדְלִי.

Among modern commentators an even wider range of interpretation is manifest. Keil and Delitzsch (English edition, 189) render נבון כן in II Sam. 6: 6 “the threshing-floor of the stroke,” deriving נבון from נבון כן. Reuss (German edition, I, 241) offers a similar interpretation. Klostermann (152) trans-
lates, "'bis zu einer bestimmten Tenne,'" and remarks, "'ein Ausdruck, der von der Benennung geflissentl. absieht, indem er die Sache setzt; denn der Ort soll erst einen Eigennamen erhalten, u. es genügt, auf die abschüssige Glätte des Tennenbodens aufmerksam gemacht zu haben, um den folgenden Vorfall zu begreifen.'" Commenting upon לְכָּל in II Sam. 6:6 Smith says (294), "'evidently a proper name; the endeavor of some of the commentators to make it mean indefinitely, a certain threshing-floor, is not sustained by usage, nor is Th.'s interpretation fixed or permanent in distinction from a temporary floor used only for a particular field or during one season. Whether Nachon is the correct name, or whether we should read כְּרִי with Chr., or נָשָׂא with Gb, cannot be determined.'" Budde (Marti, Hand Commentar, 229 and Polychrome Bible, 82) seems fairly content with the כְּרִי of Chr. Nowack (Handkommentar, 173) says that the context clearly demands a proper name, and agrees with Budde that the כְּרִי of Chr. is the best authenticated emendation that can be made. However, in his translation of the text he leaves a blank space for the name. Kittel (in Kautzsch, Die Heilige Schrift des A.T., 2 323) does likewise. (Cf. also Driver, Notes, 2 267 and Wellhausen, T.B.S.) The latest interpretation of the word, and one completely at variance with those usually given is that of Arnold (Ephod and Ark (1917), 62). He says, "'לְכָּל is of course not a proper name; which could serve no purpose here. Neither the author nor his readers would be familiar with the name of the owner of every threshing-floor between Kiriath-jearim and Jerusalem. Obviously the adjective, like the substantive כְּרִי itself, has some bearing on the misadventure about to be narrated. I have taken לְכָּל to signify in this connection, firm, hard, permanent, that is, a threshing-floor of bare rock, as distinguished from one made of levelled and hardened earth. It is possible, to be sure, that the author intends לְכָּל in the alternative sense of prepared, that is, smoothed and swept, and made ready for the season's threshing. In the latter case the description would fix the season of the year as late in June or early in July. For the rest, the phrase לְכָּל seems to imply that the procession had not travelled very far when the accident happened. Nor was a threshing-floor likely to lie across the path when once the highway had been gained.'"
For הלא בנך in I Sam. 23:23 Smith proposes (215) to read יעל כה, and interprets the expression with the Targum and Symmachus, “of a certainty,” i.e. the Ziphites were to return to Saul with information resting on a certainty. Driver (Notes, 2, 189) offers the same interpretation. Budde (159) proposes the omission of הלא, and the change of והשבה משכבר, and translates ‘‘and bring me positive information.” Nowack (120) interprets the passage in the same way, although he does not emend the text to the same extent as does Budde. Kittel (309), too, interprets the passage in the same manner. Klostermann (103) renders חלא בנך ‘‘nach der Verabredung.”

הלא בנך in I Sam. 26:4, Smith feels (231) must designate some particular place. He hesitatingly proposes to substitute ילא בנך, ‘‘to the point just in front of him.” This reading is rejected by Budde (169), who seems to prefer, with Wellhausen, the reading of סבב מַקְעֵלֵה. However, he admits that this reading, too, is open to very serious objection. Nowack (130) rejects the readings of both סבב and ס, and holds that a place name is clearly required, and also that Smith’s suggestion, ילא בנך, is worthy of consideration. In his translation he leaves a blank space for the word, as does also Kittel (312) (cf. also Driver, Notes, 2 205). Klostermann (113) feels that ילא בנך may designate the time quite as well as the place, and so renders “auf eine bestimmte Zeit.”

This great variety of interpretations shows clearly the difficulties under which the versions and commentators labored. And yet a simple explanation may well solve the difficulty. All modern commentators (with the single exception of Arnold to II Sam. 6:6) agree that the contexts of both I Sam. 26:4 and II Sam. 6:6 require a proper name for בנך. And a moment’s consideration shows that the interpretation of ילא בנך in I Sam. 23:23, “of a certainty,” involves far-fetched, unauthenticated, and altogether unnecessary textual emendation. Vv. 24 and 25 make it clear that after coming to a definite understanding with Saul, the Ziphites set out in advance of Saul and his men, to locate the hiding-place of David. Knowing the country well, and being unencumbered with the usual military and camp equipment, they can move more rapidly than Saul and his
soldiers, and are therefore able to play the rôle of scouts and spies. But Saul and his men do not remain where they had been encamped, awaiting a report from the Ziphites. As v. 25 states explicitly, they, too, move on, though naturally more slowly, in the general direction of the district in which, it is known, David is in hiding. What more natural, and even necessary, therefore, than that, when sending the Ziphites forth, Saul should have agreed with them upon some definite spot in the immediate vicinity of David’s supposed place of concealment, where they were to meet him, and there report to him the results of their search? In other words, here, too, just as in the other two passages, נֶבֶן probably stands for a place name, which has been lost. Saul says to the Ziphites, “Observe and take note of all the hiding-places where he conceals himself, then return to me at . . . . . . . . and I will go with you, etc.”

This being the case, the only satisfactory explanation of the word must be one which will account for its use in all three passages. An explanation lies ready to hand, so simple and natural that it is surprising that it has not occurred to commentators before this. Sebastian Schmid\(^2\) seems to have been on the right track when he translated נֶבוֹן of I Sam. 26:4 as ad certum (locum). Klostermann, too, has rendered נֶבֶן of II Sam. 6:6 “a certain threshing-floor.” It is beyond question that in each of the three passages a proper name stood originally in the place now occupied by נֶבֶן, and that these three proper names were lost or became unrecognizable, and נֶבֶן was substituted to supply the deficiency. נֶבֶן would then be a synonym of the more customary נֶבֶל, and would be equivalent both literally and idiomatically to our English “certain” in the

\(^1\)While the locative may be used more frequently with place names, none the less the use of נֶבֶל likewise in such connection is amply attested; cf. Zach. 8:3; II Chron. 20:27. Or, not impossibly, the original may have used the locative, and נֶבֶל may be the result of dittography with the preceding נֶבֶל. Or it may be that the original text had the locative of the place name, but when this was lost and נֶבֶל was substituted, נֶבֶל was substituted with it to avoid the building up of the form נֶבֶלל with the locative נ, which might have been easily confused with the feminine of the participle.

\(^2\)In Libros Samuclis Commentarius, Argentorati, 1687, ’89 (quoted from Smith, 231).
expression, "a certain place," for a place the name of which is unknown or has been forgotten. This translation, "certain," for נֵלָה accords perfectly with the context of all three passages. It may be that the original authors themselves were no longer acquainted with the actual names in question, and themselves employed נֵלָה in these three passages. More probably, however, the original text gave the names correctly, but when these became illegible, or, for one reason or another, were lost, later scribes inserted the indefinite and idiomatic נֵלָה.

While this hypothesis can not, of course, be proved positively, it has in its favor at least that it accounts with one explanation for the use of נֵלָה in all three passages, something which no other explanation hitherto offered, has succeeded in doing.