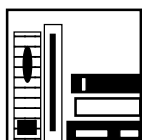


“walk away” is indicative of the hold which the Middle East has on the nations of the world. The article goes on to write of how the European Union has been involved and how (in MacAskill’s opinion) there is scope for more involvement in the crisis. The Catholic Church is also increasingly becoming involved in the crisis. On 2 August 2001 a meeting took place between Pope

John Paul II and the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. As events continue to develop in the Middle East we should exhort one another as we see the day approaching (Heb. 10:25). Let us remain faithful so that we might be with Christ as he marches through Bozrah (Isa. 34:6) and moves to Israel to carry out the “recompences for the controversy of Zion” (v. 8).



Reviews

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Some things that concordances do not tell you

John Carder

IN ENGLISH the tense of a verb shows its relation to time, that is, past tense, present tense or future tense. English is a very time-orientated language, with distinct tenses. The Hebrew of the Bible is completely different. It has no tenses in the strict sense. Instead it has two ‘formations’, one related to completed actions and the other to actions regarded as continuing over time.

The formation denoting completion is called the *avar* in Hebrew or the perfect in English, while the other is called the *atiyd* in Hebrew and continuous or imperfect in English. It is best to use those terms, and not to use the term ‘tenses’ at all. Both formations can refer to past, present or future actions or states, a feature which English-speakers find hard to visualise. There are subtle clues as to which is meant.

Centuries after the Bible was completed, changes were made in Hebrew grammar to denote past, present and future more distinctly. Modern Hebrew grammar is in this respect more in line with English and other European languages.

The basic form of Hebrew verbs is the third person singular masculine in the *avar* (perfect), as in the form ‘[he] said’. That is the form under which Hebrew verbs are listed in most concordances and dictionaries. It is a point which those sources assume you know without being told.

That form is often referred to as the stem or root of the verb.

From that basic and most simple form, usually consisting of just three Hebrew letters, all other parts of each Hebrew verb are derived. That is done by adding letters in front of the root letters (prefixes), in between them (infixes) and/or behind them (suffixes), and by modifying the vowels.

In Hebrew, both Biblical and modern, nouns are either masculine or feminine, whatever they refer to. There is no neuter. So there are four forms that Hebrew nouns may take: masculine singular or plural, or feminine singular or plural. Hebrew verbs have similar but more complex features, but their form is such that there is no mistaking whether masculine or feminine, singular or plural is meant.

Thus the first verb in Genesis 1, ‘created’, is clearly masculine singular. The first verb in Genesis 1:2, “And the earth was without form”, is clearly feminine singular—in Hebrew the earth is grammatically feminine.

Now, with the above in mind, we will look at the most frequently used reference books about Biblical Hebrew.

Gesenius

Wilhelm Gesenius, 1786-1842, was Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Halle,

Germany. The volumes we usually speak of as 'Gesenius' derive from his *Lexicon Manuale*, written in Latin and published in 1833. Gesenius also wrote other related works, both in German and in Latin, which was still from medieval times the scholarly language of Europe.

Obviously Gesenius was not the first European to study Hebrew, but he belonged to the German group of scholars who pioneered 'scientific' and 'rationalist' methods of analysis of Hebrew as a language and the Hebrew Scriptures. His works provide a basis, almost a quarry, for other well-known reference works. Several translations into English of Gesenius' works were produced quite promptly in America, notably one by Dr. Edward Robinson in 1836. Copies were scarce in England, and a rival version in English was published 'for students' (unspecified) by Dr. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles.

Tregelles

Tregelles' English edition of Gesenius first appeared in 1846, with a last edition in 1859. (It is now published in America.) In his preface, Tregelles admits that he has used Gesenius's work as a vehicle for his own views. He wanted particularly to counter what he termed the "neologian tendencies" of Gesenius, that is, his interpretations, which Tregelles regarded as not supporting the inspiration of Scripture. Tregelles tells his readers that he has included various remarks to alert them to these "neologisms", but he also introduces his own interpretations of some words without warning his readers that he is doing so.

Tregelles' book has no list of abbreviations used. A frequent entry in the text is the abbreviation 'fut.', which presumably means 'future' (tense). Another is 'pret.' or preterite (simple past tense), which is a term derived from Latin grammar and so is not very helpful to students of Hebrew. As we showed above, neither 'future tense' nor 'preterite' apply to the Hebrew of the Bible.

The 'Oxford Gesenius'

The Oxford University scholars Brown, Driver and Briggs published another English edition of Gesenius, much expanded, first in 1907, and with various reprints with corrections appearing up to fifty years later. It goes to the opposite extreme to Tregelles; it has six-and-a-half closely printed pages listing abbreviations used. Those abbreviations make it a difficult and irritating

book to consult. It now appears in a smaller format and includes Strong's numbering system.

Most of the abbreviations are references to scholarly works, and only about a dozen, mostly symbols, are needed by the general reader. The Oxford does not refer to 'preterite' or 'future', but uses 'Pf.' for perfect formation and 'Impf.' for imperfect (continuous) formation. It gives a great many references, the complete range of all except the most common words, and examples of meanings. Although it has its own biases, it is on the whole more reliable than the Tregelles version, though Tregelles is useful as a simpler, quick-reference work, especially as it has a brief English index at the back.

Strong's Comprehensive Concordance

Strong's is, of course, most useful for its numbering system for those who cannot read Hebrew or Greek. The attached Hebrew dictionary, dated 1890 (American copyright), is clearly based on the Tregelles version of Gesenius (see also the comments on 'The New Englishman's', following).

Strong's ignores the interior pointing that indicates whether the Hebrew letter *bet* is pronounced 'b' or 'v'. The general pronunciation guide in English is grotesque; it is liberally peppered with misleading and totally unnecessary letters 'w'. If the reader erases, physically or mentally, all the 'w's' it would be a great improvement. Strong's also has too many letters 'h' in its pronunciation guides, but to that there is no simple solution. Hebrew is difficult enough for those who know only English, and it is a pity that the guides make it appear even more difficult. That is quite apart from the genuine difficulty that Hebrew has some letters with sounds which cannot be represented by single, standard English letters.

The New Englishman's Concordance

The New Englishman's is clearly based on the Tregelles version of Gesenius; indeed, its first draft was thoroughly revised by Tregelles himself. Its preface advises those who cannot read Hebrew to use it in conjunction with Strong's, and it uses Strong's numbering system. In many ways it is superior to Strong's and Tregelles, and its present layout is much more clear.

Unlike Strong's it does distinguish the 'b' and 'v' forms of the Hebrew *bet*, as the first few pages clearly show. The English pronunciation guide is much better than Strong's, eliminating the

redundant letters 'w', but it still has too many letters 'h'. In this connection there is a curious but very minor point: the design on the title page shows the Hebrew alphabet in the now rarely-seen Ashkenazi (German or East European) script, in which the simple 'h' is barely distinguishable from the guttural 'h' (*chet*).

The very clear layout also makes clear the faults in the Tregelles system in a way which can be seen and checked by readers with little or no knowledge of Hebrew. For instance, examine the first verb, the entry number 6 on page 8, meaning 'perish'. (Englishman's does not always specify which entries are verbs and which are nouns.) In the left-hand column at the start of the entry is the heading 'KAL - Preterite'. We know that the *Kal* is the simplest, basic formation of the verb, and that the preterite in Latin grammar is the simple past tense. Skim down the entries without checking them one-by-one in the Bible at this stage. Among the entries you will see:

Lev. 26:38. And ye shall perish among the heathen,

(is that a past event?)

Deut. 11:17. and (lest) ye perish quickly . . .

Josh. 23:16. and ye shall perish quickly . . .

2 Kgs. 9:8. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish . . .

(are all those past tenses?)

And so on.

Now look at page 8, right-hand column, under the heading 'KAL - Future'. Among the entries you will see:

Num. 16:33. and they perished from among the congregation.

(is that a future tense?)

Deut. 22:3. of thy brother's which he hath lost,

1 Sam. 9:3. And the asses of Kish . . . were lost,

2 Sam. 1:27. and the weapons of war perished

(are all those future tenses?)

Now look at page 9 left-hand column under the heading 'PIEL - Preterite'. This means the intensive formation, but importantly 'past tense'. Among the entries are:

Jer. 15:7. I will destroy my people,

Ezek. 6:3. and I will destroy your high places

. . .

(are those past tenses?)

Finally for the moment, further down the column we see 'PIEL - Future':

Deut. 11:4. and (how) the Lord hath destroyed them . . .

2 Kgs. 11:1. and destroyed all the seed royal

. . .

2 Kgs. 19:18. therefore they have destroyed them.

(future?)

And so the process can be continued. But surely enough examples have been given to raise the question, Have the King James translators been so horribly wrong throughout the Old Testament, or is it the headings that are wrong?

The answer is: the headings '*kal*', '*pi'el*' and so on (and terms such as 'infinitive', 'imperative' and 'participle', which we have not dealt with here) are correct. It is the headings 'preterite' and 'future' which are wrong; they are totally misleading in relation to the Hebrew of the Bible.

The criticism as to the use of the terms 'preterite' (past tense) and 'future tense' applies to the Tregelles version of Gesenius and to the dependent works Strong's and New Englishman's. It is most clear in the New Englishman's. For any Hebrew verb, the entries under the subheading 'preterite' are in fact in the *avar* (or 'perfect') formation. As this article has tried to explain, Hebrew verbs in the *avar* formation may refer to past, present or future actions or situations. That may be confirmed by checking down the list of entries, as in the brief example given previously.

New Englishman's and other entries for any Hebrew verb under the subheading 'future' are in fact those in the *atiyd* (or 'continuous' or 'imperfect') formation. Again a check down the list will show that they also may refer to past, present or future actions or states.

On the employment in Scripture of verbs in the *avar* and those in the *atiyd*, and the interaction between them, one needs to consult a modern analytical grammar. Why the terms 'preterite' and 'future' were used by Tregelles and others is something of a mystery, especially as they freely used Hebrew grammatical terms, such as '*kal*', '*pi'el*' and '*hiphil*', incidentally all without explanation. Weingreen's *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew* (that is, Biblical Hebrew) also retains the misleading old-fashioned grammatical terms.

To bring in a verb that has more connection with Genesis 1 than the previous example, look at the verb 'say/said' (*amar*, Strong's number 559). This very basic verb has, naturally, many entries, running in *The New Englishman's Concordance* from pages 105 to 133. The entries related to Genesis 1 appear on page 116 under the subheading 'future'. The entry includes, "And

God said. . .”, in 1:26, which is so often quoted only in part.

In modern Hebrew, the *avar* (perfect) has become the past tense, the *atiyd* (imperfect) the future tense and conditional, and the present is shown by the participle.

None of the verb entries in *Englishman's* and others indicate whether they are singular or plural, except by implication of the AV. That omission has led to some unfortunate misunderstandings in Christadelphian literature. The only remedy is to consult the Hebrew texts in the light of a correct understanding of Hebrew verb forms.

Briefly, in a lengthy exposition such as that on Creation in Genesis 1, the first verb or two tend to be in the *avar* (perfect)—‘created’ (v. 1), ‘was’ (v. 2). Then verses 3, 4 and 5 have verbs in the *atiyd* (continuous). The whole chapter continues in the same way, groups of verses starting with a verb in the *avar* followed by verbs in the *atiyd*.

It should be noted that, except for the verb meaning, ‘Let us make’ (or ‘We will make’), in verse 26, all the verbs in Genesis 1 are in singular forms, including the first verb in verse 26, ‘And God [he] said’.

The term ‘the Elohim’, frequently found in expositions, with its suggestion, in English, of plurality, is not supported by the Hebrew. In all occurrences in Genesis 1 the title ‘Elohim’ has no ‘the’ connected to it, and in all cases is related to verbs in singular forms. There are also no phrases such as ‘Chief of the Elohim’ appearing in the Creation account. From Genesis 2:4 onwards the linking of the title ‘Elohim’ to the Divine Name does not carry any implication such as ‘the Lord of the Elohim’. The AV phrases, ‘God created’, ‘And God said’, ‘And God saw’, are correct translations.

Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

This two-volume work is dated 1980. Despite its title, it is useful for understanding the Hebrew.

The connections it draws with other languages are perhaps too academic for most readers.

Although it has its own numbering system, it has an index at the back of the second volume cross-referencing its numbers with the Strong’s system. That will be most essential to many readers who would otherwise regard it as too discursive or ‘waffly’. The introductory sections at the beginning of Volume 1 are well worth reading, especially ‘Suggestions for Use’ and ‘Finding Words in the Lexicon’.

I have some quarrels with the introductory English transliterations of the Hebrew letters (especially my pet hates of *waw* for *vav* and *taw* for *tav*), but the pronunciation guides in the body of the work are helpful and generally very good, although it reverts to only one sound for the letter *bet(h)*.

The work is based on the Oxford Gesenius, to which it refers by an abbreviation—BDB, the first letters of the authors’ surnames (Brown, Driver and Briggs). Like the Oxford, it treats the Biblical Aramaic separately at the end of Volume 2, in pages 989–1086.¹

Conclusion

The conclusion we may reach is that all reference books have their strengths and weaknesses, and that we should make use of their strengths and try to be aware of their weaknesses.

The author wishes to thank Brother Don Weldon for his work in transmitting this and previous scripts.

1. Aramaic is called ‘Chaldee’ by the older reference books, and ‘Syriack’ in the AV in Daniel 2:4. The Aramaic sections of the Bible occur in Daniel from the second part of verse 4 in chapter 2 to 7:28, and in Ezra 4:8 to 6:18 and 7:12-26. There is also a single verse in Jeremiah (10:11), which is almost certainly a later scribal comment incorporated in the text. Although the Aramaic sections are printed in the same script, Hebrew speakers have to read them in translation.

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