

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS
of the
CLASSICAL HEBREW VERB

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PREFACE

This book is intended primarily for those who have had some introduction to Classical Hebrew Grammar, whether they understood what they were taught or not, and preferably not; and for those who have some knowledge of Classical Hebrew *without* having learned any grammar, but have studied some other language (apart from English) and therefore learned something of grammatical concepts. Hebrew is probably the only language that is ever studied seriously without necessarily paying attention to grammar, right or wrong.

Those who have not studied the grammar of any language at all, even if they are familiar with Classical Hebrew, may well find this all extremely difficult if not impossible to follow, so you have been warned!

The above does not imply that beginners should not have all this explained to them, or that grammar should be taught at an advanced level - quite the contrary, grammatical rules and concepts should be introduced right from the very start, but gradually. This book throws it all at you in one go, and so is not for beginners.

Unfortunately, Hebrew grammar is almost always taught, when taught at all, on the basis of false concepts. Certain entrenched ideas are repeated from generation to generation, and these are often totally misleading. There is nothing holy about grammar. The whole idea of it is that it should work, and while it does, all well and good. When rules of grammar do not work, they can sometimes be made to work by simple amendment, but when highly complicated sets of rules and sub-rules are needed one must consider chucking out the whole lot and starting again.

Most of the ideas expressed here are not original. Some are traditional and correct. Others which go contrary to the usually-taught traditional ones are often found in existing grammar books, but not together. That is to say, one of the ideas will appear in one or a few books, another will appear in different books that do not include the first, and so on. Sometimes a fundamental idea is included only as an advanced idea or in a footnote somewhere.

The other major fault with Hebrew grammar books written in English is the terminology. Standard terms used by grammarians with a fixed meaning in teaching all other languages are used in Hebrew grammars with a different meaning, causing great confusion. As an example, two different past tenses, the past continuous and the past repeated ('I was doing' and 'I used to do') are combined into one in French, German, Latin and Greek, and possibly others, and known as the 'imperfect tense'. In Hebrew grammars, this term, 'imperfect tense', is taken as a synonym for 'future tense' ('I will do') to describe something which, as we explain, is really not even at tense at all!

The biggest problem is for Israelis, speakers of Modern Hebrew, in which over-simplified and totally incorrect concepts of Classical Hebrew, influenced by Aramaic and by European languages, have become entrenched. The language is very far from flexible, concepts cannot easily be expressed and where they can the Israel mentality will not allow them to be easily grasped.

English, on the contrary, is highly flexible, is very rich in expression, and has terms that are in accepted use in teaching other languages. If the concepts of Classical Hebrew are properly understood, they can be explained in English perhaps better than in any other language.

This book is not intended to be comprehensive. The rules given are not all universal, there are many exceptions. All that is claimed for the rules is that they cover the vast majority of cases, and that they do so far better than any other set of rules given in most if not all other grammar books. They also lead to a better understanding of the mentality and outlook behind the language, so that one can begin to understand the language from the point of view of the people who used to use it, instead of from our modern one.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The verb and how and why it varies. Outline.

A verb usually describes an action. (To avoid complications that may arise further on, we will leave aside verbs that perform a different function.) Variations on this central concept inform us who performs the action, when it is performed, or if we are considering the action in itself, whether it is a statement about it in a particular case, or a command to perform it, and so on.

In Classical Hebrew, as in Latin and Greek, these variations are usually expressed by taking the 'root' of the verb and modifying it by adding prefixes or suffixes, changing the vowels inside the word, doubling syllables or consonants, and so on. The final result in each case is still one word, and producing these variations is called 'inflexion' (or 'inflection') or 'conjugation'.

In languages such as English, these variations are mostly (but not entirely) expressed not by inflexion but by the use of auxiliary words, mainly pronouns and auxiliary verbs. Producing a set of these variations is not 'inflexion', but the word 'conjugation' is still sometimes used by analogy with other languages. French lies somewhere in between, with far more inflexion than English, but far less than Latin.

Inflexion, the variation of the form of a word to convey differences of meaning in *application*, while maintaining the essential meaning, applies also to nouns and adjectives, where it is not called 'conjugation' but 'declension'. In Latin this is quite complicated, in German it is impossibly so, but in Hebrew it is really comparatively simple - even so, it does not concern us here. We mention it only to explain that the study of the variation of all such words - declension of nouns and adjectives together with conjugation of verbs - all types of inflexion in a language, is called 'accidence'. This too we mention only to contrast it with 'syntax', the study not of words in themselves but of the way they are put together in the sentence. However, whereas English uses auxiliary verbs, Hebrew sometimes uses syntax instead of inflexion to express variation of ideas, a point overlooked in all or nearly all grammar books. We will come to this later.

The above is intended to give a background, so as to help us along with the next stage. If you can more or less follow it, there is no need to fully absorb or remember it all. The only terms that we will need to use and that should be understood at this point are 'root', 'inflexion', 'conjugation' and 'syntax'. The others you may forget.

1.2 How the variations are classified

When we meet a verb in a language that has conjugation, we analyse it to find what sort of variations have been applied and what their purpose is. Without this, we cannot understand what a particular form is trying to convey. There is a technical term used exclusively for analysing a specific verb, 'parsing', but not everyone knows what is meant by 'to parse', and we are concerned here not with the analysis of a specific form of a specific verb but with the general process. So we will use the term 'analysis' which has the same meaning here as in numerous other spheres - cutting something into pieces so as to determine the elements of which it is composed.

A verb (in a specific form) may be analysed into its 'qualities', each quality having a name and denoting a class or group of which each member has a name. Before we list these, let us use the analogy of an adjective to illustrate what we mean. A Hebrew adjective has two 'qualities' called 'gender' and 'number', the members of each of which have names. Members of the group called 'gender' are called 'masculine' and 'feminine'. There are only two (whereas in German there are three, and Swedish has four). There are also two members of the group called 'number', and these are called 'singular' and 'plural'. This of course is extremely simple, but you get the idea. The verb, as we shall see, has far more groups or qualities, each of which may well have more than two members.

Here are the main qualities associated with a Classical Hebrew verb, followed by the names of the members of that group. At this stage you do not need to understand what they all mean, that will be explained later. We have ignored object suffixes, which are best treated as a subect on their own. It looks frightening, but if we take it bit by bit, it is really not so bad. It does help if you can recognise one or two of them, so that you get the general idea.

1. STRETCH (normal, intensive, extensive)
2. VOICE (active, passive, middle)
3. MOOD (Finite : indicative, imperative, subjunctive ;

	Infinitive :infinitive,gerund,participle)
4.ASPECT	<i>Appliesonlytotheindicative</i> (perfective,imperfective)
5.NUMBER	(singular,plural)
6.PERSON	(first,second,third)
7.GENDER	(masculine,feminine)
8.STATE	<i>Appliesonlytothe gerund</i> (absolute,construct)

The name ‘stretch’ is one we have invented, and will be discussed later, along with our reason for inventing it. Two important points need to be noted :

(a) Only the first three always apply. (For the fussy, there is some question as to whether the Hebrew participle is strictly ‘infinite’ or not, but that need not be added to our worries.)

(b) ‘Tense’ is conspicuous by its absence. In Classical Hebrew, *there is no such thing as tense in the inflexion of the verb*. There is no ‘form’ to represent tense. This does not mean that there is no such thing as tense, only that tense is expressed in a different way, as we shall see later.

It is assumed that ‘number’, ‘person’ and ‘gender’ are either familiar to the reader or self-explanatory. All we need to point out is that the options, the members of those groups, are those given above – other languages may have more genders (such as neuter and common) and even more numbers (such as dual) but these do not apply to Hebrew. (Hebrew does have the relics of a dual in nouns only, not in verbs or adjectives.) ‘State’, important in nouns, does not normally apply to verbs, so our main concern is to explain only the first four of the above stretch, voice, mood and aspect.

1.3 The ‘original’ language

The purpose of grammatical rules is to provide a system which you can learn, so as to arrange things in a pattern. This is to enable you to apply one rule in a number of cases, and not have to learn every single form of every single word separately.

Often we find it convenient to refer to an ‘original’ form in an ‘original’ pre-Mosaic language from which Biblical Hebrew was developed. We then show how the biblical form was derived from this, usually by corruption. The question often asked is ‘What evidence do we have that this language ever did in fact exist?’ The correct answer is ‘None’. Evidence points to the probability that it did, but there is no proof. Those studying the history of language, or pre-Mosaic languages, are interested, but we are not. In fact it is more true to say that *we have invented this original language for our convenience*. Neither history nor theology nor anything else comes into it, it is convenient for grammar. It enables us to have a more simple original pattern, which is modified by a limited number of rules, enabling us to easily recognise a very large number of actual words in the Bible which we should otherwise have to learn individually. That is all. Examples will come later, but an analogy is worth mentioning.

We are all familiar with parables. A story is told, in which as a rule one man at least is involved, and from which a moral is derived. The story illustrates the moral plainly and simply. Did the man referred to actually exist? Did the event described actually take place at any time in the way described? Perhaps not, so what? The story illustrates the moral in the best way possible, we then have the moral in a form in which we can both understand it and remember it ; the moral is important, the historical ‘truth’ of the story is not. The same applies here.

Another example is in astronomy. Does the earth go round the sun, or vice-versa? According to Newton, all motion is relative, so it is the same thing either way. Neither is ‘true’ and neither is ‘false’. When we are considering our daily lives, for our purposes the sun goes round the earth. On the other hand when we are studying astronomy, we find that this way so do the stars, while the planets perform highly complex motions. If we take the stars and the sun as fixed and the earth as going round the sun, the planets also go round the sun, in relatively simple orbits. This way we make it easy for ourselves in our studies, but there is not the slightest bit of evidence that it is in fact so. Advanced astronomy shows that in any case it is more complex, there are variations, but we could not easily study the variations if we started with the earth as being fixed.

Let us take a well-known example. From the root כתב, we find כתב he wrote and כתבתי I wrote. The same pattern is followed in many other words with three-letter roots. But from the root נתן, while he gave is נתן, I gave is not נתתי but נתתי. We explain this by saying that ‘originally’ it was נתתי, but that the second nun dropped out in accordance with a general rule that the letter nun usually drops out in certain circumstances. Now everyone agrees on this, even Rashi who insists that Adam and Eve spoke Biblical Hebrew in the Garden of Eden. Yet there is not a scrap of evidence in support. In not one single case is the form נתתי ever found! A

sudden discovery of an earlier language in which a different form altogether is found does not help us, nor does it hinder. We ignore it. The 'original' language that *we* invented is the one that we need and use, and all reference to 'original' in this book are to be taken in that sense.

A further use of this 'original' language helps to find a common origin between Hebrew and cognate languages such as Aramaic. These sometimes help us to understand Hebrew, because while changes may occur in both, they are often *different* changes.

1.4 Fundamental problems in studying Hebrew grammar

The main difference between studying Biblical Hebrew as we do and studying other languages is that we are essentially interested in the text of the Bible and anxious not to waste time on other matters. So in our impatience we plunge or are plunged in at the deep end. The teacher, to make it easier for himself, teaches us many things wrongly as long as they are 'near enough not to matter', and when we try to sort ourselves out we get into a muddle.

Even so, we could perhaps learn to cope by starting with relatively easy texts, grasping the main grammatical rules, and progressing, were it not for one thing, the great bug-bear of Classical Hebrew, the origin and purpose of which nobody really understands - the *conversive vav* ! We cannot find simple texts where we can move any distance without one, and as soon as we bring it in we are involved in all sorts of complications. These cannot all be explained in one go, so we get out of it by bringing in a load of rubbish about non-existing 'tenses' in a way that 'simplifies' the grammar tremendously, much as a bus-driver who enters a town on his route in which he is supposed to tour around different districts decides for himself that it is much easier for him to just drive straight down the High Street and come out at the other end. He gets to his correct destination, but he has taken the wrong route, left people waiting stranded at places he has illegally by-passed, and soon. A better analogy is the postman who does the same thing when making collections from pillar boxes. Half the post gets left behind and nobody knows why it does not arrive - even worse, many who are supposed to receive it do not even know that it has been sent! Nobody tells him off, he makes a habit of it, teaches the next man to do the same, and it becomes 'accepted', but that does not make it right, nor does it help people who do not get the service they are entitled to and have been assured of.

In an attempt to correct the situation, we must first pretend that the *conversive vav* does not exist. We must ignore it completely and grasp the main essentials without it, examining forms that seldom occur because in the vast majority of cases the *conversive vav* is obligatory! Only then can we bring in the *conversive vav* and show how it affects matters, coming down to earth and reality.

Chapter 2

STRETCH AND VOICE

Roots -primary & secondary

Let us begin by taking a look at the 'original' Hebrew verb, 'original' as defined in the last chapter.

The 'root' is the form that defines the meaning of the verb, to distinguish it from other verbs. It tells us what action is being described, and an analysis of the root belongs to the dictionary - translation and etymology, not grammar. Grammar starts by taking the root as it is. In 'original' Hebrew it consists of three successive consonants. They need not all be different, but they can be. No vowels - they are added to produce the variations that come later. The root of course, three consonants without vowels, cannot be pronounced, but it does not need to be. It only uses without vowels in a dictionary, and they did not have dictionaries in those days!

One small note in passing. The consonants could be any of the 23 Hebrew letters (shin and sin are counted separately) but not the silent ׀ at the end of a word. That came later to replace something else (usually *yayod* or *vav*), in 'original' Hebrew it does not exist. A real genuine ׀ could be used at the end of a word; that in later Hebrew was represented by a ׀ with a dot in the middle (*mappik*).

This three-letter root could be called the primary root. By inserting vowels, adding prefixes and suffixes, and soon, variations are formed as required.

It is also possible to 'stretch' this root *externally* (i.e. by adding something on to it) to produce a secondary root to which vowels, prefixes and suffixes are added. This secondary root, and all variations derived from it, is called the 'extensive form' since 'extensive' means 'stretched outside'. However, because of its meaning, which is 'causative', it is more often called the 'causative form'. This will be clarified shortly.

It is also possible to 'stretch' the primary root *internally* to produce a secondary root, to which vowels, prefixes and suffixes are added. This stretching is done by 'reduplication' i.e. by doubling the middle root letter. In practice, the letter is pronounced as doubled (as in Italian, for example you can hear the double *lin bella*), but it is not written twice. In writing they later decided to put a dot in the middle of the letter, to show that it is to be pronounced as double, but it is only written once. [In some verbs, the last letter is doubled instead of the middle one. Leave that for the while.] This secondary root, and all variations derived from it, is called the *intensive* form, the word 'intensive' meaning 'stretched internally'. It does NOT mean that the action is performed 'intensively' but (at least in the original language) that it is performed *repeatedly*.

Those who are not new to Hebrew grammar will recognise the 'extensive' or 'causative' as corresponding to the Hebrew *hifil* and *hofal*, and the 'intensive' or 'reduplicated' as corresponding to the Hebrew *piel*, *pual* and *hitpael*. But for reasons that will become clear later in the chapter, we will for the moment ignore these Hebrew names completely, and stick to the English.

The original meaning of the 'causative' has on the whole been retained in Biblical Hebrew. It is worth noting that a 'causative' form exists in English in a few words, though they are not formed by 'extension' but by changing the vowels. Here are four:

Normal: <i>fall</i>	Causative: <i>fell</i>
Normal: <i>rise</i>	Causative: <i>raise</i>
Normal: <i>sit</i>	Causative: <i>seat</i>
Normal: <i>lie*</i>	Causative: <i>lay</i>

(*In the sense of 'liedown', not 'tallie')

This is not too difficult to grasp. In English sometimes the same form is used, e.g. *return* is normal in the sense of 'go back' but causative in the sense of 'take back':

he returned home and *he returned the book he had borrowed*.

Sometimes English uses a different word, e.g. *eat* and *feed*, where Hebrew would use the different 'stretches', normal and extensive (or causative) of the same word.

The original meaning of the 'intensive' was for repetitive or habitual action. This use has on the whole been lost in Biblical Hebrew. Repetitive action is expressed in a different way entirely, using aspects. What happens is that the intensive form or stretch simply has a different meaning that has to be learned, which may or may not be connected in some way with the primary root. However, a few relics of the original use do remain.

׀ means to slaughter, usually as an offering. The intensive form means to do it repeatedly and habitually, e.g. one might offer an animal to Baal (on one occasion), which would require the normal form; the intensive form implies making a habit of doing so.

רצח from the normal form means a murderer, in the sense of someone who commits or has committed a murder. From the intensive form we have רצח meaning one who keeps on murdering people (and not necessarily a professional assassin).

However, these are relics, and the distinction even when it exists is not always maintained. Strictly רצח from the intensive form is a professional thief, but it is used also for someone who steals just once.

We see then that 'normal', 'causative' (or 'extensive') and 'intensive' (or 'reduplicated' or 'repetitive') are three members of a group for which English has no name - but we need a name for it, so we have invented, for want of a better one, the name 'stretch'. The grammarians not only have no Hebrew name for the group, they do not even have names for the members of the group!

The early Hebrew grammarians referred to the 'normal' as the 'light' form (*kal*), and the 'intensive' as the 'heavy' form (*kaved*). The 'causative' they described in a different way. But modern grammarians use *kal* in a more limited sense applying only to the active (see next section), and do not use *kaved* at all.

Voice

Somuch, for the moment, about 'stretch'. Now let us turn to 'voice'.

This, to many, is already familiar, and to others easily explained. 'Voice' is the class whose members are 'active' and 'passive'. 'Active' is when for example John *hits* Joe. 'Passive' is when Joe *is hit* by John. When you turn a verb from active to passive the object (in the active) becomes the subject in the passive. If you have a verb that cannot take an object in the active (called an intransitive verb) then it cannot have a passive, e.g. John *sat*. You cannot have 'was sat', though if you take 'sat on' as a verb and John *sat on* the chair, you can say that the chair *was sat on* by John.

We will assume that you understand active and passive. Hebrew, like Greek, has a third voice, which is neither one nor the other, called 'middle'.

What is the 'middle' voice?

To start with, we can say it is the 'reflexive'. Active - the cat *washed* the kitten. Passive - the kitten *was washed* by the cat. Reflexive - the kitten *washed itself*. For the reflexive, the middle is used.

Having grasped this, we may extend it by saying that the middle is also used when there is something similar to a reflexive, a middle idea. Here are three examples where the middle is used in Hebrew:

Active - <i>see</i>	Passive - <i>beseen</i>	Middle - <i>appear</i>
Active - <i>guard</i>	Passive - <i>beguarded</i>	Middle - <i>take care, be careful</i>
Active - <i>prevent</i>	Passive - <i>beprevented</i>	Middle - <i>refrain</i>

The middle is also used for mutual action between two sides, e.g. to meet one another. It is not possible to give an exact definition, but if you begin to get the idea, then you will gradually get the feel of it from examples that you encounter.

Combination

Having grasped the ideas of stretch and voice - and it does not matter if you have not grasped them completely, as long as you have some idea and remember that there are three of each (normal, causative and intensive; a ctive, passive and middle) - we now turn to the combination. There is absolutely nothing complicated about this, except in that grammarians have got utterly confused and made it complicated.

By combining stretch and voice, we see that each of the three voices can be applied to each of the three stretches. So we have nine in all. Of these nine possibilities in the 'original' language, two have dropped out and are not found in Biblical Hebrew, leaving only seven in practice. Still, we think of these seven as nine less two, or to express it mathematically,

$$3 \times 3 - 2 = 7$$

but we look at the left hand side of the identity, which makes sense to us. The grammarians look only at the right hand side. They do not distinguish stretch and voice, but simply accept that there are seven forms, three active (correct), three passive (wrong), and one reflexive (wrong), making it impossible to understand. These seven are known in Hebrew as *binyanim*, but you can never grasp the concept of a *binyan* because such a concept does not exist. Hebrew grammars written in English sometimes refer to the *binyanim* as 'conjugations' and refer to these seven 'conjugations' of a Hebrew verb. This is terribly misleading, as the word 'conjugation', apart from the sense in which we used it earlier, is used by grammarians in all other languages in a special sense which does have its counterpart in Hebrew, and this is not it.

All this is vitally important and deserves our spending some time going into it carefully.

Of the nine forms, the active, middle and passive of the intensive all remain.

Of the causative, the middle has been lost, and it is so rarely required that its absence is no great loss. A relic of it exists in one word alone, not worth worrying about at this stage.

Now comes the difficult part. Of the normal stretch, the active remains, and so does the middle, but the passive has dropped out – all except for the participle. So what did they do? They used the middle for the passive. That does not mean that it became the passive, just that the middle *was used for* the passive; but at other times it also retained its original ‘middle’ meaning, and this changes our whole outlook on one admittedly small side of the language. Here is the pattern, with the traditional names of the *binyanim* inserted. We can use these names, but must not think of the *binyanim* as a concept.

VOICE → ↓STRETCH	ACTIVE	PASSIVE	MIDDLE
Standard/ Normal קל	<i>KAL</i> קל	→ → → → (except participle כתוב)	<i>NIPH'AL</i> נפעל
Extensive/ Causative	<i>HIPH'IL</i> הפעיל	<i>HOPH'AL</i> הפעל	
Intensive / Reduplicated/ Repetitive פָּדַד	<i>PI'EL</i> פעל	<i>PU'AL</i> פעל	<i>HITPA'EL</i> התפעל

The first thing that emerges is that contrary to what we are usually taught the *hitpa'el* is the middle (used as reflexive) only of the *intensive form* corresponding to the *piel* as the active. It is not the reflexive of the *kal*. Second, the *nifal* is not the passive of the *kal* but the middle (including reflexive), only since the passive has died out the *nifal* is used instead to take its place.

One effect – and here we are jumping the gun a bit – is the imperative, the command form. In Hebrew (unlike Latin) there is no imperative in the passive. Never! None in the *hofal*, and none in the *pual*. But it does exist in the *nifal*. When? Not when the *nifal* is being used as a passive, but only when it is being used in its original sense of a middle. There are countless cases when we wonder why a certain verb appears in Hebrew in the passive, and in fact it does not – it is a ‘middle’ form.

We will have more to say about the participle when we come to it, but for the moment we note that in the normal stretch the passive participle still exists, and the middle form also can be used as a passive, so there is a choice between the two.

It is extremely important to get this picture of the 3x3 pattern clear in the mind. Of the nine possibilities, one has dropped out completely and one almost completely, but that does not spoil the pattern. Thinking of the 7 (as we are always taught) does spoil the pattern and is totally misleading.

Chapter3

MOOD

'Mood' in grammar is not easy to define, but the specific mood indicates the way a verb is being used, i.e. to express a statement, or a wish, or a command, or to consider the action in abstract and soon.

A specific verb in a specific instance may be finite (i.e. limited by person, number and/or gender) or infinite (not so limited). Of the infinite forms, there is the infinitive (which will be discussed much later); the gerund, which is a verbal noun; and the participle, which is a verbal adjective. Although perhaps it should not be, the participle is usually classed with the infinitives.

Of the finite forms, there is the indicative, used for making a simple statement; the imperative, used for giving a command (or making a request); and other moods which vary from language to language. In Hebrew it is convenient to lump all these other moods together under the name of 'subjunctive', and this will be explained when we reach it.

As we mentioned earlier, in the conjugation or inflexion of a Hebrew verb there are not tenses, but there are 'aspects' which are a bit similar. These will be considered in the next chapter; they apply only to the indicative.

Chapter 4

TENSE AND ASPECT

Time and tense

We are taught in English the difference between 'time' and 'tense'. The former can be past, present or future, while the latter can be one of several - for example 'I have eaten', 'I ate', 'I was eating', 'I used to eat' and 'I had eaten' all contain a reference to past time, and all except the first are said to be 'in past time', but they are all different 'tenses'. In Latin, which forms its tenses by inflexion, there are six tenses (and by certain means you may get two more) but that is all. English, which forms its tenses mostly by the use of auxiliary verbs, allows an enormous number to be created, most of which are never used because they are too complicated to be grasped or even to be useful. Still, theoretically there is nothing against saying 'I shall have been about to have been eating', which does make sense and mean something if you have the patience to slowly work it out. Nobody has such patience (not even I who have just written it), nobody needs to, it will get you nowhere, but there are many tenses which are used and are useful, and you have the flexibility to create and use them as you wish. Later on we will consider the most important of these and how Hebrew expresses them.

Now Aramaic does not make the distinction between 'time' and 'tense', and has only three *tenses* - past, present and future - which are formed by conjugation (inflexion). This system was adopted by Mishnaic Hebrew, and then by Modern Hebrew, so that to an Israeli 'tense' and 'time' are the same. He cannot grasp the idea of 'tense' as we know it, and uses the same expression for 'I have eaten', 'I ate', 'I used to eat', 'I was eating' and 'I had eaten'. To us this causes difficulties, we are used to the tenses and find that we need them. Classical Hebrew *does* distinguish tenses (in which it is not quite as flexible as English but with sufficient options for practical use). However, whereas in Latin the tenses are all formed by inflexion, and in English most of the tenses (not quite all, there is a difference between 'I eat' and 'I ate') are formed by the use of auxiliary verbs, Hebrew forms tenses by a combination of inflexion ('accidence') and syntax (mainly word order). *The inflexion does not itself provide a tense, but a form which is used in a certain way to provide the required result.* This will mean something to you fully only when you read it a second time after proceeding further on.

The forms used are two indicative forms, the 'perfective' and 'imperfective', which are called 'aspects', as well as the gerund and participle.

Aspect

What is meant by 'aspect'?

This is illustrated best perhaps by turning to Russian grammar - you do not need to know anything about Russian grammar beyond what is mentioned in these few sentences - where both 'aspect' and 'tense' exist alongside one another. In Russian there are two aspects, 'perfective' dealing (roughly) with an action that is 'perfected', i.e. completed, and 'imperfective' with one that is not yet completed. These are formed by inflexion. In each of these there are three tenses - past, present and future - giving the equivalent in all of six English tenses. (In practice, one of the six is missing, so there are only five, but this is a great improvement on Modern Hebrew which has only three.)

The above is not meant to teach you Russian grammar. It may not work out quite like that in practice as Russian is a complex language, but we are not concerned with Russian. We merely bring in a simplified version of the system used in Russian, to illustrate what happens in Hebrew, because in Classical Hebrew we have the aspects as in Russian, but not the tenses.

There are two aspects, perfective and imperfective, and you choose the appropriate one and use it in the appropriate way to get the tense you want.

Strictly, the perfective refers to completed actions and the imperfective to uncompleted actions, but do not take that too literally, as it does not necessarily work that way in practice. All that matters is that the aspect provides you with an inflected form which you can use to form certain tenses. It does not provide you directly with a tense.

This is very important, as one who understands it properly does not ask stupid questions as to why a certain form appears in the Bible instead of the one he thinks ought to be used (according to his ideas of grammar), and he does not provide stupid pseudo-midrashic answers which lead to false conclusions being drawn. In other words, one is less likely to misunderstand the text.

To bring all this theory into line with practice, and to show how the aspects correspond to the forms with which you are familiar, here is the standard example:

Perfective: כָּתַב, כָּתַבְתִּי, כָּתַבְתָּ etc.
Imperfective: יִכְתֹּב, יִכְתֹּבְתָּ etc.

These forms are NOT 'past' and 'future' respectively as we are taught, though they may be and often are used for that purpose, but they also may mean something else. In particular, the imperfective is often used for the past, but it is not the same past as the perfective.

Why are we making it all so unnecessarily complicated? We are not! The language itself is complicated to that extent, and to over-simplify it leads to wrong results and a misunderstanding of the text. To a religious Jew, the one most concerned about Classical Hebrew texts, this latter is a very serious matter indeed, yet rather than make an effort to understand the grammar the scholar often prefers to make his own simple rules and interpret, or rather misinterpret, the text accordingly.

We have talked a lot about ideas in the air, generalities. How does all this work out in practice? How are the various tenses formed from the aspects? This we deal with in the next chapters.

Chapter 5

TENSES - AN OVERVIEW

Types of tense

Tenses may be grouped into three types, and this grouping is important for us, because sometimes Hebrew uses one form for a whole group, not just for a single tense. The grouping is however not as in Modern Hebrew with each 'time' (past, present and future) forming a group. There are

- (A) Simple tenses. These represent a simple action, performed once, in past or future.
- (B) Repetitive tenses. These represent an action that is repeated, in past, present or future.
- (C) Relative tenses. These represent an action relative to another action. Each of these in turn can be past, present or future, giving nine possibilities in all.

Thus we have two in (A), three in (B) and nine in (C), making fourteen in all. Not all of these are in use, but we need them for the pattern. (Further tenses are possible, and even sometimes used in English - for example 'I had been eating' does not fit into any of the fourteen, but other languages manage without them, so we need not concern ourselves. We are also not concerned with moods other than the indicative, such as 'if I were' or 'I would have' etc. These come in at a more advanced level beyond the scope of this book.)

Now let us look at these tenses and try to understand them, before considering the Hebrew. Do not attempt to remember all this but just to try to follow the classification and get some idea of the overall picture. Once you grasp the pattern it is really quite easy.

Simple tenses

A simple tense in the past is 'I ate' (once), for which grammarians have a variety of names. It is called the *preterite*, or *past definite*, or *aorist*.

A simple tense in the future is 'I will eat' (once), called the *simple future* tense.

A little careful thought will show that normally, other than perhaps in exceptional cases, there is no 'simple tense' in the present.

Repetitive tenses

A repetitive tense in the past is 'I used to eat'. It denotes a repeated or habitual action, something that occurred several times. In English we sometimes express it differently, but it is the meaning that counts, for instance 'Every day I would go....' or even 'I went there every day for a year', where here it looks as if the verb is a simple tense but in fact it is repeated. 'I went there (once)' is simple, but 'I went there every day' is repeated. Grammarians call this the 'imperfect tense', but since this same name is used also for something else (see below) it is confusing, and we may call it the *past repetitive* tense.

A repetitive tense in the present is 'I eat'. Although in a simple form, it expresses an idea of repetition. This in its form in English is a 'simple present' but we may call it the *present repetitive* tense.

A repetitive tense in the future is 'I will eat' meaning repeatedly. 'From now on I will eat an egg for breakfast every morning.' We may call this the *future repetitive* tense.

Relative tenses

These are more complicated, as they describe a state of affairs (SA) in the present, past or future, due to an action (X) which, *relative to the 'time' of SA* either has taken place (completed), is taking place (continuous) or is about to take place (intended). Strictly, the main tense is the time of SA, which is past, present or future, but X has a tense that is relative to this. Examples will make this clear.

State of affairs (SA) in the present. Now.

- (a) action X is relatively in the past. It is completed.

'I have eaten'. This is called the *perfect* (or *present perfect*) tense.

Note: this is not the same as 'I ate', which describes a simple action in the past. It describes the present state of affairs *as a result of* an action (X) in the past.

- (b) action X is relatively in the present. It is current and continuous.

'I am eating'. This is not a simple action, but one that is taking place continuously, describing the present state of affairs due to a contemporary continuous action (X).

This is called the *present continuous* tense.

(c) action X is relatively in the future. It is intended (has not yet commenced).
 'I am about to eat'. This does not have a name, as it is often confused with the simple future, but it is not the same. The simple future 'I will eat' describes a simple future, but 'I am about to eat' describes the present state of affairs with regard to an action (X) in the future. For want of a better name, we may call it the *intended* tense. It is like the perfect only back to front in time.

State of affairs (SA) in the past. Then (so many years ago).

- (a) action X is relatively in the past. It was already completed.
 'I had eaten'. This is called the *pluperfect* (or *past perfect*) tense. It describes the state of affairs at some time in the past as a result of a previous (and already completed) action (X).
- (b) action X is relatively in the present. It was contemporary and continuous.
 'I was eating' (at the time). This is the past continuous tense. (It is often called the *imperfect*, but the same name, imperfect, is also used for the past repeated tense; this is because in French, Latin, German and other languages they are the same, no distinction is made; but in English, and in Classical Hebrew, they are not the same.)
- (c) action X is relatively in the future. It was intended, but had not yet commenced.
 'I was about to eat'. This describes the state of affairs at some time in the past with regard to an intended action (X) that had not yet commenced. (Although this does not occur often, it does occur a few times in the Bible where it is very important. The action X may or may not subsequently have taken place - the point is that at the time it was intended.) This too has no name, but we could call it the *past intended*.

State of affairs (SA) in the future. Then (ahead).

- (a) action X is relatively in the past. It will be completed.
 'I will have eaten'. This is called the *future perfect* tense. It describes a state of affairs at some time in the future as a result of a previous (completed) action X.
- (b) action X is relatively in the present. It will be contemporary and continuous.
 'I will be eating' (e.g. when you arrive tomorrow). The *future continuous* tense.
- (c) action X is relatively in the future.
 'I will be about to eat'. This is most unlikely to be ever used or needed, but is included here to complete the pattern.

Action →	COMPLETED	CURRENT	INTENDED
↓ Background time			
In the past	I had eaten	I was eating	I was about to eat
In the present	I have eaten	I am eating	I am about to eat
In the future	I will have eaten	I will be eating	(I will be about to eat)

How does Classical Hebrew cope?

This is just an overview, and we will explain in outline only how Hebrew copes.

For the simple tenses, it uses the perfective aspect for a past action and the imperfective aspect for a future one. The word order (part of what we call the 'syntax') is important - the subject if any follows the verb.

For the repeated tenses, it uses the imperfective aspect *regardless of time*, i.e. for past, present and future actions. Again the subject if any follows the verb. (Sometimes, for a present repeated tense, the participle is used instead - see later.)

For the relative tenses, the imperfective or perfective aspects or the participle are used, as will be explained. The subject precedes the verb, and for an intended action an additional word may be needed..

From the above it should already be clear that the aspects are not tenses, but are forms used, in conjunction with syntax, to form tenses in different ways. In a later chapter we will take it all slowly and explain bit by bit how Hebrew copes. The mentality is different and not easy to absorb. In coping with tenses, we have now met four different *mentalities*, not just systems: the use of inflexion or conjugation alone with a limited number of options (Latin, Greek, etc.); the use of auxiliaries with unlimited possibilities (English); the use of 'time' alone to replace tense (Aramaic, Modern Hebrew); and the rather complex system used by Classical Hebrew which involves a combination of inflexion and syntax (word order, use of special words etc.).

There is also German which has a mentality (if one may call it that) of its own, where the perfect and past definite are confused - a sort of cross between each of the first three. The reason for mentioning this is that most English-written books on Classical Hebrew grammar are based largely on translations of Hebrew grammars written by Christian grammarians who were Classical (Latin and Greek and perhaps Arabic) scholars, but German speakers (Ewald, Gesenius etc.), and whose ideas were therefore coloured by whatever the Germans substitute for mentality. You may begin to see why you have been taught wrongly.

However, before we go into detail on all this, we must first take a look at the bugbear of Hebrew - the *conversive vav*, put in it seems for the sole purpose of making life difficult. Aramaic had more sense, it did not have it. Before that we need to consider the need for the *vav* prefix altogether.

Chapter 6

THE USE OF THE VAV PREFIX

Introduction - verse, sentence, clause and phrase

Classical Hebrew text is divided up into what we call 'verses'. Each of these corresponds roughly to what we call a sentence, except that in English there are strict rules for the construction of a sentence, whereas there are not such strict rules for the construction of the Hebrew verse. (Conversely, there are also rules, not too strict, for the construction of a Hebrew verse that have no equivalent in English.) The correspondence is not always exact, but very roughly they are the same.

Leave the Hebrew for a moment and concentrate on the English. A 'clause' is a self-contained section of a sentence (it may be the whole sentence, but need not be) that contains a finite verb.

Co-ordinate clauses are clauses that stand side by side in a sentence but are quite independent of one another. 'He picked up the parcel and [he] went home'. Two independent statements.

There may be a main clause and a subordinate clause - the former will stand alone comfortably, the latter is dependent on the main clause. 'He picked up the parcel which he had bought'. The first clause is main, the second subordinate.

A phrase is a group of words conveying a meaning, which does not contain a finite verb. Sometimes such a phrase contains an infinite verb (gerund or participle) in such a way that it could be replaced by a clause. 'While standing on the corner, he saw.....' could be replaced by 'While he stood on the corner, he saw.....'. This is the type of phrase that will interest us, and we will return to it later.

The vav prefix

The Hebrew vav prefix is normally translated as 'and', but this is not necessarily correct. It often means 'and', but it can also mean 'or', 'but', 'when', 'if', 'then', 'namely', among other meanings, or sometimes it does not mean anything at all: the rules of syntax demand that it be inserted.

It has two main types of use. The first is to connect nouns or adjectives in a list, in which case it usually means 'and'

but not always, as in $\text{עַם נְבוֹן וְהַיָּדָאָדָּהָהָ שֶׁן וְהָאָפוֹד}$ $\text{אֶמֶן וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ}$ where it means 'or'. Still, this use does not concern us, we merely wish to note that it exists.

The second use is as follows. As a general rule, and there are exceptions but they are rare, the vav prefix must be attached to

(a) the first word of every clause (unless it begins with another conjunction such as וְאָמַר or לְמַעַן , in which case it is only used if needed to mean 'and' before a second such clause). The clause may consist of merely one word. When used to connect a list of verbs, it is in fact connecting a list of clauses.

(b) the first word of every phrase that contains an infinite verb and that can be replaced by a clause (as explained above).

(c) the first word of every 'virtual clause' (or virtual phrase as under (b) above), which is one in which the present tense (or present participle) of the verb 'to be' is to be understood.

The present tense of the verb 'to be' is always omitted. The present participle occurs only three times in the Bible - once in an obscure case in Nehemiah, once in an obscure case in Ecclesiastes, and once in Exodus 9:3 where the rules of grammar happen to demand it. If the verb 'to be' is to be put in English, you have a virtual clause.

Perhaps it is a little bit more complicated than that, to cover all cases, but that is the general idea.

The conversive vav

Now comes the really difficult bit, the bug-bear that complicates everything.

In English, a sentence very often begins with the subject, followed by the verb. In Classical Hebrew, at least in narrative and in speeches, since the verb mostly comes before the subject, it is very often the first word in the clause, so that we find the vav attached to a verb. In some cases this does not matter, but in most cases it does, and it affects the meaning. Whatever happens, it does not, as we were taught, convert a past to a future and a future to a past, even though it sometimes looks like that.

If the verb is an infinitive or participle, or gerund or imperative, or even a subjunctive, nothing much happens. But if the verb is in the indicative, that is to say if it is a perfective or imperfective, adding a vav as a prefix causes trouble. And complex trouble at that.

First we will deal with the perfective. Adding a vav prefix to a perfective turns the verb into imperfective. (There is no logic in this.) Note that it does not turn 'past into future' but perfective aspect into imperfective. At the same time, we cannot apply the prefix *in the normal way* to an imperfective. So we have to work backwards. If we want an imperfective, but it is going to be the first word in the clause, then we must use the perfective instead. The imperfective has various uses, such as a future tense, or a repeated tense, or a strong command - it makes no difference which, if it needs a vav before it, then the perfective is used instead, and the perfective with the vav attached, called a conversive vav, is converted into an imperfective, for whatever use is required.

Perfective: **קָטַבְתָּ**

Imperfective: **בִּקְטַבְתָּ** or **תִּקְטַבְתָּ** *as required*. (It is not an option.)

The accent may be pushed toward the end of the word, but do not worry about that there.

So far, so good. Difficult? That's nothing compared to what's coming.

An ordinary vav prefix cannot be added to the imperfective. (Later we will come to the subjunctive, which is derived from the imperfective and often looks like it. An ordinary vav prefix can be added to the subjunctive, and does not affect it, but not to an imperfective.)

What you can do is to add a vav prefix that has a *patach* vowel underneath it and insert a dagesh into the next letter, which is one of the four **נ י ת א**. If it is **א** there is no dagesh, and the patach becomes a kamets **אָ**; if it is a yod the dagesh is sometimes omitted. But that is not all. When you do this to an imperfective, you may have to modify the latter by lengthening or shortening it and perhaps changing a vowel or two, not to mention moving the accent. By the time you have finished, your imperfective is not always easy to recognise! When you have done all that you get what we euphemistically call the 'imperfective with conversive vav' which the **ו** behaves in all respects like a perfective.

Once again, if we want to use a perfective, but a vav is required, we have to work backwards. We have to take the imperfective and add to it the conversive vav (with all the rules given in the last paragraph), and we get in effect a perfective, for whatever use is required. To take a fairly simple case that does not cause too much trouble, unlike many that do, we have

Imperfective: **בִּקְטַבְתָּ**

Perfective: **וּבִקְטַבְתָּ** or **וּתִקְטַבְתָּ** *as required* (it is not an option).

Now let us combine the two, and we see that for all purposes we have

Perfective: **וּבִקְטַבְתָּ** or **וּתִקְטַבְתָּ** *as required* (not an option).

Imperfective: **בִּקְטַבְתָּ** or **תִּקְטַבְתָּ** *as required* (not an option).

This applies in all cases, so wherever we talk about the use of the perfective, we automatically include with it the imperfective with conversive vav; and wherever we talk about the use of the imperfective we automatically include with it the perfective with conversive vav. Just as the imperfective alone is used among other things for a future tense and for a repeated tense (past, present or future), so the perfective with conversive vav is used among the same other things for a future tense or for a repeated tense (past, present or future).

Whose bright idea it was in the first place nobody knows. Do not blame Moses, it was already accepted long before his time, and he (and his successors) had no option but to use it. If, as Rashi suggests, Adam spoke the language in the Garden of Eden and a **ו** already used the conversive vav, he deserved to be thrown out of the Garden for that alone!

Not always the first word

Remember all this trouble only occurs when the verb is the first word in the clause. (If you have a string of verbs connected together, each is a clause on its own and you have a string of clauses, each of which must begin with a vav. If the verb is in the indicative the vav must be conversive, otherwise it is not.) Unfortunately in most simple clauses the verb is the first word, but here are a few examples of cases where it is not, and where the conversive vav is not used:

(a) When the object is put before the verb for emphasis, the vav is added to the object or to the **אשר** that precedes it.

(b) When the subject is put before the verb (to indicate contrast or to indicate a relative tense), the vav is added to the subject.

(c) Sometimes an adverb or adverbial phrase opens the clause and accepts the vav.

(d) Where another conjunction (such as **אשר** or **כי**) opens the clause the vav is not always needed.

(e) In a negative clause, **לא** always precedes the verb and, unless there is another word (never a verb) before it, it accepts the vav. There is never a conversive vav in a negative clause.

(f) After an infinitive used for emphasis. In such a case, even the infinitive does not always take a vav.

Summary

The first word in a clause must (normally) have a vav attached, even at the beginning of a book (e.g. Ruth Esther). If the first word of the clause happens (as in most cases) to be a verb in the perfective or imperfective, the vav becomes conversive, so to get an imperfective meaning you must use a perfective verb with the conversive vav, and vice versa.

Chapter 7

FORMING THE TENSES

Now we can continue from where we left off in chapter 5, and show how Hebrew tenses are formed.

First the **simple tenses**

An ordinary past tense *I ate* (aorist, preterite or what you will) is expressed by the perfective alone, or by the imperfective with a conversive vav, and the subject, if any, follows the verb.

וַיִּכְבֵּד לֵב פָּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע פֶּרְעֹה

An ordinary future tense *I will eat* is expressed by the imperfective alone, or by the perfective with a conversive vav, and the subject, if any, usually follows the verb.

וְשָׂרָץ הָיָא ר' צְפֹרְדַּעִים זָרַע רַב תּוֹצִיא הַשָּׂדֶה

This is not too difficult.

Next the **repeated tenses**

The usual way of expressing repeated action *I used to eat, I eat, I will (more than once) eat* is by the imperfective alone or the perfective with conversive vav, exactly as the simple future, except that the repeated action need not be in the future. Again, the subject, if any, follows the verb.

וְהָיָה כְּאִשֶּׁר יָרִים מ' נְשֵׂה יָדוֹ וְגָבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל

Three verbs in a row all expressing repeated action in the past.

For a repeated action in the present, optionally the participle may be used, as often in the Psalms.

וְהָיָה כְּאִשֶּׁר יָרִים מ' נְשֵׂה יָדוֹ וְגָבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל

Then the **relative tenses**

For a completed action *I had eaten, I have eaten, I will have eaten* (perfect, pluperfect and future -perfect tenses), the perfective is used, with the subject preceding the verb - there must be one. What counts is the relative time of the action - the background time is irrelevant.

Abimelech *had not* approached her

וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ ל' אֶקְרַב אֵלֶיהָ

In the following, for comparison, we have used (invented) negative verbs to avoid the complications of the conversive vav. Compare

Moses *did not* eat the meat

וְל' אֶאֱכַל מ' נְשֵׂה אֶת הַבָּשָׂר

Moses *had not* eaten the meat

וּמ' נְשֵׂה ל' אֶאֱכַל אֶת הַבָּשָׂר

He *did not* eat the meat

וְל' אֶאֱכַל אֶת הַבָּשָׂר

He *had not* eaten the meat

וְהוּא ל' אֶאֱכַל אֶת הַבָּשָׂר

Note the need in the last example to insert a pronoun, to distinguish it from the previous one.

For an example of future perfect, we find in Lev. 9 :4

'will have appeared'

ה' נִרְאָה אֵלֵיכֶם

For an action not yet commenced, one about to take place (the 'intended') *I was about to eat, I am about to eat, I will be about to eat* the background time does matter.

If it is in the past *I was about to eat*, the imperfective is used, with the subject before the verb, and generally also טָרַם. When this extra word is used, they were not always too fussy about putting in a pronoun to make sure that there is a subject (as with the perfect above).

They were about to lie down :

Jos. 2 :8 טָרַם וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ but Gen. 19 :4 just וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ

A word about טָרַם. It means 'yet' or 'still', and is only used in a context such as this. 'They were yet about to lie down.' In English we say 'they *had NOT* yet lain down', the reason being that we also change the tense, and use a past instead of a future. It is not correct to translate טָרַם as 'not yet', it means 'yet'. However, when we translate the entire clause, we may change the tense and use 'not yet'.

When the time is the present, and we are dealing with an intended action *I am about to eat*, an alternative is to use הֵינָה followed by the subject and then the participle. This is why in Ex. 9 :3 the present participle of the verb 'to be' has to be used :

G-d's arm *is about to be* against your livestock

הֵינָה יָד ה' הוֹיָה בְּמִקְנֶךָ

Without the participle, הֵינָה יָד ה' בְּמִקְנֶךָ would be a description of an existing state of affairs, that the livestock was already being attacked, not that it was about to be attacked.

When the time is in the future, *I will be about to eat* is not a form that anyone is normally likely to use - we have merely mentioned its theoretical existence to complete the pattern.

Finally, a concurrent action, a **continuous action** *I was eating, I am eating, I will be eating*, is expressed by the participle preceded by the subject.

This is strictly not a tense but a participle phrase; however we may convert it to a tense.

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ... וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב בְּפֶתַח הַדָּל (He appeared to him.... *he sitting* at the entrance', which we would prefer to render as 'while *he was sitting* at the entrance').

The verb 'to be' must sometimes be inserted when translating into English:

וַיִּלְךְ בַּלַּק מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב ... וְהָיָה בַּלַּק מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב בְּעֵת הַהוּא (Balak [*being*] king at that time, or 'Now Balak *was* king at that time' ('was' being a continuous tense and not a single action).

Note that the subject is often put before the verb for contrast, or even (rarely) for emphasis. Also in poetry and in conversation the rules of word order are not always obeyed. There are also other exceptions.

Chapter 8

THE PARTICIPLE

At this point it is worth giving a reminder that this book is not intended to be comprehensive. The rules given are not all universal, and there are often exceptions. All that is claimed for the rules is that they cover the vast majority of cases, and that they do so far better than any other set of rules given in most if not all other grammar books. They also lead to a better understanding of the mentality and outlook behind the language, so that one can begin to understand the language from *their* point of view (the people who used to use it) instead of from our modern one.

Participle phrases

A participle in any language is a verbal adjective. It behaves like an adjective in describing a noun, but like a verb it can take an object. Taken with the words applying to it or to which it applies, it does not produce a clause, because it is not really a finite verb, but it produces a phrase. A participle phrase can be replaced by a clause. Here are some examples in English.

‘Walking along the road, he saw a dog’,
equivalent to ‘As he walked along the road, he saw...’
‘He applied the brakes, the wheel flying off as he slowed down’,
equivalent to ‘and as he slowed down the wheel flew off’.

These participle phrases are very popular in Classical Hebrew, reducing the complexity of subordinate clauses which Hebrew dislikes just as Latin and German love them. We saw at the end of the last chapter how they are used instead of continuous tenses.

Another popular use of the participle in Hebrew is to create a phrase that is used instead of a relative clause (although a relative clause may alternatively be used). This is not done in English. It is a very neat construction. ‘The man who was eating the bread’ (or ‘the man who used to eat the bread’) is rendered as ‘The man the eating the bread’, *הַאִישׁ הָאֹכֵל הַלֶּחֶם*. The use of a subordinate clause with *אֲשֶׁר* is allowed, but the participle phrase is far better when this clause is inside another or has another inside it, to avoid the need for a sub-subordinate clause. For instance ‘The man who took the paper in order that he might burn it’ or ‘The man took the matches in order to burn the paper which he had found’.

Anyone who has studied or attempted to study Latin or German will have found tremendous difficulty with the complexity of clauses all one inside the other. Classical Hebrew goes out of its way to avoid this and to keep things relatively simple. One of its chief aids in doing this is the use of participle phrases and gerund phrases (which come later).

The non-derived from the participle

As explained earlier, a participle is a verbal adjective, not a noun. However, Hebrew often derives a noun from the participle to refer not to the action but to the doer of it. This is not a use of the participle as such, but of a non-derived form of it. In the active, for example, the participle ‘watching’ leads to the noun ‘a watchman’ which has the same form (*שׂוֹמֵר*).

However, in the passive, at least in the normal stretch, the form is slightly different, the *vav* being replaced by *ayod*. *מְסֻקָּד* is ‘appointed’ while *מְסֻקָּדִים* is an appointed person; *שׂוֹנְאָה* is ‘hated’ (fem. sing.), while *שׂוֹנְאָה* is a hated woman. However, the issue is complicated because an adjective can be used with an imaginary noun, so acting itself like a noun, and a participle can do this too. Thus *הַגָּדוֹל* can mean ‘the big [one]’ and likewise *הַשׂוֹנְאָה* ‘the hated [one]’. In Deut. 21:15 both forms are found. The first is the participle used as a noun (*הַשׂוֹנְאָה*), the second is the non-derived from the participle (*הַשׂוֹנְאָה*).

If you found this paragraph too difficult do not worry, because here is a case where you can get the meaning by ‘mucking through’ and you will get it right. In some of the earlier matters discussed, if you try to ‘muck through’ as we were taught you will sometimes get it wrong.

The voice and tense of the participle

A participle can be active or passive (or for that matter middle) and in other languages can be present, so-called past (strictly speaking perfect) or so-called future (strictly speaking intended). To make this clear, let us look at the English:

Active:	present	eating
	perfect	having eaten

	intended	being about to eat
Passive:	present	being eaten
	perfect	(having been) eaten
	intended	about to be eaten

Now only two of these are formed in English without auxiliaries, and it is usual in most languages when other forms die out for these two to remain: the present in the active (eating), and the perfect in the passive (eaten).

The Hebrew participle has no tense attached to it, so it can be any of the three, and where this is likely to cause difficulty the participle has to be avoided; but usually the active participle is *present*, and the passive participle is *past*. This is not necessarily the case.

In the normal stretch, the active (*kal*) has one participle (כֹּתֵב), and the passive has two - one being the genuine passive, which has no name, and of which only the participle remains (כְּתוּב), and the other that of the middle (*nifal*) which is used as a passive (נִכְתָּב). [The modern tendency to use the true passive as a perfect and the *nifal* form as a present has no basis in Classical grammar.]

There are important cases where the tenses are not as stated. For instance we saw how after הֵבִיחַ the active participle is the intended (so-called 'future'). There are at least two words whose active participle is usually perfect ('past').

One is the verb נָפַל which in the normal stretch has three principle meanings: to fall, to desert (to the enemy) and to fall down dead (especially, but not only, in battle). In the last meaning, the active participle (נֹפֵל) occurs quite often, not as a present ('falling') but as a perfect active participle ('having fallen'). One example is in Deut. 21:1, but there are many other examples in later books. It is interesting to note that the English perfect (or past) participle, which is normally passive, is in this case also used as a perfect active - 'fallen' meaning 'having fallen'. We talk of the men 'fallen in battle'.

Another word is, surprisingly, the verb מָוַת meaning 'todie'. The participle is מוֹת. The expression הֵבִיחַ אֶנְכִי מוֹת in accordance with what we have already discussed (as well as common sense) means 'I am about to die', i.e. the participle is intended ('future'). But in other contexts the word is perfect active, meaning 'having died' or 'dead'. It is not a pure adjective meaning 'dead', but the participle of the verb used as a past or perfect active participle. Hence מוֹתִי and מוֹתָא are both participles.

[Footnote. English has a passive participle even for verbs that have no passive; in itself this has no meaning, but is used with the auxiliary 'have' to form the active perfect tense, e.g. from 'rise' the passive participle is 'risen' which produces the active perfect tense 'I have risen'. The perfect active participle is 'having risen'.]

Chapter 9

CONJUGATIONS

Those who have studied Latin or French will have met the word 'conjugation' used in two different senses. One is, as we have used it in earlier chapters, to describe a process, the inflexion of a verb, as against the inflexion of a noun which is called 'declension'. (There is really no need for this difference, but it is there.) The other is to describe a pattern formed as the outcome of applying that process to a particular group of verbs. Different groups of verbs, depending on the root, form different patterns, and these are known as the first conjugation, the second conjugation and so on.

There is no reason why we should not, by analogy, apply the same to Hebrew. (But it should NOT be used to describe the *binyanim*, where there is no analogy.)

In Hebrew there are three main groups, with major differences. And within each there are various sub-groups with minor differences. Now we do not want, and do not need, thirty-six or fifty-seven conjugations; it would be too much to expect anyone to remember which is which, never mind how they work. So we are content with just three, one for each of the three main groups.

Within each group there are the *regular* verbs which follow the fundamental pattern of the group.

Then there are the *semi-regular* verbs, which follow certain sub-rules for modifying the forms, depending on the letters of the root. (For instance, if the middle letter of the root of a verb is a *resh*, and a certain form demands a strong dagesh in the middle letter, which a *resh* cannot take, then there is no dagesh in the middle letter of that verb, but the previous vowel is lengthened instead.) If you learn the regular, you do not have to learn all of any of the semi-regulars, only the parts that are modified - and often not even that, just the principle involved in the modification. The same rules for semi-regulars apply through all three conjugations.

Finally there are *irregular* verbs, not too many, which have to be learned individually as they break all the rules.

At this stage we are not discussing the details of the inflexion of any particular verb. However, to give a rough idea in advance, the three conjugations are as follows:

First conjugation. Verbs whose roots are such that they do not come in the other two.

Second conjugation. Verbs whose middle root letter is *vav* or *yod*, or whose last two root letters are identical. Examples קום שים סבב.

Third conjugation. Verbs whose last root letter is a silent *hey*, representing a *vav* or *yod*. Example גלה.

In general the rules that modify the semi-regulars are rules that apply to letters of the alphabet and how they behave in certain circumstances.

What we are considering here is not how the actual forms of individual verbs are created, but the fundamental concepts, what sort of forms are available and how they are used.

Chapter 10

THE SUBJUNCTIVE (AND IMPERATIVE)

Moods of the finite verb

The subjunctive, which occurs very very frequently, is usually ignored in grammar books, or else treated in a very off-handed manner, and never really explained properly, perhaps because it is so seldom understood.

In different languages there are different 'moods' which express different functions of the verb. Depending on the language, these may include the *imperative* for commands; the *optative* for wishes and hopes; the *jussive* for commands for which the imperative is not used; the *cohortative* for self-encouragement; the *subjunctive* for subordinate clauses, and so on. Do not try to remember all these, we will not use them. All of these are moods other than the *indicative*, which we have met and which is used for plain statements. Now in Hebrew, the imperative is quite distinct. All the others use the same *form*, and what we are concerned with is not giving fancy names like the above for the different functions and meanings, but one name for the form of the verb. The most appropriate is the *subjunctive*, which covers all the others. We then have three moods of the finite verb:

The indicative (which has two aspects, each of which suffers through the conversive *vav*).

The imperative (which can only be used in certain cases, but is self-explanatory, and is easily recognised because it has no prefix).

The subjunctive, which this chapter is mainly about.

Unlike in other languages, there is no variation of aspect or tense in the subjunctive or the imperative.

The imperative

First a word about the imperative, to get it out of the way. It deals with commands and requests, but is limited (in Hebrew, but not in all languages) as follows:

- (a) it is found in active and middle voices, but never in the passive.
- (b) it is only found in the second person (masc. and fem., sing. and plur.).
- (c) it is never used in the negative.

[The last is similar in English, where the positive imperative exists, but for the negative only one word is allowed to use it - 'do', and even then only as an auxiliary. The old English 'Go not there!' is no longer permissible. We cannot even say 'Do not that', but have to say 'Do not do that'.]

For any command or request that does not fulfil conditions (a), (b) and (c) above, we have to use the subjunctive. So before we know anything else about the subjunctive, we already know one of its uses.

Form of the subjunctive

So far, when dealing with the parts of the verb we have not considered their form. Since you are not a beginner in Hebrew you will, at least with regular verbs, recognise them and know what we are talking about. Not so the subjunctive, very few people recognise it or even realise that it exists, so we must discuss its form.

It is derived from the imperfective, and resembles it very closely. In most but not all cases it is identical to it in form. Let us assume that we have an imperfective and wish to make a subjunctive from it. We need to know the person and number, and are concerned as to whether they involve a suffix or not. If there is a suffix, nothing can be done, it remains as it is and is indistinguishable in form from the imperfective.

The second person singular feminine and the second and third persons plural all have suffixes, e.g.

תִּקְרָבִי תִקְרָבוּ תִקְרָבְךָ תִקְרָבוּ

These apply to all verbs, regular, semi-regular and irregular, in every stretch and every voice. So in all these cases the subjunctive is identical in form to the imperfective. Often, however, it can be easily recognised, as a non-conversive *vav* may be attached to it, and this is not allowed with the imperfective.

We are left with

- (a) the first person, singular and plural. These are *if possible* lengthened.
- (b) the second person masculine singular, and third persons masculine and feminine singular. These are *if possible* shortened.

In this section, to avoid having to write out the list each time, we will talk about the 1st, meaning (a) above, and the 2nd/3rd meaning (b) above. We do not include those forms with suffixes which we eliminated earlier.

The 1st is lengthened by the addition of ה־, and this may involve shortening the previous vowel.

אֶקְרָב becomes אֶקְרָבְךָ, אֶקְרָבוּ becomes אֶקְרָבוּךָ, but אֶקְרָבְתִּי becomes אֶקְרָבְתִּי.

This is possible in all verbs of the first and second conjugations, but not in those of the third conjugation where the form ends in a vowel followed by a silent ה־. So אֶקְרָבְךָ remains unchanged.

Chapter 11

INFINITIVE AND GERUND

Infinitive

The infinitive (in any language) may be regarded as the name of the verb. It may or may not have other uses, which vary from one language to another. In Hebrew the infinitive is also the best way of naming the verb for a very special reason: Hebrew verbs (nearly) all have three-letter roots, but in the course of inflexion some of these letters may drop out. Sometimes you are left with only one letter of the root (e.g. Num. 22:23 נָחַט from the root נָטָה). The *kal* (simple active) infinitive always* shows the three letters of the root clearly, and therefore should be used to name the verb. There is a modern tendency to use the gerund, or the perfective, and these lead to confusion and problems. All you have to remember is that it is the name of the verb, and what the infinitive means is something else. It does *not* correspond in meaning or in use with the English infinitive.

(*The only exception is with verbs where the middle letter is yod, which may appear in the infinitive as vav. It is therefore customary with verbs of the second conjugation, where the middle letter is either vav or yod, to use the gerund instead. This clearly differentiates between vav and yod.

e.g. Infinitive קָוֶה שׁוֹמֵר Gerund קוֹה שִׁמְרֵם

The Hebrew infinitive is, as in most languages, invariable. There is no inflexion of it, it cannot take prefixes or suffixes or change its vowel. There is an infinitive for every stretch and voice that exists, i.e. up to seven for each verb. In addition, there is a choice between two forms for the *piel* (the grammar books give the very rare form כָּתַב, but we usually find כָּתַבְתָּ), and there are two different forms for the *nifal*, which are used on different occasions.

What is the infinitive used for? It is NOT used instead of the gerund, as in English (as will be explained below) but has three special uses:

1. It is used together with an indicative (perfective or imperfective) for emphasis. This is met with at least in the Torah fairly often.

2. It is on very rare occasions used instead of an imperative, particularly with the verbs וְזָכַר and וְשָׁמַר. These are important because of the Ten Commandments and other occurrences, but otherwise the beginner can ignore this. (There is indeed doubt as to whether even on these occasions the infinitive is used instead of an imperative, and it may simply be a shortened form of the 'strong command' use of the imperfective, which we haven't yet come to, i.e. וְזָכַרְתָּ for וְזָכַרְתָּ.)

3. It is on rare occasions used where we would use a participle, e.g. וְנִתְּחַן אֹתוֹ (Gen. 41:43) 'putting him'; and especially in the infinitive וְהָלַךְ which is then followed by another infinitive, e.g. וְהָלַךְ וְנָשׂוּב, וְהָלַךְ וְנָסַע, וְהָלַךְ וְנָכַח etc.

This idiomatic use is not easy to translate or even to understand, and is not for the beginner.

To summarise, the main use of the infinitive in practice is for emphasis, and we use it to name the verb.

Gerund

The gerund is a verbal noun, and in some ways parallels the participle which is a verbal adjective. The gerund is a noun and behaves like one, yet it cannot take an object like a verb.

The gerund encapsulates the concept of the verb. If the verb describes an action as taking place, the gerund abstracts the action as a concept (writing, destroying). Likewise if the verb describes a state of affairs (e.g. sitting), the gerund abstracts and names that state of affairs (sitting). Where English uses the infinitive (instead of the gerund), Hebrew does *not* use the infinitive, it uses the gerund.

Here we come across a real difficulty in explaining a concept in English, not (as with 'stretch') because English lacks terminology and not (as with the conversive vav) because the concept is difficult, but because English has a peculiar problem of its own. In other languages, while the gerund may get confused with the infinitive, it is quite distinct from the participle, but in English they have the same form - both end in -ing. It is not easy for an English speaker to tell the difference.

The best way, when you meet a word ending in -ing which is one of these two, is to try a substitution. Try to substitute an infinitive - if it works, it is a gerund; for example 'I like eating' 'I like to eat'. Try to substitute a noun - if it works it is a gerund; for example 'I like eating' 'I like music'.

Try to substitute an adjective -if it works it is a participle ; for example 'He is singing' 'He is big'. These do not always work so you have to concentrate hard to decide, until you get used to it.

As with Latin and many other languages, English often uses the infinitive instead of the gerund. Sometimes this is compulsory, sometimes optional, sometimes unacceptable, and there are no logical rules, it depends on usage. Consider the following three :

I want cake, I like cake, I enjoy cake.

They may mean slightly different things, but grammatically they are the same.

Now consider the following :

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1(a) I want to eat cake | (b) I want eating cake |
| 2(a) I like to eat cake | (b) I like eating cake |
| 3(a) I enjoy to eat cake | (b) I enjoy eating cake |

Both 1(b) and 3(a) are unacceptable, and foreigners can never understand why. In 1 we can only use (a), in 3 we can only use (b), but in 2 we can use either! Yet all three are really the same!

Let us get this clear, and stress once again, Hebrew *only* uses the gerund. The infinitive is for something else (as mentioned above).

Absolute and construct

The gerund is a noun, and like all Hebrew nouns it has the property of 'state', meaning that it can be either 'absolute' (like בית a house) or 'construct' (like בית a/the house of). We assume that the reader is familiar with this characteristic of nouns. So you can have a gerund absolute and a gerund construct. An example of the latter is the well-known

בְּצֵאת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם

'in the going-out of Israel from Egypt'. This is not an important point in itself, but it illustrates the stupidity in this respect of most grammar books. Because the Hebrew gerund corresponds not only to the English gerund but also to the English infinitive, they decide to call it not gerund (which if not easily understood is at least not ambiguous) but 'infinitive'! How, then, to distinguish between this and the true infinitive described above? They call that the 'infinitive absolute' and the gerund the 'infinitive construct'! But as we have seen, the gerund can be absolute or construct, so you have an infinitive absolute, an infinitive construct absolute, and an infinitive construct construct!!!!

If you wish to preserve your sanity (or what is left of it after tackling the conversive vav), reserve the name 'infinitive' for the invariable form mentioned earlier, which shows the root and has only special uses; and call the gerund the gerund, even though at times it corresponds to the English infinitive.

Uses of the gerund

The gerund can be used alone, or with preposition prefixes. It can also take subject and object suffixes. In one case there is a difference between a subject and object suffix, otherwise we have to rely on the context. The old Latin *amoris*, which applies in English too, is here as well. They asked what is the meaning of the Latin *amor patris* (the love of a father)? Is 'father' subjective, i.e. the love felt by a father (for his child), or is it objective, the love felt (by a child) for his father? Both are 'the love of a father'.

We find the Hebrew gerund used both ways, but there is a difference in one only pronoun suffix - the first person singular. שמר means my guarding, subjective, i.e. when I guard someone else, whereas שמרני means my guarding, objective, i.e. when someone else guards me. (The same form is also imperative, 'guard me!', but that is something else. The pronoun ending of an imperative is always objective.)

The gerund in Hebrew is used very widely and very frequently. We will not attempt to list its uses, but state a very important one - to create 'gerund phrases' that can be (and in English usually are) replaced by clauses. This is in the same way that participle phrases can be replaced by clauses. What we said about those earlier applies even more so here. Gerund phrases are very useful, very neat, and cut down on the need for subordinate clauses. One use is with למען, which can be followed either by a finite verb (making a clause) or by a gerund. The word occurs frequently in Deuteronomy in both usages.

Another use of the gerund is in phrases that replace 'temporal clauses' (those of time) by preceding it with a prefix to mean 'when'. In the above example, 'in the going out of Israel from Egypt' would be better rendered in English as 'when Israel went out of Egypt'. Similarly, prepositions meaning 'before' or 'after' usually precede the gerund to make a gerund phrase, rather than conjunctions followed by an indicative. For instance, one finds 'before/after John's going' where English would prefer 'before/ after John went'.

The various uses of the gerund do not need to be 'explained' or even listed, but noted. Read some text yourself, note the gerunds and how they are used, what they are used for and how English replaces them -they are generally self-explanatory.

It is worth noting the difference between לְפָנָי followed by the gerund and מְטָרָם followed by the imperfective. The former means 'before something or other happened'. The something -or-other did in fact happen, but this took place earlier. The latter leaves it open as to whether the something -or-other ever did happen. It was about to happen when this took place - perhaps it happened afterwards nevertheless, but perhaps because of this it did not, the intention was abandoned - compare Gen. 2 :5 where the intention was not abandoned with Gen. 19 :4 where it was. After לְפָנָי you are sure that the something -or-other did happen.

With this we will leave the gerund, but remember to look out for it when reading texts.

Chapter 12

MAIN USES OF THE IMPERFECTIVE

The imperfective (and likewise the perfective with conversive *vav*) has three principal uses, two of which we have already considered.

1. To indicate the future tense.
2. To indicate a repetitive tense. In this it takes over from the 'original' meaning of the intensive stretch.
3. Instead of the imperative :
 - (a) For a strong command. It may be made stronger by adding an infinitive.
 - (b) Often where a string of commands is given, and the imperative is only used for the first, if at all.

The imperfective used instead of an imperative is not to be confused with the use of the subjunctive (which often is the same in form as the imperfective) instead of the imperative, as explained in the chapter on the subjunctive. Roughly speaking, the subjunctive is used where the imperative *cannot* be used, whereas the imperfective is used where the imperative *could* be used but is not strong enough, or is not used after other imperatives. As a rule, the imperfective is used only in the second person, where

- (a) in positive commands the subjunctive is not used ; or
- (b) in negative commands it is preceded by *אִלְמָוּ*, whereas the subjunctive is preceded by *לֹא*.

Chapter 13

MORE ON THE CONVERSIVE VAV

Remember the midrash about Rabbi Akiva taking three friends into the *pardes* (the realm of esoteric philosophy), from which he alone emerged in good health? One of the others died, one turned wicked, and the third went insane.

This chapter is not recommended to the average reader. Leave it out. It is only for the stout-hearted who are prepared to plummet the depths to get at the truth, regardless of cost. It dares to publish something the author discovered with something of a shock, and which all others have either not discovered or kept as a closely guarded secret: the truth about the conversive vav! This does not explain it, it merely makes it more complicated, and even more difficult to understand, but facts are facts and we cannot escape from them. Can't we? All the grammarians seem to have done so up to now. Still, the truth cannot be suppressed forever, so if you are prepared to take the risk, here goes. Otherwise, skip the rest of the chapter.

First to recapitulate. To get an imperfective when a vav is required, we put the vav on the *perfective*. An ordinary vav is added, for example, to an noun, changes a perfective to an imperfective.
Correct! Stick to it, remember it. That is correct.

Next, to get a perfective when a vav is required, we put the vav (with a patach underneath it and followed by a dagesh) onto an imperfective. A vav with patach and followed by the dagesh changes an imperfective into a perfective. Very nice, it shows a pattern. It complements the other case. Only, alas, *it is all completely wrong!!!*

The truth is that no vav, neither a conversive one nor an ordinary one, can be added to an imperfective! What happens is that there are two systems. On one system, the conversive vav is added to the *subjunctive* to create a perfective. On the other system, the conversive vav is added to the subjunctive in the second and third persons to create a perfective, and in the first person it is added to a *pseudo-subjunctive* apparently created for the purpose, because it is used for nothing else!

You were warned at the beginning of the chapter. Do you still want to go on?

Let us start with the first system. A subjunctive to which an ordinary vav is added remains a subjunctive. (On this all agree.) But if you add a conversive vav, it becomes a perfective.

Here are the rules for a conversive vav, including those we left out earlier. A subjunctive, like an imperfective, must begin with one of the letters א י נ ו.

(a) Before ו or ה the conversive vav takes the form וַ and then the next letter (nun or tav) takes a strong dagesh.

You probably knew this anyway.

(b) Before י the same applies, *except* that if the vowel under the *yod* is a sheva, then the dagesh is dropped. וְיִהְיֶה but וְיִכְתֹּב.

(c) Before א the vowel lengthens and we have אַ, and no dagesh.

In addition, the conversive vav tends to pull the accent back away from the last syllable (it does not always succeed, but it tries), and if the last syllable loses its accent it tends to shorten. In the subjunctive it may have already shortened from the imperfective, and the conversive vav may shorten it even more.

For example: Imperfective יִקְרָא Subjunctive יִקְרָא Conversive יִקְרָא (vayyabkom).

On this system, we remember that in the first person the imperfective tends to lengthen to produce the subjunctive, the second and third person tend to shorten, yet in many cases there is no change.

So to get our perfective we take the subjunctive and get things like this:

וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן

This is the system generally used by Ezra and Nehemiah. Moses tended to prefer the second system, with rare exceptions (e.g. Gen. 41:11 וַיִּחַלְקָהּ).

In the second system, the second and third person are the same as on the first system, the usual subjunctive. But for the first person, instead of the subjunctive which tends to lengthen, a *pseudo-subjunctive* is formed by shortening in the same way as the actual subjunctive shortens in the second person; and if the second person cannot shorten, nor does the first, but it *does not lengthen*. This pseudo-subjunctive is what is used, not for a true subjunctive but instead of it for the conversive. (Once again, you were warned.) The forms corresponding to those given above are as follows:

וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן וְאָכַלְתָּ בֶּן

For a good example of this, see Deut. 9:15-16.

Not the inconsistency in Gen. 43 :21 where we find וְנִפְתָּחָהּ וְנִפְתָּחָהּ.
The first system would demand וְנִפְתָּחָהּ וְנִפְתָּחָהּ, the second would demand וְנִפְתָּחָהּ וְנִפְתָּחָהּ!

This second system, where in the first person there is a pseudo -subjunctive and the verb tends to shorten, seems to apply mainly to the third conjugation. For the second conjugation, there is a third system (you were warned!) where the verb neither shortens nor lengthens : we have neither וְנִפְתָּחָהּ nor וְנִפְתָּחָהּ but וְנִפְתָּחָהּ and likewise וְנִפְתָּחָהּ, though וְנִפְתָּחָהּ (first system) is also found (Jud. 12 :3 vs. 1 Sam 28 :21)!

All the above are general rules that apply in the vast majority of cases, certainly in far more cases than are covered by the rules traditionally taught. This does not preclude the odd exception, which is not covered by these rules, but by the traditional rules that leave all the other cases out in the cold.

I cannot explain the exceptions. I cannot even explain the rules. There is no apparent logic behind them, but there is consistency. They are based on empirical fact, not theory, on what we find and not on wishful thinking about what we would rather have found.

There is of course another explanation for the second system. One could say that in fact the conversive vav is not added to the subjunctive at all, but to the imperfective as always taught. However, the conversive vav pulls back the accent and therefore demands shortening wherever possible in all 'persons', just as the subjunctive does in the 2nd and 3rd persons, so that the result looks like the subjunctive, but is not. This is the way I had always understood it, until I noticed the first system, where in the first person the lengthened form is used even for the conversive vav. This means that the conversive actually uses the subjunctive!

The fact that two systems exist does not present a problem. They could be different dialects, or one could be more colloquial.

An English analogy may be drawn. The grammar books give *I shall, you will* as the ordinary form and *I will, you shall* as the emphatic form. There are not only writers who observe this rule, there are even people who insist on speaking that way, despite the fact that it has long since gone out of fashion. The normal use today is to say *I will, you will*, and many writers follow suit, to the annoyance of the pedants. But if they do not, it would appear pedantic, and they do not wish to appear pedantic. Or there is Churchill's famous comment on the rule not to end a sentence with a preposition - 'This is something up with which I will not put!' A foreigner, however, who learns English with the rules, will follow the rules, because he is not quite sure when he can break them and get away with it.

Moses wrote in a living language, and could fall in with its inconsistencies. He could break the strict rules of grammar where everyone else did and get away with it. (Contrast וְנִפְתָּחָהּ throughout Gen. Chapters 5 and 11 with the theoretically impossible וְנִפְתָּחָהּ in 4 :18 and Chapter 10.) A thousand years later, Nehemiah wrote in a dead language that was still used for literature but seldom spoken (at least in the literary style) so he could not afford to risk breaking the rules of grammar. If he did, it would be a slip.

[AS1]

CONSTRUCTION OF THE HIFIL AND NIFAL

The hifil

The causative stretch is also known as the ‘extensive’, as explained earlier, because something is added *externally*. (Something is also added externally in the simple and intensive, but only in the ‘middle’ voice, so that does not count.) What is added is the letter ה at the beginning. In the infinitive, gerund and perfective we can see it (הַקְּתִיב הַקְּתִיב הַקְּתִיב), but in the participle and imperfective it has dropped out - מְקַתֵּב becomes מְקַתֵּב and יְקַתֵּב becomes יְקַתֵּב. We know that it was originally there through two things: first, it remains still in the imperative, which is derived from the imperfective; second, it is still there in Biblical Aramaic (e.g. Daniel 2:5,6 and elsewhere) but not in the later Aramaic of Onkelos, who drops it as in Hebrew. The relevant thing is that it is supposed to be there, it is there theoretically, and hence the name ‘extensive’. All this applies equally to the active (*hifil*) and passive (*hofal*).

The root of the causative, apart from this addition, is essentially the same as that of the normal stretch, so that the hifil resembles the kal more than is apparent at first sight. If the *kal* has any oddities, these are usually reflected in the *hifil*, sometimes oddities in the *nifal* are also reflected. The causatives should therefore be placed in verbal ‘layouts’ immediately after the normal.

Not so the intensive (see next chapter), which in the regular first conjugation verb *looks* at first sight more like the *kal* if we ignore the dagesh, but (a) we have no right to ignore the dagesh, which fundamentally changes the root and which is the main characteristic of the intensive, and (b) in verbs of the second conjugation the intensive root is formed quite differently, by doubling the last instead of the second root letter, and conjugated differently (or even by taking the first and last letters and doubling them, leaving out the middle one), so the intensive should always be put at the end. The mere fact that grammar books always do the reverse shows that the authors pay more attention to superficial resemblances than to fundamental ones. This is alright for quickly learning to master a language, correctly or incorrectly, but when teaching grammar as such it is the fundamentals that are most important, to help the student to understand and not merely have to remember. A small point, but a very important one.

The nifal

Because in this respect it is so simple, it is worth first taking a look at Aramaic. There the middle forms of all three stretches were originally formed by adding the prefix הַה, which was later reduced to הָה. (Later still, it was reduced still further, and often the ה was dropped out.)

(Incidentally, in Aramaic in all three stretches, the passive dropped out except for the participle and the middle was used instead. Much more consistent than Hebrew.)

In Hebrew we still have the הַה prefix in the middle (or reflexive) of the intensive - *hitpael*. The middle of the causative has disappeared completely (unless possibly in the odd word that occurs a number of times, הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ), but the middle of the normal stretch began it appears with the prefix הַה. However, this nowhere remains in full. Sometimes the ה drops out, sometimes the ה drops out (being replaced where possible with a strong dagesh in the next letter), and sometimes both. This leads us to a complexity of forms which are not easy to recognise until you get used to them.

In the perfective of the *nifal*, the ה always drops out, and the ה always remains and starts the word. The participle follows suit. Hence הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ and so on.

In the gerund, the ה remains and the ה drops out, thus הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ. From this the imperfective and the imperative are formed, but then in the imperfective (and not in the imperative) the ה also drops out, exactly as in the *hifil* (mentioned above). הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ becomes הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ which in turn becomes הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ.

And what of the infinitive? Usually we start with this, but in this case we have left it to the end. Well there are two forms of the infinitive, in one of which the ה drops out and the ה remains (as with the perfective) and in the other the reverse (as with the gerund). The two forms are הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ and הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ. [These are the usual forms; the grammar books substitute a very rare form for one of them!]

Which one is chosen? The answer is easy. The main use of the infinitive, as explained, is to emphasise a perfective or imperfective which immediately follows it, and the one chosen is the one that ‘matches’, i.e. the first new with the perfective and the second one with the imperfective.

So we find הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ, but הַהִתְקַדְּדוּ.

In the second conjugation we find some very odd forms for the *nifal*, but the same principles apply.

Chapter 15

CONSTRUCTION OF THE INTENSIVE FORMS

We are concerned not with the structure but with the concepts of Hebrew verbs. Despite that, tables of the conjugations of regular and semi-regular verbs have been included for reference, particularly since the tables illustrate concepts that are normally ignored (such as the subjunctive).

It is worth mentioning, however, that the characteristic of the intensive forms (*pi'el, pu'al, hitpa'el*) in the first and third conjugations is the dagesh that doubles the middle letter of the root. The second conjugation differs in two respects:

- (a) the 'intensive root' is formed in a different way - in fact in a variety of ways;
- (b) while some of these forms are conjugated in the same way as the first and third conjugations, the true second conjugation intensive root is in fact conjugated in quite a different way. To explain this is unnecessary - the best way to appreciate it is to study the tables.