Precious Jewels in the Hebrew Language

(That Can only be Seen in 'Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible')

The Hebrew language does not have tenses, such as past, present and future, as does the English language, but rather Hebrew verbs are in a state, called Perfect or Imperfect. English Bible translations, Young's being the exception, changes these verbs from being perfect or imperfect to our usage of past, present and future. For example, when David was speaking to Goliath, the Hebrew text reads (Young's Bible), "This day doth Jehovah shut thee up into my hand — and I have smitten[1] thee, and turned aside[2] thy head from off thee, and given[3] the carcase of the camp of the Philistines this day to the fowl of the heavens..." but English Bible translations, such as the NIV, change these verbs to, "This day the LORD *will* hand you over to me, and I *will* strike you down and [*will*] cut off your head. Today I *will* give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air..." (1 Sam. 17:46). The usage of the Hebrew perfect or imperfect, which are underlined, can only be seen in Young's Bible. The above underlined verbs are in the perfect state, as Yahweh has set them, and not in the future tense, as English translations have stated. Why did Yahweh do this? What was he saying by placing these verbs in the perfect state? This article will explain the Hebrew perfect and imperfect, displaying Yahweh's beautiful gems, as displayed in Young's wonderful translation. We will focus on Yahweh's usage of verbs used in the perfect (completed, finished) when the events are still future, as did David in the above quote.

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE HEBREW TENSES

Robert Kennett, in his book, 'A Short Account of the Hebrew Tenses,' said, "The present volume is an attempt to give an account of the nature and use of the Tenses in Hebrew in a form suitable for those who have but recently begun the study of the language, and who have not attained to such proficiency as will enable them to use with advantage Professor Driver's indispensable book. I have commonly found in teaching, that a student's chief difficulty in the Hebrew verbs is to grasp the meaning which they conveyed to the minds of the Hebrews themselves; that is to say, there is a tendency to assign as equivalents to each of the Hebrew Tenses a certain number of Latin or English forms by which that particular Tense may commonly be translated.

The result is a failure to perceive many of those fine shades of meaning, which give such life and vigor to the language of the Old Testament.

[1] 05221 הכנ nakah naw-kaw' to be smitten, verb hiphil waw consec perfect 1st person common singular suffix 2nd person masculine singular

[2] 05493 רוס cuwr soor or שׂרו suwr (#Ho 9:12) soor, to turn aside, depart, verb hiphil waw consec perfect 1st person common singular

[3] 05414 ונתן nathan naw-than' to give, put, set, verb qal waw consec perfect 1st person common singular

The difficulty in the use of the Hebrew verbs lies solely in the point of view, so absolutely different from our own, from which the Hebrews regarded an action; the time, which with us is the first consideration, as the very word `tense' shows, being to them a matter of secondary importance.

The name tenses' as applied to Hebrew verbs is misleading. The so-called Hebrew `tenses' do not express the time but merely the state of an action. Indeed were it not for the confusion that would arise through the application of the term `state' to both nouns and verbs, states' would be a far better designation than tenses.' It must always be borne in mind that it is impossible to translate a Hebrew verb into English without employing a limitation (viz. of time) which is entirely absent in the Hebrew. The ancient Hebrews never thought of an action as past, present, or future, but simply as

Perfect, i.e. Complete, Finished
or
Imperfect, i.e. Incomplete, Unfinished

as in course of development. When we say that a certain Hebrew tense corresponds to a Perfect, Pluperfect, or Future in English, we do not mean that the Hebrews thought of it as Perfect, Pluperfect, or Future, but merely that it must be so translated in English. The time of an action the Hebrews did not attempt to express by any verbal form."[4] "Hence, with reference to action, the speaker views everything either as already finished, and thus before him, [perfect] or as unfinished and non-existent, but possibly becoming and coming [imperfect].

The Perfect,' accordingly, is used of actions which the speaker, from his present, regards as actually finished, happened, past,—whether the act belongs to a particular period of the past, hence in narrative. It is used of actions, which, though really neither past nor present, are, through the inclination or lively fancy of the speaker, regarded as being already as good as finished; these are, accordingly, stated as if they were quite unconditional and certain. Moreover, the fancy of the poet and prophet frequently views the future as already clearly before him, and experienced. Sometimes, however, a mental picture is also represented more fully, in quite unimpassioned discourse, as it hovered before the eye of the writer while in the ecstatic state, just as if it had been actually experienced and were quite certain.

The Imperfect' describes that which is incomplete, whether this be what does not yet exist, or what is going on, merely progressing towards completion; hence it may also, on the other hand, indicate what merely is to take place, i.e. what, according to the speaker's way of thinking, is merely dependent on something else. This includes two meanings, which,

[4] A Short Account of the Hebrew Tenses by Rev. Robert Hatch Kennett 1901; pg. vii - viii, 1 - 2. http://archive.org/details/shortaccountofhe00kenn

both in conception and expression, may be very widely different from one another, without, however, completely removing all trace of their common origin. What I state absolutely as incomplete, remains a mere predication regarding a time, hence, a mere time-form (tense); what, on the other hand, I state as merely dependent on something else, is set forth as in a particular kind of being, which hence becomes more a mood than a tense (to use Latin terminology). The imperfect states what is merely becoming [or advancing towards completion, i.e. coming to pass], arising; or it represents the action as present. Looked at more exactly, however, this admits of being regarded in a twofold manner; the incomplete action is set forth either as incipient, or as continuing in this incipiency. Hence, the imperfect indicates an action which, at the present moment, is not yet completed, but is beginning, and is being carried on with a view to completion, or which happens in the present; as, 'ye are marching out,' in 1 Sam. 17:8."[5] (For additional information see Appendix A.)

The Perfect referring to the Future

"It must be remembered that, as there is no time in the Hebrew tenses, the Perfect may refer to the future equally well as to the past. It is incorrect to say that the Hebrew said 'I have done' when he meant 'I will do:' in reality he merely described the completion of the act of doing without specifying the time.

But as there is no more emphatic way of predicting an event still future
than by describing its result...
so an event which is obviously future,
when described as completed,
is impressed upon the hearer's mind as certain."[6]

This usage of the perfect will be our focus. Yahweh, in his Word, uses the perfect to express past actions (completed) and the imperfect to express future events (incomplete), but in rare conditions he used the perfect to express the absolute certainty of future events coming to pass. We must ask ourselves why, in one case, Yahweh uses the imperfect to express a future event, which is correct because the event is in the process of being complete but in another case, he uses the perfect. These are the hidden precious gems buried in his Word, ready to be unearthed by those who are seeking.

We are taught that Abram believed Yahweh and it was accounted unto him for righteousness but Genesis 15:6 states, in Young's Bible, "And he hath believed in Jehovah, and He reckoneth it to him — righteousness." Yahweh brought Abram out under the heavens, and said, ‘Look attentively, I pray thee, towards the heavens, and count the stars, if thou art able to count them’; and He saith to him, ‘Thus is thy seed.’ The verb, believed

[5] Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament by Heinrich Ewald (1891); pgs. 1-8; http://archive.org/details/syntaxofhebrewla00ewaluoft
[6] A Short Account of the Hebrew Tenses by Rev. Robert Hatch Kennett (1901); pg. 6

(aman) used in the perfect state, expresses Abrams absolute certainty of the completion of Yahweh's promise to him. Other Bible translations translate the verb as 'believed,' rather than, 'hath believed,' placing it in an imperfect state.

Young's translation brings a whole other point of view concerning Moses' encounter with Pharaoh, as a totally completed event before it even began. Exodus 7:1-5 reads,

"And Jehovah saith unto Moses, ‘See, I have given thee a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron thy brother is thy prophet; thou — thou dost speak all that I command thee, and Aaron thy brother doth speak unto Pharaoh, and he hath sent the sons of Israel out of his land. ‘And I harden the heart of Pharaoh, and have multiplied My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt, and Pharaoh doth not hearken, and I have put My hand on Egypt, and have brought out My hosts, My people, the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments; and the Egyptians have known that I am Jehovah, in My stretching out My hand against Egypt; and I have brought out the sons of Israel from their midst.’"

In contrast, the NIV reads, "

"Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it."

Yahweh, by placing these verbs in the perfect, rather than the imperfect, had stamped this project as a finished event even though it had not yet begun.

Yahweh addresses King Cyrus, a hundred years before he is born by speaking to him in the perfect state; the rebuilding of Jerusalem as a completed act, as recorded in Isaiah 48:28 to 45:3:

"Who is saying of Cyrus, My shepherd, And all my delight He doth perfect, So as to say of Jerusalem, Thou art built, And of the temple, Thou art founded. Thus said Jehovah, To His anointed, to Cyrus, Whose right hand I have laid hold on, To subdue nations before him, Yea, loins of kings I loose, To open before him two-leaved doors, Yea, gates are not shut: ‘I go before thee, and crooked places make straight, Two-leaved doors of brass I shiver, And bars of iron I cut asunder, And have given to thee treasures of darkness, Even treasures of secret places, So that thou knowest that I, Jehovah..."

In contrast, the NIV reads:

"who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid." This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD..."

The letter written to the King of Israel from the King of Syria concerning the healing of Naaman takes on additional meaning when read as Yahweh wrote it:

"And he bringeth in the letter unto the king of Israel, saying, ‘And now, at the coming in of this letter unto thee, lo, I have sent unto thee Naaman my servant, and thou hast recovered him from his leprosy" (2 Kg. 5:6). According to the King of Syria, Naaman was completely healed before he came to Israel.

In contrast, the NIV reads,

"The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

In Yahweh's eyes, according to Isaiah 11:1-4, the seed of Jesse, his Son, had already completed his mission in full:

"And a rod hath come out from the stock of Jesse, And a branch from his roots is fruitful. Rested on him hath the Spirit of Jehovah, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and might, The spirit of knowledge and fear of Jehovah. To refresh him in the fear of Jehovah, And by the sight of his eyes he judgeth not, Nor by the hearing of his ears decideth. And he hath judged in righteousness the poor, And decided in uprightness for the humble of earth, And hath smitten earth with the rod of his mouth, And with the breath of his lips he putteth the wicked to death."

In contrast, the NIV reads,

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked."

The Day of Yahweh and the New Earth are future events, but according to Isaiah 2:1-4 these events have been completed:

"The thing that Isaiah son of Amoz hath seen concerning Judah and Jerusalem: And it hath come to pass, In the latter end of the days, Established is the mount of Jehovah's house, Above the top of the mounts, And it hath been lifted up above the heights, And flowed unto it have all the nations. And gone have many peoples and said, 'Come, and we go up unto the mount of Jehovah, Unto the house of the God of Jacob, And He doth teach us of His ways, And we walk in His paths, For from Zion goeth forth a law, And a word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And He hath judged between the nations, And hath given a decision to many peoples, And they have beat their swords to ploughshares, And their spears to pruning-hooks, Nation doth not lift up sword unto nation, Nor do they learn any more — war."

In contrast, the NIV reads,

"This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more."

In all of the above scriptures, Yahweh could have used verbs in their imperfect state, because these events were not complete at the time he was speaking but he chose rather to speak to his listeners in the perfect state. Why? There is no more emphatic way of speaking about events that are still in the future than by describing their finished results; results that are described as completed. This method of communication is impressed upon the hearer's mind as being absolutely certain. Yahweh spoke to the unbelievers in the wilderness by saying, "And your infants, of whom ye have said, For a prey they are, and your sons who have not known to-day good and evil, they go in thither, and to them I give it, and they possess it" (Deu. 1:39 (See NIV reading below)).[7] There is no will possess the land in this verse but rather they possess it; Yahweh's promise fulfilled!

Robert Young said, "There are two modes of translation which may be adopted in rendering into our own language the writings of an ancient author; the one is, to bring him before us in such a manner as that we may regard him as our own; the other, to transport

[7] De 1:39 And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it.

ourselves, on the contrary, over to him, adopting his situational modes of speaking, thinking, acting,—peculiarities of age and race, air, gesture, voice, etc. Each of these plans has its advantages, but the latter is incomparably the better of the two, being suited—not for the ever-varying modes of thinking and acting of the men of the fifth, or the tenth, or the fifteenth, or some other century, but—for all ages alike. All attempts to make Moses or Paul act, or speak, or reason, as if they were Englishmen of the nineteenth century, must inevitably tend to change the translator into a commentator, characters which, however useful, stand altogether apart from that of him, who, with a work before him in one language, seeks only to transfer it into another."[8]

Purchase Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible and peruse his Old Testament looking for the perfect state used in describing future events. You too will discover the diamonds and emeralds our Father has placed within his Word, which he has magnified above his name! (A free download of this Bible is available at http://archive.org/details/holybibleconsist00youn)

[8] Preface of 'Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible.'

Appendix A

Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible

(Taken from the Preface of Young's Bible)

Style of the Sacred Writers, and of this Translation.

ONE of the first things that is likely to attract the attention of the Readers of this New Translation is its lively, picturesque, dramatic style, by which the inimitable beauty of the Original Text is more vividly brought out than by any previous Translation. It is true that the Revisers appointed by King James have occasionally imitated it, but only in a few familiar phrases and colloquialisms, chiefly in the Gospel Narrative, and without having any settled principles of translation to guide them on the point. The exact force of the Hebrew tenses has long been a vexed question with critics, but the time cannot be far distant when the general principles of the late learned Professor Samuel Lee of Cambridge, with some modification, will be generally adopted in substance, if not in theory. It would he entirely out of place here to enter into details on this important subject, but a very few remarks appear necessary, and may not be unacceptable to the student.

I. It would appear that the Hebrew writers, when narrating or describing events which might be either past or future (such as the case of Moses in reference to the Creation or the Deluge, on the one hand, and to the Coming of the Messiah or the Calamities which were to befall Israel, on the other), uniformly wrote as if they were alive at the time of the occurrence of the events mentioned, and as (eye-witnesses of what they are narrating.

It would be needless to refer to special passages in elucidation or vindication of this principle essential to the proper understanding of the Sacred Text, as every page of this Translation affords abundant examples. It is only what common country people do in this land at the present day, and what not a few of the most popular writers in England aim at and accomplish—placing themselves and their readers in the times and places of the circumstances related.

This principle of translation has long been admitted by the best Biblical Expositors in reference to the Prophetic Delineation of Gospel times, but it is equally applicable and necessary to the historical narratives of Genesis, Ruth, etc.

II. The Hebrew writers often express the certainty of a thing taking place by putting it in the past tense, though the actual fulfillment may not take place for ages. This is easily understood and appreciated when the language is used by God, as when He says, in Gen. 15:18, "Unto thy seed I have given this land;" and in 17: 4, " I, lo, My covenant is with thee, and thou hast become a father of a multitude of nations."

The same thing is found in Gem 23:11, where Ephron answers Abraham; "Nay, my lord, hear me; the field I have given to thee, and the cave that is in it; to thee I have given

it; before the eyes of the sons of my people I have given it to thee; bury thy dead." And again in Abraham's answer to Ephron; "Only—if thou wouldst hear rue— I have given the money of the field; accept from me, and I bury my dead there." Again in 2 Kings 5:6, the King of Syria, writing to the King of Israel, says: "Lo, I have sent unto thee Naaman, my servant, and thou hast recovered him from his leprosy,"—considering the King of Israel as his servant, a mere expression of the master's purpose is sufficient. In Judges 8:1b, Gideon says to Zebah and Zalmunnah, " If ye had kept them alive, I had not slain yon." So in Dent. 21:18, "For all the evils that they have done"—shall have done...

III The Hebrew writers are accustomed to express laws, commands, etc., in four ways;

1.) By the regular imperative form, "Speak onto the people."

2.) By the infinitive, "Every male of you is to be circumcised."

3.) By the (so-called) future, "Let there be light;" "Thou shalt do no murder;" "Six days is work done."

4.) By the past tense, "Speak unto the sons of Israel, and thou hast said unto them."

There can be no good reason why these several peculiarities should not be exhibited in the translation of the Bible, or that they should he confounded, as they often arc, in the Common Version. In common life among ourselves, these forms of expression are frequently used for imperatives, "Go and do this,"—" This is to be done first,"—" You shall go,"—"You go and finish it." There are few languages which afford such opportunities of a literal amid idiomatic rendering of the Sacred Scriptures as the English tongue, and the present attempt will be found, it is believed, to exhibit this more than any other Translation.