Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament

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SYNTAX

OF

THE HEBREW LANGUAGE.
SYNTAX
OF
THE HEBREW LANGUAGE
OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT.

BY HEINRICH EWALD.

Translated from the Eighth German Edition 23.3.23

BY

JAMES KENNEDY, B.D.

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Translator's Preface.

More than one attempt has already been made to lay before the English reader the earlier labours of Ewald in the field of Hebrew Grammar. A complete translation, by Nicholson, of an early edition, was published at London in 1836; but so many changes were made in subsequent editions of the original, both as regards arrangement and extent, that it is long since out of date. A translation of the third edition of Ewald's Introductory Hebrew Grammar was subsequently made by J. F. Smith, and published at London in 1870; but, though the arrangement of the work is substantially the same as is found in the later editions of the larger grammar, the whole is much too brief to prove satisfactory.

The following work is a translation of the third part of Ewald's Ausführliches Lehrbuch der hebräischen Sprache des alten Bundes (Göttingen 1870). There is all the less need for rendering the whole treatise into English because the first two parts deal mainly with grammatical forms, a very full knowledge of which may be obtained from the latest editions of Gesenius (by Davies, London), from the work of W. H. Green (New York), and, more in Ewald's peculiar line, from the smaller, but excellent introductory grammar of Dr. A. B. Davidson (Edinburgh): to these works, for the sake of convenience, occasional reference has been made. But, indeed, even the labours of Ewald in that department have, in some respects, been surpassed by the colossal work of Böttcher (Ausführliches Lehrbuch, Leipzig 1866–68).
The pagination of the original is indicated by the bold figures embodied in the text (thus, [734]). A few references have been made to special treatises on Hebrew Syntax that have recently appeared.

The translator has to record his thanks for assistance kindly and freely rendered by Mr. David Patrick, M.A., and especially by the Rev. Dr. A. B. Davidson, who has done so much to stimulate and encourage him, as so many others, in the study of the Old Testament Scriptures.

_Edinburgh, December 1878._
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THE VERB-STEMS VIEWED WITH REGARD TO THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE TWO TENSES. 1

The Meaning of the Two Tenses.

[348] 134a. Since the verb signifies effective action and the
occurrence of events, while the latter, as passing on, cannot
but lead to the idea of time, distinction of tenses belongs to
the earliest stage in the formation of the verb; and every one
of the verb-stems [viz. Qal, Niphal, etc.] must equally be sub-
ject to the distinction. But the simplest distinction of time
in an action is, that the speaker first of all merely separates
between the two grand and opposite aspects under which
every conceivable action may be regarded. Man has first
acted, passed through an experience, and sees before him some-
thing that is finished, or has taken place; but this very fact
reminds him of that which does not yet exist,—that which
lies behind, and is expected. The former, or positive side,
is that of experience, objective contemplation of action; the
latter, or negative side, is the higher, subjective side of in-
dividual human thought and inference. Hence, with reference
to action, the speaker views everything either as already
finished, and thus before him, or as unfinished and non-existent,
but possibly becoming [Ger. werdend, Gr. γενώμενον] and coming:

1 [It has been deemed advisable to present, first, Ewald’s account of these
verb-forms, since much of it really and properly, though not according to
the formal arrangement which he has actually made, belongs to the depart-
ment of Syntax. For a very full and able discussion of this subject, see
Driver’s treatise, On the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew (Oxford 1874).]
he states it as something that is, or denies that there already is such a thing. There is here, as yet, nothing whatever of the three tenses precisely distinguished in later languages as past, present, and future. In fact, however, no language, when it introduces distinctions, can start from anything threefold;¹ antithesis is almost always merely simple and thorough-going, because elicited by its [counter] thesis: first, statement (thesis), then its counter-statement (antithesis). Thus, both in thought and language, every distinction is at first drawn between no more than two things. Just as, in the sphere of personality, there is, first of all, distinction made merely between I and thou, and these two are only afterwards distinguished from the absolutely remote he (see § 105e); as, secondly, in the case of all existent things, there is, first of all, distinction made only between the animate and the inanimate, and then, in the former class, between the masculine and the feminine (see § 171): so, in the primitive languages, the distinction of tenses has by no means originated with our three tenses, or with the present as one of these three. Now, the Hebrew has remained substantially upon the ancient basis of this most simple distinction, and it is exactly in this respect that it is still very strongly distinguished from later Semitic languages; it is only to a limited extent [350] that the participle is employed as a specification of time, in addition to these two, which still continue to be the main divisions (see § 168).

b. These two ideas, viz. of what is complete and what is incomplete (or coming), sharply distinguished from the point of time at which the speaker takes his stand, lead, of course,

¹ I have always shown, orally, in my lectures on Sanskrit grammar, that, in the Indo-Germanic languages also, all the tenses and moods now employed, which have been so variously developed into their present condition, point back to no more than two distinctions of time, just as in Semitic. As regards the tenses, the same thing may be shown to hold in the Turkish, Coptic, and other languages. Thus, in Odschi (according to Riis, Basel 1853), there is first a perfect (formed by using a— ; cf. § 231b), and, in direct contrast with this, a shorter imperfect; and, only afterwards, a more definite future, present, and present future. In many respects the Bornuuese language also is very similar; see Kölle on the Kanuri language (London 1854), p. 226 ff.; see also the Amer. Oriental Journal, i. p. 370, cf. with p. 391.