



1960

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Recommended Citation

Thomas, David D. (1960) "Hebrew tense reverser," *Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session*: Vol. 4, Article 8.

DOI: 10.31356/silwp.vol04.08

Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/sil-work-papers/vol4/iss1/8>

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Hebrew Tense Reverser

Hebrew has two tenses (or better, probably, two modes), the perfect and the imperfect. The perfect tense basically signifies that the action of the verb is regarded as complete in the mind of the speaker; this usually is used with past action, but can on occasion be used for present or even future action, as in Joel 2:21 higdil yehowah la'asoθ 'the LORD will do great things.' The imperfect tense basically signifies that the action of the verb is regarded as not yet completed in the mind of the speaker: this is usually used with future action, as in Joel 2:28 ?ešpok ?eθ-ruxi 'al kal basar 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.'

The perfect tense is regularly indicated by the perfect tense stem (or action) infixes and by perfect tense person subject indicators, e.g. halakti 'I walked' h.l.k 'walk' .a.a. 'normal (Qal) phase indicator (perfect)' ti 'I'. The imperfect tense is indicated by the corresponding imperfect indicators, yiqtol 'he will kill' q.t.l 'kill' .i..o. 'normal (Qal) action indicator (imperfect)' y 'he (impf)'. But the addition of wə- 'and' to the perfect or the allomorph wəC- to the imperfect reverses the meaning to that of the opposite tense, thus wəhalakti 'and I will walk', and wəyiqtol 'and he killed'. The allomorph u- occurs before bilabial consonants in the imperfect tense, as in ubanah 'and he will build.' In some forms of the imperfect the reverser is accompanied by a shortening of the verb stem, but this shortening is variable and dependent on many factors.

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