

**01390** הָיָה found in TWOT #491

0491.0 הָיָה (*hāyâ*) to be, become, exist, happen.

This verb appears 3,540 times in Biblical Hebrew, and all of these are in the Qal stem except for twenty-one uses of the Niphal. The verb is related to another Hebrew word meaning "to become," *hāwâ* (only five times: Gen 27:29; Isa 16:4; Eccl 2:22; Eccl 11:3; Neh 6:6), and the same verb in Biblical Aramaic, *hāwâ* (71 times). In Akkadian its phonetic equivalent, *ewû*, means "to turn oneself into, to become like." To express being or existence Akkadian uses not *ewû* but *bashû* (much like Ugaritic and Phoenician *kun*).

Very seldom in the OT is *hāyâ* used to denote either simple existence or the identification of a thing or person. This can be illustrated by a quick glance at almost any page of the KJV on which one will find numerous examples of words such as "is, are, was, were," in italics, indicating that these are additions by the translators for the sake of smoothness, but not in the Hebrew itself. In such cases the Hebrew employs what is known grammatically as a nominal sentence, which we may define most simply as a sentence lacking verb or a copula, for example: I (am) the Lord your God; the Lord (is) a sun and shield; the land (is) good; and in the NT, blessed (are) the poor. This almost total lack of *hāyâ* as a copula or existential particle has led some to use this phenomenon as confirming evidence that "static" thought was alien to the Hebrews, the latter thinking only in "dynamic" categories (see Boman in the bibliography below).

An alternative way in Hebrew to express existence besides the nominal sentence is by the particles *yēsh* (positive) and *'ayin* (negative), really another type of nominal sentence "perhaps 'there are' fifty righteous in the city"; " 'there is' no God." Both of these words are more substantival in nature than they are verbal, and in function they resemble the French *il y a* and the German *es gibt*.

There are instances, however, where *hāyâ* is used with a predicate adjective: (a) in the description of a past situation which no longer exists, "The earth was (*hay'etâ*) formless and void" (Gen 1:2); (b) in historical narration, "The serpent was (*hāyâ*) more subtle than any beast of the field" (Gen 3:1); (c) in the expression of a gnomic truth, "It is not good that man should be (*hēyôl*) alone" (Gen 2:18). Notice the juxtaposition of the verbal sentence, with *hāyâ* and a nominal sentence without it: "You shall be (*tihyû*) holy for I (am) holy (*qādôsh'ānî*, Lev 19:2). Boman would account for the absence of a copula in the latter part of this phrase by

stating that the predicate (holy) is inherent in the subject (God) and hence the copula is unnecessary. He would also add that the first "be" really means "become." To jump from this observation, however, to the conclusion that the basic meaning of "to be" in the Bible is "to become" seems to be unwarranted.

Of special import is the use of the verb *hāyâ* in covenant formulae: I will be your God and you will be my people (Jer 7:23; Jer 11:4; Jer 24:7; Jer 31:33; etc.), and in the context of God's promises of blessings and judgments: and I will make of you a great nation... and you shall be a blessing (Gen 12:2). A frequent, although perhaps misleading, translation of *hāyâ* is, as we have noted above, "to come." This can be seen in connection with God's spirit "coming" upon an individual (Jud 11:29; 1Sam 19:20), and in those places where God's word "came" to someone (Gen 15:1; 1Sam 15:10; 2Sam 7:4; Jer 36:1).

A final and brief word may be said about the meaning and interpretation of Jehovah/Yahweh. It seems beyond doubt that the name contains the verb *hāyâ* "to be" (but also see article YHWH). The question is whether or not it is the verb "to be" in the Qal, "He is," or the Hiphil, "He causes to be," a view championed by W. F. Albright. The strongest objection to this latter interpretation is that it necessitates a correction in the reading of the key text in Exo 3:14; "I am that I am." Most likely the name should be translated something like "I am he who is," or "I am he who exists" as reflected by the LXX's *ego eimi ho õv*. The echo of this is found surely in the NT, Rev 1:8. More than anything perhaps, the "is-ness" of God is expressive both of his presence and his existence. Neither concept can be said to be more important than the other.

Bibliography: Barr, James, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford University Press, 1961, esp. pp. 58-72, in opposition to Boman's emphasis on the "dynamic" versus "existential" character of *hāyâ*. Boman, T., *Hebrew Thought Compared With Greek*, trans. J. L. Moreau, London: SCM, 1960, esp. pp. 38-49. Devaux R., "The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH," in *Proclamation and Presence*, eds. J. 1. Durham and J. R. Porter, London: SCM, 1970, pp. 48-75, with citation of the appropriate bibliography of studies on the meaning of the Tetragrammaton. Preuss, H. D., "Ich will mit dir Sein," *ZAW* 80: 139-73. Schild, E., "On Exodus iii 14: 'I am that I am'," *VT* 4: 296-302. *THAT*, I, pp. 477-85. V.P.H.