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Ernst Jenni

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This volume collects nine studies by Ernst Jenni, retired professor for Old Testament and Semitic Languages at the University of Basel. The first eight studies were originally published in the period 2007–2009, while the last and most extensive study, devoted to the function of the *niphal* and *hithpael* in Biblical Hebrew, is published for the first time in the present volume.

For all interested in the study of the language of the Hebrew Bible, Ernst Jenni needs no introduction. He has published broadly on a wide range of linguistic questions related to the Hebrew Bible in the course of over sixty years. Among his most famous works are the thorough and ground-breaking investigations of the Hebrew *piel* and the prepositions *beth*, *kaph*, and *lamed*.

The present volume is the third in a series called *Studien zur Sprachwelt des Alten Testaments* that collects mostly shorter studies on various aspects of Biblical Hebrew. The topics dealt with in this volume include: temporal adverbs; temporal markers in the book of Zechariah; evaluative temporal markers; comparative markers; the distinctive roles of adjectives and verbs of quality (“Eigenschaftsverben”); hyperbolic language; Ps 30:6a; the

etymology of the modal particle *na*; and *niphal* and *hithpael*. Five of these nine studies will be examined in this review.

The first three studies deal with questions of temporal markers in the Hebrew Bible. The opening essay, “Adverbiale Zeitbestimmungen im klassischen Hebräisch,” was published originally in *ZAH* 17–20 (2004–2007): 92–108. Jenni begins by pointing to the fact that temporal relations are indicated by a broad range of grammatical and lexical markers, with the temporal aspects embodied in verbal forms playing a crucial role in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, temporal adverbs (e.g., *’az*, “then”) or prepositional phrases (e.g., *ba-boqer*, “in the morning”) are also important.

In his rule 1, Jenni maintains that the biblical concept of time must be derived from the texts (*parole*), not from the language structure (*langue*). Why the language structure is apodictically disqualified as a possible source of information on this topic is a question that is not taken up further. Jenni then observes that all cultures contain a fundamental human concept of time that is, however, developed in different ways. The basic time concept is defined as follows: Time is regarded as a sequence of moments or intervals on an unlimited time-line. The intervals have a beginning (onset), duration, and end (offset). Intervals that overlap or include one another are simultaneous; those that do not are anterior or posterior. Intervals are shorter or longer, which means that they can be measured quantitatively; however, they are not marked qualitatively (as opposed to their contents). Time itself (as opposed to its contents) is not cyclical but linear.

This concept of time is “objective,” nondeictic. The nondeictic time-line approach (before, simultaneous, after) must be distinguished from the deictic approach that also takes into consideration the personal observer who is the point of orientation (rule 2). In this approach, the time line is organized in relation to the observer as past, present, and future. The temporal deixis is expressed mostly by the temporal aspects of verbal forms but also by temporal adverbs. Two examples: While German “vorher” is nondeictic, German “vorhin” is deictic; Hebrew *mohorat* is nondeictic, while Hebrew *mahar* is deictic.

In a subsequent paragraph Jenni presents an overview of the possible functions of temporal adverbials. The first category covers “simple situations,” with the rubrics simultaneous location (nondeictic or deictic), sequential location (anterior or posterior), sequential durative (nondeictic or deictic), distance (anterior or posterior), extent (nondeictic or deictic); the second category covers “complex situations,” with the rubrics iteration, frequency, sequence, and addition.

Jenni then turns to the fundamental relationship between the notions of space and time. He observes that generally a metaphorical transfer is made from the realm of space to the realm of time, not the other way round. In this process, time is conceived as a frontal-horizontal axis, almost never as a vertical axis. Moreover, in most languages what is anterior in the realm of time is related to the front in the realm of space, and what is posterior in the realm of time to the rear in the realm of space, based on the moving-time-model or the moving-ego-model. The metaphorical use of spatial terms in this process is always nondeictic (rule 6). In the last paragraph Jenni elaborates on the so-called rower simile that Wolff introduced in 1973 in his explanation of Ps 143:5 and rejects Boman's understanding of the biblical conception of time as inadequate, because it builds on speculations on the structure of the Hebrew language instead of an exclusive focus on the actual texts.

The third study in the trilogy on temporal markers, "Bewertete Zeitbestimmungen," was originally published in *Sprachliche Tiefe—Theologische Weite* (ed. O. Dyma and A. Michel; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2008). This study looks at adverbial temporal expressions in which the speaker, beyond the simple indication of time (such as in "now"), also expresses his own evaluation of a temporal situation, by comparing perception with reality (such as in "already now"). Jenni observes that such comparisons, in which perceived temporal localizations are corrected by factual ones, can be made either explicitly or implicitly. As opposed to German, such corrections are normally not expressed lexically in Biblical Hebrew; one has to resort to the context in order to find out whether subjective evaluations are intended or not. This phenomenon can be related to the fact that Biblical Hebrew lacks comparative forms that mark gradual differences. A special paragraph is devoted to the analysis of *'od* ("still") and *kebar* ("already"). Jenni also mentions cases in which evaluation of temporal situations are not expressed by temporal adverbs but by temporal verbs, such as *'hr qal* and *piel* and *qdm piel*. Lastly, Jenni points to the fact that the evaluation of a temporal situation does not need to function as a correction of a previous expectation; rather, the evaluation can also confirm the expectation (German "eben," "gerade," etc.). The clearest lexical indication of this in biblical Hebrew is *'etsem*.

The next study is devoted to the comparative: "Untersuchungen zur Komparation im hebräischen Alten Testament" (originally published in *Mein Haus wird ein Bethaus für alle Völker genannt werden* (ed. J. Männchen; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2007). Jenni begins by stating that Hebrew adjectives have no special morphemes to express gradation/comparison. What is used instead is a construction with *min comparativum*. Jenni also mentions that not only adjectives but also verbs of quality can be used to express gradation/comparison. In the subsequent paragraph Jenni presents a classification of the approximately forty various gradable adjectives used with *min comparativum* (with a total

of 180 occurrences) according to meaning. As opposed to absolute adjectives (e.g., “childless”), these adjectives are relative and as such point to a comparison. Jenni then adds a classification of the more than fifty verbs of quality (total of 140 occurrences), using the same semantic groups as with the adjectives. What follows is a classification of comparative constructions into different types of comparison: ordinary comparison, with A and B belonging to the same class of entities (e.g., “Pharaoh greater than Joseph”); partitive-elative comparison, with a singular A being opposed to a plural B within the same class of entities (e.g., “Deborah praised above all women”); rhetorical-expressive comparison, with A and B belonging to different classes of entities (e.g., “the enemies more numerous than locusts”); excessive degree with norm-comparative: a complex comparison in which the predicated quality is subjectively evaluated and related to a norm that is either missed or reached or exceeded (e.g., “this people is too strong for us”); and declaration of impossibility: A and B belong to two completely different categories of meaning, and there is no real comparison (e.g., “this thing is heavier than you (-> too difficult for you”). The last type points to a gradual shift from *min comparativum* (“seen from...”) to *min separativum* (“unattainable from...”). This shift is not surprising because Hebrew prepositions in general do not differentiate between local and directional meanings.

A somewhat related topic is taken up in “Sprachliche Übertreibungen im Alten Testament,” first published in *Sprachen—Bilder—Klänge* (ed. C. Karrer-Grube et al.; Münster, 2009). Jenni first points to the difficulty of differentiating in concrete cases between rhetorical exaggeration and superlative/elative expressions because the difference is not marked grammatically/lexically. The problem arises especially in poetic texts. Jenni then presents a classification of the biblical cases of rhetorical exaggeration under the two main headings of quantitative and qualitative exaggeration, each group subdivided into several subcategories. One of the categories of the first group is “everything-nothing.” With regard to *kol*, Jenni makes the important observation that “all” can actually mean “a high number,” as in 1 Kgs 14:23. Also important are Jenni’s remarks concerning the last category mentioned in the group of qualitative exaggerations, that is, “scheinbare Übertreibungen.” He points out, for example, that “naked” does not necessarily need to mean fully naked but can refer to a situation in which a person is merely poorly dressed; similarly, “to hate” does not necessarily imply an outright contempt of a person but can refer to a lesser degree of love as compared to the relation with another person who is more intensely loved (“set back,” as in Gen 29:31, 33). After the classification of the different types of rhetorical exaggerations, Jenni adds a discussion of the phenomenon of rhetorical exaggeration in which he stresses the following points: (1) exaggeration is not related to one word but to an entire predication; (2) exaggeration normally takes place in the context of direct speech, only exceptionally in narrative reports; (3) exaggeration is

mostly related to wishes, hypothetical utterances, and utterances referring to the future; (4) exaggeration is often embedded in contexts of intensified speech, such as prophetic announcements of doom or hymns of lament; (5) there is a great variation in motives for exaggeration and intended perlocutionary effects; and (6) exegetes tend to reinterpret all too paradoxical exaggerations by means of rationalization, as in 2 Sam 5:6 and Neh 3:35.

The final and central study in the present collection is “Nif'al und Hitpa'el im Biblisch-Hebräischen.” Before addressing the specific question of the differences between the *niphal* and *hithpael* conjugations, Jenni sheds light on the broader context in which this question is placed by investigating the topics of lexical aspect (Aktionsart) and voice (Diathese) of verbs in their syntactical context. With regards to Aktionsart, Vendler's four categories are used: state, activity, accomplishment, achievement, with their markers \pm dynamic (versus static), \pm telic, \pm momentaneous (versus durative), added by Dik's \pm control. Jenni observes that change in syntactic context can result in the change of the “Aktionsart” of a given verb, with the possible direction of change being restricted to a movement from – to +. As far as Diathese is concerned, Jenni focuses on a discussion of the term *reflexive*. In the German language, “echte Reflexiva” (as in “sich beeilen”) can be distinguished from “unechten Reflexiva” (as in “sich waschen”); in the latter case, the co-referential “sich” is used like another object in a facultative way. Jenni points out that in his study the term *reflexive* is used only for “unechte Reflexiva,” while “echte Reflexiva” are designated as “middle voice”/medium.

There are many languages that distinguish a middle voice from the active and passive voices, often marked by middle-markers. The middle voice is a category that refers to the occupation of the subject with itself; there are two nondistinctive co-referential participants—as opposed to the direct reflexive voice (“unechte Reflexiva”) that has two co-referential participants that are treated as distinguished; the transitive active voice that has distinguished agent and patient; the passive voice that has a patient and a deducible agent; and the common intransitive voice with only one participant.

Niphal and *hithpael* are understood as Biblical Hebrew middle voices, with the -n- of the *niphal* and the -t- of the *hithpael* as middle-markers. The two stems, as for example *hiphil* and *piel*, must be understood as modifications of the basic stem (*qal*) and the basic meaning of a verb, by means of which a complex structure develops out of the simple verb. The specific basic proposition is overlaid by a very general matrix proposition. In the *hiphil* and *niphal*, the superpredicate is the “letting happen” of an objective verbal statement (“causative”; supersubject lets happen that II; II: verbal proposition with subsubject and subpredicate); in the *piel* and *hithpael*, it is the “making” of a subjective predicative statement (“factitive”; supersubject makes that II; II: predicative adjectival nominal proposition with subsubject and subpredicate).

In the transitive *hiphil* and the transitive *piel*, the causative and factitive supersubject is not co-referential with the subsubject; in the *niphal* and *hithpael* (and in the intransitive, medial *hiphil*), however, the two are co-referential. In this case, the subject is concerned with itself, not reflexively as a differentiated object but as an undifferentiated middle. Jenni gives the following examples:

Piel: Exod 19:14: Moses makes that II; II: the people is holy.

Hiphil: Isa 29:23: One/they will cause that II; II: my name will remain holy.

Niphal: Isa 5:16: The holy God let happen that II; II: he showed himself holy through justice (with subsubject = supersubject).

Hithpael: Neh 12:30: The priests and Levites made that II; II: they are clean (with subsubject = supersubject).

The semantic distinction between the active and passive, which is obligatory, for example, in English, can only be derived from the context in Hebrew. The middle (or mediopassive) *niphal* is neither reflexive nor passive but rather expresses a broad range of events from volitive effecting and achieving to permissive enabling and allowing and tolerative undergoing and enduring to obligative bearing and suffering. The *hithpael* is the middle voice of the *piel*. As in the case of the *piel*, it is not the accomplishment (focus on the course of an action up to the result, as in *hiphil* and *niphal*), but the achievement (focus on the result only) that is expressed (as in *piel*). What is modified in the *hithpael* (as in the *piel*) is not a verbal proposition (as in *hiphil* and *niphal*) but a predicative adjectival (nominal) proposition.

Turning to the text-pragmatical level, Jenni describes the difference between *niphal* and *hithpael* as follows: The *niphal* is text-coherent; the *hithpael* contributes new information. What emerges, then, is that the text-pragmatical difference between predicatively used adjectives that express a new situation (“new”) and the property verbs that, like attributive and substantivized adjectives, convey to the addressee information that is already known and expected (“given”), is reflected in the difference between the *niphal* (“given”) and *hithpael* (“new”) stems.

In addition, it can be observed that in the *niphal* the event is often modally marked, whereas in the *hithpael* the nominal result can be modified alethically (declarative-estimative force). A further difference between the two stems is that the active and passive processes are clearly distinguishable when a predicative result is effected, even if the actor is not specified in Hebrew. There is, therefore, no passive *hithpael* (apparent exceptions

are due to errors in the text or to Aramaic influence); the passive stem *pual* serves for this purpose. In the *niphal*, which expresses “letting happen,” a passive voice is not necessary.

Jenni’s study examines all *hithpael* verbs (including subsidiary forms such as the *hithpolel* and the *hithpoel*) in the Masoretic Text and all *niphal* verbs coexisting with the *hithpael*; of those not coexisting with the *hithpael*, those that are attested at least twenty times are examined, usually including the action types (state, activity, accomplishment, achievement), since they can have a restrictive effect in the *hithpael* (*piel/hiphil*). The intransitive *hiphil* (ca. sixty verbs with some 520 attestations) is also treated, defined as medial *hiphil* and differentiated from the current/specific *niphal* and *hithpael* occurrences as expressing general activation of abilities and forms of behavior. The study also includes a list ordered by semantic domain of the more than two hundred *niphal* and *hithpael* verbs treated that are used medially.

This extended study of the *niphal* and *hithpael* conjugations is a must read for those interested in Hebrew grammar and especially for all involved in the teaching of Biblical Hebrew. The explanation of these conjugations presents a significant step forward in the understanding of the Hebrew verbal system and may well prove to be as pioneering as Jenni’s earlier study on the *piel*.

The present volume is an important contribution to the advancement of the understanding of the Hebrew language. It can therefore be strongly recommended to all those interested in the language of the Hebrew Bible.