

STUDIES IN HEBREW SYNONYMS

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Studies in Hebrew Synonyms by James Kennedy

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JAMES KENNEDY

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SYNONYMS**

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IN
HEBREW SYNONYMS.

BY
JAMES KENNEDY,
AUTHOR OF "AN INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL HEBREW."

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,
14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
20 SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH;
AND
7 BROAD STREET, OXFORD.
1898.

PREFACE

The publication of the following essays may be helpful in directing increased attention to a field of investigation which, although rather neglected, is nevertheless capable of yielding considerable fruit in return for careful cultivation. The material here presented will enable the reader to form a general estimate of the gains to Biblical science which may be derived from patient observation of the way in which even single words are employed by the writers of the Hebrew Scriptures.

In this department, more frequently than many imagine, it has been assumed that terms bearing the same general meaning, and presenting no perceptible difference in use, are really indistinguishable. This assumption has been further considered as confirmed by another, equally erroneous, regarding the parallelism prominent in Hebrew poetry. Here also it has been too commonly imagined that the different members present no practical difference of idea, the later members being substantially repetitions of the same thought as had been already expressed in the initial line. Indolence has here helped to confirm our ignorance. A sounder view of ancient Hebrew poetry, however, has conduced to the attainment of more accurate conceptions regarding the language generally. Happily, the conviction grows that there surely must be some distinctive difference in sense and use between different words in the same language. It is hardly reasonable to suppose that new words should be coined and put in circulation merely for variety, to bear exactly the same sense as other terms already used. We thus have warrant rather to assume that there must be some real difference in meaning when we find a difference of terms.

As the primary object in these investigations has been to determine the force and application, in Biblical Hebrew, of the words discussed, and to indicate as precisely as possible, in English, the ideas ordinarily associated with these terms in the minds of the Scripture writers, many interesting details have been intentionally omitted, as calculated to confuse the mind of the reader. Thus, it might interest many to compare the ascertained significations of the Hebrew terms with words of like import in other languages. Such connections, indeed, have occasionally been indicated, particularly when these analogous cases seemed likely to prove useful as illustrations; but as a rule they have been left unnoticed, lest they should distract attention from the main end in view. More especially, no endeavour has been made to point out the relation subsisting between the Hebrew words discussed and cognate terms in sister languages. Here, in particular, comparison may seriously mislead; for, even when the primary idea of the Shemitic root may seem to have been ascertained, the actual meaning of the term in Bible Hebrew may be metaphorical, and far removed from the original sense. Especially in the case of words rarely occurring in the Hebrew, but quite common in the cognate languages, where their use and meaning are indubitable, it is by no means safe to conclude that the Scriptural usage of the terms must be precisely the same as is proved for their congeners in the sister tongues. A fundamental likeness must indeed obtain throughout, but there is often an important difference, in sense or use, of the same term in different languages.¹

Special caution is required with reference to later Hebrew. Even a slight acquaintance with Neo-Hebraic shows new shades of meaning still unknown in the Old Testament.² The influence of these later meanings on many Jewish writers is so strong, yet subtle, that some who have written on the present topic have been at times mis-

¹ A brief experience in learning French convinces us that 'je demande' is not exactly 'I demand,' that 'parents' are not what we understand by 'parents,' that when a French mother says 'mon enfant' she does not always mean her 'infant,' and that 'editeur' must not be always rendered 'editor.'

² Thus חֲסִידוּת 'righteousness' came to signify a kind of work-righteousness, viz. alms-giving (cf. the doubtful reading *δικαιοσύνη* or *ἐλεημοσύνη* in Matt. 6:1); לִשׁוֹן 'tongue' afterwards means a word, signification, etc. See a useful list of such words in Strack and Siegfried's *Neuhebr. Sprache*, S. 36. The transition to later usage is already visible in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

led, though all unconsciously, in their interpretations of the Scripture text. While many acute remarks and valuable hints are to be found in their writings, these must be read with caution and discrimination.

Two important advantages are derivable from such investigations. Firstly and directly, in determining the precise sense of words employed in Scripture, there is a distinct gain appreciable even by ordinary readers, but especially valuable and helpful to expositors. Secondly and secondarily, reliable guidance is afforded in recovering the true text of the Hebrew Scriptures,¹ which, through the failings of transcribers and from other natural causes, has in varying degree become corrupt, and hence at least obscure.

The literature on this subject is more extensive than might at first be supposed. So thorough and discriminating an account has already been given, by F. Mühlau, of works in this field, that we merely refer our readers to his remarks,² and add supplementary notes regarding treatises which have appeared since the publication of his paper. It unfortunately holds true that a merely historical interest attaches to most of the works he reviews, which were written without adequate consideration of the Scripture usage, many distinctions affirmed being purely fanciful or arbitrary. Of works mentioned by Mühlau, perhaps the most valuable are the few and rare dissertations by H. S. Reimarus,³ the full and acute elucidations of S. Pappenheim,⁴ unfortunately rather inaccessible; and the pleasant, pregnant hints of S. D. Luzzatto.⁵

Of treatises in Rabbinical Hebrew, published since Mühlau's article appeared, we may specify that of Abraham Bedarschi, whose valuable work remained in manuscript from the 13th century till a recent date;⁶ of Moses Tedeschi, whose mechanical method of reducing the triliteral Hebrew terms to biliteral originals, in which he

¹ Examples of textual emendations thus obtained will be found on pages 13, 42, 69, 80, 99, and 129.

² *Geschichte der hebräischen Synonymik*, in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Band XVII (1863), 316-335.

³ *De differentiis vocum Hebraicarum, Wittebergæ Saxonum, 1717-18, 4to.*

⁴ His work (in Rabbinical Hebrew) appeared at intervals, 1784-1831.

⁵ These first appeared in his Rabbinical magazine entitled *מכתרי קטנים*, but have since been collected into a booklet, *בית המוצר*, Przemysl, 1888.

⁶ The Hebrew title is *ספר חזקתם תכנית*, Amsterdam, 1865.

seeks the root-idea and by this fixes the sense, has diminished the value and importance of his work ;¹ and of M. Malbim, whose brief and methodical treatise,² though sometimes devoid of illustrations, shows careful observation and affords much help.

German scholars have produced a number of treatises, varying in compass and in value. C. Oswald, in a gymnasial programm,³ has given a succinct account of Hebrew verbs ; his remarks are generally just, and perhaps as fully illustrated as his limits would allow. C. von Orelli has discussed a single group of terms⁴ so thoroughly as to leave little that could be added to his remarks. With similar scholarship, but in more philosophic form, V. Ryssel has traced through the Shemitic languages generally another class of terms.⁵ The more extensive but far less intensive work of L. Kapff, posthumously edited by his friend L. Ableiter, is mainly a handy Hebrew vocabulary,⁶ with occasional remarks on synonyms. S. Levin has given us a small but welcome instalment⁷ of a systematic treatise ; while L. Kleimenhagen offers brief and unpretentious but sound remarks upon select groups of synonyms.⁸

In English, as yet, comparatively little has been published. The Hebrew Review for 1835-36 contains some short but helpful notes. Valuable hints may be gained from the laborious lexicon⁹ by Canon W. Wilson, of Winchester, though his remarks cannot always be justified. The brochures of E. G. King¹⁰ and A. W. Hands¹¹ are rather prefatory and inconclusive. But valuable results are given in the work of Canon R. B. Girdlestone,¹² despite undue deference shown to the Septuagint.

¹ Thesaurus synonymiorum lingue Hebraicae. Padua, 1870.

² מספר יאיר אור, published at Warsaw, 1892.

³ Beiträge zur hebr. Synonymik, I. Theil : Verba. Stuttgart, 1869.

⁴ Die hebr. Synonyma der Zeit und Ewigkeit. Leipzig, 1871.

⁵ Die Synonyma des Wahren und Guten. Leipzig, 1872.

⁶ Hebr. Vocabularium in alphabetischer Ordnung. Leipzig, 1831.

⁷ Versuch einer hebr. Synonymik. Berlin, 1894.

⁸ Beiträge zur Synonymik der hebr. Sprache. Frankfurt a. M., 1896.

⁹ The Bible Student's Guide...2nd edition. London, 1870.

¹⁰ Hebrew words and synonyms : the names of God. Cambridge, 1864.

¹¹ Introduction to Hebrew synonyms expressing fear. Gloucester, 1891.

¹² Old Testament synonyms... 2nd edition. London, 1897.

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