

2. Using the Grammar

Apart from a direct reading and paragraph study, there are four basic ways in which Gesenius (or any grammar) may prove useful to you.

- a. Continuing research. The grammar will explain the technicalities of vowel and consonant change as well as the historical development of forms and linguistic phenomena. Many students never get to this point...it is pretty sophisticated stuff.
- b. Spot checking unusual forms. Gesenius has a table of these with discussion in the body of the book. An unintelligible form in your reading may have a discussion in the grammar that would save the day.
- c. Spot study of Biblical passages from which grammatical notes are prepared. Gesenius has an appendix of Bible passages consulted (most grammars do) and looking up the Bible passage in the place of study may give you light on a hard or unusual form.
- d. Better understanding of speech devices and idiomatic expressions peculiar to the language of study.

Naturally the use of the grammar as a device to shorten the lives of spiders, flies, ants, etc., is not conscientized in this course.

3. Cautionary note

Language is made by people who speak it, not by the scholars who write the books about it. Therefore you will see a lot of things in any language which are contrary to the teaching and instruction of the grammar books. Do not change the language to fit the grammar and do not say that the usage is incorrect unless there is some rebuking passage in the context. Grammars are not normative but should be descriptive and seek to postulate norms from what they describe. In your formal study a particular word may have always had a sheva at a particular point. Suddenly you see it with a seghol. It merely shows that the people who spoke the language were more interested in communication and less interested in some formal theory of grammar. If you can handle this thought, you will be spared a lot of pain in the "but that's not the way we learned it" business. Excellent notes are found on this concept in Sperber: An Historical Grammar of the Hebrew Language.

C. THE CONCORDANCE

A concordance gives the places of occurrences of words and phrases. The more the concordance gives the total language picture the more helpful it is in understanding a word in context.

1. Recommendations:

- Lisowski: Handkonkordanz...expensive and handwritten. Hebrew context.
- Mandelker: Hebrew Lexicon...useful, inexpensive, not so exhaustive.