

V. THE WIDER USE OF THE VERB TENSES

- Content:
- A. Introductory Note
  - B. The Hebrew Perfect system
    - 1. action complete in time past
    - 2. action completed but still exerting influence
    - 3. actions completed but occurrence in the future
    - 4. actions hypothetical which would have been complete had they occurred.
  - C. The Hebrew Imperfect system
    - 1. actions with reference to past time
    - 2. actions showing continuous contemporary action
    - 3. actions of the simple future
    - 4. actions for will or desire
  - D. The Imperative (actually part of the Imperfect system)
  - E. Conclusion

A. INTRODUCTORY NOTE

There is the reality of tense in every language. It grows in the minds of the users as the language develops through use although many of the users would be hard pressed to define it. They use the language and have comprehension of the changes, hearing it spoken and understanding the tone and circumstances of what is said. In a later day they may be able to explain the usages but very often, at the time, they could not explain to you the technical idea of syntax and usage even though they may just have said it and said it correctly.

So it is that in Greek we find very wide usage of the individual verb tenses. Several varieties of aorists, imperfects, perfects, futures, presents, etc., abound. An unknowing student may think these are made by the grammarians (and there is some danger of that) but those who know their own languages well with their various refinements, will know that verb usage is rarely static. It is as flexible as the mind and will of the speaker.

In Hebrew we distinguish two basic tenses or tense families, although teachers hate such overly simplified definitions. We speak of the "perfect" as a family that includes the perfect tense and participle ideas and we note the "imperfect" as a family that includes the simple imperfect, imperative and infinitive constructions. Generally speaking we note that the first is concerned with matters of completeness while the second is built around matters lacking in completion although we find varied ways to make the one do the other! While there may be some problems in this description, the general character is this:

Perfect equates with completion

Imperfect equates with incompleteness.