

c. Development of Hebrew --in brief

Biblical or classical Hebrew was the language of the Abrahamic clan and is the language of the text of the Old Testament. It has a limited vocabulary, a simplified syntax, and a minimal declension growth.

Rabbinical Hebrew developed towards the end of the first millenium of the Christian era and included terms, etc., of the various schools. Pronunciations in later periods were altered and eventually a division in eastern and western Hebrew (Ashkenazi as opposed to Sephardic) would develop. It is not major as languages go but is more like the dialectical difference in English. This was the synagogical Hebrew of the middle ages and the earlier part of our day as well.

Modern Hebrew is a return to the classical pattern with slight modifications, grammatical calculations and wider vocabulary. It has returned as a spoken language in force after the development of the Zionist movement. Those interested in this will find the book by Robert St. John TONGUE OF THE PROPHETS to be a fascinating account. A different work but of equal importance and interest is Edward Horowitz: HOW THE HEBREW LANGUAGE GREW.

d. Particular Expressions of Hebrew

Among these we mention the temporal qualities in which matters are set in a state of being more than in a condition of time. The nominal presentations with a limit of two "cases" are also striking and the categories of grammar building words about the nouns and verbs are of interest to us. It is important to remember that grammar is not devised by grammarians but by the people using the language. Usage and understanding determine "proper grammar." The linguist therefore must be a descriptive worker, not a prescriptive theoretician. Sperber, commenting on the inadequacy of the footnotes in Kittel's work, says: "It is high time that Bible scholars outgrow this attitude of superiority, and approach the Bible not as schoolmasters teaching the prophets how Hebrew sentences should be formed and Hebrew words spelled; but as humble students of these great masters of Hebrew, anxious to learn from them." (HISTORICAL GRAMMAR, p. 104).

To this, TVT gives hearty assent.