Reconsidering the So-Called Prophetic Perfect

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1.0 Introduction

The future time use of the suffix conjugation (SC) in Biblical Hebrew (BH) has been a perennial challenge for biblical philologists since the time of the early Hebrew grammarians in the Medieval Era. Abraham ibn Ezra, for example, observed that the prophets would customarily use the SC, which he considered a past tense ([char],), to speak of future situations.\(^1\) Ibn Ezra, Qimhi, and others essentially considered the future use of the SC a rhetorical device, though they did not call it that. They suggested that the past tense was used for future situations when they were firmly decided or considered to be absolutely certain – so certain that they are thought of as already done.\(^2\) Over the last millennium, many scholars have wonder at the apparent contradiction of the SC, often presumed to be a past tense, being used to refer to future situations. However, Heinrich Ewald’s aspectual approach to the BH verbal system along with Samuel Driver’s popularization of a modified form of Ewald’s approach would come to shape the way philologists and biblical scholars of the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries would understand the future time use of the SC.

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Ewald’s theory of the BH verbal system began to take shape in the first few editions of his Hebrew grammar, published in the 1820’s and 30’s. He took a radically different approach from earlier and contemporary scholars, who all considered tense the primary signification of the finite verb forms. He argued that the SC referred to situations that were completed (hence the term perfect), that is “already finished, done, and therefore ... definite and certain.” Since the form did not locate situations in any specific time, it could be used to refer to completed situations in the past and present, and even to future situations that were by “the intention or the imagination of the speaker” considered “already as good as done,” and “therefore as perfectly unconditional and certain.”

Meanwhile, another scholar was developing a new tensed approach to the BH verbal system. Samuel Lee claimed that the SC was a past tense, and argued that when the SC referred to situations that were not past from the speech time (i.e, not absolutely past), they were past from another point in time (i.e., they were relatively past). He posited that the Hebrew authors could metaphorically transport themselves and their audiences to a future time and describe events from that point in time. Thus an event that was future from the speech time was past from the point in time from which the author described it. He claimed that this was used in prophetic utterances for the purpose of connoting certainty and assurance.

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Later in the 19th century, Driver took the aspectual approach of Ewald and added to it the temporal transporting of Lee to create what is known today as the traditional description of the prophetic perfect. According to Driver, the Hebrew authors would transport themselves to a future time, which he called the *ideal standpoint*, and describe events that were still future and undone from the speech time (i.e., the *real standpoint*), as if they were already completed.8

Although Driver’s approach is the traditional one in BH studies and it can be found in commentaries and grammars from the late 19th century to today, there has been a lot of dissatisfaction with the category among scholars over the past century and a half, and especially the past several decades. Yet it has remained one of the most under-examined categories in the BH verbal system, as only a handful of studies have been dedicated to closely examining it.9 Perhaps the most obvious problem with the Prophetic Perfect is that there is, to my knowledge, no parallel to the prophetic perfect as described by Driver in any other language, modern or ancient.10 Moreover, a recent study by Rogland was able to explain many of the alleged prophetic perfects with a modern relative tense theory. He cogently argued that many of these SCs actually refer to situations that are future from the speech time, but are past relative to the reference time.11 Most notably, this occurs in quoted speech that will take place in the future and

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in reference to dreams or visions that were seen and experienced in the past. One of the most important conclusions in Rogland’s study is that the so-called prophetic perfect is actually a collection of other, unrecognized or misunderstood uses of the SC.

In a recent study, I have proposed other linguistically reasoned uses of the SC that together with Rogland’s relative tense approach explain all of the alleged prophetic perfects in the prophetic literature. As a result, it is apparent to me that the term prophetic perfect is no longer of substantive value for describing any use of the SC. In this paper, I briefly present one of the categories I have proposed. The occupation of this paper is with the irrealis use of the SC without the conjunction waw.\textsuperscript{12} In the following sections of this paper, I outline the linguistic argument I have made in my recent study. The argument begins with the expression of irrealis mood in BH, and is followed by a discussion of weqatal and the use of WO to indicate irrealis verbs. This is followed by examples of the irrealis use of the SC in the prophetic literature.

2.0 Irrealis Mood in Biblical Hebrew

BH expresses modality in two ways. First, through a modal system, which involves lexemes that express modality (e.g., English would, may, can and Hebrew ַֽעַל), and second through mood, which involves what is basically a binary system, realis : irrealis.\textsuperscript{13} Realis situations are actual, meaning that they refer to a particular situation or to a situation that is directly perceived, whereas irrealis situations are not actual, as they may refer to a virtually infinite number of hypothetical, possible, potential, and contingent situations.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} The consonant waw is here representative of the reflexes of the conjunction *wa in BH.

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. F. R. Palmer, Mood and Modality (2\textsuperscript{nd} ed.), Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 4-5.

Every irrealis situation expressed by a grammatical construction may be categorized as one of two types. The first is *event* which deals with potential or “not actualized” events.\(^{15}\) Event modality may be further divided by how the factors relate to the relevant individual. In expressions of *deontic* modality, the relevant factors are external (permission, obligation, commission, etc.), while in expressions of *dynamic* modality, the relevant factors are internal (ability, willingness, etc.).\(^ {16}\) The second type is *propositional* which deals with the “speaker’s attitude to the truth-value or factual status of the proposition.”\(^ {17}\) There are two kinds of propositional modality, evidential and epistemic. While *evidential* modality expresses situations that are perceived through the senses, *epistemic* modality is based on inference from one or many factors that lead the relevant individual to the proposition. When the factors and the circumstances surrounding a given situation cause one to have a low level of certainty regarding the truth of the proposition, the proposition is considered *speculative*. However, propositions that are considered to have a high degree of certainty are either *assumptive* or *deductive*.\(^ {18}\) The difference between these is that assumptive is drawn from “generally known evidence,” while deductive is drawn from “observable evidence.”\(^ {19}\) As a result, deductive propositions are viewed with a slightly stronger sense of certainty than assumptive propositions.\(^ {20}\) English typically

\(^{15}\) Palmer, *Mood and Modality*, p. 8.

\(^{16}\) Palmer, *Mood and Modality*, pp. 7-10.

\(^{17}\) Palmer, *Mood and Modality*, p. 8.


distinguishes these three kinds of epistemic modality by using *may* or *might* for speculative propositions, *will* for assumptive, and *must* for deductive.\(^{21}\)

BH expresses irrealis situations in several ways. In addition to certain modal lexemes (e.g., יְדַעַת) and particles that mark hypothetical and other irrealis clauses (e.g., יָד), BH also uses verb forms to express irrealis situations. The long prefix conjugation (LPC) and the SC (most frequently in the construction *weqatal*) are used to express situations with a wide variety of event and propositional modalities.\(^{22}\) There is also a directive-volitive system, which does express modality but is not technically part of the mood system of BH.\(^{23}\) The directive-volitive system includes the jussive (i.e., the short prefix conjugation [SPC]), the imperative, and the so-called cohortative. Unlike the LPC and SC, these verb forms are almost completely semantically restricted to directive-volitive values.\(^{24}\)

### 3.0 *Weqatal* and the Irrealis Use of the Suffix Conjugation

The vast majority of the irrealis uses of the SC occur in the construction *weqatal*. Although many scholars have argued that the *weqatal* construction expresses imperfective aspect,\(^{25}\) Joosten has strongly argued that every use of the construction (apart from the so-called *weqaltalts*) can be explained as irrealis. For more than two decades, he has compiled linguistic

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\(^{21}\) Palmer, *Mood and Modality*, p. 25.


\(^{23}\) Palmer, *Mood and Modality*, p. 5.


evidence from ancient and modern languages and his conclusion is that none of the uses of the weqatal construction, including the past iterative, are imperfective; rather, they are all irrealis.26

While from a synchronic point of view the weqatal construction clearly expresses irrealis situations, one might wonder how it came to have these irrealis values. There is no compelling comparative Semitic evidence to suggest that this construction developed from anything other than the conjunction *wa and the SC,27 neither of which is inherently modal.28

Cook has cogently argued that the SC acquired modal values through the process of context-induced reinterpretation.29 He argued that SCs that occurred in modal contexts were reinterpreted as modal verbs, and once the reinterpretation was accomplished, the SC could be used in other contexts with a modal value. Although many others had suggested that the construction weqatal developed from its use in the apodoses of conditional propositions, Cook added a critical piece of the puzzle arguing that it was the use of the SC in apodoses and protases that spurred the reanalysis of the SC as an irrealis verb form.30 Recognizing that the SC in conditional protases was also reanalyzed is very important for two reasons: (1) only in this ways can on account for variety of modalities that the SC is used to express in BH, and (2) it suggests that the reanalyzed constituent was the SC and not the construction weqatal.


4.0 Word Order and Modal Verbs

Over the past several decades, scholars have observed that modal verbs have a strong tendency to occur in clause-initial position. In 1987, Niccacci argued that the jussive and indicative uses of yiqtol are distinguished by word order (WO). He claimed that, apart from a handful of syntactic environments, the jussive always occur in clause-initial position. His conclusions were affirmed in later studies by Revell and Joosten. Revell’s study concluded that “[a] verb can be marked as modal in the corpus by its form (imperative, or short or affixed imperfect), by its position (initial in its clause) or by co-occurrence (with following אֲלֵת or preceding הָא).” Revell also noted that sometimes volitives (i.e., imperatives and jussives) are preceded by certain clausal adverbs (e.g., פֶּנֶל or פֶּל), which are not to be considered part of the clause (i.e., they are syntactically detached). He considered them connecting particles that mark “logical transition.”

Shulman, in her 1996 dissertation, affirmed Revell’s argument in the corpus of Genesis-Kings. She found that directive-volitive verb forms occur in clause-initial position nearly every time. Imperatives are clause-initial 1454 times out of 1515 occurrences (96%), non-negated jussives are clause-initial 96 times out of 102 occurrences (94%), and cohortatives are clause-initial 192 times out of 197 occurrences (97%). All of the non-initial volitives follow a

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constituent that was preposed for pragmatic purposes, mostly for focus or topicalization. The data provided by Shulman demonstrates that, apart from pragmatically preposed constituents and clausal adverbs, modal verbs occur in clause-initial position.

Holmstedt used the correlation of modal verbs and clause-initial position to explain the irrealis use of the SC when following conditional particles, such as וּ and אֵם, and in the weqatal construction. Essentially, Holmstedt has argued that weqatal is simply the conjunction we- and an irrealis SC. Furthermore, Kawashima has argued that this construction was synchronically viewed as an irrealis SC and the conjunction we-, based on the uses of SCs that follow וּ, וּלָ, וּלָא, and אל. He referred to the irrealis use of the SC without the conjunction we- as an “‘orphaned’ converted tense.” The correlation of clause-initial WO and irrealis mood is also affirmed by the statistically supported tendency of the realis SC to occur in non-initial position in unmarked, main clauses. It is this very tendency that has led many scholars, who take a text-linguistic approach to the verbal system, to view the realis SC as an indication of background or

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36 Which does not include those that followed a clausal adverb. She followed Revell’s suggestion that clausal adverbs are syntactically detached.


38 In the Amarna letters from Canaan, volitive verb forms are always clause-initial, apart from a few cases in which constituents are preposed; K. J. Baranowski, The Verb in the Amarna Letters from Canaan, Languages of the Ancient Near East (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), p. 160. This is of particular significance since the normal Akkadian practice is for all verbs to occur in clause-final position; A. F. Rainey, Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets: A Linguistic Analysis of the Mixed Dialect Used by the Scribes from Canaan. Morphosyntactic Analysis of the Particles and Adverbs (Vol. 3), (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 272.


40 His argument has been further supported by Cook, Time and the Biblical Hebrew Verb, pp. 235-237.


offline material. Ultimately, the evidence strongly suggests that WO is used as a strategy for disambiguating the realis and irrealis uses of the SC. This WO includes clause-initial position and instances in which the SC follows a clausal adverb or the conjunction we.-

Several studies mentioned above have noted various clausal adverbs that occur before irrealis verbs, but are syntactically detached. As Moshavi has explained, this means that they are syntactically required to occur first in the clause, regardless of the normal WO or any constituent preposing. Moshavi noted that the conjunction we-, clausal adverbs (inter alia כִּי, אַךְ, וַעֲשֵׂה, הַנֶּחֶנ, and וַעֲשֵׂה), and negative particles all fit in the category of particles that are syntactically detached.

At this point, it may be helpful to consider a few examples. The examples below illustrate the use of clausal adverbs and pragmatically preposed constituents in modal clauses.

(Translations of the preposed constituents are in bold).

(a) Jer. 28:7
וְָלָָדָבָר הַזֶּה אַךְ־שְׁמַע־נָא

“Only, hear this word!”

(b) Gen. 19:12
וְָעַתָּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִים אֵלֶּיךָ עֲשֵׂה

“And now, do everything that God said to you!”

(c) Ps. 119:37
בֹּדָרֶךְ חַיֵנִי

“Keep my life in your ways!”


44 In addition to the studies cited above, see Kawashima, “‘Orphaned’ Converted Tense Forms.”


46 A dynamic rendering; woodenly translated as make/keep me alive.
“And do not oppress the alien, orphan, or widow; do no violence (to them)! And do not spill innocent blood in this place!”

“But you – do not pray for this people!”

In example (a), the imperative follows a syntactically detached clausal adverb, meaning that syntactically the imperative is clause-initial. Similarly, example (b) begins with a syntactically detached clausal adverb, but it also has an object clause (דָּם נָקִיָּה) that is preposed for pragmatic purposes. The next example has a pragmatically preposed prepositional phrase (PP). Example (d) has two preposed object clauses, and in example (e), the pronominal subject is preposed.47

Thus far, I have outlined an argument that the irrealis SC occurs in clause-initial position which is why it most often appears in the weqatal construction. I have also suggested that the irrealis SC, without the conjunction we-, can occur after clausal adverbs. It should be noted that these very features are cited in the traditional literature as features by which interpreters can identify prophetic perfects. Ewald claimed that the SC with future time reference often occurs in clause-initial position,48 and many scholars have claimed that prophetic perfects often follow certain clausal adverbs, such as כֹּל אָשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהֶיךָ,49 and הָרָם,50 Additionally, prophetic perfects are said to be


interspersed with *wegatahs* and LPCs, which would be expected if the SCs in question were actually irrealis.

Another point of overlap between my argument and the traditional descriptions regards the notion of certainty, which is ubiquitously cited in literature. According to my explanation, the majority of alleged prophetic perfects are SCs that express situations with assumptive or deductive, epistemic modality. Both of these are used to express situations with a degree of confidence or certainty, but which it is depends on the kind of information the speaker/author has or what he has experienced.

5.0 Examples

There are three criteria that must be met in order to demonstrate that alleged examples of prophetic perfects are actually irrealis uses of the SC. The verb must have (1) a contextually determined modal meaning, which in prophetic literature is most often very closely associated with (2) a contextually determined future time reference. The final criterion is (3) the verb must occur in a clausal position appropriate for a modal verb (as outlined above); namely in clause-initial position, following a clausal adverb, or with various pragmatically preposed constituents.

In this section, I illustrate that many alleged examples of the prophetic perfect are in fact irrealis uses of the SC. The sections below have a small sample of examples from my prior study that occur in the prophetic literature. I briefly discuss each example, but a full discussion is not possible here. Each of the examples in this section was argued at length in my study, and the interested reader should refer to that work for further details.

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5.1 Clause-initial

The first clause-initial example is one of the most regularly cited of the alleged examples of the prophetic perfect.52

(f) Num. 24:17

וּנֶּּ אֶּרְׁאָּוֹ וְׁלֹּ אַעְתָּה אֲשֻׁרֶּ נוּ וְׁלֹּ אָקֶרֶּבֶּ דָרַּךְ כוֹכָּב מִיַעֲקֹּב מַעְשֵׁרָלִי

“I see it, but not now; I behold it, but not near! A star will go out (OR: march) from Jacob, and a scepter will rise from Israel!”

Based on the broader context of Balaam’s oracles and the immediate context, including clauses prior and following the clause of interest (וּנֶּּ אֶּרְׁאָוֹ), the situation referred to by the verb דרך is unambiguously future from the ST. The ancient versions (LXX, Vulgate, Targum), as well as modern translations (ESV, NRSV, NASB, NIV, NAB, HCSB, NKJV, etc.) and scholars,53 affirm that this verb has future time reference. The prophecy’s content begins with an irrealis SC (דרך), expressing the situation with assumptive, epistemic modality. The verb is then followed by a series of irrealis SCs, in the construction weqatal, in vv. 17-18.54

The next example comes from Isaiah 28, which begins with a “woe” directed at Ephraim (v. 1). The following verses (vv. 2-4) describe the destruction that is coming to Ephraim, thereby providing the explanation for the woe.55


Behold, a strong and mighty one belongs to the Lord; like a storm of hail, a gale of destruction; like a storm of strong, flooding waters; he will hurl (them) to the earth with power!

Some translations and commentators have translated ניח with past time reference, but that makes no sense in this context. First of all, this is evidently a “threat” and, moreover, the LPC in v. 3 and the weqatal in v. 4 further affirm that the time reference of these verses in future. Many commentators, translations (e.g., NRSV, NKJV, NIV, and NET), and ancient versions (LXX, Targum, Peshitta) interpret ניח with future time reference. Traditionally, the SC in v. 2 has been considered a prophetic perfect, but I propose that, with the future time reference and clause-initial position (in the fourth colon of the four cola in this verse), this is an irrealis use of the SC expressing the situation with assumptive, epistemic modality.

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58 The reading of 1QIsa הנייח (והנייח) reflects an interpretation of the MT and a linguistic-stylistic update, rather than an alternative reading; cf. E. Tov, Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible (3rd ed., revised and expanded) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), p. 256. This is to be considered on a par with the LXX translating the verb with a Future.


60 Cf. H. Wildberger (Isaiah 28-39, p. 10) who noted that “[i]n v. 2bβ the imagery is abandoned” since it is not the storm or the strong one but “Yahweh himself” who throws down.
5.2 Following a Clausal Adverb

My first example of an irrealis SC following a clausal adverb is another very commonly cited alleged example of the prophetic perfect. Isaiah 5 begins with the song of the vineyard (vv. 1-7) and following verses (vv. 8-24) describe the analogical relevance of the song for Israel. In vv. 8-24 there are several marked transitions from the current (i.e., described mostly in present time) sins of the people to the future judgment that is coming on them as a result. The first transition is made by a direct speech from the Lord (vv. 9-10), while the others are marked with the conjunction therefore (vv. 13, 14, and 24).

(h) Isa. 5:13

לָכֵן גָלָה עַמ י מ בְׁל י
dעַת
d

“Therefore, my people will go into exile for lack of knowledge.”

In light of the context and transitional markers, this verb undoubtedly has future time reference. This use of the SC is best explained as an irrealis use, expressing the judgment of Israel with future time and epistemic modality.

Another example of an irrealis SC found in a judgment context occurs in the fifth chapter of Jeremiah.

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64 The same is true for the SC in Isa. 5:14, but space prohibits discussion of this verse; see Carver, *A Reconsideration of the Prophetic Perfect*, pp. 179-180.
Therefore, a lion from the forest will slay them; a wolf of the deserts will destroy them.”

The first five verses of this chapter depict the prevalence of sin among the people of Judah. Their sin is metaphorically described as breaking the yoke and tearing up the bonds (v. 5). As a result, judgment will come on them (v. 6). Most translations (e.g., NRSV, NASB, NAB, NIV, ESV, NKJV; cf. Targum) and scholars recognize the future time reference of the SC, which is affirmed by not only the context of coming judgment but also the LPC that appears in the following clause.

5.3 With Preposed Constituents

In this section, the primary focus of our discussion on the preposed constituents is on the syntactic classes of the constituents, and not on their functions (e.g., focus or topicalization). In the following examples, some of the preposed constituents are syntactically dislocated from the clause (i.e., in extraposition). These will be distinguished from the preposed constituents that are not syntactically dislocated.

My first example comes from the Oracles Against the Nations in Jeremiah.

“From the sound of their fall the earth will shake; a cry – at the Reed Sea its sound will be heard.”

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Although some commentators have tried to force a non-future time interpretation of these verbs, the majority of commentators recognize that the SCs have future time reference, even though they have not been able to explain how these verbs could refer to future situations. I propose that these are irrealis SCs in clauses with preposed prepositional phrases (PP). The WO of the parallel cola in this verse is PP-V-S, with the added variation that in the second colon there is a dislocated noun (즮ָקָה) that is resumptively referenced with a pronominal suffix (on קולה). It is important to note, however, that the expected irrealis WO of V-S is still intact.

The next example illustrates a syntactically restricted deviation from the expected WO for irrealis clauses. This occurs when there is an independent pronominal subject. Ezekiel has two long descriptions of the metaphorical adultery and prostitution of Samaria and Jerusalem in chapters 16 and 23. The resulting judgment in each chapter draws to a close with an indication that the people will bear (נָשָׁא) the consequences of their sins.

(k) Ezek. 23:49

וְׁנָתְׁנ֣וֹנִי וּזְמָתֵךְ וּזְמָתֵךְ עֲלֵיכֶּן וָאִנְבוֹתֵךְ עֲלֵיכֶּן נַחֲלָמֶּךְ וַחֲטָאֵי אֲנִי אֲדֹנִי יִהְוֶה

“And they will set your vileness upon you, and you will bear the guilt of your idolatry. And you will know that I am the Lord Yahweh.”

(l) Ezek. 16:58

אֶת זְמַתֵךְ אַתָּה הָעִבְּדוֹתָהוּ אַתָּה נְשָאתֶּם נַחֲלָם יִהְוֶה


“Your viliness and your abominations – you must bear them, declares Yahweh.”

There are two things to note regarding the WO in 16:58. First, the phrase “your viliness and your abominations” is syntactically dislocated from the clause, and is resumptively referenced with a pronominal suffix. Second, there is an independent pronominal subject, which frequently occur in first position.

The context of the passage and the LPC in 23:49 strongly suggest that the SC in 16:58 has future time reference, and many scholars have recognized that it refers to a situation that is future from the ST. Moreover, several scholars have translated the verb with a modal force, translating “you must bear.” I propose that in light of the persistent and unrepentant viliness and abominations of Jerusalem, expresses that which is “epistemically necessary,” i.e., that there is no other possibility but for Jerusalem to bear the consequences of their sins. In other words, the SC expresses a situation with future time reference and deductive, epistemic modality.

Perhaps one of the most interesting cases of pragmatic preposing is for purpose of creating parallelism. Imperatives and jussives express deontic modality and their unmarked WO is clause-initial. However, there are cases in which imperatives and jussives occur in non-initial position because of parallelism. Some patterns do not disrupt the unmarked WO for irrealis

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71 Palmer, Mood and Modality, p. 89.
verbs, such as *abab* and *aabb*. However, chiastic parallelism (e.g., *abba*) does disrupt the unmarked WO.\(^\text{72}\) For example,

\[(m)\] Jer. 17:18

> תֵבֵא עָלֵיהֶם יָמָה רָעָה וּמֶשֶׁה עֵשְׁרֹת שָבֹרֵם

> “Bring a day of calamity upon them! And break them (with) double destruction!”

\[(n)\] Jer. 18:23

> אַל הֲכֵפֶר עַל פָּנַי מִשְׁנֶה שָבְרֵם לָיָם אַל לָהֵם

> “Do not forgive their iniquity, and do not blot out their sin from before you!”

In examples (l) and (m), the verbs occur in the expected, clause-initial position in the first colon of each verse (the A-lines), but occur in clause-final position in the respective second cola (the B-lines). The WOs of the second cola were disrupted (i.e., constituents were pragmatically preposed) in order to create the chiastic parallelism.\(^\text{73}\)

When the irrealis SC occurs in parallel with another verb form, it is usually the LPC, as in Jer. 5:6 (see above, example [i]), or a *weqatal*, as in Isa. 19:8.

\[(o)\] Isa. 19:8

> וְׁאָבְּלוּ כָּל מַשְׁל יְכֵי בַיְּוָה חַכָּה וּפֹרְשֵי מ כְּמֹרֶּת עַל פָּנַי מַיְּם אַל מְּלָלוּ

> “And all those who cast a hook in the Nile will mourn; and those who spread out a net on the face of the water will languish.”

The WO pattern is *abcba* (\(a = V; b = NP; c = PP\)) with a modification in the first colon as the PP “breaks” the construct chain.\(^\text{74}\) The first colon has the unmarked WO, but in the second colon, the NP and the PP were preposed for poetic purposes.

The future time reference of 19:1-10 is unambiguously indicated by the formulaic marker הָנָה + Participle and the many subsequent *weqatal*\(\text{s}\) and LPCs describing the disaster that will

\(^{72}\) In the examples below, an extra space is put between cola to indicate my understanding of the lineation.

\(^{73}\) It is typically, but not always, the WO of the second colon that is disrupted. Cf. Lunn, *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, p. 275: “It is primarily within the B-line of synonymous parallelisms that word-order variation as a purely stylistic or rhetorical device ... is admissible.”

\(^{74}\) See Waltke & O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, p. 140.
befall the Egyptians. Most translations (e.g., ESV, NRSV, NASB, NIV, NKJV, etc.), ancient versions (LXX, Targum, Vulgate), and modern commentators interpret the SC with future time reference, but only my explanation can account for this. The verb אָמָלָל is an irrealis SC without the conjunction we- that expresses the situation with future time reference and epistemic modality.

Another example occurs in Jeremiah 31. The relevant literary unit is 31:23-26. The first verse begins with a formulaic marker (כִּי אָמָר יְהוָה צְבָאֹת) and describes the promising future that will be when the Lord restores the fortunes of his people. The future time reference of the unit is further indicated by a LPC in v. 23 and a weqatal in v. 24. Verse 25 continues the hopeful description of the future.

(p) Jer. 31:25

כִּי תַּחְרִית נֶפֶשׁ עֲיֵפָה וְכָל נֶפֶשׁ דָאֲבָה מְלַא יָא

“For I will give (the) soul of the weary (its) fill, and every soul (that) has languished I will fill up.”

The first irrealis SC occurs after a clausal adverb (cf. examples above) and the second occurs at the end of the second colon. This verse has a modified chiastic parallelism with the pattern abcbca (a = V; b = S; c = modifying phrase). There is a difference in the modifying phrases in that the first colon has an adjective, while the second has an asyndetic relative clause. Modern translations (e.g., NRSV, NAB, ESV, and NIV) and scholars have

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78 Driver, Use of the Tenses in Hebrew, §14β; Thompson, The Book of Jeremiah, p. 576; Carroll, Jeremiah, p. 605; Holladay, Jeremiah 2, p. 154; G. L. Keown, P. J. Scalise, & T. G. Smothers, Jeremiah 26-52, Word Biblical
recognized the future time reference of these SCs, and I propose that they are irrealis SCs expressing these situations with epistemic modality. While the first follows a clausal adverb, the second occurs in clause-final position on account of parallelism.

6.0 Conclusions

In my previous study of the prophetic perfect in Biblical Hebrew, I have argued that what has been known for the last century and a half as the prophetic perfect does not exist, and that those uses of the SC that were previously lumped together into this category actually have other uses. In this paper, I have briefly presented the argument for one of those uses that has been inappropriately categorized as the prophetic perfect. I have argued that the SC is used without the conjunction we- to express epistemic, irrealis situations.

Research over the past few decades has shown that modal verbs nearly always take clause-initial position, and that this was used as a strategy for disambiguating realis and irrealis verbs. Research has also shown that modal verbs are not the first constituent in a clause in certain syntactic environments, such as when a clause is begun by a clausal adverb or the pragmatic preposing of (a) constituent(s). Based on the criteria of contextual modal meaning (and future time reference) and WO, I have argued in my previous study that 58 alleged examples of the prophetic perfect are actually epistemic, irrealis uses of the SC. In this paper I have given a brief overview of my analysis of 10 of the 58 examples argued at length in my previous study.

In conclusion, this paper makes several important contributions. First, it provides an introduction to my approach, which employs diachronic explanation and synchronic description of the language, to a use of the SC that has gone without a sound explanation for more than a

millennium. Second, it labels and explains semantic categories and syntactic parameters for the
irrealis use of the SC without the conjunction *we*-. An additional implication concerns the
interpretation and translation of Hebrew Bible. It has long been recognized that many of the
irrealis SCs have future time reference and sometimes even a modal meaning, but scholars have
failed to explain how the SC could express these situations. In light of the greater linguistic
framework provided by my approach, interpreters and translators can have a great understanding
of the language of prophecy (and even poetry more generally) as well as a heightened sensitivity
to some of the more subtle aspects of the BH verbal system.