
J. Kessler

**HARLOTRY.** See **Feminist Interpretation; Women, Female Imagery.**

**HEBREW LANGUAGE**

There are many striking features of the Hebrew language of the Prophetic Books. These include oracular forms, both native (e.g., the accusation-threat pattern of judgment speech, woe oracles) and borrowed (e.g., funeral dirge, trial speech), typical prophetic phrases (e.g., messenger formulae such as kōh 'āmar yhwh ["thus says the LORD"] and nē' um yhwh ["oracle of the LORD"]), metaphorical and parabolaic speech (e.g., Ezek 16) and cryptic expressions (e.g., Is 28:10, 13). Most such features constitute distinct and independent topics in their own right (e.g., form criticism, metaphor). By contrast, the linguistic peculiarities in the Prophetic Books generally are absorbed into the critical discussion of their composition and dating. At the same time, some of the most debated issues in the translation and interpretation of the Prophetic Books revolve around questions of the poetic form of prophetic speech and the temporal orientation of prophetic passages as indicated most frequently by verbal forms. This article surveys the role of language in critical introductory discussion of the Prophetic Books and focuses in particular on the issues of poetry and temporality.

1. Poetry in the Prophetic Books
2. Language and Composition of the Prophetic Books
3. Temporal Orientation of the Prophetic Books

1. Poetry in the Prophetic Books

The major portion of the Prophetic Books is treated as poetry, while several distinct sections clearly are prose narrative (see 2 below on individual books; on the difficulties in distinguish-
all poetic prophetic texts began as oral speeches and all prose prophetic texts are the product of editorial, literary work (e.g., G. Holscher attributed to the prophet just 144 verses of the sixteen poetic and five elevated prose sections in the book of Ezekiel). However, in recent decades this assumption has been shown to be simplistic (e.g., see Block, 1:17-23 on Ezekiel in this regard, and see Floyd on the relationship between oral and written prophecy generally). It seems groundless to assume that prophets could relate God’s messages to the people only in poetic form or that redactors could compose only prose. In Jeremiah, for example, we find a mixture of more poetic and more prosaic prophetic speeches along with third-person narratives by the prophet, often attributed to the work of his scribe, Baruch (see Holladay, 11-16). The book of Ezekiel is notable for being mostly prose, but there is good reason to think that the dated “memoir” style of preserving Ezekiel’s prophetic pronouncements derives from his own hand (see Block, 1:20). As new methods for distinguishing oral and literary origins of the biblical literature are developed (e.g., Polak), scholars may be in a better position to discriminate between these categories within the prophetic literature.

In any case, the Prophetic Books have in common with unambiguously poetic books, such as Psalms and Job, numerous poetic devices such as metaphor, word play and alliteration. Examples include the following: (1) word play on qāvis (“summer fruit”) and qēs (“end”) in the vision in Amos 8:1-3 (see Alter, 1:20). As new methods for distinguishing oral and literary origins of the biblical literature are developed (e.g., Polak), scholars may be in a better position to discriminate between these categories within the prophetic literature.

Differences between vocabulary and style in Isaiah 1—39 and Isaiah 40—66 are primary data for deciding the critical question of authorship of these sections. There are a few distinctive phrases, notably “the Holy One of Israel” (Is 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11-12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14), spread throughout the book, which some scholars point to as evidence of single author for the book (e.g., Oswalt, 20-21). However, there are numerous other phrases distinctive of Isaiah 40—66 but rare or absent in Isaiah 1-39: bāḥar (“to choose”) in reference to God’s choice of Israel or his servant (Is 14:1; 41:8-9; 43:10; 44:1-2; 48:10; 49:7); the verb hālāl (“to praise”) (Is 38:18; 41:16; 45:25; 62:9; 64:10) and the noun tēhîlāl (“praise”) (Is 42:8, 10, 12; 43:21; 48:9; 60:6, 18; 61:3, 11; 62:7; 63:7); ki ʾānyiywḥh with modifying relative clause (“because I am Yahweh who ...”) (Is 41:13; 43:3; 45:3; 49:23, 26; 60:16; 61:8); participle references to God as redeemer (gāʾal, “to redeem”) (Is 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16) or creator (bārāʾ, “to create”) (Is 4:5; 40:26, 28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15; 45:7-8, 12, 18; 48:7; 54:16; 57:19; 65:17-18) (see Driver 1908, 238-40). Other differences exhibited between the language of Isaiah 1—39 and Isaiah 40—66 are more difficult to quantify. S. R. Driver summarizes as follows: “There are also literary
features of a more general character, which differ­
entiate the author of c. 40—66 from Isaiah.
Isaiah’s style is terse and compact; the move­
ment of his periods is stately and measured; his
rhetoric is grave and restrained. In these chap­
ters [Is 40—66] a subject is often developed at
considerable length; the style is much more
flowing; the rhetoric is warm and impassioned;
and the prophet often bursts into lyrical strain”
(Driver 1908, 240-41).

2.2. Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah shows
much more complex a mixture of prose and
poetry than Isaiah. Jeremiah 1—25 contains
many poetic oracles of judgment, whereas
prose narrative accounts of Jeremiah’s life are
contained mostly in Jeremiah 26—45. Inter­
spersed through these chapters are prose
speeches that exhibit in their vocabulary and
syntax a relationship with the prose speeches in
the books of Deuteronomy, Samuel and Kings.
Finally, Jeremiah 46—51 contains poetic ora­
cles against the nations.

This variety of materials is widely under­
stood to indicate a complex composition his­
tory. The relationship between the language of
Jeremiah and Deuteronomy has been of par­
cular interest, and W. Holladay concludes that
there is dependency in both directions: Jere­
miah borrowed from proto-Deuteronomic ma­
terial while later editors of Deuteronomy in
turn borrowed from Jeremiah (Holladay, 53).
Further, Holladay discusses possible borrow­
ings of language in Jeremiah from other
sources, including the pentateuchal traditions,
the Historical Books, and earlier prophetic
books (Holladay, 35-70). In turn, Jeremiah’s
language seems to have had an impact on sub­
sequent biblical texts and writers, including
Lamentations, exilic Deuteronomic editors
and the later prophetic books of Ezekiel, Sec­
ond and Third Isaiah, and Zechariah 1—8 (see
Holladay, 80-93).

This evidence of widespread *intertextual­
ity in Jeremiah along with disagreements about
what data are relevant to drawing a linguistic
profile make it difficult to state anything de­
finite about the language of Jeremiah, thus mak­
ing problematic R. Polzin’s use of it as a bench­
mark in his typology. For instance, Holladay’s
excellent survey of “Jeremiah’s use of language”
yields nothing concrete with regard to Jeremi­
ah’s particular dialect of Hebrew (Holladay, 75­
78). Most of his observations, such as double­
duty particles, word plays and ambiguity,
merely point to the poetic features in Jeremiah,
while more particular uses, such as the pleonastic
infinitive absolute for contradictory state­
ments (Jer 4:10; 13:12; 22:10), do not constitute
dialectal evidence.

2.3. Ezekiel. The book of Ezekiel is different
again from both Jeremiah and Isaiah in that it
is mainly prose with only a few poetic passages
(e.g., Ezek 7; 17; 19). Even where there are more
extended poetic sections, they are interspersed
with narrative portions (e.g., the oracles against
the nations in Ezek 26—32).

In like manner to the centrality of Deuter­
onomy in studies of intertextuality in Jeremiah,
the focus in Ezekiel studies is on the relation­
ship of its language to the Priestly writings/school.
However, while Ezekiel exhibits similar
concerns and vocabulary as Priestly books (e.g.,
Leviticus), it also shows a certain uniqueness of
language. W. Zimmerli notes that Ezekiel lacks
many terms and verbs found in other portions
of the OT while showing a high degree of
unique vocabulary (Zimmerli, 22-24). For ex­
ample, frequently occurring terms for “deliver­
ance” or “salvation” (terms from the roots יָשָׁה,
גָּדְה, קָדְה) do not appear in Ezekiel. Similarly, key
terms from Deuteronomic thought, such as בּוּן
(“to trust”), בְּסֵד (“covenant loyalty” or “loving­
kindness”) and אֶהָב (“to love”) are absent
from Ezekiel. Compared with Psalms, Ezekiel
lacks the language of “to cry out” (שַׁי, שָׁא, צָא),
and in contrast to the Priestly writings and Hol­
liness Code (Lev 17—26), Ezekiel notably lacks
terms such as קְצֵר (“to burn incense”), יִשְׁפָה
(“fire offering”) and נָדָר (“to make a vow”).

Against these absences, Ezekiel contains
some 130 unique words. For example, the fol­
lowing verbs occur only in Ezekiel: Piel בָּטָקָה,
“to slaughter” (Ezek 16:40); Qal דָלָה, “to make tur­
bid (waters)” (Ezek 32:2, 13); Qal הֲדָה, “to pene­
trate (with a sword)” (Ezek 21:19); Hophal and
Pual הֲתָל, “to be swathed” (Ezek 16:4); Hiphil הֲה, “to
lead astray” (Ezek 13:10) (cf. הֲו); Qal קְחוּ, “to paint (the eyes)” (Ezek 23:40); Qal קָסַו, “to
trim (the hair)” (Ezek 44:20); Qal קָפַן, “to turn
toward” (Ezek 17:7); Qal נָסִי, “to free oneself,
turn away” (Ezek 23:22, 28) (cf. יָט); Piel sbh.
“to sweep away” (Ezek 26:4); Qal ווּג, “to bake
(Ezek 4:12); Niphal וָרָב, “to be scorched” (Ezek
21:3); Polel qss, “to pluck” (?) (Ezek 17:9); Qal
gm, “to cover” (Ezek 17:8); Piel שָׁמ, “to lead
along on a rope” (Ezek 39:2). Some of Ezekiel’s
unique vocabulary is used multiple times—for example: *āqoppim*, “troops” (Ezek 12:14; 17:21; 38:6, 9, 22; 39:4); *elğābīs*, “hail (stones)” (Ezek 13:11, 13; 38:22); *āttq*, “passage, street” (?) (Ezek 41:15-16; 42:3, 5); *ḥāböl*, “pledge” (Ezek 18:12, 16; 33:15); *ṭelā*, “rust” (Ezek 24:6, 11-12); *ḥāsmal*, some precious stone (?) (Ezek 1:4; 27; 8:2); *ḥintt*, “terror” (Ezek 26:17; 32:23-27, 32); *mēḵwārā*, “(ethnic) origin” (Ezek 16:3; 21:30; 29:14); *miqtām*, “oracle” (Ezek 12:24; 13:7); ʿagābim, “passions, love songs” (Ezek 23:11; 33:31-32); *izzābōn*, “merchandise” (Ezek 27:12, 14, 16, 19, 22, 24, 33); *pōʾrā*, “shoots” (Ezek 17:6; 31:5-6, 8, 12-13); *sammeret*, “top (of a tree)” (Ezek 17:3, 22; 31:3, 10, 14); *rēkullā*, “trade” (Ezek 26:12; 28:5, 16, 18); *tazaʾa*, “harlotry” (Ezek 16:15, 20, 22, 25-26, 29, 33-34, 36; 23:7-8, 11, 14, 17-19, 29, 35, 43) (see further Zimmerli, 23).

Ezekiel’s language is also notably formulaic (see Block, 1:30-39): the address *ben-ʾādām* (“son of man”) occurs ninety-three times in the book and elsewhere only in Daniel 8:17; Ezekiel’s favorite designation for his audience is *bēt-yīšrāʾēl* (“house of Israel”), which occurs eighty-three times in the book, accounting for over half (57 percent) of its occurrences in the Bible; the introductory formula *wayhi dēbar yhwh elay lēʾemor* (“the word of Yahweh came to me”) occurs more than fifty times, and the messenger formula *kōh-ʾāmar ṭādānyā yhwh* (“thus says the Lord Yahweh”) occurs over one hundred times; and Ezekiel’s distinctive “recognition” formula *wēyāḍē ʿu kī āni yhwh* (“then they will know that I am Yahweh”) occurs, in several variations, over fifty times. Finally, Ezekiel is replete with commands to Ezekiel to engage in prophetic activities, most frequently *hinnābē*... *wēʾāmārā* (“prophesy... and say”), some twenty-four times.

As in the case of Jeremiah, however, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions from these data regarding the book’s composition. Arguments regarding dating have drawn attention to the extent of Aramaicisms in the book (see Zimmerli, 21-22), but disputes over the determination and definition of “Aramaicisms” and their significance in dating biblical texts (see Eskhult; Hurvitz) make even their presence or absence in the book equivocal for questions of dialect or dating. M. Rooker has examined the language of Ezekiel in light of Polzin’s typology of “Classical” and “Late” Biblical Hebrew. He concludes that the mixture of late and early features in the book points to its language as “transitional” between the two stages (Rooker, 185-86). The central focus of Rooker’s book is on the thirty-seven Late Biblical Hebrew features found in Ezekiel, which include the areas of orthography (e.g., *plene* `dawid` in Ezek 34:23 versus `dawid` spelling of “David” in Ezek 34:24; 37:24-25), morphology (e.g., first-person subject pronoun *ʿānī* [169x] instead of *ʿānōkî* [only in Ezek 36:28]; third-person masculine pronoun *ḥēm* used in place of the feminine *ḥēn* [Ezek 1:5-6; 3:13; 23:47]) (for a full list, see Rooker, 182-83), and syntax (e.g., the use of the direct-object marker *ʿer* with subjects [Ezek 10:22; 16:4; 17:21; 20:16; 29:4; 35:10; 44:3]). However, Polzin’s typology has been severely criticized in recent years (e.g., Young, Rezetko and Ehrensvard), calling for a reassessment of this and other data with regard to the stages of development of Hebrew.

2.4. Daniel. The language of the book of Daniel has received a good deal of attention, not only because of its curious bilingual Hebrew-Aramaic character (Dan 2:4b—7:28 is written in Aramaic), but also because the language data have been central in dating the book—a debate involving issues of prophecy versus apocalyptic literature and the nature of Scripture. Over a century ago, Driver famously remarked, “The verdict of the language of Daniel is thus clear. The *Persian* words presuppose a period after the Persian empire had been well established: the Greek words *demand*, the Hebrew *supports*, and the Aramaic *permits*, a date after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander the Great” (Driver 1900, lxiii). Arguments for an earlier date have likewise looked to the linguistic data for support.

versus the earlier reverse order (Dan 1:21; 8:1); older absence of incert guilt” (Dan 1:10); to describe the daily burnt offering versus the earlier "grace and fluency" even of early Second Temple literature is absent in Daniel (Collins, 22). By contrast, the Hebrew of Daniel is characterized by numerous Aramaisms, Persian loanwords (e.g., from Driver’s list above: madā’, “knowledge”; miqṣat, “some of”; šāpir, “he-goat”; rāšam, "to inscribe"; gil, “age”), and by late grammatical constructions and expressions often in common with Qumran literature (e.g., hyh ["to be"] with periphrastic participle in Dan 1:16; 8:5; 10:2 and about fifty times at Qumran; absence of wayhī ("and it was") before temporal infinitival phrases; long first-person forms in Dan 10:16 and regularly at Qumran; the late idiom šām ’al lēb ["to lay upon the heart" = "to resolve"] in Dan 1:8) (see further Collins, 20-23).

Finally, the bilingualism in Daniel has been judged to be more than a stylistic curiosity, but a compositionally significant characteristic: the Aramaic stories (Dan 2—6) may have circulated independently before being incorporated into the book, to which was added an introductory narrative, possibly originally in Aramaic (Dan 1), and the vision account of Daniel 7. Perhaps somewhat later the Hebrew chapters of Daniel 8—12 were added (see Collins, 24).

2.5. The Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets). The type of discussions in which the language of the Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets) features varies from book to book in the collection among three main sorts: identification of "northerns," intertextuality or dependence on other books within the canon or specifically the Book of the Twelve, or discussions of dating and composition. This last category is consistently interrelated with discussions of the first two sorts. For example, northerisms in Micah 6—7 to some scholars are indicative of northern prophetic authorship; intertextuality, if the
direction of dependence can be demonstrated, is crucial in relative dating of the books in the collection as well as identifying the composition of the collection itself. The language of the Book of the Twelve is surveyed here in terms of these three types of discussion.

Northernisms, or instances of Israelian Hebrew, in the Book of the Twelve are limited to Hosea, Amos and Micah 6—7. Northernisms in Hosea are unsurprising, given that the prophet probably was a native of a northern tribe (see the extensive treatment by Yoo), while northernisms in Amos are explained by his prophesying in the north despite hailing from Tekoa in Judah. Micah 6—7 was identified as coming from the hand of a northern prophet by F. Burkitt already in 1926, and the presence of Israelian Hebrew in those chapters is thought to support his thesis. In these books/chapters, grammatical forms appear that align with Aramaic (e.g., rō̂eh ["desire" versus "shepherd"], wā̂al rā' ["and not evil"], in Amos 5:14, as in Deir 'Alla; Hithpael used as a passive, wēyisṭamm̄er luqqōt 'omrit ["and the laws of Omri are observed"], in Mic 6:16), Phoenician (e.g., yāsārū "to rebel against"), from srr but vocalized as Phoenician ô > ū, in Hos 7:14; indefinite use of demonstrative, yōm hu'["that day"], in Mic 7:12 (cf. Heb hayyōm hahu'), Ugaritic (e.g., third-weak root infinitive ḥakkē in Hos 6:9 vocalized as Ugaritic [cf. Heb ḥakkōt], or a combination of these (e.g., fem. demonstrative zō in Hos 7:16 like Aramaic and Phoenician [cf. Heb zō't]; negative bal in Hos 7:2; 9:16 like Phoenician and Ugaritic; narrative use of infinitive absolute in Amos 4:5, wēqatter mēhāmēs tôda ["and burn a tôda-offering from leaven"], like Ugaritic and Phoenician; particle of existence 'ās in Mic 6:10, cognate with Ugaritic and Aramaic [cf. Heb yēš] (Rendsburg)). Vocabulary items also appear in these books/chapters that G. Rendsburg identifies as part of the lexicon of northern Hebrew (e.g., aḥab ["love"] in Hos 8:9; 'armōn ["palace, citadel"] in, e.g., Hos 8:14; Amos 1:4; 'etnā ["price"] in Hos 2:14; ḥēkōl ["palace"] in Hos 8:14; Amos 8:3; hēdeq ["brier, thorn"] in Mic 7:4; hēleq ["field"] in Hos 5:7; Amos 7:4).

Intertextuality is a notable feature in several of the Minor Prophets. A. Berlin notes that Zephaniah is a "study in intertextuality" and goes on to cite parallels between Zephaniah and Genesis 1—11 (e.g., the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 and the oracles of the nations in Zephaniah 2), Deuteronomistic vocabulary (e.g., the description of religious syncretism in Zephaniah 1 and the description found in 2 Kings 23), other prophetic books (e.g., "āšōp 'āšōp ["I will sweep away"] in Zeph 1:2 and 'āšōp 'āšōpem ["I will utterly sweep them away"] in Jer 8:13; has mippēnē 'ādonāy yhwḥ ["hush before the Lord God"] in Zeph 1:7 and has mippānāyōw ["hush before him"] in Hab 2:20), Psalms (e.g., 'ānāw hā'ařes ["humble of the land"] [cf. Ps 76:10]), and Wisdom literature (e.g., "awla ["wrong"] in Zeph 3:5, 13, which occurs only three other places in the Minor Prophets [Mic 3:10; Hab 2:12; Mal 2:6]) but nine times in Job and in Prov 22:8 (Berlin, 13-17). Similarly, Obadiah shows direct dependence on Jeremi­ah's Edom oracle (Jer 49), and P. Raabe lists numerous other phrases in Obadiah that parallel other books in the canon (Raabe, 32). In recent decades interest has turned to intertextuality within the Book of the Twelve as a clue to the composition and redaction of the collection as whole. J. Nogalski argues that "catchwords" appear at the seams of the books (i.e., last chapter of one book and first chapter of the next book) as a literary strategy for tying the books together in the collection (Nogalski 1993a; 1993b).

The importance of the language for dating the Prophetic Books is foremost in the case of Jonah, Joel and the postexilic books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The dating of Jonah and Joel is notoriously difficult, which accounts for the use of linguistic data to narrow possibilities. For instance, J. Crenshaw notes a number of linguistic peculiarities in Joel that argue for a sixth- or fifth-century BC date for the book, including the following: late words such as hāššelāh ("missile") [Joel 2:8], hūs ("have compassion on") [Joel 2:17], saḥānā ("stench") [Joel 2:20], sōp ("rear") [Joel 2:20] and first-person pronoun 'ānī instead of 'anōkī; and late expressions such as bēt ("house") of the temple (e.g., Joel 1:9) and bēnē-siyōn ("sons of Zion" [Joel 2:23]) (Crenshaw, 26). At the same time, Joel exhibits intertextuality with other books of the Bible (see the list in Crenshaw, 27-28) and uncertain temporal orientation with regard to the "day of the LORD": are the events past or future (see 3 below)?

Jonah contains a number of "late" or Ara-
maic-based words or grammatical expressions that feature in discussions of composition date. These include mallåh ("sailor" [Jon 1:5]), sepînà ("ship" [Jon 1:5]), za'ap ("fury" [Jon 1:15]), gerti'â ("message" [Jon 3:2]), ta'am ("authority" [Jon 3:7]), ribbô ("myriad" [Jon 4:11]), Hithpael 'îš ("to intercede" [Jon 1:6]), Qal šiq ("to calm down," used with inanimate subject [Jon 1:11]), Piel mnh ("to appoint" [Jon 2:1; 4:6-8]); Piel qdm ("to plan" [Jon 4:2]), Qal 'ml ("to labor over" [Jon 4:10]); words uncommonly associated with inanimate entities, such as hâšôb ("to consider") with the subject "boat" (Jon 1:4), sìtaq ("to calm down" [Jon 1:11]) and za'ap ("fury" [Jon 1:15]) used of the sea, hûs ("to pity" with the object "plant" [Jon 4:10]); and expressions such as hâtav ("to dig") used of rowing (Jon 1:13), elôhé hâssâmâyim ("God of the heavens" [Jon 1:9]), the order hânnûn wërâhûm ("gracious and compassionate" [Jon 4:2]) versus rahûm wêhânnûn (Ex 34:6), the 3 relative constructions (Jon 1:7, 12, 4:10) and the interchange of the prepositions 'el and 'al (Sasson 1990: 22-23).

The language of the postexilic prophetic books—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi—have recently become controversial, with a few scholars arguing that linguistic data cannot be reliably used to date the biblical texts either relative to one another or absolutely (e.g., Young, Rezetko and Ehrensvard), and others responding with new assessments of the existing data (e.g., Miller-Naudé and Zevit).


Perhaps no characteristic of Hebrew language is more troublesome for the interpretation of the Prophetic Books as the temporal contours of its verbal system. The tense-aspect-mood system of Biblical Hebrew is still not fully understood, and the switching among various verb forms in the prophetic literature, especially the poetic sections, is such that in places it defies explanation. Such problems are exacerbated in the Prophetic Books by the caricaturing of the prophets as "foretellers," which casts into further confusion the uncertainties about whether the prophets in places are making pronouncements about the past, the present, the future, or a combination of
HEBREW LANGUAGE

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Table 1. Verb Translations of Habakkuk 1:2

depend. For example, J. Barton makes this stunning admission: “Nothing can really be said about the time references in Joel on the basis of the verb forms used” (Barton, 69). The variety of ways the verbs in Habakkuk 1:2 (‘O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save?’ [NRSV]) have been rendered by modern translators is a good illustration of the difficulties (table 1 is based on Andersen, 103).

The difficulties evident here can be multiplied many times over. They emerge from uncertainty with the overall temporal orientation (Is he complaining of things that have happened or of things that will happen? Is he crying out, or has he cried out, or both?), the uncertain syntax (Does the initial interrogative influence the interpretation of the perfect verb that follows, or should it be treated as extending only to the vocative: “How long, LORD? I have cried out!”?), and ambiguity of meaning for some forms (Are “will not hear” and “will not save” temporal statements, or are they descriptions of God’s unwillingness to respond?).

Behind such passage-specific issues stand several features of the Hebrew verbal system that feed into such ambiguities. First, tense is not encoded in the morphology of the two main verbal forms, the perfect and imperfect. Instead, these two verb forms contrast in terms of the way they portray events: either as a whole event with beginning and end point in view (perfect), or as in the process of unfolding (imperfect) (see Cook 2001; 2006). In the realm of past tense, this distinction may be analogically illustrated by the contrast between English simple past (“it flew”) and past progressive (“it was flying”). Nevertheless, these two verb forms imply a “default” temporal interpretation (see Smith), such that the perfect is generally interpreted as referring to past events, and the imperfect refers to nonpast events. Nevertheless, crossover is possible and demonstrates their lack of explicit temporal indications—for example, 1 Samuel 1:10, “She prayed to Yhwh and she was weeping greatly” (imperfect), and Genesis 15:18, “To your descendants I hereby give this land” (perfect). Difficulties with the temporal interpretation of these forms are particularly evident in the sphere of present time, where the two forms most overlap, such as in proverbial statements (see Cook, D友谊PW 260-67) or in prophetic passages such as Habakkuk 1:1-2, cited above.

Second, both the perfect and imperfect forms can express both statements of fact (indicative mood) and statements of possibility (nonindicative mood). Nonindicative statements most frequently are expressions of the speaker’s will (e.g., Jer 7:27: “You shall speak [irreal perfect = waw-consecutive perfect] to them these words”; Ezek 5:17: “And a sword I will bring [imperfect] upon you”) or the expression of hypothetical or conditional/contingent events, as in this following passage: “If you are willing [imperfect] and obey [irreal perfect = waw-consecutive perfect], the good of the land you shall eat [imperfect]; but if you refuse [imperfect] and rebel [irreal perfect = waw-consecutive perfect], by the sword you shall be devoured [imperfect]” (Is 1:19-20).

The difficulties with interpreting the verbs in the Prophetic Books are well illustrated by the grammatical category “prophetic perfect,” which appears already in the medieval grammatical discussions of the biblical prophets (see Rogland, 53-56). This category was developed to explain instances of the perfect(ive) verb that seem to refer to an indicative future event in prophetic literature, such as Isaiah 5:13a: “Therefore my people will go into captivity [perfect] because they lack knowledge of
me” (REB). Other examples include “be full” in Isaiah 11:9, “dry up” in Isaiah 19:7 and “capture” in Jeremiah 48:41 (see Klein).

The “prophetic perfect” explanation has taken several forms, but generally grammars point to the imminence and vividness of a future event so expressed by the perfect verb (see Rogland, 53-54). If we treat this as a rhetorical device, we can see a certain analogy with the “historical present” tense found in so many languages, including English and NT Greek (e.g., Mk 15:24: “And they crucified [present tense: staurosin] him”). However, as analogous as these might appear, the identification of prophetic perfects has proved uncertain. Quite a number of examples that some grammarians or commentators treat as clear cases of future events expressed by the perfect verb, other authorities interpret as past events. Thus, it is only as an ad hoc process of elimination that examples of the prophetic perfect can be identified (see Klein). On this basis, M. F. Rogland has argued that many of the passages brought forward as examples of the prophetic perfect are misidentified (Rogland, 58-113). Rather, the perfect verb is functioning with much more “normal” senses (i.e., past and perfect expressions), which senses are missed by scholars because they overlook the possibility of future perfect expressions (“this will have happened”) or temporal shifts such as quoted speech or visionary narratives.

In fact, the principles that Rogland puts forward to narrowly explain the prophetic perfects are more widely explanatory of the variety of verb forms found in prophetic literature. In particular, three issues need to be taken into account: (1) the temporal (deictic) shifts occasioned by quotations and visionary passages; (2) the means available to the prophets for expressly signaling future time; (3) the conditional nature of prophetic threats as over and against the caricatured interpretations of their pronouncement as “prediction.” These three issues are treated here in turn.

In *vision reports we find the prophets describing events that may be past or future, but the vision itself is present before their eyes. As a result, these static descriptions may utilize a number of different verb forms, including both perfects (especially with stative predicates) and imperfects, as well as the participle and null-copula/verbless expressions. The vision report in Habakkuk 3 is a good illustration of the variety of verb forms that may appear in such a context. The visionary portion extends from Habakkuk 3:3-15, and the mixture of various verbs (thirty-two in all) is quite diverse, yet the NRSV, NIV and NKJV translate all as past verbs, while the REB, NAB and JB mostly use present verbs, and the NASB and NLT both show a split between present verbs in Habakkuk 3:3-7 as past verbs in Habakkuk 3:8-15. Some authorities claim that the verbs should be interpreted as future on the basis that the perfect forms in the passage are “prophetic perfects” (de Regt, 92).

The alternation between imperfect and perfect verbs may be clarified by attention to characteristics of temporal immediacy in a vision report, such as in Habakkuk 3. On this basis, the passage, which begins mainly with imperfect verbs (Hab 3:3-5), is best translated with present pro­gressive verbs, which convey the events as going on at the very moment in which they are described by the prophet. The stative perfect in Habakkuk 3:3 expresses a present state, as is typical (see Gibson, 61).

3.3Eloah from Teman is coming
[imperfect],
and the Holy One from Mount Paran.
His glory has covered [perfect] the
heavens,
and his praise fills [stative perfect] the
earth.
3.4His splendor is [imperfect] like a light
—rays from his hand, and there is his
power.
3.5Before him is going [imperfect]
pestilence,
and plague is coming [imperfect] forth
at his feet.

The change from the dominance of the imperfect verbs in Habakkuk 3:3-5 to perfect and past narrative forms (= waw-consecutive imperfects) in Habakkuk 3:6-7 conveys a shift away from a temporal immediacy of the report. This shift coincides with the shift of focus on God’s arrival to the earth’s reaction to his arrival: only the actions of Eloah stand in narrative order expressed by past narrative verbs, underscoring that “the earth quaked” and “the nations shook” as a direct consequence of Eloah’s standing and looking (Hab 3:6). The prophet’s reference to himself in Habakkuk 3:7 (“I saw”) underscores
the distancing of himself from the visionary experience, as he is able to reflect upon his watching of the vision. The shift in verbal dominance to perfects and pasts points to a past progressive rendering of the imperfect in Habakkuk 3:7.

He stood [perfect] and the earth quaked [past], he looked [perfect] and the nations shook [past], and the ancient mountains shuddered [past], the everlasting hills sank on his everlasting path. Under disaster I saw [perfect] the tents of Cushan, the curtains of the land of Midian were trembling [imperfect].

A similar alternation appears in the second half of the poem (Hab 3:8-15): the predominance of imperfect verbs coincides with a description of God’s theophanic approach (Hab 3:8-9, 12), and the predominance of perfect verbs with a description of the earth’s reaction (Hab 3:10-11). And in the final alternation (Hab 3:13-15) the prophet once again distances himself from the temporal immediacy of the visionary experience with perfect verbs, this time to reflect on the significance of God’s arrival: he has come to save his people.

Is it with the rivers you are angry [stative Perfect], Yahweh, or at the rivers (is) your anger, or at the sea (is) your wrath, that you are riding [imperfect] your horses, your chariots of victory; (that) you are brandishing [imperfect] your naked bow —oaths of (your) tribes, a command; (that) you are cleaving [imperfect] rivers in the earth?

The mountains have seen you [perfect], are writhing [imperfect], a torrential downpour has passed [perfect], the deep has given [perfect] its voice, its high hand the sun has raised [perfect], the moon has stood [perfect] in its lofty abode— at the light of your arrows (which) are coming [imperfect], at the splendor of the flash of your spear.

In fury you are marching [imperfect] on the earth, in wrath you are threshing [imperfect] the nations. You have come forth [perfect] for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You have crushed [perfect] the head of the wicked house—laying bare the foundation to the neck. You have pierced [perfect] with your staff the head of its warriors —(who) were storming [imperfect] to scatter me; their exultation (is) as to devour the poor in secret. You have trodden [perfect] in the sea with your horses —great foaming waters!

By contrast, the prophets sometimes cast their descriptions quite unambiguously into the future. One of the ways they do this is by using a tense-indicating copula verb. The copula "to be" verb is extremely frequent in the Bible, appearing most frequently either as a marker of past events (past narrative = waw-consecutive imperfect wayhi ["and it was"]) or future events (irreal perfect = waw-consecutive perfect wehayyā ["and it shall be"]). About half of the occurrences of wehayyā ("and it shall be") appear in the Prophetic Books, usually alone but sometimes in a set phrase such as "and it shall be on that day" or "and it shall be at time." The following passage from Zephaniah 1 illustrates the use of this verb to unambiguously portray the events described as happening in some future time when God takes action, as he has announced earlier in the chapter that he intends to do (I have placed the circumlocution "and it will be," as found in older translations, in parentheses and italicized the future auxiliary verb, which is the real significance of the wehayyā form):

Hush before the Lord God, for the day of the L ORD is near. Indeed, he has prepared a sacrifice,
consecrated his guests.

18 (And it will be) on the day of the sacrifice I will punish [irreal perfect] the officials and the king’s sons and all who dress themselves in foreign attire.

19 (And I will) punish [irreal perfect] all who leap over the threshold on that day — those who fill their master’s house with violence and fraud.

10 (And it will be) on that day — oracle of the Lord — there will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate, and of a howl from the Second Quarter, and a crash from the hills.

11 Wall, inhabitants of the Mortar, for all the traders have perished; all who weigh out silver are cut off.

12 (And it will be) at that time I will search [imperfect] Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish [irreal perfect] the people who rest complacently on their drags, those who say in their hearts, “The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm.”

13 So that their wealth becomes plunder, and their houses desolation. And if they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; and if they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.

Although the prophets had the means to describe events as unambiguously future, they were not simple foretellers. Much more frequently the description is one of what will happen if God’s people will not heed the prophetic warning (see Jer 18:1-11). Following the passage from Zephaniah cited above, the prophet calls for the people to seek the Lord before the day of the Lord comes (Zeph 2:3). For this reason, the description in Zephaniah 1 is not simply cast in future time using wehāyā, but uses non-indicative expressions of what God intends versus indicative expressions of what will happen (e.g., “I will punish” [Zeph 1:8, 9, 12]). These verbs, like the copula wehāyā, are irreal perfects, which makes the statements of God’s action conditional threats: “If this, then that.” In other words, the entire tenor of the prophecy, via the grammar of the Hebrew, is set not as a forecast of future activities of God, but as a statement of intended action that is contingent upon the people’s response.

See also Aramaic Language; Intertextuality and Innerbiblical Interpretation; Writing and Prophecy.