

From

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The significance of the qatal

5.2. It is time to begin further developing your understanding of the qatal verb form. **The qatal verb form gives an attribute to the subject of the verb.**² This is a difficult concept to capture consistently in the English language. Fortunately, our main concern in this course is *understanding* Biblical Hebrew, not *translating* it. Therefore, we can “talk our way to the concept.” Translate many of the qatal verb forms which do not follow אָשַׁר (or אָם or כִּי) as “attributions.” For your translation, use an *-er* word or a gerund (-ing noun) + possessive pronoun. In translation, you may need to add an extra word *of* if the verb is an action verb that takes a direct object.

Translation of אָמַר

: *He was a sayER (of)*

or

His sayING (of)

Notes:

1. The word *of* is optional. Use *of* when the clause contains a direct object. In other words, if the action of the verb is done *to something or someone* you will need the word *of* in your translation.
2. The use of the *er*-word will be much more common.
3. The subject or doer of the verb אָמַר is not specified in our lesson verse, so it is translated according to the null affix ending which means 3rd m. s., our *he, it*. If you would read the verses before our lesson verse in your Bible, you would see that the subject of the verb is *YHWH* God.
4. The significance of the qatal as a verb form that pins an attribute on its subject may seem an overly abstract concept right now. Don't worry. We will be constantly developing this idea with numerous examples as the book progresses. Allow the course to unfold like a good movie in which each scene's contribution to the over-all theme of the movie is not instantly clear.

Footnote 2

This description of the verbal semantics of the qatal verb form as an attribution represents one of a few decisions in this book to go down “the road less traveled.” Most grammarians hold that the qatal is the simple past tense of Biblical Hebrew, equal in meaning to a wayyiqtol. See Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon U. Press, 1910), §106; Jouon/Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Editris Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1993), §112; Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (NY: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1971), §44.1. Waltke and O'Connor (1990), §30 assign qatal an aspectual rather than time referent asserting

that the qatal expresses a complete situation as one unanalyzable whole. This writer finds both positions untenable and holds to an interpretation of the qatal which is more reflective of its origin, described variously as nominal, stative, adjectival, attributive. This account of its origin is held by Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen: Neukirchen Verlag, 1956), §41; Bergsträsser, *Introduction to the Semitic languages*, trans. Daniels (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), §1.2.2.2; Hetzron, "Hebrew," *The World's Major Languages*, ed. Comrie (NY: Oxford, 1990) 661. Simply put then, I hold to a meaning for the qatal that views the meaning of the form at a more primitive stage of development than generally held. Cf. Turner, "The Tenses of the Hebrew Verb," *Studies Biblical and Oriental* (Edinburgh: Black, 1876), 384; Michel, *Tempora und Satzstellung in den Psalmen* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1960), 110 and quoted in Waltke and O'Connor(1990), 473; Hatav, *The Semantics of Aspect and Modality: Evidence from English and Biblical Hebrew* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1997), 18, 177; and Eskhult, *Studies in Verbal Aspect and Narrative Technique in Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Uppsala: Uppsala U., 1990), §2.2.2. Lambdin, §44.4 admits an adjective-like habitual meaning for qatal in some cases whereas I am suggesting it for all.