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“A Slip of the Reader and Not the Reed:  
(Infinitive Absolutes with Divergent Finite Forms). Part II.”

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anyone. The glory of the Lord is manifest in creating and evoking as a poetic image a being that carries both transcendent grandeur and voracious evil. The ambiguity gives us yet another perception of the grand scope of God's world and the checks and balances He built into it.

Further, the dichotomy of the image teaches us the principle of potentiality and limitation. It gives greater meaning and poignancy to that remarkable piece of realism in the Friday night prayer at the table before Kiddush: "Privilege us to receive Sabbaths amid abundant gladness, amid wealth and honor, and amid fewness of sins" — not "without sin" (an impossibility), but "fewness of sins" (an ever-present reality).

Potentiality is ever leavened with pride, and sin will always be threatening to burst forth, like the rapacious nature of the eagle, God's own symbol for power, kingship, and fatherliness. The eagle symbolizes a kind of spiritual death and spiritual resurrection. In the ultimate judgment, we are, metaphorically, all eagles.

This concludes one suggested homiletical climax to the darshanut on the ambiguity of eagles. Certainly, the meanings and the significance of the eagle as poetic symbol have not been exhausted. It may be hoped that each reader now feels inspired that he can and should delve into the embedded meanings of poetic images in Tanakh without fear. It is an activity for everyone that renders spiritual, religious, inspired that he can and should delve into the embedded meanings of poetic images in Tanakh without fear. It is an activity for everyone that renders spiritual, religious, intellectual, and intellectual satisfaction. Try it!

NOTES
1. All biblical translations, except where noted, are Tanakh: A New Translation (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).
2. Adele Berlin, Biblical Poetry through Medieval Jewish Eyes (Bloomington: 1991) p. 82. n. 16.
4. See Ramban on this verse. The parallel injunction in Deuteronmy 14.12 is much less damning.
5. Some Bible scholars have argued that "eagle" is a mistranslation of יְָּדֹק, that it should be "vulture." Others have argued exactly the reverse. In this paper, it makes not an iota of difference. It is how the word יְָּדֹק is used that concerns us. The JPS translation of 1916 confronts the difficulty of the יְָּדֹק being nearly divine in one place and a bloody abomination in another. When the יְָּדֹק is good, it is translated as "eagle"; when bad, as in Leviticus 11 and Job 39, for example, it is "vulture!" Connotation is all. In the 1985 version, it is "eagle" throughout.
7. How distressingly modern all this sounds, like a speech in Nuremberg in 1938.
Moreover, the target of the Lord's wrath, the inhabitants of Jerusalem (42:18), also recalls the finite verb in דָּשַׁן [the inhabitants of Jerusalem]. As for the infinitive absolute מְיוֹרָה [return] in 42:10, we hear it echoed soon afterwards in The Lord's conditional prophecy in 42:12: 'I will dispose him [the king of Babylon] to be merciful to you; he shall show you mercy and bring you back [דָּשַׁן] to your land.' Later, after Jeremiah finishes his prophecy, we are told that his hearers did not obey his words but instead took all those who had returned [דָּשַׁן] and fled to Egypt (43:5).

The ambiguity of מְיוֹרָה in 42:10 is quite meaningful when we keep in mind the conditional nature of The Lord's promise in Jeremiah 42. As W. Holladay notes:

the change on [The Lord's] part is dependent on the change on the part of the people. In the present instance [The Lord] cannot call back the fall of Jerusalem, but he can shift the fortunes of the people from evil to good. Indeed, though they renege on their word, as 42:6 tells us, the people originally had promised to accept The Lord's decree whether for good or for bad [דָּשַׁן]. This explains The Lord's ambiguous response in 42:10: Its interpretation, like the people's future, hinges on a decision, one which involves both a correct divining of The Lord's word and obedience to that word. God's message, therefore, forces the people to listen closely and to decide; hence Jeremiah's exhortation immediately afterwards: 'then hear the word of The Lord, a remnant of Judah' (42:15).

ZEPHANIAH 1:2

We turn now to a fourth ambiguous infinitive absolute, in Zephaniah 1:2. It is very similar to that found in Jeremiah 8:13. Here Zephaniah opens his prophecy with the words: יָסֵף יָסֵף יָסֵף is a literal translation which commentators usually render 'I will make an end to everything from the face of the earth.' Discussing options for explaining the anomaly, Adele Berlin concludes:

It seems more plausible that on occasion one may find an infinitive absolute plus finite verb from two different but related roots, especially defective roots. The effect produces greater assonance, an important feature in prophetic speech, without sacrificing meaning.

I believe that Berlin is correct here. Moreover, Zephaniah, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, employed the two roots side by side in order to prophesy with a polysysemous punch. The context and imagery of Zephaniah's speech support this. The meaning "sweep away" for the expression יָסֵף יָסֵף is bolstered by the twice repeated use of the root יָסֵף in v. 3: 'I will sweep away [ינשף] man and beast; I will sweep away [ינשף] the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea.' The reader, who accepts the meaning "sweep away," finds reassurance soon afterwards when God pronounces His doom: 'And I will cut off [ינשף] mankind from the face of the earth.' The similarity in phraseology serves to reinforce the connection to 1:2. Note how the predicate mankind from the face of the earth appears in both the opening line and the end of v. 3 and acts as a kind of inclusio.

The examples of infinitive mixing in Isaiah and Jeremiah have demonstrated that both meanings projected by the construction are relevant to the prophecy. Therefore, we should expect in Zephaniah some reference to the secondary meaning projected by יָסֵף יָסֵף namely "I will gather." We first find the meaning "gather" in 2:1: Gather together; gather. O nation without shame. Here, however, Zephaniah employs for "gather" the expression, יָסֵף יָסֵף a denominative from יָסֵף [straw, stubble]. According to Berlin, Zephaniah selected his words to play on the sound of יָסֵף [shame] and to provide a semantic association with the words "like chaff" [יָסֵף] in the next line. I aver that it also was chosen to remind the reader of the previous allusion.

In 3:8 Zephaniah again rehearses the link between "sweeping away" and "gathering": 'But wait for me,' says The Lord, 'for the day will arise as an accuser, when I decide to gather [ינשף] nations, bring kingdoms together [ינשף].' Note here how The Lord must perform an act of decision, an act which is mirrored in the word choice of 1:2; i.e., the choice of interpreting 1:2 as "gather" or "sweep away" is made by God in 3:8. Yet, here again, The Lord decides to gather the nations only for the purpose of pouring upon them His indignation and wrath (3:9). In case the reader missed the connection to 1:2, Zephaniah spices his prophecy with the root יָסֵף [cut off] (3:6, 3:7) which refers to יָסֵף in 1:3.
When Zephaniah concludes his prophecy he again refers to "gathering" but this time in a positive sense, transforming the object of his wrath from the Judeans to the other nations.

"I will fly away [תָּקַל] from you the woe over which you endured mockery. At that time I will make an end [תָּקַל] of all who afflicted you. I will rescue the lame and gather [תָּקַל] the strayed; and I will exchange their disgrace for fame and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you [תָּקַל] home, and in that time I will gather you [תָּקַל יִזֵּר] (3:18b-20).

Observe how Zephaniah concludes his prophecy with several references to the ambiguous use of נָסָכ (gather) in 1:2. First, in 3:18b God asserts that He will remove the hardship which the people endured. He does so by using the verb נָסָכ (take away). The act of "sweeping away" which the reader heard echoed subtly in 1:2 and which was clarified as the agent of God's wrath against Judah in 3:8-9 now appears unequivocal. It is an act which The Lord will perform against the nations. Zephaniah's use of the root נָסָכ (gathering) twice in 3:19-20, and which he employed in synonymous parallelism with נָסָכ (gather) in 3:8, also reminds the reader of 1:2. Like 1:3, it serves as a larger inclusio device for the entire group of prophecies. The words נָסָכ נָסָכ in 1:2 which naturally raised the question "Will God sweep us away or gather us together?" now achieve resolve.

JEREMIAH 48:9

Though scholars traditionally have not included Jeremiah 48:9 among the known examples of ambiguous infinitive absolutes, it should be discussed in conjunction with them. In 48:9 Jeremiah proclaims calamity upon Moab: נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָ�ָּכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָסָכ נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר נָשָר

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Moab, for shining she will surrender. J. Thompson follows suit. R. Carroll cautiously notes that "wordplay or confusion may explain MT."

At the heart of the crux interpretum is the infinitive absolute נָסָכ which appears to derive from the root נָס (fly) or its by-form נָס which also can mean "struggle, fall to ruins," and the finite form נָס which must derive from נָס (commonly "go out"). The construction conveys at least three, and possibly four, senses: (1) You surely shall go out [to battle (struggle?)!] (cf. I Sam. 11:3, Isa. 36:16). (2) You surely shall come to ruin (cf. Jer. 4:7). (3) You surely shall fly away. (4) She will go out shining.

We find support from the first meaning just prior in 48:7 where Jeremiah proclaims: Chemosh shall go forth נָס to exile. Perhaps this reference serves to set the reader up in order to play upon his or her expectation. The second meaning, "come to ruin," is suggested by the previous mention of desolation in 48:8: the valley shall be devastated and the tableland laid waste (cf. 48:3). These two references propose conflicting contexts for the expression נָס נָס in 48:9. As for the meaning "fly away," we hear of it later in the prophecy when Jeremiah associates Moab's demise with the fleeing of a dove: Desert the cities and dwell in the crags. O inhabitants of Moab! Be like a dove that nests in the mouth of the [rock's] opening (48:28). In fact, the comparison of Moabites with birds must have been proverbial. See, e.g., Isaiah 16:2: Like fugitive birds, like nestlings driven away. Moab's villagers linger by the fords of Arnon. Jeremiah also associates Moab's conqueror with a bird: See, he soars like an eagle and spreads out his wings against Moab (48:40). Finally, the meaning "go out shining," which is based on the Arabic and Ugaritic root נָס, is suggested by association with "lost glory" (נָשָר נָשָר) in 48:2 and "treasures" in 48:7 (cf. Job 14:2). This networking of nexuses is reminiscent of the referential nature of the infinitive constructions in Isaiah 28:28, Jeremiah 8:13, and Zephaniah 1:2, and adds weight to the argument of its deliberateness.

ISAIAH 24:19

Another overlooked absolute infinitive construction utilizing two different roots occurs in Isaiah 24:19.

The earth is breaking, breaking נָשָר נָשָר.
While the finite form in 19a derives from the geminate הֵרֵע (break, smash), the infinitive construct appears to be from הֹרֵע [pasture, tend, graze]. Nevertheless, the medievals, e.g., Rashi, Radak, Ibn Ezra, and the commentaries Metsudat David\(^2\) and Metsudat Zion, as well as the moderns, e.g., Gray, Kaiser, Oswalt, and Hakam, treat the infinitive absolute as if derived from הֶרֵע [break, smash].\(^{24}\)

Though the vocalization of the infinitive absolute is also odd, appearing as הֹרֵע and not as the expected הֵרֵע, the accentuation demands that we treat it as the infinitive absolutes הָרֵע in Ruth 2:16 and הָרֵע in Numbers 23:25.\(^{23}\) Still, if the qal infinitive absolute should be derived from the root הֶרֵע we would expect to find it as הָרֵע and not as הֵרֵע (cf. הֶרֶע פָּרָה from הָרֵע פָּרָה in the same verse); i.e., one can explain the ה only by appealing to another root, namely הֶרְע.\(^{26}\) Therefore, הָרֵע is a compromise form evoking הֶרֵע as expected from הֵרֵע, but allowing us to see ה seulement as well. As with the other examples of anomalous infinitive absolutes above, we need not impose upon the usage a single linguistic derivation. Instead, as in Isaiah 28:28, the prophet has combined both הָרֵע and הֶרֵע in order to deliver a polysemous message.

Also like the other examples, in Isaiah 24:19 we find internal references at work. The meaning "break" conveyed by the finite form הָרֵע points us to the repeated mention of destruction (Isa. 24:12, 24:19-20) and entrapment (Isa. 24:17-18). הֶרֵע, on the other hand, connects us with Isaiah’s metaphors used to describe that destruction. Note how the prophet refers to the imminent onslaught "[let them glean over and over, as a vine]" (cf. Jer 6:3-4). Therefore, unlike F. Delitzsch who saw the anomalous infinitivus absolutus in Isaiah 24:19 as a "slip of the pen,"\(^{25}\) we should regard הָרֵע הָרֵע as a deliberate and sophisticated usage.

In sum, the evidence above demonstrates how wordplay, in this case, grammatical portmanteau, has governed the authors’ choice of lexemes in Isaiah 24:19, 28:28, Jeremiah 8:13, 42:10, 48:9, and Zephaniah 1:2. They are mistakes made not by a red, but by readers, and are quite meaningful when viewed in context. Such usages, though rare, have multiple benefits. They deliver the message concisely, force the listener to contemplate the meaning of the oracle, and provide for the listener important clues for interpreting the prophecy.

Notes


3 Holladay, Jeremiah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) p. 300. Cf. הָרְעָה in Psalm 23:6, which may play both on "sit" and "return ."


5 Holladay, Jeremiah, p. 300.


7 Berlin was anticipated by O. Palmer Robertson, The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, New International Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990) p. 257, who saw the form as a combination of two roots juxtaposed for the sake of assonance. I would argue, however, that there are contextual and semantic reasons as well as stylistic at work here.

JOSEPH AND REVOLUTIONARY EGYPT

JONATHAN A. STEINBERG

Israel's sojourn in Egypt was not just a result of divine providence or national fate. A re-reading of the biblical narrative, along with other sources, suggests that Joseph's policies in conjunction with the historical circumstances set the stage for a political upheaval in Egypt and led to Israel's experience of slavery and redemption. Joseph's ascent to the position of vizier of Egypt and the Israelites' subsequent descent into slavery is one of the critical episodes of Jewish history, and its themes of bondage, injustice, stranger in a strange land, and miraculous deliverance have provided raw material for the Jewish people's collective psyche ever since. But the story also has a dark underside, and viewed from the end of the 20th century, Joseph's realpolitik and his policies and actions smack of more recent rulers who used their vast powers to the detriment of their subjects, and who paid a price as a result.

It is difficult if not impossible to piece together the story with historical accuracy after almost 4,000 years. Egyptian records and archaeological evidence are sketchy. But the Bible gives a full account of Joseph's career, and with an eye on material from other sources a plausible recreation of his time can be constructed. A likely chronology is that Joseph arrived in Egypt while it was under the control of the Hyksos, a people from Western Asia who conquered Egypt around 1700 BCE and ruled it for approximately 150 years. The theory of Hyksos dominion of the Hyksos, a people from Western Asia who conquered Egypt around 1700 BCE and ruled it for approximately 150 years. The theory of Hyksos domination in the time of Joseph is only one of several possibilities, but in this article it is assumed to be the correct one.

Aided by the horse-drawn war-chariot, then a new military weapon, the Hyksos established an empire which included Canaan and Syria, with their capital city at Avaris in the Goshen area of the Nile delta. These "princes of the desert," as they termed themselves, accommodated themselves to the system of rule in Egypt and contributed to Egyptian culture. However, in line with the Egyptian...