

GUIDE TO THE USE OF BDB

BETHEL SEMINARY



CENTER FOR BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

PAUL W. FERRIS JR., Ph.D

1 PREPARATION

NOTES:

- 1.1 Familiarize yourself with the *sigla* on p. xix. and then check on abbreviations as necessary as you use the lexicon.
- 1.2 BDB will prove helpful in determining the meaning of a given term in a given passage, and in determining or verifying the proper morphological analysis of a term that proves difficult to parse.
- 1.3 Remember that a dictionary does not "dictate" the meaning of a word. Rather it records the lexicographer's observations of the current usage of a term. Meaning is determined by custom and common usage at a given time as well as by the conscious choice of the user (writer or speaker).

2 USING THE LEXICON

- 2.1 BDB uses alphabetical arrangement according the *shoresh*. In most cases, derived words do receive an alphabetical entry of their own which merely refer you to the *shoresh*, e.g. **טָשַׁף** entry, p. 606c, reads "v. **טָשַׁף**." Note that these entries are often clustered and there may be more than one per line. When you go to the *shoresh* entry, the verb is normally treated first and derived words follow.
- 2.2 Note the primary gloss(es) suggested by the lexicographers (in bold type right after word classification).
 - 2.2.1 If the glosses given seem fairly straightforward and seem clearly to suit the context, there is probably no need for any further lexical

analysis.

- 2.2.2 If there are several possible meanings given, or if they seem unclear in the context, further analysis is warranted.
- 2.3 Check to see if the passage you are studying is cited in the article (Einspahr can help by giving you quadrant and section number).
- 2.4 Take note of both extra-biblical usage and cognates in other languages (cited within bold parentheses following the gloss). These may be instructive but not determinative.
- 2.5 Pay special attention to how the *binyan* and aspect (tense) affect the meaning. E.g., if your passage uses the H (hiph`il) *binyan*, you'll want to do most of your analysis in other passages that use the same *binyan*. E.g., look up **לְמַד**, **אֵר**, **מְצָא**, **שָׁכַל**, etc.
- 2.6 Be sure you have checked each possible *shoresh*. E.g. **גִּוַר**, **הָלַל**
- 2.7 Does your author use the term elsewhere and, if so, does he define or otherwise explicate the term himself? (If the article is marked by a dagger, indicating that all passages are cited, BDB can be used somewhat like a concordance.)
- 2.8 Work objectively to narrow a field of comparable usages (chronologically, grammatically and possibly even topically) by classifying usage and meaning of the various occurrences.

3 SYNTHESIS

- 3.1 Be sure to take good notes on your work, recording lexicon page and quadrant references, to conserve the results of your efforts.
- 3.2 Determine that you will record the results of your own reflection on the data.
- 3.3 Decide whether it would be most effective for you to start your own "dictionary" file or to file your notes by passage reference. The former is probably best

for "theological" terms, idioms and the like, the latter for matters pertaining more to a given passage.

4 EXERCISE

- 4.1 What can BDB tell you about **מִתְאַמְצָה** in Ruth 1:18
- 4.2 What is the distinction between the two *shoreshim*, **לְאָל**?
- 4.3 What is a **לְאָל** and how does it function?