SHORT NOTES

KAYYÔM HAZZEH "ON THIS VERY DAY"; KAYYÔM "ON THE VERY DAY"; KĀʾĒT "AT THE VERY TIME"

The preposition k most commonly indicates approximation or comparison ("about", "like", "as"), but it can also be used as a temporal expression to indicate exact point of time. The purpose of this note is to suggest that some occurrences of k which have been understood as denoting approximation or comparison in fact belong to the group which indicate exact point of time.

First this is surely the invariable meaning of the expressions kayyôm/kehayyôm. These occur eleven times in the Hebrew Bible, and some instances have been taken to indicate approximation or comparison. BDB (p. 400b) indeed suggests that the expressions' literal meaning is "at (about) to-day", and an understanding in terms of approximation appears in the New International Version rendering at 1 Sam. ix 13 where kēhayyôm is translated "about this time". Precisely in this passage, however, k can hardly suggest a vague indication of time, because the context in vv. 12-13 emphasizes the urgency of the moment. The preposition k indicating exact point of time has already been used at the beginning of v. 13 (NIV: "as soon as"), and it is surely repeated here (cf. the Revised Standard Version: "immediately"). An understanding of kayyôm in terms of comparison appears in the New English Bible and the Revised English Bible at Isa. lviii 4, which translate "on such a day" (cf. J. D. W. Watts²). Here, however, it makes good sense to take the phrase to refer to the fast which the audience are undertaking "this day" (RSV; cf. R. N. Whybray³). k can indeed mean "about", "the like of" (BDB, p. 453ab) when prefaced to indications of quantity or proportion (e.g. Gen. xxxviii 24; Exod. xi 4, xii 37; 1 Sam. ix 22; Ezek. xvi 51; Ruth i 4, ii 17). But it may be doubted whether this understanding can be extended to expressions such as kayyôm/kehayyôm. As translations elsewhere recognize, these expressions means "right then/right now" or "today". They are synonyms of hayyôm though conveying more emphasis. The fact that in other contexts k can suggest comparison or approximation

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has obscured the fact that prefaced to hayyôm it invariably suggests temporal precision.

A similar point can be made regarding kā'ēt and its compound expressions. These are sometimes translated "about the time...", a rendering which introduces an unintended and unjustified element of bathos into some passages because an expression which was designed to add precision and force is being understood instead to convey approximation: so e.g. the RSV and New RSV at 1 Kgs xx 6 and 2 Kgs vii 1, 18 (cf. J. Gray⁴). The same consideration applies to Exod. ix 18, though there the RSV's "about this time" (cf. J. P. Hyatt⁵) gives way to the NRSV's "at this time" (cf. B. S. Childs⁵). As the NEB recognizes, kā'ēt... always means "at the very time...", as kayyôm/khayyôm always means "on the very day". Here, too, the k denotes temporal precision not approximation.

The same may be suggested regarding the phrase kayyôm hazzeh/khayyôm hazzeh, which is usually taken to denote not approximation but comparison. It occurs 27 times in the Hebrew Bible, seven in Deuteronomy, sixteen in Deuteronomistic-style prose in Kings, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, two in the Joseph story, and two in 1 Sam. xxii. The LXX commonly translates by phrases such as ὡς ἐν τῷ ἡμέρᾳ τούτῳ; BDB (p. 400b) offers the rendering "as it is at this day" (cf. the Revised Version) and S. R. Driver in his commentary on Deuteronomy translates "as is now the case". More likely, however, this k also denotes exact point of time.

The instances in Deuteronomy, and a number of occurrences elsewhere, indeed come in contexts where there is a comparison between what was once the case and what is so now. Nevertheless, there are difficulties about the traditional understanding which takes the phrase kayyôm hazzeh/khayyôm hazzeh as itself drawing attention to this comparison. First, in a number of instances no comparison is involved. Thus HAL, for instance, while suggesting the traditional understanding for some instances of the phrase (Deut. vi 24; Jer. xlv 22; Ezra ix 7, 15; Neh. ix 10), in other passages assumes that it simply means "today"/"now" (e.g. Gen. 1 20; Deut. ii 30; Dan. ix 7).¹⁻⁸ Translations and commentaries also oscillate between the two understandings.¹⁻⁹ It is not clear on what basis one or the other is chosen. Second, in a series of other passages there appears the phrase bayyôm hazzeh (e.g. Exod. xix 1; Lev. viii 33; Josh. vii 25) or simple hayyôm hazzeh (e.g. Deut. v