
The project of *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* under the editorship of David Clines began in 1988. To date three volumes have appeared out of an expected total of eight. The drafting of the entries is being carried out by a team of research associates, who, since 1993, have been working under the direction of John Elwolde, the executive editor of the volumes.

This dictionary is intended to be the successor of BDB,¹ the most famous Hebrew dictionary in the English-speaking world. It is not, however, a revision of BDB but is a completely original work. The purpose of the editors is to provide a dictionary that takes into account both contemporary approaches to lexicography and also the expansion in the corpus of Hebrew material. For this reason it is not restricted to the Hebrew of the Old Testament but covers all Hebrew material from the earliest times down to c. A.D. 200. The sources include (1) the Old Testament (excluding the Aramaic portions), (2) the book of Ben Sira, (3) the Qumran manuscripts and (4) inscriptions. The non-biblical texts are in extent about 15% of the size of the Old Testament. The Qumran material includes the large number of texts that have become available to the public this decade. Each volume of the dictionary covers an increasingly wider range of texts as the publication of the material from Qumran progresses.

The introduction in the first volume explains that a dictionary project must take account of the requirements of its potential users. The form of the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, accordingly, has been influenced by “market research”. In this way it is hoped that it will satisfy the needs of the majority of its users.

The dictionary is distinguished from other Hebrew dictionaries not only in its comprehensive corpus but also in the method of presenting the material. It is based on the principle that “the meaning of a word is its use in the language”. The entries, therefore, present in a thorough manner the patterns and combinations in which words are used. They record, for instance, the subjects and objects that are attested for verbs, and, for nouns, the verbs and the other nouns with which they are connected. This treatment is usually exhaustive, except in the case of a few frequently occurring particles. Also synonyms and antonyms are listed to show the relationship of the word to others in the same semantic field. The primary function of the dictionary is stated to be “to organize and rationalize the available data about Hebrew words, enabling readers

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to make their own decisions about the meaning of words in the light of all the evidence”.

Adherence to the principle that meaning lies in usage has led to the exclusion from the entries of information relating to the historical background of words in the form of cognates in other Semitic languages or relating to the history of interpretation of a word, such as is found in Bible versions, in lexicographical works and exegetical literature throughout the ages. It is recognized that such information often shows us how we know the meaning of Hebrew words, but it is stated in the introduction to the first volume that “we [the compilers of the dictionary] have not seen it as our task to justify the meanings we propose for the Hebrew words” on the grounds that it is too complex an undertaking to be accomplished within the confines of a dictionary. There is a slight change in policy in the second and third volumes in this respect, in that they include a comprehensive bibliography of published lexicographical studies of individual words as well as references to the manuscript of D. Winton Thomas’s revision of BDB, on which he was engaged at the time of his death in 1970. The second and third volumes also differ from the first in containing separate entries for “new” words whose existence has been proposed in recently scholarly literature largely on the basis of comparative philology. Many of these are homonyms of already known words, e.g. in addition to the entry for the verbal root יָדַע in the sense of “to speak” there are seven further entries of homonymous roots, namely “to destroy”, “to turn the back”, “to drive out”, “to carry off”, “to manage”, “to follow” and “to have descendants”. These recently proposed roots are marked with a star and in the bibliography there is an indication of the words in other Semitic languages which have been claimed to be cognate with them.

The material is arranged on an alphabetical principle, at least for parts of speech other than verbs. The headword given for a noun is the absolute singular form. A noun such as עָמָר “watch”, therefore, is arranged under עָלֵף, with a cross-reference to the root שָׁמַר. The various inflections of a verb are not presented separately but are collected together under the heading of the root. At the end of the entries of verbs there are cross-references to nouns derived from the root. In addition to the headword, all Hebrew words and phrases mentioned in the entries are translated into English. These features are designed to make the dictionary as user-friendly as possible.

No attempt has been made to trace the historical development of the meanings of words within the period covered by the material of the corpus, on the grounds that few of the texts can be dated with absolute certainty. Emendations in the reading of texts that have been suggested in scholarly literature are reported. These, however, are not evaluated and the reader is left to decide on their validity.

After the headword, the entries include an indication of the number of occurrences in the four main divisions of the corpus (Bible, Ben Sira, Qumran,