ARAMAIC AND THE BIBLE

How *Targum Onqelos* Can Help Discern Between the Biblical Hebrew Frequentative and hte Preterital Imperfects

by Richard McDonald

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Abstract: The biblical Hebrew past Imperfect can be a difficult verb form to translate. The Hebrew grammars available to the reader do not provide many tips to determine whether a particular BH past Imperfect is functioning as a frequentative or a preterital. In fact, one grammarian contends that it is often left up to the intellect of the reader. However, the reader has another tool—not simply his or her intellect—to utilize in order to understand the BH past Imperfect. This paper argues that Targum Onqelos of the Pentateuch serves as a reliable guide in discerning the function of the BH frequentative and preterital Imperfects in the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy. The Hebrew and the Aramaic texts of Numbers 9:15-23 and Exodus 15:1-18 are analyzed to demonstrate that Onqelos consistently renders the BH frequentative with a Participle, and the BH preterital Imperfect with a Perfect. The concepts gleaned from Numbers 9:15-23 and Exodus 15:1-18 are then applied to other passages in the Pentateuch confirming that the targumist is consistent in rendering the various functions of the BH Imperfect.

Key Words: Targum Onqelos, frequentative Imperfect, preterital Imperfect, vav-consecutive Perfect, Participle, Perfect

Introduction

For readers of Biblical Hebrew (BH) the BH verbal system can be difficult to grasp. The situation seems even more dire when the reader observes that for the past two centuries BH scholars have written volumes on the BH verbal system. From the vav-conversive theories of Jewish grammarians, to the influential works of S. R. Driver and G. H. Ewald, and to the latest trends in modern BH linguistic studies, scholars have wrestled with explanations of the BH verbal system. Leslie McFall sums up the situation well with his aptly named book, *The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System*.[1]

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1. Leslie McFall, *The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System: Solutions from Ewald to the Present Day*, Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship 2 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982). For a brief survey of the history of scholarship on the Biblical Hebrew verbal system see John A. Cook,

The BH Imperfect in particular can frustrate readers of BH.[2] In beginning Hebrew grammars, students are taught that the Imperfect can indicate a future action (Exod. 4:1; 6:1), present action (Gen. 24:50; 37:15), or a modal (Gen. 1:9; Lev. 19:2).[3] To make matters more difficult, students are taught that the BH Imperfect can communicate actions in the past.[4] Some Imperfects are used to indicate incomplete, continuous actions in the past (Gen. 2:6; 1 Sam. 1:7), or the 'frequentative Imperfect.'[5] Other Imperfects indicate a one time action in the past and provides vividness to the action (Jdg. 2:1; 1 Sam. 13:17; 1 King 7:8), or the 'preterital Imperfect.'[6]

Context and various particles (בְּטֶרֶם, טֶרֶם, עַד, אָז) often help to discern if the BH Imperfect is functioning as a future, past, or modal. However, it can be difficult to determine if the biblical author is using the Imperfect to indicate frequentative action or a preterital. For example, the English translations of Genesis 37:7 render the Imperfects of Joseph's dream as a simple past, indicating that Joseph is using preterital Imperfects:

"The Finite Verbal Forms Do Express Aspect," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 30 (2006): 21–22; John A. Cook, *Time and the Biblical Hebrew Verb: The Expression of Tense, Aspect, and Modality in Biblical Hebrew*, Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 77–175; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 458–78.

2. The long-standing terminology of Perfect and Imperfect will be retained in this paper.

3. Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001): 165; Duane A. Garrett and Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009): 35–40; C. L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987): 142–43; Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 100.

4. Pratico and Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, 165; Seow, *Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, 142; Garrett and DeRouchie, *Modern Grammar*, 36; Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 502–4; S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions*, Ancient Language Resources (1892; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 30–35; Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. and rev. T. Muraoka, Subsidia Biblica 14 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), §113e–k; Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, Biblical Languages: Hebrew 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 147–48; Russell T. Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi, *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2017), §4d, g–h; G. H. Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament*, trans. James Kennedy, Ancient Language Resources (1891; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 8–10; E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 28th ed., trans. A. E. Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), §107b–e.

5. Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §4d; Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language*, 9–10; Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §107b; Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §113f, g.

6. Waltke and O'Connor label the Preterital Imperfect the "incipient past non-perfective" (Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 503). According to Driver, the Preterital Imperfect is labeled "nascent," Driver, *Treatise*, 29–31. See also Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, § 113h; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 149–50; Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language*, 8. For the sake of simplicity Joüon's term "preterital" is adopted in this paper primarily to set it apart from the frequentative Imperfect.

וְהִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ מְאַלְּמִים אֲלֻמִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֲלֻמָּתִי וְגַם־נִצָּבָה וְהִנֵּה תְסֻבֶּינָה

אֲלֻמֹּתֵיכֶם וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶיןָ לַאֲלֻמָּתִי:

> "For behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves **gathered around** and **bowed down** to my sheaf." (NASB)[7]

While the translation of the English versions are valid, it is possible that Joseph is describing his family in a continuous action, which requires the frequentative Imperfect. Moreover, Hebrew grammarians often differ in their analysis of various past Imperfects. For example, S. R. Driver and Gesenius-Kautzsch differ in their opinions of the Imperfect in Exodus 8:20b, which reads:

וּבְכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם תִּשָּׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵי הֶעָרֹב:

> And in all the land of Egypt, the land **was destroyed** from before the swarm. -*or*-

> And in all the land of Egypt, the land **was being destroyed** from before the swarm.

Gesenius-Kautzsch describes the Imperfect תִּשָּׁחֵת as a frequentative Imperfect; the action "*continued* throughout a longer or shorter period."[8] Gesenius-Kautzsch's description would then require the second translation. On the other hand, Driver analyzes the Imperfect תִּשָּׁחֵת as preterital—or 'nascent,' according to Driver—requiring the first translation.[9] According to Driver, the act of destroying the land by the swarm is pictured "with vividness to the mental eye" by the nascent—or preterital—Imperfect.[10]

Driver maintains that the reader is often left to his or her own intellect in discerning the correct function of the BH Imperfect in verses like Genesis 37:7 and Exodus 8:20b. He writes, "In which of these senses [a preterital or frequentative Imperfect] it is on each occasion to be understood is left to the intelligence of the reader to determine; and this will not generally lead him astray."[11] However, contrary

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7. See also the KJV, ASV, ESV, NIV, CSB, and NLT.

8. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §107b. Italics are original.

9. Driver, *Treatise*, 32–33. The "nascent" Imperfect, according to Driver, focuses on the action while the action is "in movement rather than while at rest, to picture it with peculiar vividness to the mental eye" (30).

10. Driver, *Treatise,* 30.

11. Driver, *Treatise,* 30. Driver observes that the difference between the frequentative Imperfect and the preterital Imperfect may at times be "immaterial." While determining the difference between a nascent—or preterital—or frequentative Imperfect may not affect the meaning of a passage, the goal of translating any passage is to strive for accuracy. Onqelos demonstrates accuracy in rendering the nascent and frequentative Imperfect.

to Driver, the reader is not left with intellect alone; there is another guide to help discern the function of the BH Imperfect.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that Targum Onqelos serves as a reliable guide to correctly render the BH Imperfect. Two passages in particular—Exodus 15:1-18 and Numbers 9:15-23—illustrate how Onqelos renders the BH frequentative and preterital Imperfect. In *Tg. Onq.* Numbers 9 Onqelos renders the BH frequentative Imperfect with a Participle, indicating that the targumist views the BH Imperfect as a frequentative. In *Tg. Onq.* Exodus 15 Onqelos renders the BH preterital Imperfect with the Perfect. Outside of *Tg. Onq.* Exodus 15 and *Tg. Onq.* Numbers 9, Onqelos demonstrates a consistency in using the Perfect and Participle to render the BH Imperfect in past time.

The Targums and the Hebrew Bible

Scholars of the Targums have focused much of their attention on how the targumists translate and interpret the Hebrew Bible. Many scholars focus on issues such as the avoidance of anthropomorphisms, the use of two Aramaic words to translate one Hebrew word, the tendency to expand or paraphrase rather than literally translate the poetical and prophetical books, the nature of the Targums as translation, and the influence of the Targums on New Testament studies.[12] While these studies are valuable in understanding the Targums and Scripture, the reader of BH can strengthen his or her understanding of the BH verbal system by studying how the targumists render BH verbs. As Dmytro Tsolin—in his study of how the targumists' render BH verbs in BH poetry—rightly observes, the targumists demonstrate an "awareness" of the BH verbal system.[13]

Targum Onqelos of the Pentateuch—the focus of this study—is particularly beneficial to the reader of BH because it is primarily a literal translation of the Hebrew

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12.   See for example, Philip S. Alexander, "Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 225–28; Paul V. M. Flesher and Bruce Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 39–54; Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible 6 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 12–14; Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible 1A (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 24–39; Simon G. D. A. Lasair, "Targum and Translation: A New Approach to a Classic Problem," *AJS Review* 34, no. 2 (2010): 265–87; Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 2010); John Ronning, *The Jewish Targums and John's Logos Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).

13.   Dmytro Tsolin, "Archaic Verbal Conjugations in Exod 15:2–18, 21 and Deut 32:1–43: Their Renderings in the Targums," *Aramaic Studies* 15 (2017): 76. The author of this paper discovered Tsolin's paper late in research. Many conclusions reached by the author of this paper was reached independently of Tsolin's work. Tsolin's paper focused primarily on the poetical sections of Hebrew narrative; however, he provides helpful categories for understanding how the targumists rendered Biblical Hebrew verbs in all portions of the Hebrew Bible.

text. Due to the literal nature of Onqelos, the reader of BH can easily recognize how the targumist apprehends a given BH verb.[14] To understand the literal nature of Onqelos, Onqelos and the other Targums could be compared to the wide range of English Bible translations.[15]

Targum Onqelos and Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings) could be compared to the KJV and NASB. The translators of the KJV and NASB generally follow the grammar and syntax of the original Hebrew Bible. There are instances in which the translators expand their translation in order to interpret difficult passages, but essentially, they are literal translations of the original Hebrew. Likewise, difficult phrases and words in the Hebrew text are interpreted and explained in Targums Onqelos and Jonathan, but on the whole the Aramaic of Onqelos and Jonathan follow closely the grammar and syntax of the Hebrew Bible. Other Targums—Neofiti and the Targums on the prophets and poetical books—are similar to the NIV or The Amplified Bible. These English translations interpret the difficult phrases and passages for the reader, smoothing out the difficult syntax of the original languages into easy-to-read English. Likewise, Neofiti and the Targums on the prophets and poetical books are more interpretive in their translations; they generally do not provide a literal translation of the Hebrew Bible.[16]

The benefit of Onqelos lies not only in the literal translation of the narrative portions of the Pentateuch, but also in its close adherence to the BH grammar and syntax in the poetical sections of the Pentateuch. In two major poetical sections—the Song of the Sea in *Tg. Onq.* Exodus 15 and the Song of Moses in *Tg. Onq.* Deuteronomy 32—Onqelos manifests a tendency to conform to BH grammar and syntax.[17] In particular, the targumist proficiently employs the Aramaic Perfect, Imperfect, and Participle to reflect the various functions of the BH verbal system.

How Onqelos translates the poetical sections of the Pentateuch is a key reason Onqelos was selected for this study. In the targums on the prophetical and poetical

14. For the term "literal translation" Lasair contends that a better term is "one-to-one interlinguistic rendering." Lasair terms the expansive translations of the Targums "narrative expansion"; Lasair, "Targum and Translation," 275–76. Dmytro Tsolin uses the terms "grammatically equivalent translation" for a literal translation, and "grammatically inequivalent translation" for expanded translations; Tsolin, "Archaic Verbal Conjugations," 76–77.

15. The author of this paper credits Russell T. Fuller for this illustration. The illustration was given in a class on targumic Aramaic in the Spring of 2012. The author of this paper, however, is completely responsible for the wording and the conveying of the illustration in this paper.

16. Of course, the comparison of the Targums to the English translations is not a one-to-one correlation. Factors often influenced the targumists' decisions to expand their translation that did not influence the translators of the English Bibles. See McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, 111–18; Alexander Sperber, *The Targum and the Hebrew Bible*, vol. 4b of *The Bible in Aramaic* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1973), 37–61, 144–47, 193–210. However, both the translators of the Targums and the English Bibles were motivated by the desire to make their translations understandable to their target audiences. See Lasair, "Targum and Translation," 269–70.

17. See Lasair, "Targum and Translation," 270–71.

books (Isaiah, Ezekiel, Psalms, etc.), the targumists are looser in their translations, often explaining and interpreting the BH text rather than providing a literal translation. While these Targums may provide some assistance in understanding the BH verbal system, the interpretative translation of the prophetical and poetical books adds a layer of difficulty. However, Onqelos, in the narrative and poetical sections of the Pentateuch, provides great insight into how the targumist understands the function of the BH Imperfect.

Onqelos and the Frequentative Imperfect

The BH Imperfect often is used to express actions that occurred habitually or repeatedly in the past; this use of the Imperfect is called the 'frequentative Imperfect.'[18] The Imperfect is ideally suited to express frequentative action in the past because the aspect of the Imperfect indicates incomplete action.[19] Genesis 2:6a provides an example of the frequentative Imperfect:

וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן־הָאָרֶץ

And a mist ***would come up*** from the ground.

The context of Genesis 2:6a indicates that the tense of the verb is in the past. The frequentative Imperfect יַעֲלֶה communicates that the mist would continually rise from the ground over a period of time. Consider also Exodus 1:12a:

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יְעַנּוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ

And as they ***would afflict them***, thus they ***would increase***, and thus they
would break forth.

In this verse, Moses describes the situation of the Israelites under the rule of the new Pharaoh. Moses uses three Imperfects to describe the continual activity of the slave

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18. Joüon employs the terms "repeated" and "durative" to explain the frequentative Imperfect; Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §113e, f. Duane Garrett labels the frequentative Imperfect "imperfective"; Garrett and DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar*, 40. According to Waltke and O'Connor the frequentative Imperfect is the "customary non-perfective"; Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 502–02. Driver, and the author of this paper, use the term "frequentative"; Driver, *Tenses*, 30; Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §4d. Lambdin, and Pratico and van Pelt labels the frequentative Imperfect "habitual or customary action"; Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 100; Pratico and van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, 165; Martin, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar*, 74. See also, Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Langauge*, 9–10; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 148; Seow, *Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, 142.

19. Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language*, 7; Driver, *Treatise*, 29; Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §4c; Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §107a; van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 146.

masters and the continual results on the Israelites: as the Egyptians continued to oppress the Israelites, the Israelites would continue to increase in numbers.

In Onqelos, the BH frequentative Imperfect is often rendered by a Participle. Like the Imperfect, the Participle is ideally suited to communicate ongoing action because the aspect of the Participle—in BH and in Aramaic—is incomplete action.[20] This is not to say that the Imperfect and the Participle are the same. The Imperfect signifies the beginning of an action and its "constant renewal or repetition."[21] The Participle, on the other hand, signifies a fixed "habitual and abiding state."[22] In the Imperfect an action happened; the participle is descriptive.[23] Despite the difference between the Imperfect and Participle, the targumist takes advantage of the fact that they express incomplete aspect. Therefore, because the targumist exhibits a desire to accurately render the BH frequentative Imperfect, the targumist chose the Participle.[24]

Tg. Onq. Numbers 9:15–23 provides an example of how Onqelos renders the BH frequentative Imperfect with the Participle. Throughout the passage twenty BH Imperfect verbs are used. Moses employs the BH Imperfects to describe the habitual actions of the Israelites when they set up camp and when they set out to journey. In each of the twenty instances Onqelos renders the BH Imperfect with the Participle. Take for example Numbers 9:18 in the Hebrew:

עַל־פִּי יְהוָה יִסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל־פִּי יְהוָה יַחֲנוּ כָּל־יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֹּן הֶעָנָן עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן יַחֲנוּ׃

Upon the command of the LORD the sons of Israel *would set out*, and upon the command of the LORD they *would camp*. All the days which the cloud *would dwell* upon the tabernacle, they *would camp*.

20. Franz Rosenthal, A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic, 7th ed., Porta Linguarum Orientalium 5 (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 59; Kautzsch, Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, §116a; Driver, Treatise, 165; Joüon, Grammar of Biblical Hebrew, §121c; Fuller and Choi, Biblical Hebrew Syntax, §16a. Because of its incomplete aspect, the Participle is often used for occupations or for "abiding states" (Fuller and Choi, Biblical Hebrew Syntax, §16). For example, סֹפֵר secretary, scribe is the Qal Participle masc. sing. from the verb root ספר to count, to number. Therefore, the participle of ספר denotes a person who is regularly or continually counting or taking record: a secretary or scribe. Consider also רֹאֶה seer, which is the Qal Participle masc. sing. form of the verb ראה to see. The participle יֹשֵׁב inhabitant, from the verb ישב to dwell, indicates a person who is in the continual state of dwelling in a place. With regard to the similarity of the Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic participle, Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew grammar and syntax share many similar feature because they are Semitic languages. The study of the one is beneficial to the study of the other. The same is true with the study of Arabic. For centuries Jewish and Christian Hebraists availed themselves with the knowledge of Arabic and Aramaic grammar in their study of Biblical Hebrew. See Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §3f; Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, x; Driver, *Treatise*, 219–45.

21. Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §16a.

22. Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §16a; Rosenthal, *Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 59; Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §116a; Driver, *Treatise*, 165; Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §121c.

23. Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §16a.

24. See Lasair, "Targum and Translation," 270–71.

עַל מֵימְרָא דַיוי נָטְלִין בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל מֵימְרָא דַיוי שָׁרַן כָּל יוֹמִין דְּשָׁרֵי עֲנָנָא עַל מַשְׁכְּ־
נָא שָׁרַן:

Upon the memra of the LORD the sons of Israel *would travel*, and upon the memra of LORD they *would dwell*. All the days which the cloud *would dwell* upon the tabernacle, they *would dwell*.

In Onqelos the targumist signifies that the BH Imperfects are communicating frequentative action. Since the Participle also indicates incomplete aspect, the targumist utilizes the Participle to describe the Israelites habitual action in the wilderness.[25] As seen in the Table 1 below, all twenty BH Imperfects are rendered in Onqelos as Participles.

Table 1. Onqelos and the BH frequentative Imperfect in Num. 19:15-23

	Hebrew Text	Onqelos
Num 9:15	יְהְיֶה Qal Imperfect 3ms '*it would be*'	הֲוֵי Peal Part. ms '*it would be*'[26]
Num 9:16	יְהְיֶה Qal Imperfect 3ms '*it would be*' יְכַסֶּנּוּ Piel Imperfect 3ms + 3ms energic '*it would cover it*'	הֲוֵי Peal Part. ms '*it would be*' חָפֵי Peal Part. ms '*it would cover*'
Num 9:17	יִסְעוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would journey*' יְשְׁכָּן Qal Imperfect 3ms '*it would dwell*' יַחֲנוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would camp*'	נָטְלִין Peal Part. mp '*they would travel*' שָׁרֵי Peal Part ms '*it would dwell*' שָׁרַן Peal Part mp '*they would dwell*'
Num 9:18	יִסְעוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would journey*' יַחֲנוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would camp*' יְשְׁכֹּן Qal Imperfect 3ms '*it would dwell*' יַחֲנוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would camp*'	נָטְלִין Peal Part. mp '*they would travel*' שָׁרַן Peal Part mp '*they would dwell*' שָׁרֵי Peal Part ms '*it would dwell*' שָׁרַן Peal Part mp '*they would dwell*'
Num 9:19	יִסְעוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would journey*'	נָטְלִין Peal Part. mp '*they would travel*'

25.   The participle, as a verbal noun, does not have tense. Participles derive their tense from the context; Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §116d.

26.   The Peal in Aramaic is the base verb form like the Qal in Biblical Hebrew.

Num 9:20	יְהְיֶה Qal Imperfect 3ms 'and it would be' יַחֲנוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp 'they would camp' יִסָּעוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp 'they would journey'	הֲוֵי Peal Part. ms '*it would be*' שָׁרַן Peal Part mp '*they would dwell*' נָטְלִין Peal Part. mp '*they would travel*'
Num 9:21	יְהְיֶה Qal Imperfect 3ms 'and it would be'	הֲוֵי Peal Part. ms '*it would be*'
Num 9:22	יַחֲנוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would camp*' יִסָּעוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would journey*' יִסָּעוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would journey*'	שָׁרַן Peal Part mp '*they would dwell*' נָטְלִין Peal Part. mp '*they would travel*' נָטְלִין Peal Part. mp '*they would travel*'
Num 9:23	יַחֲנוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would camp*' יִסָּעוּ Qal Imperfect 3mp '*they would journey*'	שָׁרַן Peal Part mp '*they would dwell*' נָטְלִין Peal Part. mp '*they would travel*'

Furthermore, what is telling about this passage is how Onqelos renders the vav+Perfect. The vav+Perfect occurs three times in the Hebrew text of Numbers 9:15-23: once in verse 19 and twice in verse 21. The vav+Perfect can prove difficult to readers of BH because the form could either be a Perfect with a vav-consecutive or a Perfect with a conjunction.[27] The Perfect with a vav-consecutive mirrors the function of the preceding Imperfect (future, modal, etc.); the Perfect with a conjunction would still be rendered in the past tense. In many instances, context must determine which rendering fits the context; in the case of Numbers 9:19, 21 it is clear that the vav+Perfect is the Perfect with a vav-consecutive and continues the previous frequentative Imperfect. As with the BH frequentative Imperfect, Onqelos renders the vav+Perfect according to its proper function.

In *Tg. Onq.* Numbers 9:19, 21 Onqelos renders each vav-consecutive Perfect with a Participle. In verse 19 וְשָׁמְרוּ *and they would keep* is rendered in Onqelos with the Participle וְנָטְרִין *and they would keep*. In verse 21 the verbs וְנַעֲלָה *and it would lift* and וְנָסָעוּ *and they would set out* are rendered in Onqelos with the Participles וּמסתלק *and it would be taken up* and וְנָטְלִין *and they would travel*, respectively.[28] In rendering the BH vav-consecutive Perfect with the Participle Onqelos reflects the proper function of the BH vav-consecutive Perfect. The vav-consecutive

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27. See for example Gesenius's list of difficult occurrences of vav+Perfect. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §112qq.

28. The verbs וְנַעֲלָה and וְנָסָעוּ occur twice in Num 9:21. Onqelos renders the verbs with Participles in both occurrences.

Perfects—following frequentative Imperfects—are rendered as frequentative actions; therefore, the targumist reflects the frequentative action with the Participle.[29]

Tg. Onq. Numbers 9:19, 21 illustrate that the targumist was mindful of how the BH verbal system functioned and that the targumist sought to precisely render the function of each BH verb. Onqelos consistently renders the BH frequentative Imperfect and the BH vav-consecutive Perfect with a Participle. A number of other examples throughout Onqelos illustrate the consistency of Onqelos in rendering the frequentative Imperfect.[30] For example, Onqelos renders the BH frequentative Imperfect in Genesis 2:6a (cited above) with a Participle:

וַעֲנָנָא הֲוָה סָלֵיק עַל אַרעָא

> And a mist ***would continually go up*** upon the earth.

In this example the Participle סָלֵיק occurs in conjunction with the verb הֲוָה (equivalent to the BH הָיָה). In *Tg. Onq.* Numbers 9:15-23 context indicates that the Participle is in the past tense; in *Tg. Onq.* Genesis 2:6a the verb הֲוָה sets the participle in the past tense. The frequentative action of the mist going up is communicated by the Participle סָלֵיק.[31] Consider also *Tg. Onq.* Exodus 1:12a (BH cited above):

וּכמָא דְמעַנַן לְהוֹן כֵין סָגַן וְכֵין תָּקְפִין

> And as they ***would oppress*** them, thus they ***would multiply***, and thus they
> ***would grow strong***

Onqelos mirrors the BH frequentative Imperfect with Participles, highlighting the ongoing action of the Israelites and Egyptians. The next section will demonstrate how Onqelos renders the BH preterital Imperfect.

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29.   Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §49h, §112a; Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §119a.

30.   Other examples include Gen 2:25; 30:38, 42; 37:7; Exod 13:22; 19:19; 40:36, 38; Deut 32:3, 6. Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets also renders the Biblical Hebrew frequentative Imperfect with participles. Examples include Jdg 2:18; 6:5; 1 Sam 3:2; 13:17, 18; 19; 1 Kgs 7:8.

31.   Many grammarians of Aramaic categorize the conjunction of the verb הֲוָה with a participle as a "compound verbal form" or "compound tense"; David M. Golomb, *A Grammar of Targum Neofiti, Harvard Semitic Monographs 34 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985)*, 188; William B. Stevenson, *A Grammar of Palestinian Jewish Aramaic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924)*, §22; Frederick E. Greenspahn, *An Introduction to Aramaic, Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study 38 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999)*, 124. While this construction may be prevalent in Aramaic, a more accurate assessment is that the Participle is in the accusative to הֲוָה describing the "habitual or abiding state" of the mist (Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §16l). See also William Wickes, *A Treatise on the Accentuation of the Three So-Called Poetical Books of the Old Testament, (1970; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010)*, 51.

Onqelos and the BH Preterital Imperfect

When translating the BH Imperfect some Imperfects seem to require a simple past, an indication that the Imperfect is preterital. While various terms have been offered for this function of the Imperfect, most grammarians explain that the function of the preterital Imperfect is to heighten the language.[32] Grammarians explain that the author views the action of the preterital Imperfect as in process; therefore, the preterital Imperfect is descriptive.[33] Ewald contends that the speaker or author views a definite event in the past and transports the reader to the moment the action actually happens.[34] While the preterital Imperfect is descriptive, the preterital Imperfect is different from the frequentative Imperfect. Joüon rightly points out that the preterital Imperfect, unlike the frequentative Imperfect, is "punctiliar in force, not habitual, repetitive, etc."[35]

Preterital Imperfects are primarily found in poetry or direct speech, which should make identifying them relatively simple. However, not all Imperfects in poetry are preterital. For example, in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43) some Imperfects are frequentative (Deut. 32:3, 6) and others express the will of the speaker (Deut. 32:1, 2). As with the frequentative Imperfect, Onqelos is consistent in how the BH preterital Imperfect is rendered, aiding the reader in discerning the various functions of the BH Imperfect.[36] Onqelos renders the BH preterital Imperfect with the Perfect, indicating that the action is not repetitive or habitual.

The Perfect is the ideal verbal form to render the preterital Imperfect, as the Perfect conveys completed action.[37] Consider *Tg. Onq.* Genesis 6:1:

וַהֲוָה כַד שָׁרִיאוּ בְנֵי אֱנָשָׁא לְמִסְגֵי עַל אַפֵּי אַרעָא וּבנָתָא **אִיתיְלִידָא** לְהוֹן

> And it happened when the sons of man began to increase upon the face of the
> earth, and the daughters ***bore children*** to them.

In *Tg. Onq.* Genesis 6:1, the targumist employs the Perfect אִיתיְלִידָא because the focus is on the completion of the act of bearing children; the action happened and now it is complete. Had the targumist used the Imperfect or Participle, the focus would have been on the incompleteness of the action or that it was ongoing. But, as it stands the act of bearing children in *Tg. Onq.* Genesis 6:1 is completed, as signified by the

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32. For examples of the various terms given to the preterital Imperfect, see footnote 6 above.

33. Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 503; Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §4c, d, h; Driver, *Treatise*, 30; Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language*, 8.

34. Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language*, 8.

35. Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §113h.

36. In the Song of Moses, Onqelos renders the frequentative Imperfects in verses 3 and 6 with participles, and the Imperfects that express the will of the speaker (vv. 1 and 2) with Imperfects.

37. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §106a; Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §3b; Driver, *Treatise*, 13; Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language*, 3–4.

Perfect.[38] While the biblical author may heighten the action with the descriptive BH preterital Imperfect, the targumist sets the focus on the completion of the action with the Perfect.

Exodus 15:1-18, the Song of the Sea, illustrates how Onqelos renders the BH preterital Imperfect with Perfects. Throughout the song a total of twenty-four Imperfect forms are used; however, eight Imperfects function as a preterital Imperfect and the remaining sixteen express other functions of the Imperfect. In *Tg. Onq.* Exodus 15:1-18 Onqelos consistently renders the BH preterital Imperfect with the Perfect, aiding the reader to discern between the BH preterital Imperfect and other functions of the BH Imperfect.[39] Take for example Exodus 15:7:

וּבְרֹב גְּאוֹנְךָ תַּהֲרֹס קָמֶיךָ תְּשַׁלַּח חֲרֹנְךָ יֹאכְלֵמוֹ כַּקַּשׁ:

> And in the greatness of Your majesty You ***destroyed*** those who rose up against You You ***sent*** Your fury, You ***consumed*** them as chaff.

All three Imperfects in the verse are rendered by Onqelos with Perfects:

וּבְסַגֵּי תוּקְפָּךְ תַּבַרְתָנוּן לְדִקָמוּ עַל עַמָּךְ שַׁלַּחַת רוּגְזָךְ שֵׁיצֵינוּן כְּנוּרָא לְקַשָּׁא:

> And in the abundance of Your strength You ***broke*** them, to those who rose up against Your people. You ***sent*** Your anger. You ***destroyed*** them as fire to chaff.

By employing the Perfect in verse 7, Onqelos indicates that Moses does not view the action as frequentative; rather, he views the action as complete. Moses employs the BH preterital Imperfect in the Song of the Sea to heighten the language, or—as Ewald describes—to transport the reader to the moment the action occurs. Onqelos, however, sets the focus on the completion of the action rather than on the vividness of the language. Table 2 below lists all the BH preterital Imperfects rendered by Onqelos with Perfects.

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38. In the Masoretic Text of Gen 6:1, Moses also utilizes the perfect: יֻלְּדוּ.

39. The purpose of this paper is not to communicate to the reader that a knowledge of Aramaic is required to understand the Biblical Hebrew imperfect. In the Hebrew text of Exod 15:1–18 the reader has clues within the passage to help determine between the various functions of the Biblical Hebrew imperfect. For example, Joüon notes that the preterital imperfect—often in poetry—often follows the perfect. He writes, "Thus in an alternance of qatal [perfect] and yiqtol [imperfect] . . . , the qatal places in the past the action expressed by the following yiqtol" (Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, §113o; Driver, *Tenses*, 33. See Exod 15:12 for an example. The Aramaic Targums are just another tool to help the reader of Biblical Hebrew understand the Biblical Hebrew verbal system.

Table 2. Onqelos and the BH Preterital Imperfect

	Hebrew Text	Onqelos
Exod 15:5	יְכַסְיֻמוּ Piel Imperfect 3mp + 3mp '*they covered them*'	חֲפוֹ Peal Perfect 3mp '*they covered*'
Exod 15:6	תִּרְעַץ Qal Imperfect 3fs '*it shattered*'	תְּבַרַת Peal Perfect 3fs '*it defeated*'
Exod 15:7	תַּהֲרֹס Qal Imperfect 2ms '*You destroyed*' תְּשַׁלַּח Piel Imperfect 2ms '*You sent*' יֹאכְלֵמוֹ Qal Imperfect 3ms + 3mp '*and it consumed them*'	תַּבַרְתָּנוּן Pael Perfect 2ms + 3mp '*You shattered them*'[40] שַׁלַּחַת Pael Perfect 2ms '*You sent*' שֵׁיצִינוּן Shaphel Perfect 3ms + 3mp '*It destroyed them*'[41]
Exod 15:12	תִּבְלָעֵמוֹ Qal Imperfect 3fs + 3mp '*and it swallowed them*'	בְּלַעַתְנוּן Peal Perfect 3fs + 3mp '*it swallowed them*'
Exod 15:14	יִרְגָּזוּן Qal Imperfect 3mp '*and they trembled*'	וְזָעוּ Peal Perfect 3mp '*they trembled*'
Exod 15:15	יֹאחֲזֵמוֹ Qal Imperfect 3ms + 3mp '*it seized them*'[42]	אֲחַדִינוּן Pael Perfect 3ms + 3mp '*it seized them*'

As mentioned above, there are sixteen other Imperfects in the Hebrew text of Exodus 15:1-18. Fifteen of the remaining BH Imperfects are rendered by Onqelos with Imperfects. In each case, Onqelos' use of the Imperfect reflects the function of the BH Imperfect in the Hebrew text. In verses 2 and 9 Onqelos renders the BH Imperfect with an Imperfect to express the will of the speaker (eight Imperfects total).[43] For example, in Exodus 15:2 the Israelites express their will to praise the Lord:

עָזִּי וְזִמְרָת יָהּ וַיְהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה זֶה אֵלִי וְאַנְוֵהוּ אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי וַאֲרֹמְמֶנְהוּ:

My strength and song is the Lord, and He has become my salvation. This is my God, and *I will praise* Him; the God of my fathers and *I will exalt* Him.

Onqelos renders the two BH Imperfects as Imperfects to indicate the will of the speaker in Onqelos:

40. The Pael is the intensive stem like the Piel in Biblical Hebrew.

41. The Shaphel is the causative stem like the Hiphil in Biblical Hebrew.

42. The NASB, ESV, and ASV render the Biblical Hebrew Imperfect in Exod 15:14, 15 with the English Present. The context is set in the past by the first verb in both sentences. The use of the English present makes the action more lively, similar to the use of the Imperfect in the Hebrew text. The KJV, NIV, and CSB, however, render the Biblical Hebrew Imperfects in Exod 15:14, 15 with the future.

43. Fuller and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §4f; Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §107m, n.

תּוּקְפִּי וְתוּשׁבַחתִּי דְחִילָא יוי אֲמַר בְּמֵימְרֵיה וַהֲוָה לִי לְפָרִיק דֵין אֱלָהִי וְ**אַבנֵי** לֵיה מַקדַשׁ אֱלָהָא דַאֲבָהָתִי וְ**אַפלַח** קֳדָמוֹהִי:

'My strength and My praise are fearsome,' the Lord said by His Memra. He has become to me a redeemer. This is my God, and *I will build* to Him a sanctuary; the God of my fathers, and *I will serve* before Him.[44]

In verses 16 and 17 Onqelos renders the BH Imperfects (six total) with the Imperfect to indicate future action. For example, Exodus 15:17 declares what the Lord will do for His people Israel:

תְּבִאֵמוֹ וְתִטָּעֵמוֹ בְּהַר נַחֲלָתְךָ

You will bring them and *You will plant* them in the mountain of Your inheritance.

Consider the same verse in Onqelos:

תַּעֵילִינוּן וְתַשׁרֵינוּן בְּטוּרָא דְאַחסָנְתָך

You will cause to bring in and *You will plant* them in the mountain of Your inheritance.[45]

Onqelos renders the two BH future Imperfects in Exodus 15:17 with Imperfects to indicate future action.

Exodus 15:1-18 presents the reader with a number of BH Imperfects with various functions. Just as in Numbers 9:15-23, Onqelos is careful to discern the function of each BH Imperfect and purposely renders each function of BH Imperfect. While context and particles provide clues to the function of the BH Imperfect in Exodus 15:1-18, Onqelos demonstrates that it is a valuable tool in helping the reader discern the proper function of the BH Imperfect.

Onqelos and the BH Imperfect in the Pentateuch

In Numbers 9:15-23 and Exodus 15:1-18 Targum Onqelos demonstrates that the targumist renders the BH Imperfect according to its function. The targumist renders

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44.   Onqelos and the KJV render the verb אַנוֵהוּ "I will build"; the NASB, NIV, ESV, ASV, and CSB render the verb "I will praise." The difference centers on how the translators understand the verbal root נוה. See BDB, 627a. Despite the difference in translating the Hebrew verb, all translations reflect the will and intention expressed by the Biblical Hebrew Imperfect.

45.   The two remaining Biblical Hebrew Imperfects are found in verses 1 and 18. In verse 1, the Biblical Hebrew Imperfect יָשִׁיר is preterital. However, this Imperfect is found in the narrative introduction to the Song of the Sea; therefore, the preterital Imperfect is preceded by the particle אָז. Most preterital Imperfects are preceded by a particle in narrative sections. See Driver, *Treatise*, 32. Onqelos renders the first Biblical Hebrew Imperfect in Exod 15:1 with a Perfect: שַׁבַח. In verse 18, Onqelos does not render the Biblical Hebrew Imperfect; rather, the targumist provides an interpretation of the verse. In verse 1 Moses and the Israelites use a Cohortative to express their will and intention to sing to the Lord: אָשִׁירָה. Onqelos renders the Biblical Hebrew Cohortative with an Imperfect, expressing the will of the people: נְשַׁבַח. See Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §107n.

the BH frequentative Imperfect with the Participle, the BH preterital Imperfect with a Perfect, and the BH Imperfect expressing the will of the speaker or future action with the Imperfect. With these insights gleaned from Onqelos, the issues raised above regarding the BH Imperfect in Genesis 37:7 and Exodus 8:20 will be addressed.

It was noted above that BH grammarians often disagree on how to analyze the BH past Imperfect. In Exodus 8:20b, Driver classifies the BH Imperfect תִּשָּׁחֵת as preterital—or 'nascent' according to his terminology.[46] Gesenius, on the other hand, designates the verb as frequentative.[47] Onqelos, however, renders the BH Imperfect as a Perfect, indicating that the targumist analyzes the verb as a preterital Imperfect:

וּבְכָל ארעא דמצרים **אִתְחַבַלַת** ארעא מִן־קֳדָם עָרוֹבָא:

 And in all the land of Egypt, the land ***was destroyed*** from before the swarm.

According to Onqelos, the action in the BH Imperfect תִּשָּׁחֵת happened once and is not frequentative or habitual. The BH Imperfect in Exodus 8:20b expresses lively language, 'transporting' the reader back to the moment the action took place.[48] Onqelos, however, focuses on the occurrence and completion of the action.

Onqelos is particularly helpful in Exodus 8:20b because the preterital Imperfect in Hebrew narrative is usually preceded by a particle (בְּטֶרֶם, טֶרֶם, עַד, אָז).[49] There are instances, however, in which the BH preterital Imperfect in narrative is not preceded by a particle, making the identification of the preterital Imperfect more difficult. Just as Onqelos serves as a reliable guide in understanding the BH Imperfect in poetical sections like Exodus 15:1-18, Onqelos guides the reader in identifying preterital BH Imperfects in Hebrew narrative.[50]

In Genesis 37:7, it was noted above that it is often difficult to discern when the BH Imperfect is preterital or frequentative. Most English translations render the BH Imperfects in Genesis 37:7 as a simple past, indicating that the translators analyzed the BH Imperfect as preterital. This use of the Imperfect views the simple occurrence of the action described in a lively manner, similar to the historic Present in Greek.[51] However, Onqelos paints a much more lively picture:

וְהָא אֲנַחְנָא מְאַסְרִין אֵיסָרָן בְּגוֹ חַקְלָא וְהָא קָמַת אֵיסַרְתִּי וְאַף אִזְדְּקֵיפַת

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46. Driver, *Treatise*, 32–33.

47. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §107b.

48. Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language*, 8.

49. See for example Gen 2:5; 19:4; 24:45; Exod 15:1; Deut 4:41. In each of these verses, Onqelos renders the Biblical Hebrew Imperfect with the Perfect.

50. Other examples of the preterital Imperfect in narrative—without a preceding particle—are found outside of the Pentateuch: Judg 2:1; 2 Sam 2:28; 23:10. In each case Targum Jonathan renders the Biblical Hebrew preterital Imperfect with a Perfect.

51. Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, rev. Gordon Messing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), §1883; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 526.

וְהָא מְסַתַּחְרָן אֱסָרַתכוֹן וְסָגְדָן לְאֱיסָרְתִי׃

> And behold, we were busy binding bundles in the field, and behold! my bundle stood up and arose. And behold! your bundles were ***continually going around*** and ***continually bowing*** to my bundle!

Unlike the English versions, Onqelos renders the BH Imperfects in Genesis 37:7 as frequentative, as indicated by Onqelos' use of the Participle. The preterital Imperfect reflected in the English versions describe Joseph's brothers surrounding Joseph and bowing down once. According to Onqelos' reading, the brothers' sheaves were continually moving around and continually bowing to Joseph's sheaf. The brothers were in continual motion, going in circles around Joseph and bowing repeatedly.

While the difference between rendering the BH Imperfect in Genesis 37:7 and Exodus 8:20 as a frequentative or a preterital may seem immaterial, the reader of BH should strive for accuracy in translation.[52] Onqelos exhibits an intentionality in how the BH Imperfect is rendered. Moreover, since Onqelos demonstrates a reliability in rendering the BH frequentative and preterital Imperfect, Onqelos will likely prove reliable in other areas of the BH verbal system. One only needs to consider how Onqelos handles the BH vav-consecutive Perfect in Numbers 9:15-23 and the other functions of the BH Imperfect in Exodus 15:1-18.

Conclusion

In Numbers 9:15-23 and Exodus 15:1-18, Targum Onqelos demonstrates a remarkable consistency in rendering the various functions of the BH Imperfect and other features of the BH verbal system. In Numbers 9:15-23, Onqelos consistently uses the Participle to render the BH frequentative Imperfect, describing a continual action in the past. Moreover, Onqelos renders the BH vav-consecutive Perfects that follow the BH frequentative Imperfects with the Participle. In Exodus 15:1-18 Onqelos proves to be a reliable guide in discerning how the various BH Imperfects are functioning. Onqelos renders the BH preterital Imperfect with a Perfect, and the BH future Imperfect, and the BH Imperfects expressing the will of the speaker, with an Imperfect. With the reliability of Onqelos established in Exodus 15:1-18 and Numbers 9:15-23, Onqelos sheds light on the proper understanding of the BH Imperfect in Genesis 37:7 and Exodus 8:20. In Genesis 37:7 Onqelos renders the BH Imperfect with a Participle, painting a livelier picture of Joseph's dream than most English versions. In Exodus 8:20, Onqelos renders the BH Imperfect with a Perfect, indicating that Moses is using heightened language—and not a continual or habitual action— to describe the action of the swarm in Egypt.

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52. See Driver, *Treatise*, 30.

Onqelos exhibits an awareness of how the BH verbal system functions.[53] Contrary to Driver, then, the reader of BH is not simply left to intellect alone to determine the correct function of the BH Imperfect. Onqelos proves to be a valuable tool for the reader of BH to handle the BH Imperfect.[54]

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53. See Tsolin, "Archaic Verbal Conjugations," 76.

54. A study of how Targum Jonathan renders the Biblical Hebrew Imperfect in the Former Prophets could also prove valuable. Like Onqelos, Jonathan tends to follow Biblical Hebrew grammar and syntax in its translation. As noted in footnote 30 above, Jonathan demonstrates a reliability in rendering the Biblical Hebrew frequentative Imperfect. Jonathan also consistently renders the Biblical Hebrew preterital Imperfect with a Perfect (see footnote 49).