

PERFECT OR IMPERFECT LEARNING – TEACHING THE “TENSES” OF BIBLICAL HEBREW

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The article discusses the pedagogical challenges inherent in teaching the “tenses” of Biblical Hebrew. How does one cope with explaining the intricacies and scholarly uncertainties of this question to beginners – and to what level is it advisable to do so? The author also examines the possible benefits of imparting a deeper understanding of these issues beyond the domain of the classroom.

At modern western universities, the Classical Hebrew language is mostly taught to theology students, particularly (but not exclusively) to those who are studying to fill various roles within religious groups and see their future careers there. This creates a situation in which the study of Ancient Hebrew is for many students but a part of a much larger and very multifaceted education, in which working with classical texts is only a small piece in the curriculum. Such an order puts a special burden on the teacher – not only because the students’ previous acquaintance with linguistic and philological work is usually extremely varied (to say the least), but also because the time allocated to linguistic-exegetical studies is often quite short.¹

All this means that a teacher giving the introductory course in Biblical Hebrew may be tempted to run through the subject matter very quickly and superficially, without creating opportunities for the development of a deeper understanding of the Hebrew linguistic system. There is a distinct risk that “being able to translate today’s assignment” becomes the overriding objective for the individual student, blocking or hindering a more fundamental understanding of how the language works – even more problematic, as Biblical Hebrew is a language that differs dramatically in typology from English, German, Swedish and European languages in general. And it is different not only in its structure: Edward Ullendorff once posed the question “[I]s Biblical Hebrew a Language”,² making the point that what we are studying and analyzing when reading the Old

¹ For example, at Lund University (where I am currently teaching), many of the students are involved in textual exegetical studies for no more than one term, divided into a ten-week intensive introduction to the Biblical Hebrew language and ten weeks of reading of original text, no less intensive. One ought sometimes to consider the enormity of this charge: grasping the basic structure of a language in ten weeks and then going directly to its “high literature” (in this case excerpts from Genesis, Exodus, Psalms and Isaiah) is somewhat akin to having two and a half months of English and then going straight to Christopher Marlowe and Evelyn Waugh! For those who go on to the Master level, there are of course opportunities for further studies in Hebrew.

² E. Ullendorff, “Is Biblical Hebrew a Language,” *BSOAS* 34 (1971), 241–255.

Testament is only a fraction of a linguistic system, which has come down to us through scattered remnants of preserved texts – and trying to convey to students how such a “micro-language” uses specific linguistic structures is certainly not an easy task.³

In this text, I intend to discuss one salient point in this large complex of problems, viz. the presentation and the learning processes concerning the Biblical Hebrew “tense” system, a topic that makes the opposition between surface and deep learning extremely significant – and one in which the teacher must actively choose which of the two levels he or she is to pursue.⁴

The difficulties of the Hebrew “tense” system are well known. Are there tenses at all, or aspects, or a combination of both?⁵ Or do factors such as subjective psychological emphasis play a part in the choice between “perfect” and “imperfect”?⁶ And what of the consecutive forms?

The manifold proposed answers to these questions of course constitute quite a *Forschungsgeschichte* in themselves, and the question is how one is to introduce often stressed out theology students to these concepts in a valid way. Students are often surprised and baffled when told that the verbs of Biblical Hebrew do not have temporal forms in the manner Europeans are accustomed to, that the perfect may in some cases be used to describe present or (perhaps) even future events, etc. To ease the transition into this mindset is certainly a delicate and difficult task.

Hebrew teachers of olden days often tended to ignore these problems as much as possible during the early stages of instruction: one concentrated on the easier cases and simply taught students that the perfect is basically a past tense form and the imperfect a present/future

³ Text-critical problems also make their voice heard at a very early point in a student’s career in Biblical Hebrew, adding to the difficulties inherent in teaching the language in an adequate way and within a constrained amount of time.

⁴ The intended readership of this article is at least partly other teachers of Biblical Hebrew to beginners, among whom this type of question certainly merits discussion.

⁵ In this article, I use the traditional terms “perfect” and “imperfect” even though I am well aware of their unsuitability (in fact, the terminological difficulty and the problems of semantics is very much what motivates the existence of the present text!).

⁶ The “psychological” view of the Hebrew verbal system, associated to a large extent with the “Danish” school of Pedersen and his grammar (J. Pedersen, *Hebræisk Grammatik*, 2nd ed. [København: Branner, 1933]; *non vidi*), has had a not inconsiderable impact on Hebrew teaching in Sweden due to its adoption by Ivan Engnell in his widely used introductory grammar (I. Engnell, *Grammatik i gammaltestamentlig hebreiska* [Stockholm: Norstedts, 1960]). My own views of the historical development of parts of the Hebrew “tense” system can be found in O. Wikander, “The Hebrew *Wāw* Consecutive as a North West Semitic ‘Augment’: A Typological Comparison with Indo-European”, *VT* 60 (2010), 260–270. It has later come to my attention that similar (though not identical) ideas were presented in D.D. Testen, *Parallels in Semitic Linguistics: the Development of Arabic la- and Related Semitic Particles* (Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 26; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 197–198. Early (but substantially different) comparisons between the consecutive forms and the augments of Indo-European languages can be found in H. Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament*. tr. by J. Kennedy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1879), 19.

one. In somewhat more modern times, it has often been customary to invoke a scheme of perfective versus imperfective aspect, more or less copied from the situation in the modern Slavic languages, to explain the difference between the forms.⁷ It is my view that if we only teach the students a simple and formulaic description of the linguistic system, we lose a great deal in understanding. Of course, there are always some students who would very much appreciate a “simple solution” of the “tense” issue, one that makes it easier to translate the sentence you happen to have in front of you – but it would also mean that these students would acquire only a very superficial understanding of the system, and that they would thus face serious problems when confronted with more authentic text examples not put together for a textbook.

To explain the “tense” system of Biblical Hebrew is a particularly complex task, because there is no certainty of scholarly truth in the matter – only a (large) number of theoretical models of varying shape and value. This often forces the teacher to opt for one theory or another, which of course is quite natural – but if we are to be fair to our students, I believe we must somehow own up to the controversy that is after all there. Does Hebrew have a system of tenses, aspects, degrees of autonomous emphasis, modality, or a combination of all these? The teacher must certainly tread with caution. And what of the fact that the use of “tenses” seems to change over time as the texts of the Old Testament canon evolve?

In tabular form, we may illustrate some possible ways to understand the Hebrew verbal system and relate them to the different ideas of depth and surface learning that confronts us in pedagogical literature:⁸

Most superficial level (analogy with modern “western” languages)⁹

⁷ The fact that the “traditional” way to describe the Hebrew “tense” system (without reference to modern research in this area) is not adequate for modern language teaching has been noted several times. See, for example, J. A. Cook, “The *Vav*-Prefixed Verb Forms in Elementary Hebrew Grammar”, *JHS* 8 (2008), 2.

⁸ I am thinking of models such as the one proposed in N.J. Entwistle & E.R. Peterson, “Conceptions of Learning and Knowledge in Higher Education: Relationships with Study Behaviour and Influences of Learning Environments”, *International Journal of Educational Research* 41 (2004), 407–428 (415), in which the superficial level explicitly focuses on being able “to cope with course requirements” and “routinely memorizing facts and carrying out procedures”, a type of learning strategy that matches very well with trying to obtain simple and formulaic ideas about what a certain form denotes (“past”, “present”) in order to apply them precisely to those practice sentences that the course covers. The “deep approach” level of Entwistle and Peterson instead consists of searching for “underlying principles” without shying away from the “intellectual challenge”, i.e. in this case to try to understand the “tense” problem more thoroughly, although this may not directly “pay off” in terms of short-term ability to translate (sometimes contrived) practice sentences and assignments.

⁹ As indicated within parentheses, this article deals mainly with the problems of teaching the Hebrew “tenses” to people with a background in the languages of western Europe or Indo-European-speaking America.

Perfect = past tense, imperfect = present / future
Intermediate level (mechanical analogy with Slavic, etc.)
 Perfect = completed action, imperfect = continuous action

Deep Level

Analysis of multiple axes (time, aspect, emphasis, modal differentiation etc.)
 based on actual study of Hebrew texts in their contexts.

The most superficial level is also the most schematic, totally focusing on simple rules adapted to creating the rapid ability to translate sentences more or less correctly. The intermediate level is in itself equally schematic and mechanistic, but it incorporates concepts (such as aspect) with a more general linguistic background. Still, simply describing the Hebrew verbal system as an analogue of the Slavic and similar languages is not quite honest, and it will not create any opportunity for autonomous analysis on the part of the students. It is not until the third level is reached that a truly holistic (and hopefully thoroughgoing) analysis can be accomplished – one that cannot easily be adapted to the understanding of schoolbook grammar as commonly known by western students.¹⁰

Of these three levels, I would definitely say that the third, deepest level, is the most desirable – not only because it gives students the tools better to understand a given Hebrew text, but perhaps most importantly, it allows them to reflect on linguistic systems in general – perhaps even on that of their own native language. If one honestly confronts the varied and often very complex ways in which different languages deal with tense, aspect and similar phenomena, one may also challenge one's ingrained beliefs about how "language works", and this, I believe, is a lesson that the students may find useful in many walks of life and in other areas of study – not only in terms of the ability to translate this or that Hebrew sentence correctly. Such intellectual challenge may help develop the communicative and hermeneutical competence of the student.¹¹

¹⁰ It is worth noting that the succession of levels of understanding as outlined above has a lot in common with some features of the so called SOLO taxonomy, originally proposed in J. B. Biggs & K. F. Collis, *Evaluating the Quality of Learning: the SOLO Taxonomy (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome)* (Educational Psychology; New York: Academic Press, 1982). Thus, the most superficial level in many ways corresponds to the "unistructural" stage of the SOLO taxonomy, where only one dimension of analysis is given prominence, the one which appears subjectively to be the "easiest" (in this case, the "tense" explanation of the forms). The second level corresponds to the "multi-structural" stage, in that information from other linguistic environments and contexts are also used for pedagogical purposes (e.g., the aspect systems found in the Slavic and other Indo-European languages) – but in an automated and calquing manner that is not based on real contextual analysis of the Hebrew system itself. The deep level, finally, is reminiscent of SOLO's fifth and sixth stages, as independent, integrated analysis must occur and automatically substituted concepts such as "past" or "completed act" are no longer enough. At the final stage, the acquired understanding of the Hebrew system can be used to aid analyses of other languages. It is worth noting that the early research on the Hebrew "tense" system underwent a similar development itself.

¹¹ I would like to thank Göran Eidevall (p.c.) for suggesting this apt turn of phrase.

It is perhaps not surprising that many introductory Hebrew textbooks happily proceed to the second stage – but rarely to the third. This, I think, is a mistake. The deeper and more reflective approach inherent in the third stage may in fact be an important part of what could make a course in Biblical Hebrew relevant to the later lives of the students – the life outside of the classroom. Very few of those studying Old Testament Exegesis at university will end up as professional Hebraists: however, almost everyone with a degree background in humanities or theology stand to gain by having to some extent learned to think critically about language structure and the major differences between languages and their typologies. Questioning semi-automatic prejudices about linguistic structures can help the student to expand his or her horizons – and thereby aid in the learning process itself.¹² Understanding that the question of tense is not so clear-cut in the original language may possibly challenge uncritical ways of thinking concerning the biblical material and underscore the lack of an absolute translatability of the text. Anti-scholarly and fundamentalist attitudes toward the text may be less easy to entertain when this type of reflection is undertaken.

Then, of course, the question arises how such a deeper level of understanding might be encouraged. I think that one of the most important methods here is the contrastive one. By repeatedly contrasting the students' perceived knowledge of how it "works" in western languages to the situation in Hebrew will help to create cognitive dissonances that may inspire to a search for deeper insight and provide an impetus for deeper reflection. Such reflection will not necessarily stop at the level of grammar but possesses the ability to expand into larger hermeneutical questions. Entire theological constructs have been built upon insensitive grammatical readings of Hebrew verbal forms.

In order to facilitate a more thorough understanding of Hebrew verbal typology in beginning students, I think it may be worthwhile to give them

¹² Some theorists in the sphere of pedagogy have even suggested that a successful learning experience to some extent entails a change in the personality of the student, almost turning study into a kind of initiatory and transformative experience. Entwistle and Peterson ("Conceptions of Learning and Knowledge", 409), describe a tabular scheme in which the student's very view of his or her own identity might change as part of the educational experience – basing themselves on W. G. Perry, *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston 1970). I myself find such a demand on a good learning process to be rather extreme – and even somewhat suspect from a philosophical standpoint. How is the teacher to ascertain whether or not the student has changed his or her personality enough to pass? Is this even desirable? To me, such a demand seems to encroach rather drastically on the freedom of the individual. However, if one views the "change" in a more positive light, as a sudden realization of knowledge previously unavailable, I would say that the insights possible through diligent analytical study of subjects such as the Hebrew "tense" system may lead to such results: the very challenge to homegrown and pre-analytical assumptions about Hebrew and one's mother tongue is, I believe, a pathway to that very form of transformations of points of view – or may at least be so.

a brief (and of course quite cursory) indication and overview as to the very intense scholarly debates that have been going on concerning these issues for a century and a half. Of course, I do not mean that first year students should necessarily be thrown straight into the debates themselves, but the teacher may well introduce some of the main theoretical points of view that have stood out. This would perhaps mean that the students might to some degree feel as though they took part in the scholarly discussion themselves as they work with their translation assignments. At higher levels, reading of scholarly articles on the subject may very well contribute to the learning process (in particular when contrasting some of the radically different analyses that crop up concerning these questions) – but at the elementary level this would probably be overzealous. The risk of creating unnecessary stress must be taken into account, and an introductory course in Biblical Hebrew is often quite labor intensive even without lofty linguistic or theoretical considerations.¹³ Because of time-constraints, there is always the risk of losing other important parts of the course one is teaching.

Instead, I believe that working with example sentences where the “tenses” are used in different and contrasting ways is a good and easy way forward – making the understanding of the different possibilities less abstract and distant from the very intense exercise and translation work the students must still engage in during the course. In order to connect the issue at hand to areas that are often of interest to this particular student population, one might look at specific biblical passages concerning which the interpretation of the “tenses” can give widely diverging results, for instance passages like Job 13:18, where it is easy to show how different translations use different tenses for the same verbs. The New King James Version has “See, I have prepared *my* case, I know that I shall be vindicated”; The New Jerusalem Bible has “You see, I shall proceed by form of law, knowing that I am upright”; The Good News Bible translates “I am ready to state my case, because I know I am in the right”. All of these translations are based on differing analyses of the use of “tense” forms, and the students can benefit from seeing the differences in action. Another illustrative example would be to look at the song of the suffering servant in Isa 52:13–53:12, a passage in which the question of the possible temporal meaning has been used in Jewish-Christian polemics (“is the servant a thing of the past or of the future”). My point here is not that the teacher ought confessionally to state a “true” answer to this question, but rather that he/she can illustrate the difficulties and the

¹³ The risks and problems inherent in throwing students strait into the scholarly discussion have been noted and problematized in G. Gibbs & T. Habeshaw, *Preparing to Teach: An Introduction to Effective Teaching in Higher Education* (Bristol: Technical & Educational Services 1989), 190.

implications they can have for exegesis. Another, more purely linguistic example may be found in Job 1:5, which shows the three-way opposition between straight perfect, imperfect consecutive and even a non-past, durative imperfect: *hiqqîpû* (“they had gone around”), *wayyišlah* (“and he sent”) and *ya ‘ăšê* (“he used to do [every day]”). There are possibly also iterative consecutive perfects:

Wayhî kî hiqqîpû yēmê hammištê
 And it happened as the days of the banquet had gone around,
wayyišlah ‘iyyôb wayqadděšēm
 that Job sent and blessed them/purified them.
wēhiškîm babbōqer
 And he would rise in the morning
wēhe ‘ělâ ‘ōlôt mispar kullām
 and offer up sacrifices for each one of them,
kî ‘āmar ‘iyyôb
 for Job said/thought:
‘ūlay ḥātē ‘û bānay
 “Perhaps my children have sinned
ûbērākû ‘ēlōhîm bilbābām
 and blessed (=cursed) God in their hearts.”
kākâ ya ‘ăšê ‘iyyôb kol-hayyāmîm
 Thus Job used to do every day.

These discrepancies to which the students are exposed create their own creative cognitive dissonances in and of themselves. This process becomes especially prominent in cases where the actual meaning of the text is altered depending on “tense” analysis, because the choices made in the various Bible translations can be shown to be incomprehensible without a deeper analysis of the verbal system. For students studying in preparation for future employment in a religious body or congregation, this creates an ideal opportunity to relate something as seemingly abstract as a system of verbal conjugation and its syntax to a future work situation, by pointing out the importance of a correct syntactical understanding as a necessary prerequisite for exegetical work as part of an inner-religious framework outside of Academia.

Of course, possible personal religious relationships with the biblical texts on the parts of the students may also create a sense of relevance that encourages the learning process – however, it is important for the teacher not to presume that such relationships exist: it has too often been an implicit notion that “everybody” who engages in academic Biblical

Studies is studying to be a minister or priest, which is by no means certain.

An obvious difficulty in trying to encourage some kind of deeper understanding of the “tense” system is of course that there occasionally may be students who feel some aversion to this more reflective approach and prefer to get through the course as quickly and easily as possible. These students often want a quick, easy answer to what the forms mean and can easily become overwhelmed by the sprawling plethora of theories and different possibilities of translation. McKeachie describes this type of student as “Students Who Want the Truth”, and points out that they are “all too many”.¹⁴ However, I have rarely found this student category to be so large in numbers when it comes to the issue of the “tenses” – but of course there is always one or two. The question then is how to combine these students’ needs with the overarching goal of propagating a deeper and more (proto-)scholarly type of understanding. I believe that it is quite important to introduce the problems (or rather, the very concept that there is a problem sphere of this sort) early on in the course. Applied examples of the sort mentioned above should ideally also come rather early, and, if possible, it is preferable to choose such examples that can be relevant to the vocational interests of the students, although this can hardly be possible in each and every case.

One methodical approach that I have found useful is to illustrate taxonomically the very different uses of “tense” forms in a convenient tabular form, as an inventory of the various possibilities at hand. This of course has the disadvantage of forcing the meanings into a pre-existing framework to some extent, but, on the other hand, the method allows one to demonstrate the wide distribution of usage in a simple and easily applied manner without compromising the ambition actually to show that the issue is very complex and problematic from a scholarly point of view.

Both those students who seek a deeper, analytical understanding and those who want “the simple truth” (in order to translate a certain sentence) can hopefully benefit from such a presentation – which of course should be discussed and enthusiastically taken apart under the leadership of the teacher.¹⁵ The more “superficially minded” student can take the possibilities given in the table as purely practical options for translation, and those interested in deeper analysis can use it as a basis for reflection and comparison between different theoretical models. With a

¹⁴ W. J. McKeachie, M. Svinickim, *et al.*, *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers*, 12th ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 2006), 174.

¹⁵ In this case, I would say that the teacher’s role may very aptly be described as that of a travel guide, one of the four models of teaching theory described in D. Fox, “Personal Theories of Teaching”, *Studies in Higher Education* 8 (1983), 151–163 (156–157). The teacher’s task will be to create a structured way of pointing out the (on the surface) confusing options available for understanding the “tenses” and let students reflect on this vast landscape themselves.

bit of luck, such a method combined with text analysis and discussion of the syntax of individual passages (cf. the verses from Job mentioned above) could also incite students to move from the “shallow” to the “deeper” level of interest and reflection.

Such a table could look something like this (of course, this does not encapsulate all possibilities but is meant as a guide for students):

<u>Perfect</u>	<u>Imperfect</u>	<u>Perfect Consecutive</u>	<u>Imperfect consecutive</u>
Constative past	Present	Future consequence	Narrative Past
Narrative past	Future	Certain results	
Background information	Repeated past	Clear-cut future	
General facts and states	Possibilities	Iteratives	
Present of verbs of knowing, etc.	Uncertain cases		
Performative present	Duratives		
Prophetic, certain statements regardless of timeframe (?)			
Emphatic exhortations			

A rough, taxonomic breakdown of this type has in my experience proved both effective and appreciated – and, like I said, it can create a both deeper and more superficial understanding, according to the preferences of the individual student, but it also creates a road from the simpler to the more complex in a natural way.¹⁶ It can also be fruitful to discuss with the students the differences that exist in terminology and what these differences can possibly entail in terms of varying grammatical analyses (“prefix form”/imperfect, etc.). Above all, it does not try to hide the confusing but also intriguing collection of structures that the Hebrew “tense” system is made up of. If the above, more usage-based, analytical model is combined with more theoretical frameworks, it provides an opportunity for both practically applicable understanding and one more thorough and analytical. And this is of course the very goal of the exegetical study of the biblical texts in the original: that through contact with the original languages, their expressions and structures, a deeper and more comprehensive understanding may be created of a text corpus which forms the background not only of Judeo-Christian faith but of all our modern western culture. A small and seemingly esoteric detail like the “tense” system may become a focal point, and with the help of thought-out pedagogy it can be used to create an understanding of both

¹⁶ Such a table may of course also include constructions such as the use of participles (with or without *hinne*) and freestanding short *yiqtol*s.

what unites us with the authors of the biblical texts and what separates us from them.¹⁷

In general, one of the myths that the teacher of Biblical Hebrew has to dispel at an early stage is the idea that the language is very difficult. This is just plain wrong. Classical Hebrew is a relatively easy language in which to reach basic proficiency. Its deeper nuances and literary structures are, it must be granted, quite complex, but it is certainly not very difficult as a beginner's language. It has few of the syntactic intricacies of Classical Arabic, nor its extensive morphological system. The writing system is uncomplicated and poses none of the problems that are encountered when studying languages such as Akkadian or Japanese. As pertains to syntax, most of the more difficult questions do not present themselves before the rather advanced stage – at the beginning level, the syntactical structure of Biblical Hebrew may even appear rather “primitive” to those who have a background in languages such as Latin, German or French. Neither is the student of Hebrew prose confronted with problems such as those besetting westerners who are learning Japanese, where matters of pragmatics complicate the issues at every turn, with such famous examples as the sentence *Boku wa unagi da*, which in isolation has to be translated “I am an eel” (literally “concerning me, eel is/am”), but which in its true context (ordering at a restaurant) means “I’ll have eel, please”.¹⁸ Few of these issues plague the student of Classical Hebrew. Even though there may be many students whose willingness to grapple with grammatical intricacies is low, the Biblical Hebrew language is not generally a very hard language in which to be a beginner.

But the “tenses” are difficult, no question there, and this syntactic difficulty is one of those that do not wait but confront the student directly – one of the few in fact, which in itself is a reason that it ought to be tackled openly and thoroughly. The responsibility lies with the teacher to present this difficulty not as an insurmountable hurdle or a confusing, insolvable conundrum but as a frustrating but fascinating beauty. The very strangeness (to our eyes) of the system is also its great charm, and helping the students find this out will stimulate reflection on the ways in which language works, on different ways of mentally categorizing verbal actions and – who knows? – perhaps on the very nature of temporality itself.

¹⁷ Another matter worthy of discussion with students is the difference in “temporal” usage between classical prose, poetry and texts in Late Biblical Hebrew. If there are students who have a background in Modern or Mishnaic Hebrew, such historicizing can be quite beneficial. One must, however, not forget to point out which of these details are, so to speak, “extracurricular”, as some student may find such digressions confusing.

¹⁸ This humorous example sentence is discussed in many places. One example is J. Rubin, *Making Sense of Japanese*, 1st paperback ed. (Tokyo: Kodansha 2002), 45–46.

In an ideal world, where time would not be as scarce as is often the case in the actual teaching of Biblical Hebrew, techniques other than the “grammar-translation” method might be even more suited to illustrating the problems of the “tenses”, yet the traditional approach has the benefit of providing a meta-perspective that can include instructive linguistic analysis, if handled carefully. As always, the question is one of time.

The steps must be gradual, by giving the students interimistic and in the long run insufficient tools (“the imperfect is mostly non-past, perfect mostly past”) which can get them on the way to start working, but this simplistic analysis must be constantly challenged. The above tabular method could be introduced at a somewhat later stage, but even then, the study of individual passages must be the main guide to acquiring a deeper mode of understanding of how the forms work. The teacher must also be guarded against succumbing to an attitude of “the tenses meaning whatever you want them to”: even though the exact meanings of the forms may elude us in certain cases, there definitely is a meaning there. The fact that the Hebrew “temporal” system was in flux during the millennium in which the texts were written must not be forgotten – the language as preserved does after all harbor the very ancient (“consecutive imperfect”) as well as the quite late (participles used for present tense in some cases). From a more general understanding to a deeper one, the process of learning the Hebrew “tenses” has to be a challenge – and a transforming one at that.

