

SHORT NOTES

KAYYÔM HAZZEH "ON THIS VERY DAY"; *KAYYÔM* "ON THE VERY DAY"; *KĀ'ĒT* "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.¹ 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/k'hayyôm*. 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 *k'hayyôm* 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/k'hayyôm*. 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

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. Childs⁶). As the *NEB* recognizes, *kā'ēt*... always means "at the very time...", as *kayyôm/k'hayyôm* 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/k'hayyôm 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 τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ*; *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".⁷ 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/k'hayyôm 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. i 20; Deut. ii 30; Dan. ix 7).⁸ Translations and commentaries also oscillate between the two understandings.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

24/21, xxvii 9; Josh. xii 22; Judg. xii 3). Their meaning seems to be similar to that of *kayyôm hazzeh*, and in a number of the passages in question the phrase used could be replaced by the latter, even on the traditional understanding of it.

A third difficulty is that in those passages which are comparing some other day with “this day”, one would expect the *k* to appear in connection with the time with which “this day” is compared. Thus in Josh. x 14 the similar phrase *kayyôm hahû*⁹ is used to denote “like that day”. A comparison of two times is made at the opening of 1 Sam. ix 13, already alluded to, which the *RV* translates “as soon as [*k*] you be come into the city, ye shall straightway [*kên*] find him”. Comparison is expressed in this way by means of *k... kên...*, “as/like... so...”, in passages such as Hos. iv 7; Pss xlvi 11 [10], cxxiii 2, cxxvii 4; Prov. xxvi 1, 8, 18-19.¹⁰ It is also possible to express comparison by means of *k... k...* (e.g. Josh. xiv 11; 1 Sam. xxx 24), *k* being repeated where we might have expected *kên*. In the use of the phrase we are studying, however, in effect the first *k* is lacking and *k* only appears where we might have expected *kên*. The passages in question do not declare “as at that day... so at this day” but “at that day... as at this day”, so that the translation “as it is at this day” in effect understands *k* to have a similar meaning to *kên* or *kôh*.

The questions raised by such an odd usage can be resolved if we understand the *k* in *kayyôm hazzeh/k^hayyôm hazzeh* as a further instance of *k* denoting exact point of time rather than *k* denoting comparison. The phrase as a whole is another emphatic expression, meaning, “this very day”, “right now”. Where “this very day” is being compared with an earlier day, the comparison emerges from the juxtaposition of the two days rather than from the use of *k* on the “wrong” noun; the function of the *k* is to add emphasis and precision rather than to make the comparison explicit. “This very day”, the one in which the implied readers of the biblical text live, is one when people experience Yahweh’s care (Deut. vi 24) or chastisement (Jer. xlv 22; Ezra ix 7, 15) and when Yahweh’s name is still well-known (Neh. ix 10).

This understanding can also apply to the problematic Gen. xxxix 11. In the light of considerations expressed above, the phrase there can hardly be understood to mean “about this time” (*RV*). Whereas a number of commentators have taken it to mean “as usual”,¹¹ the usage we have been considering rather supports the

view that it is an instance of the anticipatory determination of a noun, suggesting “on the very day on which the incident about to be related took place” (cf. *bayyôm hahû*’ in 1 Sam. iii 2; so BDB, p. 400b; GK§126*rs*). Here, too, the *k* phrase is a temporal expression denoting exact point of time rather than denoting comparison or approximation. The translation “as [is the case] this day” is never appropriate.

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¹ Cf R J Williams, *Hebrew Syntax* (2nd edn, Toronto 1976), p 262

² *Isaiah 34-66* (Waco, Texas, 1987), p 268

³ *Isaiah 40-66* (London, 1975), p 214

⁴ *I & II Kings* (London and Philadelphia, ²1970), pp 419, 519, 521

⁵ *Exodus* (London, 1971), on the passage

⁶ *Exodus* (London, 1974) = *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia, 1974), on the passage

⁷ *Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh, 1895), p 43

⁸ See L Koehler, W Baumgartner, and others, *Hebraisches und Aramaisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament 3* (3rd edn, Leiden, 1983), p 384a

⁹ See e g H G M Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (Waco, Texas, 1985), pp 124, 125

¹⁰ P Jouon, *Grammaire de l’hébreu biblique* (2nd edn, Rome 1947) 174c, cf BDB, p 454b

¹¹ See e g C Westermann, *Genesis 3 Genesis 37-50* (Neukirchen, 1982, E tr *Genesis 37-50* [Minneapolis and London, 1986]), on the passage, and cf A M Honeyman, “The occasion of Joseph’s temptation”, *VT* 2 (1952), pp 85-7

A NOTE ON THE NAMELESS SERVANT IN ISAIAH XLII 1-4

In Isaiah xlii 1-4, YHWH introduces someone whom he describes as his servant (*‘bd*) and chosen one (*bh̄yr*), whom he upholds and in whom he delights. (xlii 1). Neither is the servant named in these verses nor do the surrounding verses allow us to deduce his identity with certainty. This no doubt explains why Isa. xlii 1-4 has become known as the first of the servant songs, the others being xlix 1-6, l 4-9, and lii 13-liii 12. These songs are considered to describe the fate and vocation of an individual servant of YHWH, priest, prophet, messianic figure... But there has never been unanimity concerning the identity of this servant, and indeed, many biblical scholars have come to doubt his existence. In his form-critical work, Roy F. Melugin takes the servant of Isa. xlii to



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