MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

508(c)(1)(a) Free Church • Sole Tanakh Authority

A Study for Judaism · Christianity · Islam

DOCUMENT 345

THE SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF BIBLICAL HEBREW

A Corrected Edition of the Paper by Reinier de Blois (United Bible Societies)

With a Table of Corrections and a Covenant Assessment of the Semantic-Grid Method

October 22, 2026

Elder Kepha Arcemont, Founder

miqdashbethel.ai • miqdashbethel@gmail.com

The Message is Sent to the World

REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

Why the Meaning of One Hebrew Word Matters to All Three

✡ JUDAISM	✝ CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
The year of release, the ***shemittah (release)*** of **Deuteronomy 15:1–3**, is still kept in Jewish practice. This paper shows from the Hebrew text itself what the word means: the creditor ***"drops his hand"*** from what he lent, and gives up his claim to it.	The lexicons taught in seminaries, BDB and HALOT, shape every English Bible. Here the reader sees those lexicons disagree on one root, and sees that the use of the word in the Hebrew text, not a later dictionary, settles its meaning.	Arabic words are often used to explain difficult Hebrew words. The paper, following John Kaltner, cautions that later Arabic data used carelessly can be made to prove almost anything, a fair caution for readers of both languages, who share the same Semitic roots.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never

as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Deuteronomy 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh's** own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Psalms 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh's** covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

Part II reproduces Reinier de Blois's paper ***"The Semantic Structure of Biblical Hebrew"*** (United Bible Societies) with its mistakes corrected. The paper remains his work. Miqdash Bethel has changed only what is wrong: typing errors, a wrong verse number, wrong verb-stem labels, a contradictory count, an incorrectly listed translation, and incomplete citations. Each correction is marked in the text with a small gold tag such as [C9], and Part III lists every correction with the reason for it and the witnesses behind it. The diagrams of the original paper are described in words in square brackets. Bible quotations in the case study are the Revised Standard Version, as in the original; where the RSV prints ***"the LORD,"*** the Name is supplied in brackets as [**Yahweh**]. The paper's abbreviated book names (Gn, Jdg, Pr, and so on) are written out in full. Part IV gives the Miqdash Bethel assessment of the method, with each finding graded Corroborated (two or more witnesses in the text), Single witness, or Not in the text.

Verse numbers follow the English version. In a few chapters the Hebrew Bible divides the chapter at a different point, so the same verse carries a different number in the Hebrew text. Where that happens, the Hebrew number is given in brackets on first citation, for example Numbers 30:13 [Hebrew 30:14].

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

BOOK	PASSAGES	WHERE
Genesis	**Genesis 4:23; 7:18; 11:7; 12:10; 16:11; 19:19; 24:40; 31:23; 41:1; 48:2**	Part II grids
Exodus	**Exodus 9:16; 12:13; 20:12; 23:11**	Part II, IV
Leviticus	**Leviticus 14:11; 25:6–7**	Part II, IV
Numbers	**Numbers 4:15; 7:9; 36:7**	Part II, IV
Deuteronomy	**Deuteronomy 1:38; 12:23; 15:1–3; 19:15; 28:21; 34:1**	Part II, IV
Joshua	**Joshua 8:9; 14:11; 24:3**	Part II grids
Judges	**Judges 1:28; 16:28**	Part II grids, III
1 Samuel	**1 Samuel 4:9; 14:52**	Part II grids
2 Samuel	**2 Samuel 6:6; 11:25; 13:13; 15:17; 18:9**	Part II, IV
1 Kings	**1 Kings 19:13**	Part II grids
2 Kings	**2 Kings 9:33; 14:5; 15:19; 18:6**	Part II, IV
Isaiah	**Isaiah 22:21; 23:8; 27:5; 30:30; 41:9; 47:2; 47:6; 47:12**	Part II grids, III
Jeremiah	**Jeremiah 13:11; 17:4**	Part II
Ezekiel	**Ezekiel 3:26; 22:14**	Part II grids
Hosea	**Hosea 5:13**	Part II grids
Malachi	**Malachi 3:6**	Doctrinal Authority
Psalms	**Psalms 101:3; 105:10; 106:2; 106:44; 109:23; 119:89; 130:3; 141:6**	Part II
Proverbs	**Proverbs 8:24; 12:9; 16:29; 25:2**	Part II, closing
Job	**Job 6:3; 38:38**	Part II grids

BOOK	PASSAGES	WHERE
Nehemiah	**Nehemiah 5:15; 8:8**	Part II, IV
1 Chronicles	**1 Chronicles 11:10; 13:9; 15:2, 13, 15; 28:10**	Part II, IV

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

The following are cited by the paper as comparative reference only. None of them carries doctrinal authority in Miqdash Bethel material; each is tested against the Hebrew text.

TEXT	WHAT IT IS	HOW IT IS USED HERE
Septuagint (LXX)	Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, made in stages from about the 3rd century BCE	Shows how early translators read **2 Samuel 6:6** and **1 Chronicles 13:9**
Peshitta	Syriac translation of the Hebrew Scriptures	Same; its two renderings disagree with each other
Latin Vulgate	Jerome's Latin translation, about 400 CE	Same; its two renderings also disagree
RSV, NRSV, NIV, NJB, REB, NJPS	Modern English translations	Show how modern translators render **שמט**
Gesenius, BDB, HALOT	Standard Hebrew lexicons	Their differing analyses of **שמט** are compared in section 3.1
Arabic, Akkadian, Aramaic, Syriac	Related Semitic languages	Cognate evidence the lexicons use, weighed with caution

I. WHY THIS PAPER IS IN THE LIBRARY

Reinier de Blois, a translation consultant with the United Bible Societies and the editor of the *Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew*, wrote this paper to show how a lexicographer can determine the meaning of a rare Hebrew word. His answer is that Hebrew words do not change meaning at random. They extend their meaning along regular paths, and when those paths are mapped, a word with only a few occurrences can be placed on the map with more confidence than a guess drawn from a foreign language.

This matters to Miqdash Bethel because it is the same conviction behind the Miqdash Bethel method (Document 333): the Hebrew text is its own best lexicon. The paper's worked example, the root ***shamat (to let drop)***, is also a covenant word. It names the year of ***shemittah (release)*** in **Deuteronomy 15:1–3** and the rest of the land in **Exodus 23:11**, so the method is tested on a law that **Yahweh** gave for the poor.

The paper is sound in its method but contains a number of mistakes: a wrong verse reference, several wrong verb-stem labels, a sentence that contradicts its own table, a mislabeled table, a translation listed under two different readings, and incomplete or wrong citations. These are corrected below. None of them overturns the paper's conclusion, but a reader who looked up **Isaiah 47:2** or **Proverbs 8:24** would not find what the paper says is there.

II. THE CORRECTED PAPER

The Semantic Structure of Biblical Hebrew

Reinier de Blois, United Bible Societies

Abstract. Throughout the ages lexicographers working on Biblical Hebrew, and on other languages of the Bible that are no longer spoken in the same form today, have been struggling to determine the meaning of words. This always has been especially difficult in the case of the so-called hapax legomena and other words with a limited distribution in the available texts. Many lexica of Biblical Hebrew strongly rely on data from related languages in their efforts to establish the meaning of lexical items. This type of information, however, is not always very dependable. This paper investigates how a thorough semantic analysis of Biblical Hebrew from a cognitive linguistic perspective can help to reconstruct a kind of ***"semantic grid"*** for this language, and how this grid provides the lexicographer with more certainty in his or her efforts to determine the meaning of ***"difficult"*** words. The advantages of this method will be illustrated with a number of Hebrew words with an uncertain meaning.

1 HOW TO DETERMINE THE MEANING OF A WORD

Students of language rely heavily on dictionaries. This is true for modern languages, such as English, French, Spanish, etc., that are still spoken today and actively used. It is equally true for languages that are no longer spoken in the same form today, such as most, if not all, of the Biblical languages.

Dictionaries usually have a lot of authority. If a dictionary claims that word X has meaning Y, many readers accept this without argument. Few people realize, however, how difficult it can be for a lexicographer to determine the meaning of a word. If the language in focus is a modern, living

language, this is easy enough. The lexicographer can actually consult speakers of the language and may have access to numerous written texts as well. If, on the other hand, the language in focus is one of the languages of the Bible, that was actively spoken many centuries ago but has undergone significant change since, the lexicographer has to resort to other methods to do his or her work.

Let me give a brief overview of the tools and resources that are available to a Biblical lexicographer:

1.1 Context

There is no doubt that the most reliable source of information regarding the meaning of a word is the context in which it is found. We have to study the way a word is actually used in order to find out what it communicates. If a word occurs frequently in a given body of data the lexicographer usually does not have much difficulty determining what it means. If, on the other hand, a word is a hapax legomenon or occurs only a few times this becomes a lot more difficult. And not every context is equally helpful, as is illustrated in the following examples:

> *On my way home I saw an X.*
> *John used an X to plow his field.*
> *He fed his X some oats.*

1.2 Etymology and Philology

It is sometimes possible to reconstruct the meaning of a word on the basis of a related word. This may be a word from within the same language or a word from a closely related language. This method can be quite useful. If the Hebrew root חזק means ***"to be strong,"*** it is very possible that the derived noun חָזְקָה means something like ***"strength."*** More often than not, however, the semantic relationship between two related words is much more complex than that. Words often undergo semantic shift and, as a result of that, meanings can change to such an extent that it obscures semantic relationships.

This problem is even more pertinent when we make use of information from related languages. There is no doubt that a student of Biblical Hebrew can learn a lot from languages such as Akkadian, Ugaritic, Arabic, and Aramaic, provided the right tools and methods are used. Too often, however, this type of information is used in a careless and haphazard way, leading to a lot of unfounded speculation about the meaning of words.

It is easy to make mistakes, especially in the case[C1] of Arabic. This has two main reasons. Firstly, the information that is available is relatively young.[1] Most of it is several centuries younger than the most recent texts in the Hebrew Old Testament. It is like comparing contemporary Dutch with Shakespeare's English. The second problem concerns the quantity and the diversity of the data. The amount of Arabic data that is available is incredibly vast and represents different periods of time,

geographical locations, and sources. If this information is used indiscriminately, it can be used to prove almost anything. John Kaltner[2] has devoted an entire monograph to the problem of using data from Arabic in order to determine the meaning of a Hebrew word. In this publication he gives numerous examples that illustrate clearly how easy it is to make serious errors. At the end of his book he gives a list of specific guidelines that are to be followed in order to avoid the many pitfalls in this area. One of his tips is not to rely on Arabic data in existing dictionaries such as HALAT[3] and BDB.[4] (HALAT is the German original of the lexicon cited in its English translation as HALOT in section 3.1.3.)[C2]

1.3 Ancient Versions

Scholars of Biblical languages are blessed by the fact that there may be several ancient translations available of the text that they are studying. After all, if we, who live today, no longer know the meaning of an ancient word, maybe those translators knew it. This can be a very helpful source of information. Too often, however, we are disappointed, when we discover that the ancient translator either made use of a different *Vorlage* of the text or when it becomes obvious that he did not know the meaning of the word in focus either.

1.4 Older Dictionaries

Many lexicographers of Biblical languages make extensive use of older dictionaries. That, of course, makes a lot of sense, and it would be wrong for a lexicographer to completely ignore existing resources. On the other hand, this may lead to the perpetuation of errors, especially if the resources we are consulting were produced with methodologies that should be considered linguistically out of date.

1.5 Extra-Biblical Information

Thankfully there is a treasure of extra-biblical information available as well. Especially disciplines such as archaeology and ancient history yield a lot of information that can be helpful to a dictionary maker. Information of this type, however, can only be used if the lexicographer has been able to identify a given concept in his or her data with one of the concepts dealt with in the extra-biblical resources. In other words, there is quite some information available about the concept of **מַצֵּבָה** ***"sacred pillar."*** This information, however, can only be accessed once the lexicographer has been able to establish with some degree of certainty that the word **מַצֵּבָה** actually refers to such a pillar.

1.6 Semantic Grid

Lexicographers working with Biblical languages would be greatly helped if there were any other tools in addition to the ones that were just mentioned. I believe that there is such an additional tool, and that is the main subject of this article. Knowing and understanding the semantic structure of the language one is working with can also give significant help in the tedious process of assigning meanings to words.

Some of the most elementary aspects of this semantic structure form what I would call a semantic grid. In the next sections I will explain this grid and show how it can help in the lexicographic process.

2 HEBREW SEMANTICS

Two years ago I presented a paper during one of the Hebrew linguistics sessions on word classes in Biblical Hebrew, viewed from a cognitive standpoint. In order for this current presentation to make sense, I will need to summarize some of the main points of that paper.

2.1 Things vs. Relations

According to Langacker[5] there is no distinction between grammatical word classes and semantic word classes. There is no need, therefore, to distinguish between semantic categories, like things and events, and grammatical categories, such as nouns and verbs, as the latter can be defined semantically as well as grammatically. In Langacker's approach language basically consists of two kinds of elements: things and relations. In principle, nouns designate things, whereas verbs and other word classes designate relations.

Since in Semitic languages such as[C3] Biblical Hebrew most nouns are considered derivatives from verbs, I will focus on relations now.

[Diagram in the original: a diamond labelled TRAJECTOR joined by a vertical line to a square labelled LANDMARK, inside a frame labelled DOMAIN.]

The diagram represents a simple relation. It consists of two elements: the *trajector* and the *landmark*. The line connecting the two symbolizes the relation. The trajector is the most salient cognitive entity in the relation, whereas the landmark functions as a point of reference for locating the trajector.[6] Even though the trajector and the landmark are represented by different shapes, because of the difference in prominence between the two, these two elements are essentially identical in nature. Let us take the following simple English phrase as an example:

> *John is home*

In this phrase ***"John"*** functions as the trajector, whereas the position of the landmark is filled by ***"home."*** In this example, the relation between these two elements is one of ***"space"***: John is located in a place described as ***"home."***

2.2 Domains

In the bottom right corner of the diagram above we see the word ***"domain."*** Every element of a language, whether it represents a *thing* or a *relation*, is, as far as its semantic pole is concerned, characterized relative to one or more *cognitive domains*.[7] These are contexts that help us categorize

semantic units. These domains may differ from language to language depending on the world view behind the language. It appears, however, that some domains play a prominent role in the minds of people all over the globe. SPACE, for example, seems to function as a prototype for many other domains in languages everywhere.

However, I do not want to talk about universals of language here. In my research I have focused on Biblical Hebrew. Over the past years I have been doing research in the areas of Hebrew semantics and lexicography, and I have published various articles in this field. I have come to the conclusion that the following four basic domains cover the Hebrew semantic field quite adequately: POSITION, CONNECTION, PERCEPTION, and DESCRIPTION.

2.3 The Four Basic Domains[C4]

In the following subsections I will give a brief description of each of these four domains.

2.3.1 Position

[Diagram in the original: the diamond (tr) drawn inside the square (lm), labelled POSITION.]

This domain covers the way both things and relations relate to the surrounding world, such as location in space, location in time, ***"to exist," "to happen,"*** etc. It includes prepositions and conjunctions denoting space and time, interrogatives that ask the question ***"where?"*** or ***"when?"***, and also negative particles[C5], since these deal with the question whether a process actually takes place or not.

The diagram is an elaboration on the diagram that was shown a little earlier. It shows the trajector and the landmark, but what is different is that the relation between the two has been visualized on the basis of its domain: the trajector is actually located within the landmark. Please note that the trajector and landmark do not necessarily have to represent *things*. In the domain TIME, for example, which is an extension of the domain SPACE, the trajector typically represents a relation, whereas the landmark refers to the time in which this event takes place.

2.3.2 Connection

[Diagram in the original: the diamond (tr) placed against the square (lm), touching it, labelled CONNECTION.]

It is a relatively small step from the domain POSITION to the domain CONNECTION. This domain covers the way things and relations connect to one another, e.g. attachment, possession, association, involvement, etc. The prepositions and conjunctions included here are the ones denoting linking or separation. The interrogatives under this domain deal with the question ***"who?"*** or ***"what?"*** in an effort to determine the different parties involved in a particular process.

2.3.3 Perception

[Diagram in the original: the diamond (tr) above a frame (lm) containing a pair of eyes, labelled PERCEPTION.]

The third basic domain in Hebrew is PERCEPTION. This domain covers the way things and relations are perceived by animate creatures, such as humans, animals, and supernatural beings. This does not only include perception with the senses, but also cognition with the mind. Also included are adverbs and words that belong to other classes denoting observations, opinions, presuppositions, calls for attention, etc. The interrogative belonging to this domain asks the question ***"why?"*** The trajector represents the thing or relation in focus, whereas the landmark refers to the human mind that perceives or processes the information conveyed by the trajector.

2.3.4 Description

[Diagram in the original: the diamond (tr) placed above a marked scale (lm), labelled DESCRIPTION.]

DESCRIPTION, finally, is the fourth basic domain. This domain covers all physical and non-physical features of things, such as size, shape, number, color, character, attitude, and emotion. It also covers the features of relations, such as manner, quality, frequency, speed, intensity, etc. Also included are prepositions and conjunctions that denote the manner in which a process or other event is carried out, interrogatives that ask the question ***"how?"***, and interjections denoting attitudes and emotions.

This domain is somewhat more abstract in that the landmark represents a scale. In the case of the Hebrew word קָטֹן ***"small,"*** for example, the landmark does not correspond to a thing or relation, but to a schematic scale of size. The trajector is a particular position on this scale, as can be seen in the diagram.

2.4 Constructing the Semantic Grid

Let us now proceed to construct the semantic grid for Biblical Hebrew. The first thing we should realize is that one single word often has different meanings[C6]. More often than not these meanings are related. Sometimes these relationships are somewhat arbitrary. Very often, however, when comparing the semantic behavior of different words, we can see patterns. These patterns can be formalized with the help of a scheme, which I would like to call a semantic grid.

Along the horizontal axis of the semantic grid we find different extensions of meaning. One of the important lessons that cognitive linguistics has taught us is that most metaphors are not accidents that happen occasionally, but that they are a structural part of language. This is true for Biblical Hebrew as

well. If we take a careful look at Hebrew verbs we can see different kinds of metaphorical extensions of meaning that occur in patterns. I believe there are three major levels here:

Relations with a thing as trajector, physical. This is the most basic type of relation. The relationship between the trajector and the landmark is concrete, physical in nature, e.g. *John went home*.

Relations with a thing as trajector, non-physical. Relations of this type are closely related to the ones mentioned above. In this case, however, the relationship between trajector and landmark is more abstract, non-physical, e.g. *John went astray*.

Relations with a relation as trajector. Relations of this third type are closely related to both previous types. In this case, however, the slot of the trajector is filled by another relation, e.g. *The situation went from bad to worse*.

Along the vertical axis we find extensions with regard to the complexity of the relation.

The most basic type is a relation in which the trajector is not in control of what happens, like in what is often described in semantics as a *state* or a *process*. A simple example of a state is: *John is in the pit*. An example of a process would be: *John fell into the pit*. In both cases John is not in control of the situation. Even though states and processes are quite different in theory, in Biblical Hebrew it is often hard to distinguish between the two. According to HALOT, for example, the root **גדל** has (among others) the following glosses: ***"to be great"*** and ***"to become great."*** It is often the grammar that helps determine which of these two glosses is to be chosen.

The second type of relation on the vertical axis of the grid is the *action*. An action differs from a state or process in that the trajector is actually in charge of what happens. An example would be: *John jumped into the pit*.

The third type of relation in this range is the so-called *causative* action. This requires a third element in a relation: the *causer*. An example would be: *Pete threw John into the pit*.

[Diagram in the original: a third shape (the causer) added above the diamond (tr) and the square (lm), all joined by one line, inside a frame labelled DOMAIN.]

To summarize what we have seen so far in this subsection, this is what the semantic grid for Hebrew relations looks like:

	RELATIONS WITH A THING AS TRAJECTOR, PHYSICAL	RELATIONS WITH A THING AS TRAJECTOR, NON-PHYSICAL	RELATIONS WITH A RELATION AS TRAJECTOR
State / Process			
Action			
Causative			

2.5 Filling the Semantic Grid

Every relation in Biblical Hebrew has its own semantic grid, depending on the domain where it belongs. In the following subsections we will[C7] look at examples from each domain.

Please note that it is not always possible to fill the entire semantic grid for an entry. We are limited by the amount of data that is available. I have looked for examples that fill as many slots as possible.

For each cell in the grid one example will be given. Since we are dealing with relations, the examples will usually be verbs. Some of the examples given under DESCRIPTION, however, are adjectives.[C8] In the case of a verb its ***binyan (verb stem)*** will be given as well. In subsection 2.6 a few general statements about ***binyanim (verb stems)*** will be made. (S/P = state or process; A = action; C = causative. qal, ni = niphal, pi = piel, pu = pual, hi = hiphil, hitp = hitpael.)

2.5.1 POSITION

The first example of a relation belonging to the domain of POSITION is the root **עמד** ***"to stand."*** Only one slot has not been filled.

POSITION		LOCATION	EXISTENCE	OCCURRENCE
עמד	**S/P**	*to stand* **Genesis 41:1** (verb, qal)	*to stand firm* **Psalms 130:3** (verb, qal)	*to endure* **Ezekiel 22:14** (verb, qal)
	A	*to stop* **2 Samuel 15:17** (verb, qal)	*to persist* **Isaiah 47:12** (verb, qal) [C9]	
	C	*to place, to set* **Leviticus 14:11** (verb, hi)	*to raise (a king to power)* **Exodus 9:16** (verb, hi)	*to confirm, establish* **Psalms 105:10** (verb, hi)

The second example is the verb **הלך** ***"to go."*** All but two slots are filled for this verb:

POSITION		LOCATION	EXISTENCE	OCCURRENCE
הלך	**S/P**	*to move* **Genesis 7:18** (verb, qal)	*to vanish* **Psalms 109:23** (verb, ni)	
	A	*to go* **Joshua 8:9** (verb, qal)	*to live* **Genesis 24:40** (verb, hitp)	
	C	*to lead, bring* **Joshua 24:3** (verb, hi)	*to lead astray* **Proverbs 16:29** (verb, hi) [C10]	*to carry (one's shame)* **2 Samuel 13:13** (verb, hi)

2.5.2 CONNECTION

A very good example of a relation belonging to the domain CONNECTION is the verb **דבק** ***"to cleave to,"*** which fills all of the slots of its semantic grid.

CONNECTION		ATTACHMENT	ASSOCIATION	INVOLVEMENT
דבק	**S/P**	*to cleave together* **Job 38:38** (verb, pu)	*to be faithful* **2 Kings 18:6** (verb, qal)	*to take part (in an event)* **Psalms 101:3** (verb, qal)
	A	*to pursue* **Genesis 31:23** (verb, hi) [C11]	*to retain* **Numbers 36:7** (verb, qal)	*to overtake (of disaster)* **Genesis 19:19** (verb, qal)
	C	*to cause to stick* **Ezekiel 3:26** (verb, hi)	*to bring close* **Jeremiah 13:11** (verb, hi)	*to cause (pestilence) to cling to* **Deuteronomy 28:21** (verb, hi)

The second example is the root **חזק**. This root has more than one basic meaning. We will also find it under DESCRIPTION. In this case all but two slots are filled.[C12]

CONNECTION		ATTACHMENT	ASSOCIATION	INVOLVEMENT
חזק	**S/P**	*to get stuck* **2 Samuel 18:9** (verb, qal)		*to be firmly (in one's hand)* **2 Kings 14:5** (verb, qal) [C13]
	A	*to take hold* **Isaiah 41:9** (verb, hi)	*to support* **1 Chronicles 11:10** (verb, hitp)	*to hold on (to behavior)* **Isaiah 27:5** (verb, hi)
	C	*to fasten* **Isaiah 22:21** (verb, pi)		*to strengthen someone's hold* **2 Kings 15:19** (verb, hi)

2.5.3 PERCEPTION

The grid for the domain PERCEPTION is somewhat different. Columns #1 and #3 have been collapsed. This is due to the fact that it is not easy to distinguish between a relation with a *thing* as its trajector and one that has another *relation* in that position. Someone who *looks at* a person, for example, not only sees the person but also the activities that this person is engaged in, if they are visible. In the same way, someone who *hears* a person actually hears events that this person is engaged in.

The first example of a relation belonging to this domain is the root **ראה**:

PERCEPTION		SENSATION	COGNITION
ראה	S/P	*to see* **Exodus 12:13** (verb, qal)	*to discern* **Hosea 5:13** (verb, qal)
	A	*to look* **Psalms 106:44** (verb, qal)	*to take heed* **1 Chronicles 28:10** (verb, qal)
	C	*to show* **Deuteronomy 34:1** (verb, hi)	*to cause to discern* **Exodus 9:16** (verb, hi)

The second example is the root **שמע**:

PERCEPTION		SENSATION	COGNITION
שמע	S/P	*to hear* **1 Kings 19:13** (verb, qal)	*to understand* **Genesis 11:7** (verb, qal)
	A	*to listen* **Genesis 4:23** (verb, qal)	*to give heed* **Genesis 16:11** (verb, qal)
	C	*to cause to hear* **Isaiah 30:30** (verb, hi)	*to proclaim* **Psalms 106:2** (verb, hi)

2.5.4 DESCRIPTION

The final domain we need to look into is DESCRIPTION. The first example is the root חזק. We have already seen under CONNECTION that this verb has more than one basic meaning. One of its meanings[C14] is ***"to be strong,"*** which is a case of DESCRIPTION. Only one slot remains empty.

DESCRIPTION		ATTRIBUTE	ATTITUDE	MODIFICATION
חזק	S/P	*to be strong* **Judges 1:28** (verb, qal) [C15]	*to be resolute* **Deuteronomy 12:23** (verb, qal)	*fierce (of battle)* **1 Samuel 14:52** (adj) [C16]
	A	*to summon one's strength* **Genesis 48:2** (verb, hitp)	*to take courage* **1 Samuel 4:9** (verb, hitp)	
	C	*to give strength* **Judges 16:28** (verb, pi)	*to encourage* **Deuteronomy 1:38** (verb, pi)	*to intensify (events)* **2 Samuel 11:25** (verb, hi)

The second example contains both a verb and the adjective that is derived from it. It is the verb כבד ***"to be heavy"*** with its derivative כָּבֵד ***"heavy."***

DESCRIPTION {CI7}		ATTRIBUTE	ATTITUDE	MODIFICATION
כבד כָּבֵד	S/P	*to be heavy* **Job 6:3** (verb, qal) [C18]	*to be honored* **Isaiah 23:8** (verb, ni)	*to be intense* **Genesis 12:10** (adj) [C19]
	A		*to honor oneself* **Proverbs 12:9** (verb, hitp)	
	C	*to make heavy* **Isaiah 47:6** (verb, hi)	*to honor* **Exodus 20:12** (verb, pi)	*to put a heavy load (on people)* **Nehemiah 5:15** (verb, hi)

2.6 The Semantic Grid and the Binyanim

Ideally, there would be a direct link between these three levels and the Hebrew ***binyanim (verb stems)***. In practice, however, it does not work this way. Even though quite often we find a ***hitpael (reflexive stem)*** in the second row and a ***piel (intensive stem)*** or ***hiphil (causative stem)*** in the third row, it is by no means exclusively that way. Several studies have already shown that ***"it does not appear that there is a clearly defined function for each binyan, nor a system capturing such functions."***[8]

3 CASE STUDY

The root **שמט** occurs nine times in the Old Testament: seven times in the ***qal (simple stem)***, once in the ***niphal (passive stem)***, and once in the ***hiphil (causative stem)***. For the benefit of the reader each of the passages has been reproduced below. The English translations are quoted from the Revised Standard Version.[9] The form of **שמט** in each verse is underlined in the English.

Exodus 23:11, qal

וְהַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּשְׁמְטֶנָּה וּנְטַשְׁתָּהּ וְאָכְלוּ אֶבְיֹנֵי עַמֶּךָ

"but the seventh year <u>you shall let it rest</u> and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat ..."

Deuteronomy 15:2, qal

וְזֶה דְּבַר הַשְּׁמִטָּה שָׁמוֹט כָּל־בַּעַל מַשֵּׁה יָדוֹ אֲשֶׁר יַשֶּׁה בְּרֵעֵהוּ לֹא־יִגֹּשׂ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וְאֶת־אָחִיו כִּי־קָרָא שְׁמִטָּה לַיהוָה׃

"And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall <u>release</u> what he has lent to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD's [Yahweh's] release has been proclaimed."

Deuteronomy 15:3, hiphil

אֶת־הַנָּכְרִי תִּגֹּשׂ וַאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֶת־אָחִיךָ תַּשְׁמֵט יָדֶךָ׃

"Of a foreigner you may exact it; but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall <u>release</u>."

2 Samuel 6:6, qal

וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־גֹּרֶן נָכוֹן וַיִּשְׁלַח עֻזָּא אֶל־אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאחֶז בּוֹ כִּי שָׁמְטוּ הַבָּקָר׃

"And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen <u>stumbled</u>."

2 Kings 9:33, qal (twice)

וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁמְטוּהָ וַיִּשְׁמְטוּהָ וַיִּז מִדָּמָהּ אֶל־הַקִּיר וְאֶל־הַסּוּסִים וַיִּרְמְסֶנָּה׃

"He said, '<u>Throw</u> her <u>down</u>.' So they <u>threw</u> her <u>down</u>; and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled on her."

Jeremiah 17:4, qal

וְשָׁמַטְתָּה וּבְךָ מִנַּחֲלָתְךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָךְ וְהַעֲבַדְתִּיךָ אֶת־אֹיְבֶיךָ בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדָעְתָּ

"You shall <u>loosen</u> your hand from your heritage which I gave to you, and I will make you serve your enemies in a land which you do not know ..."

Psalms 141:6, niphal

נִשְׁמְטוּ בִידֵי־סֶלַע שֹׁפְטֵיהֶם

"When they are <u>given over</u> to those who shall condemn them, then they shall learn that the word of the LORD [Yahweh] is true."

1 Chronicles 13:9, qal

וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־גֹּרֶן כִּידֹן וַיִּשְׁלַח עֻזָּא אֶת־יָדוֹ לֶאֱחֹז אֶת־הָאָרוֹן כִּי שָׁמְטוּ הַבָּקָר׃

"And when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzzah put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen <u>stumbled</u>."

In the following subsection we will look at three of the major Hebrew lexica and discuss their semantic analysis of **שמט**.

3.1.1 Gesenius

Gesenius recognizes two basic meanings of this root, with etymological evidence for the first only. This is a summary of his semantic analysis.

QAL
(1) to smite, to strike; also, to cast, to throw down, based on Arabic شمص ***"to strike, to thrust, and to urge on a beast violently."***
  a. to kick (**2 Samuel 6:6** כִּי שָׁמְטוּ הַבָּקָר ***"for the oxen kicked"***)
  b. to cast, throw down
(2) to fall, to let lie
  a. to leave (a field) untilled
  b. to remit (a debt)
  c. to desist from anything
NIPHAL — passive of QAL (1) — to be cast down, precipitated
HIPHIL — related to QAL (2) — to remit

3.1.2 Brown–Driver–Briggs (BDB)

BDB analyses this root somewhat differently. As far as the etymology is concerned, it gives examples from Late Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic. The Arabic root mentioned by BDB (*samaṭa*) is

different from the one mentioned by Gesenius and more in support of Gesenius's meaning (2) than of (1). On the basis of this, BDB postulates[C20] one single basic meaning: to let drop. All occurrences are explained as variations of that one basic meaning.

3.1.3 Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT)

HALOT[10] structures this entry somewhat differently again. It starts with a long discussion of the etymology of this root with data from different languages. Important is the addition of Akkadian here. The same Arabic root (*samaṭa*) is mentioned here as in BDB, the difference being that HALOT cites many more meanings than BDB does. HALOT ends this discussion with the observation that there may be two different Semitic roots underlying this entry.

This is a summary of the semantic analysis found in HALOT:

QAL
(1) to let loose, let fall
a. to throw someone out of a window
b. שָׁמַט אֶרֶץ the land is left to itself, meaning to leave fallow
(2) with מַשֶּׁה יָדוֹ: to abandon a personal debt, forgive
(3) שָׁמְטוּ הַבָּקָר no precise meaning [different options are discussed]
NIPHAL — to be thrown down
HIPHIL — to allow to lapse, drop

3.2 Alternative Analysis

As we have seen, there is quite a bit of variety between the three entries. By postulating one basic meaning, BDB provides the simplest analysis of the three. The other two dictionaries seem to prefer two underlying roots.

The question we have to deal with now is whether there is a way to analyze this root in a more satisfactory way. And maybe the concept of the semantic grid could help here.

In such a case it is always good to start with a meaning that is uncontested. This is true for the two occurrences of **שמט** in **2 Kings 9:33**. This verse talks about Queen Jezebel[C21], who is thrown out of the window of her palace. The context makes quite clear that the appropriate definition of **שמט** in this passage is ***"to let go of an object held in one's hand so that it will fall."*** The domain here is CONNECTION, and the appropriate diagram is the CONNECTION diagram shown in 2.3.2.

This occurrence belongs to the first column of the semantic grid. Since the *trajector* is actively involved in the process of dropping Jezebel, it should be located in the second row.

CONNECTION		ATTACHMENT	ASSOCIATION	INVOLVEMENT
שמט	**S/P**			
	A	*to drop, let fall* **2 Kings 9:33**		
	C			

The occurrence in **Psalms 141:6** probably belongs here as well. Even though the BHS apparatus considers this passage corrupt, Dahood gives some powerful arguments for translating it as ***"to let fall."***[11]

The second meaning is the one found in the first verses of Deuteronomy 15. Both the verb **שמט** and its derivative **שְׁמִטָּה** occur several times here, and there is enough context to determine the meaning of these two words. These verses talk about creditors that are required to ***"drop their hand"*** from money they lent to people in the past; in other words, to relinquish their right to get that money back. This is a clear metaphorical extension of the meaning we established for the occurrences in **2 Kings 9:33**. This extended meaning goes into the second column of the semantic grid. Note that the occurrence of **שמט** in **Deuteronomy 15:2** is a qal form, whereas its counterpart in verse 3[C21] is a hiphil. There does not seem to be a significant difference in meaning, though. The occurrence of **שמט** in **Jeremiah 17:4** has a similar meaning as well.[12]

CONNECTION		ATTACHMENT	ASSOCIATION	INVOLVEMENT
שמט	**S/P**			
	A	*to drop, let fall* **2 Kings 9:33**	*to relinquish* **Deuteronomy 15:2–3**; **Jeremiah 17:4**	
	C			

Now what to do with **Exodus 23:11**? What is clear here is that the object of **שמט** is ***"land."*** It is supposed to lie fallow so that the poor can eat from it. That much we can infer from the context. But what is the exact meaning of **שמט** in this passage? If we look at some of the available dictionaries and Bible translations, we get different results:

SOURCE	RENDERING OF שמט IN EXODUS 23:11
Gesenius	to leave untilled
Brown–Driver–Briggs, RSV, NRSV	to let rest
HALOT	to leave to itself
NIV	to let unused
NJB	to forgo all produce
REB	to leave alone

However, if we take into consideration the semantic grid, the NJB may be on target more than the other resources. In a normal situation the produce of the land goes to the owner. During the seventh year, however, the owner is to relinquish his right to receive the produce of his field and leave it to the poor. In other words, the lexical meaning is almost identical to what we found in Deuteronomy 15.

Now we still need to deal with the two parallel passages in **2 Samuel 6:6** and **1 Chronicles 13:9**. What happened to the oxen pulling the cart with the ark of the covenant? There are many possibilities, some of which are presented in the table below.

VERSION	TEXT	MEANING
LXX (**2 Samuel 6:6**)	ὅτι περιέσπασεν αὐτὴν ὁ μόσχος	for the bull calf caused it to swerve
LXX (**1 Chronicles 13:9**)	ὅτι ἐξέκλινεν αὐτὴν ὁ μόσχος	because the ox was tilting it
Peshitta (**2 Samuel 6:6**)	ܕܐܫܬܡܛܘ ܠܗܘܢ ܬܘܪܐ	the oxen slipped away from the harness
Peshitta (**1 Chronicles 13:9**)	ܕܪܗܛܘ ܗܘܘ ܠܗܘܢ ܬܘܪܐ ܠܕܪܐ	the oxen rushed to the threshing floor
Vulgate (**2 Samuel 6:6**)	quoniam calcitrabant boves	because the oxen kicked

VERSION	TEXT	MEANING
Vulgate (**1 Chronicles 13:9**)	bos quippe lasciviens paululum inclinaverat eam	for the ox being wanton had made it lean a little on one side
RSV, NIV, NJPS, REB [C22]	—	the oxen stumbled
NJB	—	the oxen were making it tilt
NRSV	—	the oxen shook it

It is interesting to note that the ancient versions quoted here translate both passages differently and differ from each other as well. It gives the impression that the ancient translators were not too sure about the exact meaning of **שמט** in these passages either.

To what extent could the semantic grid help us here? There are still several slots open. My suggestion would be to place it in the top left slot. If this is correct, then this is what probably happened: the oxen failed to make proper contact with the road, which apparently was somewhat slippery, and threatened to fall. In other words: they slipped. This caused[C23] the cart to shake and the ark to slide. This fits the semantic grid very well. It is a process, because it happened out of the control of the oxen, and it is a case of ATTACHMENT, because the oxen lost their grip on the surface of the road.

That means that we can complete the semantic grid for **שמט** as follows:

CONNECTION		ATTACHMENT	ASSOCIATION	INVOLVEMENT
שמט	**S/P**	*to slip* **2 Samuel 6:6**; **1 Chronicles 13:9**		
	A	*to drop, let fall* **2 Kings 9:33**; **Psalms 141:6** (ni)	*to relinquish* **Exodus 23:11**; **Deuteronomy 15:2–3**; **Jeremiah 17:4**	
	C			

If this analysis is correct, there is no need to postulate two roots here. Without much effort we have been able to fit everything in a single semantic grid under one domain.

4 CONCLUSION

In this paper I have tried to show how a structural semantic analysis of an ancient language like Biblical Hebrew can provide a lexicographer with an additional tool for his or her work. This can be especially useful in cases where there are not enough data available to determine the meaning of a word in a satisfactory way. Of course this tool is to be used with care, just like all other tools. There are cases, however, where this tool can turn a wild guess into an educated one.

NOTES TO THE PAPER

1. Kaltner, John. 2002. ***"Arabic,"*** in *Beyond Babel: A Handbook for Biblical Hebrew and Related Languages*, edited by John Kaltner and Steven L. McKenzie. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

2. Kaltner, John. 1996. *The Use of Arabic in Biblical Hebrew Lexicography*. Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 28. Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America.

3. Koehler, L.[C24] and W. Baumgartner. *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*. 3rd ed. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967–1990 (Hebrew part).

4. Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952 (corrected reprint).

5. Langacker, R. W. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, Volume I: *Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 189.

6. Langacker 1987, pp. 217, 231.

7. Langacker 1987, p. 147.

8. Verheij, A. J. C. 2000.[C25] *Bits, Bytes, and Binyanim: A Quantitative Study of Verbal Lexeme Formations in the Hebrew Bible*. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 93. Leuven: Peeters, p. 135.

9. *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*. 1952, 1971, 1973. New York: Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

10. Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000.[C2]

11. Dahood, Mitchell. 1970. *Psalms III: 101–150*. The Anchor Bible 17A. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

12. This is a qal form. Note that the second word in **Jeremiah 17:4**, וּבְךָ, is to be emended to read יָדְךָ ***"your hand."*** Another slight difference with the occurrences in **Deuteronomy 15:2–3** is the presence of the preposition מִן in **Jeremiah 17:4**, which is lacking in the other passages.

III. TABLE OF CORRECTIONS

Each correction below is tagged in Part II. The column ***"Witnesses"*** gives the evidence: for a verse or verb-stem correction, the Hebrew text itself is the first witness and a standard lexicon is the second. Typing and citation corrections are marked as such.

NO.	WHERE	ORIGINAL	CORRECTED	WITNESSES / BASIS
C1	1.2	***"in de case of Arabic"***	***"in the case of Arabic"***	Typing error (Dutch article)
C2	1.2; 3.1.3; notes	HALAT in 1.2, HALOT in 3.1.3, with no citation for HALOT	HALAT identified as the German original; full citation for HALOT (English, 1994–2000) added as note 10	Citation; the paper used both names for one lexicon without saying so
C3	2.1	***"in Semitic languages as Biblical Hebrew"***	***"in Semitic languages such as Biblical Hebrew"***	Grammar
C4	2.2–2.3	Subsections numbered 2.3.1–2.3.4 with no section 2.3	Heading ***"2.3 The Four Basic Domains"*** supplied	Numbering
C5	2.3.1	***"negatives particles"***	***"negative particles"***	Typing error
C6	2.4	***"often has different meaning"***	***"often has different meanings"***	Grammar
C7	2.5	***"will we look"***	***"we will look"***	Word order
C8	2.5	***"One of the examples ... features an adjective"***	***"Some of the examples ... are adjectives"***	Follows from C15, C16, C19: three DESCRIPTION examples are adjectives
C9	2.5.1, **עמד**	**Isaiah 47:2** ***"to persist"***	**Isaiah 47:12**	**Isaiah 47:2** is ***"take the millstones and grind meal"***; 47:12 reads **עִמְדִי־נָא בַּחֲבָרִיךְ** ***"stand now with your enchantments."*** Corroborated: Hebrew text; BDB/HALOT under **עמד**
C10	2.5.1, **הלך**	**Proverbs 16:29** (no stem given)	(verb, hi)	**וְהוֹלִיכוֹ** ***"and leads him"*** is hiphil. Corroborated: Hebrew text; BDB under **הלך**

NO.	WHERE	ORIGINAL	CORRECTED	WITNESSES / BASIS
C11	2.5.2, **דבק**	**Genesis 31:23** (verb, qal)	(verb, hi)	**וַיַּדְבֵּק אֹתוֹ** ***"and he overtook him"*** is hiphil. Corroborated: Hebrew text; BDB/HALOT under **דבק**
C12	2.5.2, **חזק**	***"all but two slots are not filled"***	***"all but two slots are filled"***	The paper's own table: 7 of 9 slots filled, 2 empty
C13	2.5.2, **חזק**	**2 Kings 14:5** (no stem given)	(verb, qal)	**חָזְקָה הַמַּמְלָכָה בְּיָדוֹ** is qal perfect. Corroborated: Hebrew text; BDB
C14	2.5.4	***"One of its meaning"***	***"One of its meanings"***	Grammar
C15	2.5.4, **חזק**	**Joshua 14:11** (verb, qal) ***"to be strong"***	**Judges 1:28** (verb, qal)	**Joshua 14:11 עוֹדֶנִּי הַיּוֹם חָזָק** uses the adjective **חָזָק**, not the verb. **Judges 1:28 כִּי־חָזַק יִשְׂרָאֵל** ***"when Israel was strong"*** is the qal verb. Corroborated: Hebrew text; BDB
C16	2.5.4, **חזק**	**1 Samuel 14:52** (verb, qal) ***"to be bitter, fierce"***	(adj) ***"fierce (of battle)"***	**וַתְּהִי הַמִּלְחָמָה חֲזָקָה** ***"the war was fierce"***: **חֲזָקָה** is the feminine adjective after the verb **הָיָה**. Corroborated: Hebrew text; BDB
C17	2.5.4, **כבד**	Table headed POSITION	DESCRIPTION	The paper places **כבד** under DESCRIPTION in its own text
C18	2.5.4, **כבד**	**Proverbs 8:24** (verb, qal) ***"to be heavy"***	**Job 6:3** (verb, qal)	**Proverbs 8:24 נִכְבַּדֵי־מָיִם** is a niphal participle (***"abounding with water"***), not qal. **Job 6:3 מֵחוֹל יַמִּים יִכְבָּד** ***"it would be heavier than the sand of the sea"*** is qal. Corroborated: Hebrew text; BDB/HALOT under **כבד**
C19	2.5.4, **כבד**	**Genesis 12:10** (verb, adj)	(adj)	**כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעָב בָּאָרֶץ**: the paper treats **כָּבֵד** here as the adjective; ***"verb, adj"*** contradicts itself
C20	3.1.2	***"BDB postulate"***	***"BDB postulates"***	Grammar
C21	3.2	***"queen Jezebel"***; ***"vers 3"***	***"Queen Jezebel"***; ***"verse 3"***	Capitalization; typing error
C22	3.2 table	NRSV listed under both ***"stumbled"*** and ***"shook it"***	NRSV only under ***"the oxen shook it"***	NRSV reads ***"for the oxen shook it"*** at **2 Samuel 6:6** and **1 Chronicles 13:9**

NO.	WHERE	ORIGINAL	CORRECTED	WITNESSES / BASIS
C23	3.2	***"This cause the cart to shake"***	***"This caused the cart to shake"***	Grammar
C24	Note 3	***"Koehler, M."***	***"Koehler, L."***	The lexicographer is Ludwig Koehler
C25	Note 8	Verheij 1999; ***"Quantative"***; Louvain	2000; ***"Quantitative"***; Leuven; series OLA 93 added	Published Leuven: Peeters, 2000, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 93 (library record, RelBib). Page 135 not independently checked

Checked and found correct. The count of nine occurrences of **שמט** (seven qal, one niphal, one hiphil) is correct. Every other reference and stem label in the grids for **עמד**, **הלך**, **דבק**, **חזק**, **ראה**, **שמע**, and **כבד** was checked against the Hebrew text and found as stated, as were the RSV quotations, the Latin and Greek readings, and the Gesenius, BDB, and HALOT summaries. The Syriac (Peshitta) readings were not independently checked.

IV. COVENANT ASSESSMENT OF THE METHOD

The paper is tested here against the **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard. Each finding is graded by how many witnesses the Hebrew text itself supplies.

IV-A. The Text Is Its Own First Lexicon

Finding: The meaning of a Hebrew word is settled first by how the Tanakh uses it, before any foreign cognate or later dictionary. **Grade: Corroborated.**

De Blois ranks context first (1.1) and treats cognates, ancient versions, and older dictionaries as aids that can mislead (1.2–1.4). The Tanakh models this itself. **Deuteronomy 15:2** defines its own new term: ***"this is the manner of the release,"*** then explains it, the creditor releases what he lent. **Nehemiah 8:8** describes the Levites reading the law ***"distinctly"*** and giving the sense so the people understood the reading. The word was explained from the scroll in front of them, not from a foreign language. This is the same principle Miqdash Bethel follows in Document 333.

IV-B. One Root, One Picture: Letting Go of What Is Held

Finding: ***shamat (to let drop)*** is one root with one basic picture, the hand letting go of what it holds, extended from the physical to the legal. **Grade: Corroborated.**

Four passages witness the same picture. In **2 Kings 9:33** the hands let go of Jezebel. In **Deuteronomy 15:2** the creditor lets go of his claim. **Deuteronomy 15:3** says it outright: ***"your hand shall release."*** **Jeremiah 17:4** turns the same picture into judgment: Israel will let go of its own inheritance. The lexicons that split the root in two (Gesenius, HALOT) did so mainly because of foreign cognates and the one unclear verse about the oxen. The Hebrew usage alone does not require two roots.

IV-C. The Seventh Year: The Owner Lets Go for the Poor

Finding: In **Exodus 23:11** the owner releases his claim on the produce so that the poor may eat. The land is not merely ***"rested"***; the owner's right is released. **Grade: Corroborated.**

De Blois prefers the NJB's ***"forgo all produce,"*** and the Tanakh supports him with more than the grid. **Exodus 23:11** states the purpose in the same verse: ***"that the poor of your people may eat."*** **Leviticus 25:6–7** says the growth of the land's sabbath shall be food for the owner, his servants, the hired worker, the stranger, and even the cattle and the wild animals, so it belongs to everyone and not to the owner alone. **Deuteronomy 15:2** uses the same root for releasing debts in the same seventh year. Three witnesses agree: the seventh year is a release of the owner's claim, in land and in loans, for the sake of the poor.

IV-D. "The Oxen Slipped": An Educated Guess

Finding: In **2 Samuel 6:6** and **1 Chronicles 13:9** the oxen slipped. **Grade: Single witness.**

De Blois is honest that this is a suggestion. The only support is the fit with the grid. The two verses give no further description of what the oxen did, and the ancient translators disagreed with each other and even with themselves. ***"Slipped"*** is a reasonable reading, better than ***"kicked,"*** but it should be taught as the most likely reading, not as settled. What the text does settle is why Uzzah died. **Numbers 4:15** forbids the sons of Kohath to touch the holy things, ***"lest they die."*** **Numbers 7:9** says the holy things were to be carried on the shoulder, not on a cart. David himself confessed afterward that **Yahweh** broke out against them because they did not seek Him according to the ordinance, and the Levites then carried the ark on their shoulders with poles (**1 Chronicles 15:2, 13, 15**). Whatever the oxen did, the breach was carrying the ark on a cart and reaching out a hand to it.

IV-E. Psalms 141:6

Finding: נִשְׁמְטוּ in **Psalms 141:6** means ***"were let fall"*** or ***"were thrown down."*** **Grade: Single witness.**

The paper relies on Dahood for this verse, and the BHS apparatus regards the line as damaged. The sense ***"thrown down"*** fits the root, but the verse is too difficult to serve as a witness for anything else.

IV-F. Two Cautions on the Method

The rows of the grid depend on how the scene is pictured. The paper's own example of a causative action is ***"Pete threw John into the pit"*** (2.4), yet ***"throw her down"*** in **2 Kings 9:33** is placed in the action row, not the causative row. That placement is defensible if the one who lets go is pictured as the trajector separating from what he held, and that picture is what links Jezebel, the creditor, and the slipping oxen. But the same verse could be pictured the other way. The reader should know that the row assignments are an interpretive choice, not something the Hebrew marks.

The verb stems do not decide meaning. The paper says so in 2.6, and its own data prove it. **Genesis 31:23** (corrected to hiphil, C11) stands in the action row, not the causative row, and **Deuteronomy 15:2** (qal) and 15:3 (hiphil) carry the same meaning. A reader should not assume that a hiphil always means ***"cause to."*** Each occurrence has to be read in its context, which brings the reader back to IV-A.

IV-G. Summary

The semantic-grid method is a sound and useful tool. Its strength is that it lets the Hebrew Bible's own patterns of meaning govern a rare word, instead of a word from a later language. Its limit is the one the author names himself: it can turn a wild guess into an educated one, but it cannot turn an educated guess into a certainty. Where a passage gives two or three witnesses, as with the release of debts and the seventh year, the conclusion stands. Where it gives one, as with the oxen, the conclusion should be held loosely.

V. CORRECTIONS TO EARLIER LIBRARY MATERIAL

No corrections to earlier library material were identified in preparing this edition. Any Miqdash Bethel study that teaches the year of release (Deuteronomy 15) or the seventh-year rest of the land (**Exodus 23:11**) may cite Part IV-B and IV-C of this document for the meaning of ***shamat (to let drop)*** and ***shemittah (release)***.

SCRIPTURE INDEX

BOOK	REFERENCES
Genesis	**Genesis 4:23; 7:18; 11:7; 12:10; 16:11; 19:19; 24:40; 31:23; 41:1; 48:2**
Exodus	**Exodus 9:16; 12:13; 20:12; 23:11**
Leviticus	**Leviticus 14:11; 25:6–7**

BOOK	REFERENCES
Numbers	**Numbers 4:15; 7:9; 36:7**
Deuteronomy	**Deuteronomy 1:38; 12:23; 15:1–3; 19:15; 28:21; 34:1**
Joshua	**Joshua 8:9; 14:11; 24:3**
Judges	**Judges 1:28; 16:28**
1 Samuel	**1 Samuel 4:9; 14:52**
2 Samuel	**2 Samuel 6:6; 11:25; 13:13; 15:17; 18:9**
1 Kings	**1 Kings 19:13**
2 Kings	**2 Kings 9:33; 14:5; 15:19; 18:6**
Isaiah	**Isaiah 22:21; 23:8; 27:5; 30:30; 41:9; 47:2; 47:6; 47:12**
Jeremiah	**Jeremiah 13:11; 17:4**
Ezekiel	**Ezekiel 3:26; 22:14**
Hosea	**Hosea 5:13**
Malachi	**Malachi 3:6**
Psalms	**Psalms 101:3; 105:10; 106:2; 106:44; 109:23; 119:89; 130:3; 141:6**
Proverbs	**Proverbs 8:24; 12:9; 16:29; 25:2**
Job	**Job 6:3; 38:38**
Nehemiah	**Nehemiah 5:15; 8:8**
1 Chronicles	**1 Chronicles 11:10; 13:9; 15:2, 13, 15; 28:10**

כְּבֹד אֱלֹהִים הַסְתֵּר דָּבָר וּכְבֹד מְלָכִים חֵקֹר דָּבָר

"It is the glory of Elohim to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings to search out a matter."

— Proverbs 25:2

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

Document 345 • The Semantic Structure of Biblical Hebrew (Corrected Edition)

miqdashbethel.ai • miqdashbethel@gmail.com

The Message is Sent to the World