

to think that the meaning of a word could be proved by finding the meaning of a similar word in a related language. Commentaries often based arguments about the meaning of Hebrew words on similar words in Arabic. This method has now been almost entirely abandoned by competent linguists, as it is recognized that while such similarities may suggest possibilities of interpretation, only usage can prove a meaning.

Words often develop in very different ways in related languages. For instance, the English word *knight* and the German word *knecht* have the same origin but have developed very differently. In German, *knecht* means a servant; in English, *knight* indicates a man of rather high standing.

If a word occurs a number of times in the Old Testament it is usually easy to determine its meaning from the context. If it occurs only once or twice it is more difficult, since practically all the ancient Hebrew that has been preserved is in the Old Testament. In such cases the meaning of a similar word in a cognate language may suggest possibilities but cannot prove them. Help is also gained by comparing related words in Hebrew and by examining the way the word has been rendered in ancient versions (see Note 3).

NOTE 2: PECULIARITIES OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

Since it is necessary, in studying the book of Isaiah, to refer to particular features of the Hebrew language, an explanation of some of these features will be given at this point.

The Hebrew verb system does not possess the great precision and flexibility of the Greek verb system, or even as much as is available in the English language. Aside from the imperative, infinitives, and participles, Hebrew has only two tenses. The perfect tense represents an action as completed, while the imperfect tense presents an action as it occurs. Either of these tenses may be used to express situations in past, present, or future, though in the majority of cases the perfect can safely be translated as past and the imperfect as future. Many future events predicted in the prophetic books are considered as so definite that they are represented as already accomplished and therefore