

**MIKHAIL G. SELEZNEV**

**TRANSLATION OF HEBREW TENSES  
IN THE GREEK PSALTER:  
CHOOSING BETWEEN PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE**

**HSE UNIVERSITY**

Tov-Polak-¶ Hebrew/Greek-¶ Parallel-Text¶			MT-TAGGED¶ (Westminster-Morphology-and- Lemma-Database)¶	LXX-TAGGED¶
Psa· 1:1.1¶	)\$RY¶	MAKA/RIOS¶	)A\$:R"YOPi¶	maka/rios@annmsn¶
Psa· 1:1.2¶	H/)\$¶	A)NH/R¶	HAQPa·)IY\$Qncmsa¶	a)nh/r@nnmsc¶
Psa· 1:1.3¶	)\$R¶	O(\\$¶	):A\$ERQPr¶	o(/s@rrnms¶
Psa· 1:1.4¶	L)¶	OU)K¶	LO)QPn¶	ou)@b¶
Psa· 1:1.5¶	HLK¶	E)POREU/QH¶	HLKQvq3ms¶	poreu/omai@viap3s¶
Psa· 1:1.6¶	B/(CT¶	E)N·BOULH= ¶	B.:QPp·("CFHQncfsc¶	e)n@pd-boulh/@ndfsc¶
Psa· 1:1.7¶	R\$(YM¶	A)SEBW=N¶	RF\$(Qampa¶	a)sebh/s@angmpn¶
Psa· 1:1.8¶	W/B/DRK¶	KAI\·E)N·O(DW= ¶	W:QPc·B.:QPp·D.EREK:Qncbsc¶	kai/@cc·e)n@pd· o(do/s@ndfsc¶
Psa· 1:1.9¶	X+)YM¶	A(MARTWLW=N¶	XA+.F)Qampa¶	a(martwlo/s@angmpn¶
Psa· L)¶	L)¶	OU)K¶	LO)QPn¶	ou)@b¶

GREEK										
finite verbs									Other*	
Ind					subj	opt	imp			
Aorist	Impf	pf	Pres	Fut						
HEBREW										SUM
qatal	1196	35	16	31	35	9	0	7	75	1404
wəqatal	9	3	0	1	29	0	3	2	4	51
yiqtol	327	49	2	93	1011	211	93	205	79	2070
wayyiqtol	289	3	0	5	23	0	1	2	9	332
participle	21	1	3	66	12	1	0	3	753	860
imperative	20	2	0	0	4	1	2	627	44	700
Other**	54	18	2	207	14	10	8	14		
SUM	1916	111	23	403	1128	232	107	860		

\* A non-finite form, a non-verbal form or no correspondence in the Greek text.

\*\* An infinitive, a non-verbal form or no correspondence in the Hebrew text.

1:1	אֲשֶׁר־יְהִי אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר   לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצָת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדַרְךְ חָטָאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבִמְוֹשֵׁב לְצִדִּים לֹא יָשָׁב:	1:1. μακάριος ἀνὴρ ὃς οὐκ ἐπορεύθη ἐν βουλή ἄσεβων καὶ ἐν ὁδῶ ἀμαρτωλῶν οὐκ ἔστη καὶ ἐπὶ καθέδραν λοιμῶν οὐκ ἐκάθισεν
1:2	כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חָפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה:	1:2. ἀλλ' ἢ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ κυρίου τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτοῦ μελετήσῃ ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός
1:3	וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל־פְּלִי מֵיִם אֲשֶׁר פָּרְיוֹ   יָתֵן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעֵלְהוּ לֹא־בֹוֹל וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־ יַעֲשֶׂה יַצְלִיחַ:	1:3. καὶ ἔσται ὡς τὸ ξύλον τὸ πεφυτευμένον παρὰ τὰς διεξόδους τῶν ὑδάτων ὃ τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ δώσει ἐν καιρῷ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ φύλλον αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀπορρησεται καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἂν ποιῇ κατευσωθήσεται
1:4	לֹא־כֵן הִרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם־פֹּמֶץ אֲשֶׁר־ תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ:	1:4. οὐχ οὕτως οἱ ἄσεβεῖς οὐχ οὕτως ἀλλ' ἢ ὡς ὁ χνοῦς ὃν ἐκρίπτει ὁ ἄνεμος ἀπὸ προσώπου τῆς γῆς
1:5	עַל־כֵּן   לֹא־קָמוּ רְשָׁעִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט יַחְטְאִים בְּעֵדַת צְדִיקִים:	1:5. διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἀναστήσονται ἄσεβεῖς ἐν κρίσει οὐδὲ ἀμαρτωλοὶ ἐν βουλή δικαίων
1:6	כִּי־יִוָּדַע יְהוָה דְּרֹךְ צְדִיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תִּאבֹּד:	1:6. ὅτι γινώσκει κύριος ὁδὸν δικαίων καὶ ὁδὸς ἄσεβων ἀπολείται
2:1	לְמָה רָגְשׁוּ גוֹיִם וְלֵאמִים יִהְיוּ־רִיק:	2:1. ἵνα τί ἐφρύαξαν ἔθνη καὶ λαοὶ ἐμελέτησαν κενά
2:2	יִתְצַבּוּ   מַלְכֵי־אֶרֶץ וְרוֹזְנִים נוֹסְדוּ־יַחַד עַל־יְהוָה וְעַל־מִשְׁחֵיו:	2:2. παρέστησαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ διάψαλμα

GREEK										
finite verbs									other*	
Ind					subj	opt	imp			
	Aorist	impf	pf	Pres	Fut					
HEBREW										SUM
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	GREEK		
HEBREW	PAST (aor, impf, pf)	PRESENT	FUTURE/ NON-INDICATIVE
<i>qatal</i>	93.8 %	2.3 %	3.8 %
<i>wəqatal</i>	25.5 %	2.1 %	72.3 %
<i>yiqtol</i>	19.0 %	4.7 %	76.3 %
<i>wayyiqtol</i>	90.4 %	1.6 %	8.0 %
predicative participle	23.4 %	61.7 %	15.0 %
imperative	3.4 %	0 %	96.6 %

**INHERITING THE TENSE OF THE PREVIOUS CLAUSE  
IN THE GREEK TRANSLATION**

**INHERITING THE TENSE OF THE PREVIOUS CLAUSE  
IN THE GREEK TRANSLATIONS OF**

**wayyiqtol, wə+yiqtol, wəqatal and wə+qatal**



	Greek translations of		
	<i>wəqatal</i> , <i>wə+qatal</i>	<i>wayyiqtol</i>	<i>wə+yiqtol</i>
exact inheritance (e.g. aorist after aorist, future after future etc.)	75%	85%	70%
inexact inheritance: past after past, present after present, future/non-indicative after future/non-indicative	85%	90%	85%

## **Inheriting the tense of the previous clause in parallel lines**

2:1	לָמָּה רָגְשׁוּ גוֹיִם וְלֵאמֹרִים יְהִי גִדְּרֵי קִי:	ἵνα τί ἐφρύαξαν ἔθνη καὶ λαοὶ ἐμελέτησαν κενά
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Why did nations grow insolent (aorist),  
 and peoples contemplate (aorist) vain things?

60:11	מִי יִבְלִגֵּי עִיר מְצֻר מִי יִנְתֵּן עַד-אֲדוּמַיִם	τίς ἀπάξει με εἰς πόλιν περιοχῆς τίς ὀδηγήσει με ἕως τῆς Ἰδουμαίας
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Who will bring me (future)  
 to the fortified city?  
 Who will lead me (future)  
 as far as Idumea?

# **The influence of preconceived rhetorical and theological schemes on the translator's choice of tenses**

94:5	עַמְּךָ יְהוָה יִדְכָּאֶנּוּ וְנַחֲלֶתְךָ יַעֲזֹבוּ:	93:5. τὸν λαόν σου κύριε ἔταπείνωσαν καὶ τὴν κληρονομίαν σου ἐκάκωσαν
94:6	אַלמָנָה וְגֵר יִהְיֶה גֹף וְיִתּוּמִים יִרְצָחוּ:	93:6. χήραν καὶ προσήλυτον ἀπέκτειναν καὶ ὀρφανοὺς ἐφόνευσαν

Your people, O Lord, they humbled, (aorist) and your heritage they wronged. (aorist)
Widow and guest they killed (aorist), and orphans they murdered. (aorist)

**God's righteousness as a cause for hope and praise**, especially in subordinate clauses introduced by ὅτι, is described by Greek past tense forms, even if this contradicts the Normal scheme.

27:5	כִּי יִצְפְּנֵנִי בְּסֻכֹּה בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִסְתַּרְנִי בְּסֵתֶר אָהָלֹו בְּצֹר יִרְוּמֵנִי:	ὅτι ἔκρυψέν με ἐν σκηνῇ ἐν ἡμέρα κακῶν μου ἐσκέπασέν με ἐν ἀποκρύφῳ τῆς σκηνῆς αὐτοῦ ἐν πέτρᾳ ὕψωσέν με
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... because **he hid me** in a tent in the day of troubles,  
 he **sheltered me** in the secret spot of his tent;  
 high on a rock **he set me**.

See also, e.g., 4:9; 8:2; 11:7; 17:6; 21:4; 63:12; 72:12; 109:31; 148:13.

In the context of moral exhortation, **the inevitable retribution** is described with future tense.

37:38	וְפֹשְׁעִים נִשְׁמְדוּ יַחְדָּו אַחֲרֵית רְשָׁעִים נִכְרְתָהּ:	οἱ δὲ παράνομοι ἐξολεθρευθήσονται ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό τὰ ἐγκαταλείμματα τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἐξολεθρευθήσονται
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But transgressors of the law shall be destroyed together;  
 the residue of the impious shall be destroyed.

See also, e.g., 34:8, 21-23; 49:15; 53:6; 55:18-20; 92:10-11; 94:23;  
 107:42; 146:4.



# **CAUSE AND EFFECT**

To emphasize **cause and effect**, the LXX translator sometimes renders cause in past and effect in future.

109:17	<p>וַיֵּאָהֵב קִלְלָהּ  וַתְּבוֹאֶהוּ  וְלֹא-תָפִיץ בְּבִרְכָּהּ  וַתִּרְתַּק מִמָּוֶנּוּ:</p>	<p>καὶ ἠγάπησεν κατάραν  καὶ ἥξει αὐτῷ  καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησεν εὐλογίαν  καὶ μακρυνθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ</p>
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And he **loved** (aorist = wayyiqtol) cursing,  
and **it shall come** (future = wayyiqtol) on him.  
And he **did not want** (aorist = qatal) blessing,  
and it **shall be put far away** (future = wayyiqtol) from him.

7:15	הִנֵּה יִחַבֵּל-אֹוֹן וְהָרָה לְמַלְאָכָה וַיֵּלֶד שִׁשְׁקָרָה׃	7:15. ἰδοὺ ὠδίνησεν ἀδικίαν συνέλαβεν πόνον καὶ ἔτεκεν ἀνομίαν
7:16	בּוֹר כָּרוֹת וַיְחַפְּרוּהוּ וַיִּפֹּל בְּשַׁחַת יַכְפֹּעַל׃	7:16. λάκκον ὥρυξεν καὶ ἀνέσκαψεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐμπεσεῖται εἰς βόθρον ὃν εἰργάσατο
7:17	יָשׁוּב עֲמָלוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וְעַל קַדְקָדוֹ חֲמָסוֹ יֵרֵד׃	7:17. ἐπιστρέψει ὁ πόνος αὐτοῦ εἰς κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ κορυφὴν αὐτοῦ ἢ ἀδικία αὐτοῦ καταβήσεται

<sup>15</sup> Look, he was in travail with injustice; he conceived toil and brought forth lawlessness. <sup>16</sup> A pit he dug and cleaned it out, and he shall fall into the hole he made. <sup>17</sup> His toil shall return upon his own head, and on his own pate his injustice shall descend.

## **Eschatology in the Greek Psalter?**

109:17	וַיִּאַהֲבֵב קְלָלָהּ וַתְּבוֹאֶהוּ וְלֹא-חָפֵץ בְּבִרְכָּהּ וַתִּרְתַּק מִמֶּנּוּ:	καὶ ἠγάπησεν κατάραν καὶ ἥξει αὐτῷ καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησεν εὐλογίαν καὶ μακρυνθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ
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And he loved (aorist = wayyiqtol) cursing,  
 and it shall come (future = wayyiqtol) on him.  
 And he did not want (aorist = qatal) blessing,  
 and it shall be put far away (future = wayyiqtol) from him.

146:10	יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ	145:10. βασιλεύσει κύριος
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(βασιλεύσει rendering Hebrew *yiqtol*; once; 146:10)

99:1	יְהוָה מָלַךְ	98:1. ὁ κύριος ἐβασίλευσεν
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(ἐβασίλευσεν rendering Hebrew *qatal*; 5 times; 47:9; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1)

9:5	... יִשְׁבֶּתָּ לְכֹסֶא שׁוֹפֵט צְדָק:	9:5. ... ἐκάθισας ἐπὶ θρόνου ὁ κρίνων δικαιοσύνην
9:6	גְּעַרְתָּ גּוֹיִם אַבְדָּתָּ רָשָׁע שָׁמַם מְחִיתָ לְעוֹלָם וְעַד:	9:6. ἐπετίμησας ἔθνεσιν καὶ ἀπώλετο ὁ ἀσεβής τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῶν ἐξήλειψας εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος
9:7	הָאֵיבִיב   תָּמוּ חַרְבוֹת לְנֶצַח וְעָרִים נִתְּשָׁתָּ אֲבָד זְכָרָם הֵמָּה:	9:7. τοῦ ἐχθροῦ ἐξέλιπον αἱ ῥομφαῖαι εἰς τέλος καὶ πόλεις καθεῖλες ἀπώλετο τὸ μνημόσυνον αὐτῶν μετ' ἤχους
9:8	וַיְהוּהוּ לְעוֹלָם יֹשֵׁב כִּוְנֵן לְמִשְׁפַּט כְּסָאוֹ:	9:8. καὶ ὁ κύριος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα μένει ἡτοιμάσεν ἐν κρίσει τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ
9:9	וְהוּא יִשְׁפֹּט-תָּבֵל בְּצֶדֶק יִדְיֵן לְאַמִּים בְּמִישְׁרָיִם:	9:9. καὶ αὐτὸς κρινεῖ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρινεῖ λαοὺς ἐν εὐθύτητι

<sup>5</sup> ... you **sat** (aorist = qatal) on a throne, judging with righteousness.

<sup>6</sup> You **rebuked** (aorist = qatal) nations, and the impious **perished** (aorist = qatal);

their name you **blotted out** (aorist = qatal) forever and forever and ever.

<sup>7</sup> The swords of the enemy **failed** (aorist = qatal) completely, and cities you **destroyed**; the memory of them **perished** (aorist = qatal) resoundingly.

<sup>8</sup> And the Lord **remains** (present = yiqtol) forever;

he **prepared** (aorist = qatal) his throne in judgment.

<sup>9</sup> He **will judge** (future = yiqtol) the world with righteousness;

he **will judge** (future = yiqtol) peoples with uprightness.

(NETS)



God's intervention in history is often depicted through **images of the earth, hills and mountains trembling, shaking or melting**. God either causes these cataclysms (e.g., 18:8; 46:3-4, 7; 68:8-9; 77:17-19; 114), or puts an end to them (75:4; 93:1), or both (60:4). The LXX translator understands these cataclysms as occurring in the past (they can often be interpreted as referring to the Exodus events) and depicts them mostly with past tense forms, regardless of the tenses of the original.

46:4	יְהִמּוּ יַחְמְרוּ מִיַּמּוּ יִרְעָשׁוּ הָרִים בְּגִאֲוֹתָו סֵלָה׃	ἤχησαν καὶ ἐταράχθησαν τὰ ὕδατα αὐτῶν ἐταράχθησαν τὰ ὄρη ἐν τῇ κραταιότητι αὐτοῦ διάψαλμα
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Their waters **roared** and **were troubled**;  
 the mountains **were troubled** by his force.

## Summary

1. In about 80% of cases the choice between past, present and future in the Greek Psalter was predetermined by the Normal scheme
2. The default translation for *wayyiqtol*, *wə+yiqtol*, *wəqatal* and *wə+qatal* was just following the tense of the last finite form in the Greek context, without discriminating between *waw* consecutive and *waw* copulative
3. In translating parallel lines, the translator often followed in the second line the tense of the previous line.
4. Sometimes the translator's choice of tenses seems to have been governed by certain predetermined rhetorical and narrative patterns

Each of these four strategies is consistent and logical in itself. It is the translator's switching between them that sometimes gives the impression of chaos.

5. The evidence for eschatologisation of the Psalter in the Greek translation is slight and dubious. The translator fails to express his eschatological views in passages that might have been understood eschatologically. This raises doubt that he had such views, or at least that he was willing to reflect them in his choice of tenses.