

וְנִדְרָה and וְנִאמַר in Isa 41:26; וְאָרָא in Isa 41:28

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The purpose of this article is two-fold: (1) to provide a discussion of the Masoretic Text (MT) pointing of the two indirect volitives in Isa 41:26, וְנִדְרָה and וְנִאמַר; (2) to provide an explanation of the MT pointing of וְאָרָא in Isa 41:28, along with a case for re-pointing this form as וְאָרָא. The following presents the two verses in the MT context:

25. תֵּעִירוֹתַי מִצְפוֹן וְיָאֵת מִמִּזְרַח-הַשָּׁמֶשׁ יִקְרָא בְשֵׁמִי
וְיָבֵא סִגְנִים כְּמֹחֶמֶר וְכִמּוֹ יוֹצֵר יִרְמֹס-טִיט:
26. מִי־הֵגִיד מֵרֵאשׁ וְנִדְרָה וּמִלְפָּנַיִם וְנִאמַר צְדִיק
אֵף אִין־מִגִּיד אֵף אִין מִשְׁמִיעַ אֵף אִין־שְׁמִיעַ אִמְרֵיכֶם:
27. רֵאשׁוֹן לְצִיּוֹן הִנֵּה הֵנָּה וְלִירוּשָׁלַם מְבֹשֵׁר אֶתֶן:
28. וְאָרָא וְאִין אִישׁ וּמֵאֵלָה וְאִין יוֹעֵץ
29. וְאִשְׁאֵלֶם וְיִשְׁבִּבוּ דְבַר: הֵן כָּלֶם אֵין
אִכֶּם מַעֲשִׂיהֶם רוּחַ וְתִהְיֶה נִסְכֵיהֶם:

TRANSLATION:

25. I have roused a man from the north and he has come,
from the east he is being summoned^a by name^b.
He will tread down^c rulers like red earth,
like a potter who tramples clay.
26. Who made this known ahead of time? (Tell us) that we
might know it!
(Who made this known) beforehand? (Tell us) that we
might now say: That's right.
Indeed, there was no one who reported it,
indeed, there was no one who announced it;
indeed there was no one who heard from you the words:
27. The first news for Zion is: "Look, here they are;

for Jerusalem I am appointing a messenger of good tidings."

28. I have looked around^a and there is no one,
among them there is no one to give counsel,
that I might question them and they might answer.
29. All of them are nothing^a,
empty are their deeds,
wind and emptiness are their images.

TEXTUAL NOTES:

25. יִקְרָא: read יִקְרָא. בְּשֵׁמִי: read בְּשֵׁמוֹ, with 1QIsa^a. וְיִבְא: read וְיָבֵס.
28. וְאָרָא: read וְאָרָא.
29. אָרְוִי: read אָרְוִי.

(1) The form וְנִדְעָה in Isa 41:26, the verb preceded by a simple shewa and cohortative by form, is certainly, like וְנִאמַר that follows, an indirect volitive (expressing purpose or result). The form presents certain problems. The text could possibly be interpreted: Who manifested these things ahead of time so that we knew about it then/in order that we might know about it then?

The indirect volitive generally follows a direct volitive; less commonly it can follow an indicative or a nominal sentence. JOÜON provides examples of both patterns.¹ But the examples he cites, all follow a sentence set in the present or the future. I know only one certain example where the indirect volitive follows a past indicative, Lam 1:19:

כִּי־בִקְשׁוּ אֶכֶל לָמוֹ וְיִשְׁבִּיבוּ אֶת־נַפְשָׁם:

They sought (בִּקְשׁוּ) food for themselves,

that they might save (וְיִשְׁבִּיבוּ) their lives.

¹See JOÜON, P. (1923) 116e, 168b, 169b.

As DRIVER has pointed out, the converted imperfect form is totally out of the question.² That form would mean: and they saved their lives. Why the indirect volitive to express purpose or result is so exceedingly rare after a past tense is clear enough. The volitive is by its very nature a future tense. It denotes something that is hoped for -- something that by its very nature is truly potential. Thus it is generally used after another volitive and can occur after an indicative or a nominal sentence in a present or future time frame. But the past is already fixed, no longer genuinely potential and to express purpose or result in a past time frame the switch is made to liqtol or a related construction: Laban had departed (הֵלֵךְ) to shear (לְגַז) his sheep (Gen 31:19); How have I found (מָצָאתִי) favor in your eyes, so that you have taken note of me? (לְהַכִּירָנִי)? (Ruth 2:10).

For the same reason wishes relating to the past and no longer capable of being fulfilled are expressed by לוֹ + qatal, not by a volitive: Would that we had died (לוֹ מָתוּנָא) in Egypt! (Num 14:2).³ Against that background Lam 1:19 is a genuine oddity in BH verb usage. Without pressing the point, it seems to me a possible solution to the problem in Lam 1:19 would be to interpret וַיְשִׁיבוּ as ׀ + yiqtol, a past modal, "so that they might be able to save their lives."

While Lam 1:19 does open up the slight possibility that וַיְנַבְּאֵהּ is to be interpreted as indicated above (Who manifested these things ahead of time so that we knew about it then/in order that we might know about it then?), I do not think that it is correct or favored by the context. The verb וַיְנַבְּאֵהּ much more probably means: That we here and now might know (who announced

²DRIVER, S.R. (1892) p. 63.

³See the examples listed in WALTKE, B. - O'CONNOR, M. (1990) 30.5.4.

these things ahead of time). JOÜON offers a set of examples where the indirect volitive follows questions.⁴ It should be noted that for all practical purposes these questions are wishes. For example: Isn't there another prophet of the Lord here, that we might consult (וְנִדְרָשָׁהּ) him? (I Kgs 22:7). The question that precedes the indirect volitive here is in effect an imperative (Tell me whether there is another prophet of the Lord here!) or there is an ellipsis of an imperative "tell me!" before וְנִדְרָשָׁהּ. The same can be said of מִי הִגִּיד in Isa 41:26. The question is an implicit: Tell us who manifested! Or an ellipsis of "Tell us!" is to be recognized after the question. On either of these implicit volitives is hung the indirect volitive וְנִדְרָשָׁהּ and וְנִאמַר that follows.

(2) וְאָרָא (emended to וְאָרָא): The Masora vocalizes וְאָרָא, and apparently understood the form as a present tense. Against this is the apocopate form. This is the only attested וְאָרָא understood as a non-converted tense, over against fifteen instances of וְאָרָא, the converted tense. The context seems to require וְאָרָא. In v. 26 the Lord asks what god announced beforehand (הִגִּיד) the advent of Cyrus; in v. 26, the Lord answers his own question in a series of nominal sentences, presumably in past time. There weren't any gods who announced beforehand the coming of Cyrus. These nominal sentences are continued in v. 28 with the opening verb וְאָרָא. It is possible to attempt an explanation of why the Masora vocalized וְאָרָא with a non-converting waw. It had its eye on the two indirect volitives in v. 28, וְאִשְׁאֲלֶם and וְיִשְׁיבוּ. It knew the rule discussed in the treatment of וְנִדְרָשָׁהּ in v. 26 (the indirect volitive does not follow

⁴See JOÜON, P. (123) 161m.

a past tense) and consequently interpreted v. 28:

When I look around there isn't anyone;

among them there is no one to give counsel,

that I might question them and they might answer.

The analysis of the tenses the Masora presumes is in every way acceptable. By rejecting the vocalization אָרָאָה it was rejecting the interpretation:

I looked around and there wasn't anyone;

among them there was no one to give counsel,

that I might question them and they might answer,

because the rules governing the sequence of tenses do not allow it.

But the interpretation of the Masora has two serious drawbacks. As noted above, the writing אָרָאָה is everywhere else in BH אָרָאָה, "I saw." In the present context, אָרָאָה seems the obvious continuation of the past nominal sentences in v. 26.

My explanation of the tenses of v. 26 is an attempt to take advantage of the genuine grammatical insight of the Masora (indirect volitives do not follow past tenses) and to explain the apocopated writing אָרָאָה. I interpret אָרָאָה as a present perfect. The nominal sentences that follow are in present time. These nominal sentences are continued by two indirect volitives:

I have looked around. There isn't anyone.

among them there is no one to give counsel,

that I might question them and they might answer.

With v. 28 the text passes from the fact that the gods did not bring about the advent of Cyrus or announce it beforehand to the unavailability (= non-existence) of the gods to do or say anything. That point is made explicit in v. 29:

All of them are nothing,
empty are their deeds,
wind and emptiness are their images.

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