

”הם” ו”המה”

אבנר רמו

The Hebrew words meaning “they” are **הם** and **המה**. The words **הם** and **והם** (“and them”) appear in 213 biblical verses, while the words: **המה** and **והמה** (“and them”) are found in 262 biblical verses. However, the distribution of these words among the biblical books is extremely uneven. In the Pentateuch we find 89 verses that contain **הם** or **והם**, while the words **המה** or **והמה** are found in only 21 verses. On the other hand, the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel contain only 18 **הם** or **והם**, while the words **המה** or **והמה** are found in 96 verses of these books.

ארבעה **הם** קטני-ארץ ; **והמה** חכמים מחכמים.
הנמלים עם לא-עז ; ויכינו בקיץ לחמם.
שפנים עם לא-עצום ; ושימו בסלע ביתם.
מלך אין לארבה ; ויצא חצץ כלו.
שממית ביזים תתפש ; והיא בהיכלי מלך.

“**They** are four who are smallest of the earth, but **they** are exceeding wise:

The ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in the summer;

The rock-badgers are but a feeble folk, yet make they their dwellings in the crags;

The locusts have no king, yet forth they go all as one band;

The spider that can be caught by hands, yet is in kings' palaces” (Pro 30:24-28).



From Aesop's Fables: The Ant and the Grasshopper. By Milo Winter 1919

We read in the Book of Jeremiah: **“In those days, and at that time”** - **בימים ההם ובעת ההיא** (Jer 50:20; see also: Jer 33:15).

Yet seventeen verses earlier we find: **“In those days, and in that time”** (Jer 50:3; see also: Jer 3:16, 18; 5:18).

The term **בימים ההם** appears in 35 biblical verses (of the Books of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zacharia, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, and 2 Chronicles), while the term **בימים ההמה** is found in only 9 verses (2 Ki 18:4, Jer 3: 16, 18; 5:18; Joel 3:2; 4:1; Zec 8:23; and Neh 13:15).

In the Book of Exodus we read:

והבאת את-הבדים בטבעת על צלעת הארון, לשאת את-הארן בהם.
“**And you shall put the staves into the rings on the sides of the ark, wherewith to bear the ark”** (Ex 25:14).

Yet five chapters later we find:

ושתי טבעת זהב תעשה-לו מתחת לזרו על שתי צלעתיו-תעשה על-שני צדיו; והיה לבתים לבדים, לשאת אתו בהמה.
“**And two golden rings shall you make for it under the crown thereof, upon the two ribs thereof, upon the two sides of it shall you make them; and they shall be for places for staves wherewith to bear it”** (Ex 30:4).

The word **בהם** appears in 152 biblical verses (of them 14 in the Book of Exodus), while the word **בהמה** is found in only three verses (Ex 30:4; 36:1, and possibly in Hab 1:16).

In the Book of Chronicles we read: **“And Joab said: *YHWH* will add to His people a hundred times like them”** (1 Ch 21:3).

Yet in the Book of Jeremiah we find:

וירמיהו לקח מגלה אחרת, ויתנה אל-ברוך בן-נריהו הספר, ויכתב עליה מפי ירמיהו את כל-דברי הספר אשר שרף יהויקים מלך-יהודה באש; ועוד נוסף עליהם דברים רבים כהמה.
“**And Jeremiah took another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and there were added besides them many like them”** (Jer 36:32).

The word **כהם** appears in 5 biblical verses (2 Sam 24:3; 2 Ki 17:15; Ecc 9:12; 1 Ch 21:3; and 2 Ch 9:11), while the word **בהמה** is found in only verse Jer 36:32).

In the Book of Jeremiah we read:

ואמר אהה אדני יהוה, הנה הנבאים אמרים להם לא-תראו חרב ורעב לא-יהיה לכם: כי-שלוש אמת אתן לכם במקום הזה.
“**And I said I: Ah, my Lord *YHWH* behold, now the prophets say to them: You shall not see the sword, neither shall you have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place”** (Jer 14:13).

Yet three verses later we find:

והעם אשר-המה נבאים להם יהיו משלכים בחצות ירושלם מפני הרעב והחרב, ואין מקבר להמה

“And the people that they prophesy to them shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and there shall be no undertaker to them” (Jer 14:16).

The word **להם** appears in 580 biblical verses (52 of them in the book of Jeremiah)), while the word **להמה** is found in only verse Jer 14:16).

We read in the Book of Jeremiah: **אל-תיראו מהם כי-לא ירעו, וגם-היטיב אין אותם** - “Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good” (Jer 10:5; see also: Deu 1:29; 7:18; 20:1; Jos 10:8; Eze 2:6; Job 32:15).

Yet three verses earlier we find:

כה אמר יהוה, אל-דרך הגוים אל-תלמדו, ומאתות השמים אל-תחתו: כי-יחתו הגוים מהמה.
“Thus said *YHWH*: Do not learn the way of the nations, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the nations are dismayed of them” (Jer 10:2).

The word **מהם** appears in 89 biblical verses (7 of them in the book of Jeremiah)), while the word **מהמה** is found in only 2 verse (Jer 14:16; and Ecc 12:12).

In summary, Hebrew words that contain: **הם** - “they” with a prefix letter: **ב; ה; כ; ל; מ** are found in 871 biblical verses, while those that contain **המה** and these prefix letters are found in only 19 verses. As (correctly) indicated by the Greek (and the English) translators the addition of the suffix letter **ה** does not change their meaning or affects the syntax, we may assume that the appearance of such words is due to stylistic preference by certain biblical writers (or late scribes. For example; there are 8 such words in the Book of Jeremiah but none in the books of Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Ezekiel, ten of the Minor prophet, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Canticles, Esther, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra, or Chronicles.