LESSON 5   THE HEBREW VERB[1]

THE VERB may be thought of as the "motor" of the sentence: it makes the sentence "run" or "go". It does this by identifying what the subject of the sentence did, or by describing the subject itself.[2] For example, sentence (a) tells us what God did (identifies a deed that he performed), but does not describe him (apart from implying that he is a creator), and sentence (b) describes God himself, without telling us anything about what he has done.

    a.   God *created* heaven and earth.
    b.   God is great.

Both functions can also be combined in a single sentence, which can be either *compound* (c) (i.e., two or more *parallel* clauses) or *complex* (d) (i.e., one or more clauses is *subordinated* to another):

    c.   God is great, and created heaven and earth.
    d.   God created heaven and earth, which in turn reflect his greatness.

Since English is a "slot" language in which a word's function is determined by its position, we normally recognize the verb in an English clause or sentence by its *position*—the verb is the word following the subject (which is the first word or group of words in the sentence).

    e.   The *bears* killed forty-two men.
    f.   The Levite *bears* the ark.

In (a) the word "bear[s]" is the subject (since it begins the sentence and is preceded by the article "the"), and "killed" is the verb. In (b), however, "bears" is a verb, identifying or naming what the Levites (the subject) did to the ark. In either case, we know that "ran" and "bear" are the predicates of their respective sentences because they follow their subjects.[3]

In (a) through (f), as in all languages, the verbs define or describe the subject or its action(s). Verbs are therefore part of the *comment* of their clause.

By definition, clauses consist of a *topic* (or "subject") and a *comment* (or "predicate"). In sentences (a) and (b), "God" is the topic and "created heaven and earth" is the comment (it describes an action of the subject). A sentence always consists of at least one clause, although a clause may not be a complete sentence. All three of the following sentences represent "complete" thoughts, but the thought represented by (h) is "more complete" than that in (g), and (i) is the most complete of the three. Note that only (g) consists of a single clause.

    g.   Job was patient.
    h.   Job was patient, even when he was tested.
    i.   Job was patient, even when his flocks and herds were stolen, his servants and children killed, and he himself afflicted with boils.

Like nouns, verbs in BH are inflected to indicate (1) that the form is a verb; and (2) the person, gender, and number (§5.1.3) of the noun(s) that it modifies (the 'subject"). Their inflection also indicates (3) the general function or nature of the clause (especially in narrative); and (4) the general time frame of the

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[1] Most of the rest of this book addresses the functions and forms of the verb in BH, not because verbs are somehow more fundamental or basic or "important" than nouns, but because the verbal system is the most complex aspect of Hebrew grammar.

[2] This distinction between action and state is discussed further below (§15.1).

[3] We sometimes recognize that a word is the verb because of its context, not because of its form or syntax:
    a.   "Bank!" the flight instructor screamed.
    b.   "Bank" was his laconic reply to "Where are you going?"
    c.   "Bank ahead" called the lookout on the riverboat.

event or state that they describe. Unlike nouns, verbal affixes (the "bits and pieces" that inflect the form) can be prefixed or suffixed to the verbal root (§5.1.1).

Verbal inflection is therefore part of the concord system (§4.1-2), since its affixes indicate its subject (the word that it modifies or comments on), and the relationship between the event or state that it describes and those described by verbs in other clauses. English has lost most of its inflectional system; only third person singular forms are inflected by adding "s" ("I/you/we/they sing" *vs.* "he/she sings").

5.1 FORM

IN DISCUSSING the verbal conjugations of BH (Lessons 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13) as well as the stems (Lessons 18-21) and types of verbal roots (Lessons 24, 27, 28, 30, 31) the term "diagnostic" refers to those few vowel points (including *dageš*) that enable us to distinguish one form from another, or to determine the stem and root of a particular form. This is one aspect of a verb's *morphology*, or "shape", i.e., the vowel points, subject affixes (§5.1.1), &c. that the Masoretes added to the consonantal text to tell readers how to pronounce and understand a particular form. We have already looked at the basic morphology of the noun (e.g., endings for gender and number); now we turn to the morphology of the verb in BH.

5.1.1 SUBJECT (PGN) AFFIXES

Verbs modify their subjects by identifying what the subject is or does. In English the verb follows the subject (word order again), but Hebrew verbs have affixes (prefixes and suffixes) that agree with the person, number, and gender of the subject.

1. The *person* [**P**] of the verb (first, second, third) shows the relationship of the speaker or narrator to the action or state described by the verb:

Person	The speaker/narrator …		
1st	… describes himself as doing the action, or as existing in the state described by the verb	"I know" "I thought"	"We see" "We went"
2nd	… *addresses* the subject of the verb	"You know" "You thought"	"You see" "You went"
3rd	… talks or writes *about* the subject of the verb	"He knows" "They thought"	"She sees" "He went"

2. The verb's *gender* [**G**] (masculine, feminine) and *number* [**N**] (singular, plural) agree with the number and gender of its subject, so that the form of the Hebrew verb is sufficient to identify its subject (unlike the verb in English, which requires an explicit subject).

The three features of person-gender-number [**PGN**] are indicated by the form of the verb itself, whereas the subject of an English sentence is always a separate word, either a noun ("Moses", "a servant") or pronoun ("he", "they"). The subject in Hebrew *may* be expressed by a noun or pronoun, but the narrator's decision to identify the subject by using a separate word (whether it is a proper name or a common noun), phrase, or clause is one of the ways that he shapes the story.

Furthermore, although "he went" in English describes the action of one male ("he"), the form of the English verb ("went") tells us nothing about its subject. The verb in Hebrew, however, identifies its subject as singular or plural, masculine or feminine, and first, second, or third person. Although "you" is completely ambiguous in English (singular? plural? male? female?), there is a specific Hebrew verbal form for each 2nd person number-gender combination (2ms, 2fs, 2mp, 2fp), all of which are represented by "you" in contemporary English.

The range of subjects to which a given verbal form may refer is thus modified by verbal suffixes and prefixes—affixes attached to the end and beginning of the verbal root (below)—so that the verb agrees with

43

the person, gender, and number [**PGN**] of its subject. There are two main sets of verbal PGN affixes, one for each of the two main sets of conjugations.

5.1.2 VERBAL ROOT
Every verbal form consists of a set of consonants called the "verbal root". The root usually has three, but sometimes two (rarely four) of these consonants, which we will call "radicals". Verbal roots have been abstracted by grammarians from the forms of the verb.[4]

I ruled/reigned	*Rule! (masc. pl.)*
He shall rule/reign	*Those (masc. pl.) who rule …*
He ruled/&c.	*They caused him to rule*

When early Hebrew grammarians recognized that all of these forms (and many others) share the consonants - - , and that they all refer in some way to "rule", "govern[ment]", "dominion", &c., they concluded that these three consonants—in this order—were the "root" of a verb , "rule/govern", as well as the root (or source) of nouns referring to rule or government. Since many roots in the Semitic languages—including BH—have three radicals, the Semitic languages are said to be "triradical".

Many lexical tools (lexicons, theological wordbooks and dictionaries, concordances, &c.) list both verbal forms and nouns under the verbal root that they are either "derived from" or "related to" (e.g., these nouns that contain and refer to governance are listed after the verbal root).

rule, dominion, realm, kingdom

rule, dominion

rule, dominion, ruler

N.B. In order to use any of these tools it is therefore necessary to note how it arranges words (i.e., alphabetically or by root), and—for those that arrange words by root—to identify the noun's putative root, since the nouns will be listed under [after] the verbal forms.

5.1.3 CONJUGATION
Hebrew verbs have two main sets of forms—the *perfect* (which has a more or less unique set of PGN affixes) and the *imperfect* (which "shares" PGN affixes and other characteristics with other conjugations). The main difference between these two main sets of conjugations[5] is that the perfect uses PGN *endings* to agree with the subject, whereas the imperfect uses PGN *prefixes and endings* to agree with the subject. The perfect is thus also called the "suffix conjugation" and the imperfect is called the "prefix conjugation". Their functions also differ (below). Although it is tempting to describe or think of these as tenses, they are not as fundamentally time-oriented as Indo-European tenses; any connotation of "tense" in BH depends more heavily on the surrounding context and syntax than in, e.g., English.

Some conjugations in BH, such as the preterite and imperative, have a single or primary function—to narrate a series of past events and to give commands, respectively. The perfect and imperfect, on the other hand, have various functions, depending on, e.g., whether or not they have a prefixed conjunction (-). And some—more specifically, the imperfect—also has other functions that are discerned largely from their context, such as when the imperfect functions as a third-person "imperative", as in "He should/ must/ought to …"

Finally, the descriptions of the functions of the various conjugations in this book refer primarily to their function in biblical *narrative* or *instructional* discourse.[6]

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[4]Some grammars and most lexicons use the "root" sign ( ) when they discuss verbal roots.
[5]The term "conjugation" is more neutral than either "tense" or "aspect", both of which are potentially misleading with regard to BH.
[6]In biblical poetry, conjugations seem to be used more for poetic reasons than for any temporal reference.

5.1.4 STEM (*BINYAN*)

There are eight main ways of constructing verbal forms in BH in order to show the type of action being described by the verb. The medieval grammarians referred to stems as *binyanîm* ("buildings"??), since they were "built" on or from the root. The stems differ in both form and function.

In *form*, some stems have a doubled middle radical (*piel, pual*), some have prefixes (*hifil, hofal, nifal*), and one has both (*hitpael*). One stem has neither (*qal*). Note that all of these names, except for "qal" begin with either "p" or "f" and end in "l". This is because the early grammarians used the verbal root *p'l.?????*

Where English uses pronouns, helping verbs, and prepositions to show the type of action described by a verb ("David *hid* the sword", "David *hid* [*himself*]", "David *was hidden*", "The sword *was hidden by David*"), Hebrew shows the *function* of the verbal form by, e.g., doubling the middle letter of the verbal root, and varying the forms and vowels of the prefixes.

Doubled II-radical	Prefix	Both	Neither
Piel	*Hifil*	*Hitpael*	*Qal*
Pual	*Hofal*		
	Nifal		

We will begin with the *qal* stem, since more than two-thirds of all verbal forms in the Bible are in the *qal*.

5.2   THE IMPERFECT

THE PREFIX CONJUGATION—which we shall call the "imperfect"—primarily describes events or states that are either present or future to the time of the speaker. It therefore tends to be more frequent in direct quotations and poetry than in the direct stream of narrative (BH rarely anticipates events, whereas anticipation is not infrequent in English, as in "He would soon discover …"). It is therefore unlike the English imperfect (or the French *imparfait*), which refers to a continuous action in the past (e.g., "He was walking")—the Hebrew imperfect does not refer to the past.[7]

5.2.1 FORM

THE IMPERFECT[8] uses *prefixes* and some *suffixes* to show the person, gender, and number of its subject. Every form of every imperfect has a PGN prefix; half of the forms also have endings. The affixes of the imperfect are:

Person	Gender	Singular		Plural	
1st	Common	-	*I*	-	*We*
2nd	Masc.	-	*You*	-	*You*
	Fem.	-		-	
3rd	Masc.	-	*He/It*	-	*They*
	Fem.	-	*She/It*	-	

1.   Two sets of forms (2ms/3fs, 2fp/3fp) are identical, and can be distinguished only by context.
2.   The dash (-) represents the consonants of the verbal root, which either follows, or is "surrounded by" the PGN affix.

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[7] This statement refers primarily to biblical narrative, not to poetry.

[8] The imperfect is also called "*yiqtol*" (the 3ms form of the *qal* imperfect of the verb   *qtl*, "kill"), or the "prefix conjugation" (since every form has a prefix).

3. A form with a *yod* prefix is always *masculine*.

4. The six forms with a - prefix all require endings, context, or both to distinguish their PGN.

5. These affixes *must be memorized*, since they are used in the imperfect and preterite[9] of all verbs, and the second-person endings are used in the imperative of all verbs.

6. Although the subject prefix is always followed by a vowel, none is listed here because the prefix vowel varies from stem to stem.

5.2.2 *QAL* IMPERFECT

THE TERM *QAL* (related to the verb *qll*, "be light, slight, trifling") means "light", and was used because the *qal* lacks the doubling and prefixes (or both) that occur in the other stems (Lessons 18-21). The term "*qal*[10] imperfect" refers to a particular combination of three elements: the radicals of the verbal root, the PGN affixes of the imperfect, and the vowels that characterize the *qal* imperfect. This combination yields the following paradigm:

Person	Gender	Singular	Plural
1st	Common	*I rule*	*We rule*
2nd	Masc.	*You rule*	*You rule*
	Fem.		
3rd	Masc.	*He rules*	*They rule*
	Fem.	*She rules*	

1. The vowel for the *qal* PGN prefixes is *hireq* (except 1cs—remember the close relationship between the *i/e* vowels). Two other stems also have *hireq* as their prefix vowel (*nifal, hitpael*,[11] Lessons 18, 19).

2. The first radical (*not* the PGN prefix) is followed by silent *šewa*.

3. The vowel after the second radical in the *qal* imperfect is often *holem* (all forms except those with a vocalic ending). Because this vowel helps distinguish one stem from another, it is often called the "stem" or "theme" vowel.

4. Verbs that have a guttural (, ,) as their second or third radical (e.g., ,) usually have *patah* as their theme vowel. This *patah* is the only difference between these verbs and .

Person	Gender	Singular	Plural
1st	Common	*I hear*	*We hear*
2nd	Masc.	*You hear*	*You hear*
	Fem.		
3rd	Masc.	*He hears*	*They hear*
	Fem.	*She hears*	

5. Verbs with as their third radical (III- verbs) have *qames* where has *patah*, because the cannot close the syllable (for, e.g., : , , &c.). Since the is silent, it is not followed by silent *šewa*.

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[9]The *preterite* is the conjugation that identifies the "main storyline" of biblical narratives (Lesson 6).

[10]It is also called "G" for *Grundstamm* (German: "basic stem").

[11]The names of the stems reflect the verbal root ("do, make"), which was used as the paradigm verb by the early Jewish grammarians. The names (which are the 3ms perfect of for each stem) are often written with a sign for *ʿayin: nif'al, hitpa'el* to show the presence of the middle radical. This is left out for the sake of simplicity.

Person	Gender	Singular	Plural
1st	Common	*I find*	*We find*
2nd	Masc.	*You find*	*You find*
	Fem.		
3rd	Masc.	*He finds*	*They find*
	Fem.	*She finds*	

5.2.3 FUNCTION   HBI §2.2.2

THE FUNCTION OF THE IMPERFECT depends on its context, especially on the genre (literary type) of material, and sometimes on whether or not the conjunction (-) is prefixed to the form. In Genesis, for example, the imperfect occurs relatively infrequently, whereas it is by far the most frequent verb form in Leviticus (most of which is instruction, commandment, and prohibition, with little narration).

1. The imperfect usually occurs in direct or indirect quotations[12] (relatively rarely as part of the narration *per se*), and generally refers to *future* or *present* events.[13]

> Everyone who hears *will laugh* for me (Gn 21.6).
>
> "… and the older *shall serve* the younger" (Gn 25.23).
>
> He said, "*I will redeem*" (Ru 4.4).
>
> This is my covenant which *you shall keep* (Gn 17.10).

It occurs in both main and secondary clauses, as in Gn 17.10. "This is my covenant" is the *main* clause—it is the primary part of the sentence—and the relative clause (introduced by the relative   ) is *secondary* or supplemental to it.

2. The following list of functions of the imperfect is not meant to intimidate beginning students, but rather to arm you against simply equating the imperfect with the [English] future by demonstrating some of the variety of expression possible within a single conjugation. When beginning your study of Hebrew, assume that an imperfect verb refers to the present or future, unless a modifying particle occurs, or there is enough context to show that it has some other use (or your teacher directs you otherwise). You will find this list more helpful when you begin reading the biblical text.

    a. The imperfect occurs in conditional sentences, generally preceded by   (*if*) or   (*if not*; also with   , *perhaps*):

> "If *he will redeem* you—good, *let him redeem*. But if *he is* not *pleased* [*willing*] to redeem you …" (Ru 3.13).
>
> "If *you will redeem*, redeem! But if *he will not redeem* …" (Ru 4.4)

    …

    b. The imperfect can be negated by   or   (both   *not*). Depending on the context, a negated second

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[12]An indirect quotation reports what someone said, thought, or felt, and is usually introduced by "that": "He said *that* she had finished". A direct quotation would be: "He said, 'She finished'." Indirect quotations also occur with verbs of perception (e.g., "see", "hear"), emotion (e.g., "fear", "rejoice").

[13]Since those have not yet occurred, they may be called *irrealis* ("not real"). This does not mean that the events will not happen, merely that they had not happened as of the time of the quotation.

person imperfect may express a *prohibition*:[14]

> "… we *will not go down*, for the man said to us,
> '*You shall not see* my face …" (Gn 43.5).

> He said, "*Do not send*" (2 Kgs 2.16).

> "You *shall not murder*" (Ex 20.13).

> "You *shall not steal*" (Ex 20.15).

c. When it is not first in its clause, the imperfect may be modified by a particle:

> and *every* wild herb *had not yet sprouted*, … (Gn 2.5;   *not yet*); = "*no* herb had *yet* sprouted"
> "… until your brother's anger *turns away*" (Gn 27.44;   *until*)
> "Perhaps it will be good in God's eyes …" (Nu 23.27;   *perhaps*)

d. When the imperfect occurs with the conjunction ( ) it *always begins* its clause, is usually followed by its subject, and generally refers to the future. It seems to imply that the imperfect is closely linked to the preceding verb (which is often an imperative or another imperfect). Many times the verb merely describes the next in a logical or chronological sequence of events, but, depending on the *context* and on the *relationship* between the function ("meaning") of the verbal roots, this syntagm may also imply purpose or result.

> …   "Let us make mankind … *so that they may rule* …" (Gn 1.26).
>   "Perhaps God will save us, *so that we do not perish*" (Jon 1.6).
>   "… *that* we *may live* and *not die*" (Gn 43.8).

3. Hebrew lacks anything that corresponds to what are called "helping", "auxiliary", or "modal" verbs (e.g., "may, might, will/would, shall/should, ought").[15] Imperfect forms can apparently serve any of these functions, but the nuance of any given imperfect form is open to debate (see the examples above). This is especially clear in biblical poetry, where a single form might be rendered as either "*May* YHWH *bless* you" (precative—a prayer), "YHWH *blesses* [*is blessing*] you" (present indicative), or "YHWH *will/shall*[16] *bless* you" (future). Even published translations differ, and their renderings tend merely to follow tradition. For now, unless the context demands a modal interpretation, we will use the simple present or future to represent the imperfect (unless the context, especially a particle, indicates that the verb is functioning modally, as in Gn 17.18).

> …   The woman said … "From the fruit of the tress of the garden we *may eat*" (Gn 3.2)
>   "My two sons *you may put to death* …" (Gn

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[14] The imperative (Lesson 8) in Biblical Hebrew is used only for positive commands, not for prohibitions.

[15] The verbal root   , glossed as "[be] able", "can", or "could", is introduced with the infinitives (below).

[16] The distinction between "will" and "shall" is complex, but this grammar uses "will" in the first person for simple futurity, and "shall" for intent, determination, or choice. In the second and third persons, "shall" is much stronger than "will" (e.g., "You *shall* not steal"). In American English, at least, this distinction is largely lost, so that emphasis is often used ("You *will* not get any dessert!") to accomplish the same purpose.

42.37)

"If only Ishmael *might live* before you!" (Gn 17.18; , *if only*)

4. This brief discussion of conjugational function shows that, as in vocabulary (Lesson 2), so in grammar, there is no direct or one-to-one correspondence between BH and English (i.e., they are non-isomorphic). Its function depends on a complex interplay of a given form's lexical function. the genre in which it is being used, and its immediate and larger contexts (perhaps especially, its relationship to the preceding clause. The verbal conjugation therefore has no "basic", "fundamental", or "central" function *in the other language*. This in turn implies that no word or form has a "literal" function in another language (again, especially when the languages are as varied in form and function as BH and English).

5.3   THE "SIGN OF THE OBJECT"

Since Hebrew lost its "case" endings—vowels that indicated a word's function (as subject, object, &c.)—and since word order in Hebrew is not as determined as it is in English, Hebrew uses a particle to point out the *definite direct object* of the verb. The particle   (or   ) occurs only before definite direct objects (in Ex 34.13, the object precedes the verb).

… … I will send *my servants* to you … (1 Kgs 20.6)

…, and *their Asherahs* you shall cut down (Ex 34.13)

5.4   *MAQQEF*

A horizontal line (   ), written evenly with the top horizontal stroke of, e.g.,   (   ) can link two or more words into a single accentual unit, so that they are pronounced as though they were one form (although they are still separate "words"). This is especially common when the first consists of a single syllable, such as the sign of the object (Ex 34.13, above).

all these

son of Ahinoam

against the city

5.5   PARSING VERBS

To parse is to identify the "parts" (Latin: *pars*) of a thing. Parsing verbal forms allows us to check our understanding of a form, since our ability to understand it depends on identifying or recognizing it accurately. Parsing a Hebrew verb entails identifying the following elements or "parts" (some do not yet apply):

Lexical form	The radicals of the verbal root
Gloss(es)	One or more of the glosses linked to its *lexical form*
PGN	The person, gender, and number of the form (e.g., 3fp)
Stem	The stem of the form (for now, we are studying the *qal*)
Conjugation	The conjugation of the form (e.g., imperfect, preterite, imperative, perfect)
Prefixes	There are only four possibilities for this column: the conjunction *waw*, the interrogative – (§18.1.2), inseparable prepositions (Lesson 7), the article (only on participles [Lesson 12])
Suffixes	This refers *only* to the PGN of pronominal suffixes (Lesson 14; *not* the PGN of the subject)

49

The "parsing form" at the end of this lesson may be reproduced and used throughout your studies.

5.6 FREQUENCY

The occurrence and distribution of the conjugations vary widely, the perfect and infinitive absolute being the most (29%) and least frequent (less than 1%), respectively. The conjugations are not distributed evenly through the Bible; e.g., imperatives (positive commands) are more frequent in the poetic books (Pss) than in, e.g., the specifically "covenantal" books (Ex, Lv, Dt).

More than one-fifth (**21.7%**) of all verbs in BH are imperfect. Together with the preterite (Lesson 6), *two-fifths of all verbal forms* (**42%**) use the same set of subject [PGN] affixes.

Conjugation	Occurrences	% of Total
Perfect	21032	28.4%
Imperfect	16110	21.8%
Preterite	14977	20.3%
Imperative	4270	5.8%
Infinitive Absolute	796	1.1%
Infinitive Construct	6985	9.4%
Participle	9787	13.2%
Total	**73957**	

5.7   CONCEPTS

affix	dynamic equivalence	interlinear	parse	*qal*
aspect	function	*maqqef*	person	root
comment	functional equivalence	modification	PGN	stem
conjugation	gender	morphology	predicate	subject
context	imperfect	number	prefix	topic
diagnostic				translate/translation

5.8   VOCABULARY

rule, reign	.58	*no, not*	.50
tree (sg. & coll.), *wood*	.59	*with* (preposition); when it marks definite direct objects it is not translated	.51
voice, sound	.60	*go down, descend*	.52
(f.) *breath, wind, spirit*	.61	*utensil, tool; container, pot*	.53
cultivated ground (trad. "field"); contrast	.62	*no, not*	.54
official, leader, ruler	.63	*war, battle*	.55
heaven(s), sky	.64	*reign, rule* (as monarch, king), *be king*	.56
watch, guard, keep, protect	.65	*place*	.57

5.9   EXERCISES

1. After learning the PGN affixes of the imperfect and the 3ms *qal* imperfect of   , gloss these clauses in English, using the simple future, and parse the verbs.

.e	.c	.a
.f	.d	.b

2. *After reading the "enrichment" section* (below), please prepare an interlinear version of these clauses and sentences. We will discuss the task of representing one language by another.

2 Sam 14.16   .a

Is 30.21;   *your ears;*   *from*   .b
behind you

Ps 121.7;   - *your* (m.s.)   .c

    (see 'f')   .d

Ex 20.13;   *murder*   .e

    over (prep.)   .f

51

with you (m. pl.)   .g

David;   *over* (prep.);   *all of*   .h

Ex 20.15;   *steal*   .i

 voice of   .j

 to (prep.);   *write*   .k

 approach, come near [*be*] *near*;   *to*   .l
(prep.)

 , *covenant*   .m

5.10 ENRICHMENT: TRANSLATION & EXERCISES

TRANSLATION from one language [and therefore one culture] into another raises a host of questions which we will not attempt to answer. One of the foremost questions is whether the translator is primarily responsible to the original text or to the audience for which the translation is intended. Does the translation primarily face the original or the reader(s)? The answer to this question determines many of the differences between the so-called "dynamic" or "functional equivalence" versions and the more-or-less "literal" versions.

The exercises in an introductory grammar afford us an opportunity to practice recognizing grammatical forms and their function, and to check our identification and understanding by representing them in English. In other words, the goal is *not* "translation" as we often think of it—rendering or representing a passage written in one language (in this case, BH) by means of a fluid passage in another language (e.g., English). Especially in later lessons, where the exercises consist of biblical passages, such "fluent" translations often merely show that we are familiar with one of the standard English versions (or that we checked our work against theirs!). In fact, without first-hand speakers to interview, no one knows Biblical Hebrew well enough to produce a "polished" or "smooth" translation without a great deal of guesswork, much of which merely reflects the "received" or traditional translation or interpretation.

Furthermore, the goal of exercises should reflect our overall reasons for studying Biblical Hebrew—that we learn to read the biblical text as carefully as possible, that we be able to understand and evaluate translational choices made by the various versions in English (and, possibly, other languages), and that we be able to evaluate the comments in published tools (commentaries, lexical aids, &c.). We are not trying to see "more deeply" into the text, but to make sure that we are actually reading the text, rather than skimming across its surface, basing our "understanding" on what it says (and does not say), rather than on what we have heard said about it.[17]

Therefore, your primary goal in rendering the clauses, phrases, sentences, and verses into English should be to represent what is in the Hebrew text—to prepare an "interlinear"—that will provide a basis for studying the Hebrew text and looking at other versions. Your "translation" of the exercises should, therefore, be fairly "literal", even "wooden"—it is actually a *gloss*, not a translation—rather than free and impressionistic (see the discussion of "gloss" in terms of vocabulary in Lesson 2). This does not not mean that it should be unintelligible (e.g., following Hebrew word order rather than English); your work should be well-formed English. Free and impressionistic versions are the appropriate fruit of much study and interpretation, *not* for this point in your Hebrew career.

This list of "rules" for glossing BH into English are merely suggestions—feel free to use or modify

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[17]This is not meant to denigrate the use of commentaries and other exegetical tools, but merely to suggest that if our primary obligation is to the text, we ought to be sure that our primary interaction is *with the text*.

them in ways that are most fruitful for the specific goals of your own studies.

1. Every element is verbally represented in English; every English element represents an element in the Hebrew text.
2. Words in English that correspond to elements of compound forms in Hebrew are linked by dashes (e.g., , *and-he-says*).
3. Each Hebrew lexeme is rendered by the same English lexeme (e.g., is rendered by *land*; by *who/that*. [N.B. The latter is not "who" or "that", but the combined form "who/that".], by *behold*, and by *and*).
4. Synonyms are distinguished (e.g., - *to*, *unto*).
5. The object marker is indicated by "[o]" or the like.
6. Linking words that are necessary for sensible English (e.g., relative pronoun, article, copula) are added in brackets [*is*], *italics*, or underlined.
7. Only proper names (persons, places) are capitalized.
8. Only two punctuation marks are used:
   a. !" indicates that the verb that it follows is an imperative (#16b).
   b. ?" indicates the presence of the interrogative prefix (-).
9. In longer passages, verse numbers are minimized (verse divisions and numbers were not original).
10. Rules for the construct (Lesson 9):
    a. Words in construct are indicated by '-of' as the last element in their English word-group.
    b. All elements of a construct are visually linked by em-dashes (i.e., *the-house-of – the-king*).
    c. Words that are construct to a definite form are represented with the definite article 'the'.
11. Verbs are rendered as 'he' and 'she' for 3ms and 3fs, respectively, regardless of the 'gender' of their subject in English, e.g., *and-[o] the-city she-was-captured*.
12. The translation of *hifil* verb forms (Lesson 20) includes the word 'cause' if the form is causative.
13. Verbal forms are rendered as consistently as possible:
    a. imperfects as future: *I-will-[future]*
    b. preterites as past: *and-she-[past]*;
    c. imperatives are immediately followed by an exclamation point (e.g., *Go! to the land …*).

These rules probably sound great—after all, don't we want to get as "close" to the original as possible? Here's the result for Jonah 1.1-3:

1

And-he-was the-word-of Y<small>HWH</small> unto Jonah the-son-of Amittai to-say

2

Rise! Go! unto Nineveh the-city the-great and-call against-her for she-has-gone-up their-evil before-me

3

And-he-rose Jonah to-flee Tarshish-ward from-before Y<small>HWH</small> and-he-went-down Joppa and-he-found ship going Tarshish

And-he-gave her-fare and-he-went-down in-her to-go with-them Tarshish-ward from-before Y<small>HWH</small>

Carefully following the rules yields a text that is neither Hebrew nor English ("Heblish"?), and that communicates primarily to *readers who already know Hebrew* and so can reconstruct the Hebrew text behind our "translation".

53

Although we might think that such a version demonstrates our knowledge of Hebrew and our faithfulness to the Hebrew text, it actually shows that we don't understand how language works. The first priority of any attempt to communicate is *to communicate*, and this rendering of Jonah communicates little. Since most users of this grammar know the story of Jonah, as well as English, we can figure out what is going on in the "Heblish Version", even though it is not normal English. In order to test our understanding of Hebrew, therefore, we need to render the Hebrew text into "good"—or at least "normal"—English (since it was written, as far as we know, in "good" ["normal"] Hebrew). For example:

> YHWH's word came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and call out against her that[18] their wickedness has come up into my presence."
> But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish away from YHWH's presence. He went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish, paid its fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish away from YHWH's presence.
> (Jonah 1.1-4)

Whether or not this is the best possible translation of these verses into English is beside the point, for our purposes. It certainly *communicates* more to the reader than the "inter-linear" version, and so—from that point alone—is more "successful".

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[18] Ambiguities are one of the delights of translation. In this case, the word   can introduce either the reason for Jonah's mission ("since", "because", "for"), or the content of his message ("that").

PARSING FORM

Lexical Form	Gloss	P/G/N	Stem	Conjugation	Prefix	Pronominal Suffix	Key
							Lexical Form: the vocabulary form of the word
							Gloss: of the lexical form
							P/G/N: person (1,2,3), gender (m, f), & number (s, p)
							Stem: *qal* (Q), *qal passive* (Qp), *nifal* (N), *piel* (D), *pual* (Dp), *hitpael* (Dt), *hifil* (H), *hofal* (Hp)
							Conjugation: perfect (P), imperfect (F), preterite (Pr), imperative (V), cohortative (C), jussive (J), participle (Ptc), infinitive construct (NC), or infinitive absolute (NA)
							Prefix: The conjunction, article, [prefixed] preposition, & interrogative –h are the only possibilities for this column)
							Pronominal suffix: P/G/N of pronominal suffix
							N.B.: The last two columns (prefixes, pronominal suffixes) are only used if these elements are present. Lexical form, gloss, stem, & conjugation are *required* for all verbal forms. Infinitives have no P/G/N.

55

LESSON 6   THE PRETERITE

MOST LANGUAGES use one particular verbal conjugation for the "main sequence" of events in a story ("narrative"). In BH that form is the preterite (which means "past"),[19] the conjugation that identifies the main sequence of events in a biblical narrative.[20] In telling a story, English uses the simple past for the sequence of events, as in this example (the preterites are in *italics*).

> George *walked* toward the cliff, wondering what had happened to his friends. Standing on the edge, he *gazed* down its face, looking for some sign of them, but no one was there. He *sighed*, *put* his hands to his mouth, and *shouted* yet again. There was still no answer, but then something far below him *moved* on the face of the cliff.

The main storyline consists of five events: George walked, gazed, sighed, put, and shouted, and something moved. The other verbal forms ("wondering", "had happened", "standing", "looking", and "was"), also identify events (or non-events), but do not describe the *next event* on the storyline. Both "wondering" and "standing" tell us that George was doing two things at the same time (wondering as he walked; standing as he gazed). "Looking for" modifies "gazed", narrowing its focus (no pun intended) to tell us that George was not merely admiring the scenery. The three verbs "sighed", "put", and "shouted" identify a sequence of actions (and perhaps, by their close proximity, suggest that they were executed rapidly and without interruption). The form "had happened"— an example of the English "past perfect"—refers to something that occurred before George walked toward the cliff.[21] Both occurrences of "was" are negated ("no one", "no answer")—they are examples of *irrealis*, giving the reader necessary information about something that did not occur.

It may be helpful to think of a story as made up of a number of *threads*,[22] each of which keeps track of a certain type of information. The thread provided by pronouns is obvious in the sentences above: "his", "he", and "him" enable the narrator to refer to George without repeating his name (just as "them" refers back to "his friends").[23] Another thread is the simple past tense that outlines the story (George walked, gazed, sighed, put, and shouted, and [then] something moved). The preterite in BH is a cohesive device that links an event to the preceding event.

Verbal PGN is a cohesive device in BH that enables us to track verbal subjects. In Gn 24.17, for example, the second verb   , *and he said*, is 3ms. Since it has no expressed subject, and has the same PGN as the preceding verb, they have the same subject, but   , *and she said*, is 3fs, which tells us that Rebecca (already introduced in the story) answered the servant's request. Furthermore, since they are described by three consecutive preterites, readers will assume that these events are consecutive and consequentially related.[24]

…	And the servant *ran* … (Gn 24.17a)
…	And *he said*, "Let me swallow …" (Gn 24.17b)
…	And *she said*, "Drink …" (Gn 24.18a)

The preterite in BH thus has the same function as the italicized verbs in the "story" (above)—it tells

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[19]The preterite is also called "**wayyiqtol**" (3ms form of the *qal* preterite of the verb   ), or the "**imperfect plus waw-consecutive** [or **conversive**]". The latter terms reflect views that the *waw* either "converted" the function of the imperfect from present-future to narrative, or showed that its event was "consecutive to" or "consequent upon" the preceding event. All three terms continue in use.

[20]Although the existence of a preterite "conjugation" in BH is debated, this grammar uses the term to refer to the narrative *function* of these verbs, rather than to their form, since this form and function are so closely related in BH (avoiding the debate about the existence of the preterite as a morphological class).

[21]Of course, the narrator decides how to express this simultaneous action. How would the story change if it read "Walking toward the cliff, George wondered …" In this case, "wondered" is the main narrative verb (preterite), modified by "walking". The biblical narrators made the same choices, as we shall see.

[22]This is not the same as the literary term "narrative thread", which refers to a story's basic plot.

[23]Pronouns have a similar function in BH (see §13.1.2).

[24]Other cohesive devices are temporal and locative expressions (e.g.,   , "then",   , "today";   , "there, in that place").

the reader that the event that it describes was the next event in the story (see §6.10).

6.1 FORM

THE PGN AFFFIXES of the preterite are the same as those of the imperfect. The only difference between their forms is that the preterite is always preceded by *waw* followed by *patah* with a *dageš forte* in the PGN prefix (this is sometimes called the "pointing of the article" (·), since it has the same vowel and doubling), so that the PGN prefix is doubled by the *dageš forte* (except the guttural - [1cs: "I"]). The result of this combination of the conjunction, pointing, and prefix is the following set of subject affixes, which is unique to the preterite (cf. the PGN prefixes of the imperfect, §5.2.1).

Person	Gender	Singular		Plural	
1st	Common	-	*I* …	-	*We* …
2nd	Masc.	-	*You* …	-	*You* …
	Fem.	-		-	
3rd	Masc.	-	*He/It* …	-	*They* …
	Fem.	-	*She/It* …	-	

1. Apart from the prefixed *waw* and *dage forte* the forms of the preterite are identical to those of the imperfect.

2. *Every form that begins with waw followed by a letter with dage (or waw+qames followed by 'alef) is preterite.*

6.1.1 THE *QAL* PRETERITE OF

Person	Gender	Singular		Plural
1st	Common	*I ruled/reigned*		*We ruled/reigned*
2nd	Masc.	*You ruled/&c.*		*You ruled/&c.*
	Fem.			
3rd	Masc.	*He ruled*		*They ruled*
	Fem.	*She ruled*		

1. Note the difference in form (the vowel under the conjunction) and function between the imperfect (Dt 10.2) and preterite (Jr 32.10) of the same verb:

> and *I will write* on the tablets the words (Dt 10.2);
> 1cs Q F +w

> and *I wrote* in the document (Jr 32.10); 1cs Q Pr

2. When the verbal PGN is 1cs ("I"), with the guttural prefix   , the *waw* is followed by *qames*, and there is no *dageš forte* in the   , since it is a guttural, and so does not double (cf. Jr 32.10, above):

> and *I sent* Moses and Aaron … (Jos 24.5); 1cs Q
> Pr

57

3. As with the imperfect, preterites of II- and III-guttural and III-   verbal roots[25] have an *a*-vowel after the second radical instead of *holem*.

and *I called* you by your name (Is 44.4).	1cs Q Pr
And David *heard* and *sent* Joab (2 Sam 10.7)	3ms Q Pr (both)

4. Because only four consonants function as prefixes in the preterite, all preterites begin in one of six ways—there are no exceptions—regardless of the vowel following the prefix.

1cs preterite: *I*	1cp preterite: *we*
2ms/2fs/3fs preterite: *you, she* 2/3fp preterite: *they*	3ms/p preterite: *he, they*

N.B.   In parsing the preterite, there is no need to specify the conjunction in the "prefix" column, since the term "preterite" assumes the prefixed *waw*.[26]

Lemma	Lexical Form	Gloss	P/G/N	Stem	Conjugation	Prefix
		rule, reign	3ms	Q	Pr	

6.2   I- VERBAL ROOTS

THE *QAL* PRETERITE (and imperfect) of most strong verbs looks like   (above), but five verbs look quite different. These five verbs begin with the letter   (they are therefore called I- [27] or "initial   " verbal roots). Because   is silent when followed by silent *šewa*, the prefix vowel of the *qal* imperfect and preterite is *holem*, not *hireq*, and there is no *šewa* under the   (i.e., the *šewa* was left out and the   functions as a "place marker", a little like "silent *e*" in English). The five I-   verbs[28] are:

Verbal Root	Gloss	Occurrences
	say, speak	5000+
	eat, consume, devour	827x
	perish; stray	191x
	bake, cook	54x
	desire, be willing, agree	25x

1. Their prefix vowel in Q F and Pr is *holem*; there is no *šewa* under the   , which is silent.

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[25] On this terminology, see §6.2 (below).

[26] There are a few examples of preterites without prefixed *waw*.

[27] The Roman numeral "I" refers to the position of the *'alef* as the *first* radical of the verbal root. The same pattern can also refer to the second (II) and third (III) letters in the verbal root. These terms (I-, II-, III-) will be used without further comment.

[28] Other verbal roots begin with   , but their forms follow the pattern of the "guttural" verbal roots (Lesson 22).

We [shall] eat	1cp Q F
You/She said	2ms/3fs Q Pr
They said	3mp Q Pr
We [shall] perish	1cp Q F
you perished	2ms Q Pr

2. In 1cs *qal* imperfect and preterite the 1cs prefix ( ) assimilates with the first radical, so that only one   is written:

I shall say	1cs Q F
I ate	1cs Q Pr

3. The main reason for introducing this set of verbal roots at this point is so that we can use   in the exercises. Here is its paradigm for the *qal* preterite:[29]

Person	Gender	Singular	Plural
1	Common	*I said*	*We said*
2	Masc.	*You said*	*You said*
	Fem.		
3	Masc.	*He said*	*They said*
	Fem.	*She said*	

N.B.   is so frequent that the clause   *YHWH said* (e.g., Gn 4.9; 2 Chr 18.16) represents one-half of one percent of all the words in BH (alone occurs nearly 2000 times).

6.3   FUNCTIONS   HBI §2.2.3

THE INTRODUCTION to this chapter said that the preterite identifies the main storyline of the narrative; this is its main function, but it also has other—much less frequent—functions.

6.3.1 NARRATIVE "BACKBONE"

The preterite describes a series of events in the main flow of a narrative (also called the "main sequence" or "backbone" of the narrative). Preterites are usually translated with the simple past. Each preterite always begins its clause, so that the string of preterites describes the string of past events (see also the examples above) [all of the verbs in these examples are Q Pr]:

and *they proclaimed* a fast and *put on* sackcloth (Jonah 3.5)

and the king *swore* [an oath] and *said* … (1 Kg 1.29)

…   and *I wrote* in the document, and *I sealed* [it], …
and *I weighed* the silver with scales (Jr 32.10).

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[29]The paradigm for the *qal* imperfect of   is nearly identical to this paradigm of its preterite.

Tracing the string of preterites in Gn 1 reveals the prominence of divine speech in creation (these are only the last few vv. of the creation story):

…	and God *said* … (Gn 1.26)
…	and God *created* human beings, … (Gn 1.27)
	and God *blessed* them
…	and God *said* to them (Gn 1.28b)
…	and God *said* … (Gn 1.29)
…	and God *saw* everything … (Gn 1.30)

Calling the "preterite chain" the narrative "backbone" does not mean that events described by preterites are the only events—or even "essential" or most important events—of the story.[30] It *does* mean that in the narrator's mind, the events described by these verbs comprise the main sequence, or flow, of the narrative. As you might expect from its function, the preterite is far more common in books that are largely narrative (e.g., Gn, 1-2 Sam, Est) than in books that are mainly covenantal (e.g., Lv, Dt) or poetic (e.g., Jb, Pss, Pr, SS).

In 1 Sam 3.4-5, the string of preterites outlines a series of events (the speeches introduced by "[and] he said" are brief):[31]

	YHWH *called* Samuel
	and he *said*, "Here I am!" (1 Sam 3.4)
	He *ran* to Eli
…	and he *said*, "Here I am, because …"
…	But he *said*, "I did not call …"
	So he *went*
	and he *lay down* (1 Sam 3.5).

This string of preterites extends (with interruptions, see §6.6, §6.10) through the rest of the chapter (and the rest of Samuel).[32] When first reading a biblical narrative, a helpful first step is to identify the preterites, since they normally yield the [bare] outline of the story (see Lesson 25).

6.3.2 NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Although each preterite in a string usually describes the next event in a series, a preterite may also summarize an entire sequence of events, usually at the end of a larger discourse. This function can be recognized by *content* of the preterite clauses, and the relationship between the events that they describe. "God humbled" (Jg 4.23) summarizes the events of Jg 4.13-22, whereas the next preterite (4.24) describes a further event that had begun on the same day.

That day, God *humbled* Jabin king of Canaan
before the sons of Israel (Jg 4.23),

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[30] For example, in any story, *what* is said is as important as *that* something was said (e.g., the content of the initial divine speech (Gn 1.26) is crucial, although its content is not "on" the storyline).

[31] Note the context-dependent renderings (or non-rendering) of the initial *waw*.

[32] The books of 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah each form a single book in the Hebrew Bible.

(cont'd.)

and the hand of the sons of Israel *grew* continually harsher

against Jabin king of Canaan

until they [had] destroyed Jabin king of Canaan (Jg 4.24).

6.3.3 Past Perfect

A preterite can apparently refer to an event that took place before the previous event. This function is discernable only from context. Although YHWH might be repeating himself, in the context, Ex 4.19 seems to refer back to 4.11-12; it seems unlikely that Laban interrupted Jacob and Leah's wedding night (Gn 29.24).

Now YHWH *had said* to Moses   (Ex 4.19)

Now Laban *had given* her Zilpah his maid—

[to be] his daughter Leah's maid (Gn 29.24)

6.3.4 Compound Reference

Consecutive preterites can describe a single event. In Ru 1.9 and 14, the three women wept aloud ("lifted their voices and wept"), which we might call "compound" or "multiple" reference:

And they *lifted* their voices and *wept* (Ru 1.9)

And they *called* to Lot and *said* … (Gn 19.5)

6.4   Word Order

ALTHOUGH THERE IS SOME VARIETY in the order of elements in preterite clauses, *every preterite begins its own clause* (as the above examples illustrate). Nothing—adverb, subject, object, negative, prepositional phrase—precedes the preterite. After the preterite the order is generally **subject – object**(s) (direct or indirect); **adverbial** expressions are usually clause- or sentence-final. This structure of main narrative clauses is the main reason that Hebrew is often referred to as a **V-S-O** (verb-subject-object) language.

6.5   The Imperfect & Preterite

THE IMPERFECT AND PRETERITE together "cover" all of the verbal "tenses" and many of the verbal "moods" used in English:

Imperfect	Present
(contextual)	Future
	Modal (*may/might, should, ought*, &c.)
Preterite	Past Narrative (the main line of events)

1. They do not directly correspond to what we think of as "tenses", "moods", or "aspects", since their function depends on the type of material—the *genre*—within which they occur, so that this chart applies primarily to their function in *narrative*, not to their use in poetry, legal or instructional materials, or other genres.

2. The imperfect can also be preceded by the conjunction *waw*, which means that you will need to distinguish these forms from the preterite; the clue is the pointing under the *waw*:

61

conjunction + 3ms Q imperfect (present/future)	*and he shall rule*
conjunction + 3ms Q preterite (narrative past)	*and he ruled*
conjunction + 1cs Q imperfect (present/future)	*and I shall rule*
conjunction + 1ms Q preterite (narrative past)	*and I ruled*

6.6   DISJUNCTIVE CLAUSES   HBI §3.2.2

SINCE THE PRETERITE names consecutive narrative events, other information (e.g., flashbacks, contemporaneous action) is contained in clauses that begin with *waw* followed by "something-other-than-a-verb". This information is often *parenthetic*, adding information to the narrative about a character or circumstance that the reader needs to understand the story. It may also *contrast* two characters or their circumstances, or *introduce* a new character to the story, or describe something that did not happen (a negative clause). Disjunctive clauses in narrative may be non-verbal, have a perfect or a participle as predicate, or an imperfect with a modifying adverb. Genesis 12.6b, for example, heightens God's promise in the next clause (12.7) by telling the reader that the promised land was not uninhabited:

(now the Canaanites were then in the land) (Gn 12.6b)

"… to your seed shall I give this land." (Gn 12.7)

The syntax of the disjunctive clause (*w* + subject ["the Canaanites"] means that this is not the next event in the story (the Canaanites were [already] in the land), but it contains information crucial to the story.

Furthermore, the disjunctive syntax of this clause derives from—and is determined by—its function in the story; the word order is not merely another way of saying "the same thing". I.e., a disjunctive clause means that its contents do *not* describe the next event in the story (whether it is a positive or negative statement). Furthermore their syntax does not *of itself* indicate the function of a disjunctive clause; it merely indicates its non-sequentiality. [See §6.11.]

6.7   FREQUENCY

About one-fifth (**20.3%**) of all verbal forms in the Bible are preterites, but this frequency is much higher in narrative. In Genesis (for example) more than two-fifths of all verbs (41.6%) are preterite, and Song of Songs (in which less than one percent (0.7%; one example) are preterite).

6.8   CONCEPTS

clause	disjunctive [clause]	narrative	perfect	VSO
waw-consecutive	flashback	narrative backbone	pluperfect	*wayyiqtol*
waw-conversive	genre	parenthetic information	preterite	word order
diagnostic(s)				

6.9   VOCABULARY

bread, food	.74	*enemy*	.66
wilderness (uncultivated or "unclaimed" land)	.75	(I) *also, even, all the more* (cj.) (II) *nose, nostril; anger* (n.)	.67
clan, extended family (smaller than a tribe)	.76	*covenant, treaty, agreement*	.68
serve (cf.)	.77	*flesh, meat; humanity* (as "flesh")	.69
time (i.e., a particular moment)	.78	*month, new moon*	.70
do something [good or bad] *for/to* [someone] (trad. "visit")	.79	*be*[come] *strong; sieze, grasp, hold onto*	.71
flock (sheep, goats)	.80	*evening*	.72
approach, come/draw near	.81	*cut* [off]; *make a treaty* [with as object]	.73

6.10 EXERCISES

1.   After studying the PGN affixes of the preterite and the 3ms *qal* preterite of   , please represent these clauses in English using the simple past (e.g., "He said"), and parse the verbs.

.e	.c	.a
.f	.d	.b

2.   Please represent these clauses and sentences in English, parsing the verbal forms. Remember that the purpose of the exercises is primarily to recognize and identify grammatical forms.

2 Sam 11.3; - *for the*;   *seek*; David   …   .a

2 Kgs 20.8;   *to*; Hezekiah; Isaiah   …   .b

Gn 21.27;   *they both*   .c

Jg 12.7;   *six*; Jephthah; Israel   .d

2 Sam 20.22;   *head of*;   *son of*; Sheba, Bichri   .e

2 Chr 2.16;   *count*; Solomon   .f

Ex 6.5;   *remember*;   *my* [final   -] *covenant*   .g

Jg 2.5;   *there, in that place*   .h

Jg 2.2;   *you* (mp);   *inhabitant* (= ms Q participle);   *this* (modifies   )   .i

2 Kgs 24.6; *sleep*; *with*; *his fathers*; .j
his son; Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin

Ps 59.1; *, to kill him (put him to death; cause him to* .k
die)

Jg 20.27; - often introduces the object of ; *sons of* .l

Jg 9.18; *his sons*; NB: Q Pr; the .m
guttural ( ) affects the prefix syllable

6.11 ENRICHMENT: NARRATIVE BACKBONE (& ANCILLARY INFORMATION)

TRACING PRETERITE AND DISJUNCTIVE CLAUSES in a narrative reveals its skeleton (the preterites) and information that the author considered "ancillary" to the storyline (disjunctive clauses). In 1 Samuel 3, for example (next page), the first three verses contain seven disjunctive clauses and two secondary (parallel) clauses, which together set the stage (or background) for the rest of the story (disjunctive clauses are in *italics*):

Now the young man Samuel was serving YHWH *in Eli's presence,*	**1a**
but YHWH*'s word was rare in those days—*	b
no vision was breaking through. [parallel cl.]	c
Then one day	**2a**
when Eli was sleeping in his place	b
(now his eyes had begun to be dim—	c
he could not see), [parallel cl.]	d
and the lamp of God had not yet gone out,	**3a**
and Samuel was sleeping in YHWH*'s temple,* *where the ark of God was,*	b

The *events* of the story itself begin with the preterites in v. 4 (preterites are in **bold**):

YHWH **summoned** Samuel	**4a**
and he **said**, "Here I am".	b
He **ran** to Eli	**5a**
and **said**, "Here I am, for you called me."	b
But he **said**, "I did not call. Go back to sleep."	c
So he **went** and **lay down**.	d
YHWH **called** Samuel again,	**6a**
so Samuel **got up** ,	b
went to Eli,	c
and **said**, "Here I am, for you called me."	d

But **he said**, "I didn't call, my son. Go back to sleep." e

Saying that vv. 1-3 provide "background" does not mean that their contents are unimportant or non-essential to the story. It does mean, on the other hand, that they "set the stage" for the events themselves, which begin in v. 4 (above).

After Samuel goes twice to Eli the author finally explains why Samuel did not recognize YHWH's voice:[33]

(*Now Samuel did not yet know* YHWH, **7a**

nor had YHWH's *word yet been revealed to him*) b

---

[33]The opening syntax of 7a-b (*w* + subject ["Samuel"] and *w* + adverb ["not yet"]) means that these are **not sequential** event(s). In fact, because these statements are negative, they "describe" *non-events* (*irrealis*), or things that did not happen and which therefore cannot be part of the storyline, but their information is crucial to the reader's understanding of the sequence of events in the story.

LESSON 7   NOMINAL MODIFICATION (II): PREPOSITIONS

PREPOSITIONS precede (are *pre-position*ed to) other words in order to show their *function* or *rôle* in the clause or phrase. In English, for example, the difference in function between "George went *to* the store" and "George went *from* the store" is determined by the prepositions "to" and "from", which indicate which way George went relative to the store. Prepositions thus modify a noun's *syntagmatic function*, rather than its reference (which is modified by the article (§4.3), construct (Lesson 8), adjectives and the relative particle (Lesson 11). Prepositions in BH do not affect the form of the word that they modify (remember, there are no "case endings" in Hebrew). There are three types of prepositions in BH:

1. *inseparable*—the prepositions   ,   , and   are always prefixed to the word that they modify (like the conjunction   )
2. *separable*—the preposition   may be either separate from or prefixed to the word that it modifies
3. *separate*—most prepositions in BH are separate words (as are prepositions in English)

7.1   THE INSEPARABLE PREPOSITIONS

THE PREPOSITIONS   (*in, with, against*),   (*like, as, according to, about* [*approximately*]), and   (*to, for, at, belonging to*), are always prefixed to the word that they govern, becoming the first syllable in the word (cf. the conjunction   ).

1. If the word is anarthrous, the preposition is prefixed using vocal *šewa* (but if the first vowel in the word is *šewa*, they use *hireq*).

a house	*in a house*
a king	*like a king*
a woman	*to/for a woman*
garments	*in/with garments*
young men	*like young men*

2. The first letter of a word that begins with a *beged-kefet* letter loses *dageš lene*, since the preposition is followed by a [half-] vowel:

a house	*to a house*
a son	*like a son*
tool	*with a tool*

3. If the first letter of the word has a *hatef*-vowel, the preposition uses the full vowel that matches the half-vowel:

an ark/box	*in a box* ("in *the* box" =)
a fool	*to a fool*

4. When they are added to an *articular* word, these three prepositions *replace* the   of the article, but *not* its pointing (hence the importance of being able to recognize the article's pointing). These three are the *only* prefixes that replace the   of the article:

66

	Articular		**Anarthrous**
the house	*in the house*		*in a house*
the son	*like the son*		*like a son*
the woman	*to/for the woman*		*to/for a woman*

5. When they are added to the name and titles of God (below), their vowel is *sere* (with   ) or *patah* (with   and   ):

God	*for God*
YHWH	*in* YHWH
the Lord	*for/to the Lord*

6. When the *conjunction* is prefixed to a word with an inseparable preposition (   ), it is simply added in front of the preposition (and   will lack *dageš lene*):

like the house	*and like the house*
for the king	*even for the king*

7. The prepositions   (c. 20,000x) and   (c. 15,700x) account for well more than half of all prepositions in BH. There are several reasons for their frequency:
    a.   often indicates an [*indirect*] *object*, much like English "to" or "for":

> They sacrificed there *to* Y<small>HWH</small> (Jg 2.5)
>
> "Do not take a wife *for my son* …" (Gn 24.6)
>
> And he did not seek [*for*] *the Baals* (2 Chr 17.3)

    b.   is one of several ways in which BH indicates *possession*; the   is prefixed to the "owner". The context determines whether the syntagm corresponds to a phrase "an X of Y" ("Y's X") or clause ("Y has/had an X"). This is how Hebrew shows that the owner is a particular person, and implies that he or she has more than one:

> a prophet *of* Y<small>HWH</small> (1 Kgs 18.22);
> Y<small>HWH</small> has more than one prophet
> a psalm *of David* (Ps 3.1);
> David wrote more than one psalm
> Now Rebekkah *had* a brother (Gn 24.29);
> Rebekkah had more than one brother

    c.   frequently shows purpose or result, much like English "to", in the sense of "in order to" or "so that" (Lesson 16).

    d.   has a wide range of functions, as its glosses suggest (e.g., *in, with, by, on, against*), and is also used to form temporal clauses (as is the preposition   ; Lesson 16).

67

7.2   THE SEPARABLE PREPOSITION (   )

1. THE PREPOSITION   , "from", can be prefixed to its noun, or written as a separate word. When separate, it is usually linked to the word that it governs with *maqqef*:

a house	*from a house*
the son	*from the son*
the woman	*from the woman*

2. Like the inseparable prepositions (, ,),   is often joined to the word that it governs, becoming its first syllable. When this happens, the *nun* of   assimilates[34] completely to the first letter, which therefore doubles, so that the *nun* shows up only as a *dageš forte* in the first letter. This assimilation is called *nunnation*. In the first example, **minbáyit* **>** *mibbáyit* (* means that the form is hypothetical; **>** means "developed into").

a house	*from a house*
a son	*from a son*
a king	*from a king*

3. This means that we now know three causes of doubled letters:

The word's spelling:	*a woman/wife*
The article:	*the son*
Nunnation:	*from a king*

N.B.   You should **always ask why a letter is doubled**, since this often helps identify the word's lexical form, or distinguish the elements of a "compound word" (below).

4. Since *reš* and the gutturals (, , ,) do not double,   appears as   (remember that the *i/e* vowels are closely related) when it is joined to a word beginning with one of these letters:

a woman	*from a woman*
a city	*from a city*
a land	*from a land*

5. Since   does not replace the   of the article, but is prefixed to it, *sere* also joins   to articular words (-   is always a guttural):

the house	*from the house*
the woman	*from the woman*
the king	*from the king*

---

[34] In *assimilation* one consonant becomes exactly like another—usually the one after it. In English the prefix *in-* ("not") assimilates to the first letter of words beginning with *m, r, l* (e.g., *im*mobile, *ir*replaceable, *il*legal), but not to the first letter of every word (cf., e.g., *in*violate). Note that assimilation produces a doubled letter in English as well as in BH.

7.3 SUMMARY: COMPOUND FORMS

A SINGLE SUBSTANTIVAL FORM can thus consist of as many as four elements: a noun plus up to three prefixes (conjunction, preposition, article [and always in that order]).[35] This chart shows how they are combined; you should learn to "take apart" the forms listed on the right by identifying their elements:

Noun +	Article +	Preposition +	Conjunction
a house	*the house*	*to the house*	*and to the house*
a king	*the king*	*from the king*	*even from the king*
a man	*the man*	*like the man*	*or like the man*

7.4 INDEPENDENT ("SEPARATE") PREPOSITIONS

ALL OTHER HEBREW PREPOSITIONS are separate words, although they are often connected to their noun by *maqqef*. Those that end in a long vowel (e.g.,   ) often cause an initial *beged-kefet* letter in the following word to lose *dageš lene*.

a house	*under the house*
his father	*in his father's place*
a house	*before/in front of a house*
the king	*before/in the presence of the king*
Dan	*as far as Dan*
the Jordan	*beyond the Jordan*
Moses	*to[ward] Moses*

7.5 SYNTAX

HEBREW PROSE may repeat the preposition before each element of a multiple object, and use the conjunction between prepositional phrases. This repetition is normal, not emphatic.

between Bethel and Ai (Gn 13.3);
not "right smack between both Bethel and Ai"
from Dan to [as far as] Beersheba (1 Sam 3.20)

7.6 DIRECTION/GOAL

HEBREW INDICATES that an action or event is directed to or toward a person, thing, or location in three different ways: (1) lexically, by prefixing a *preposition* (e.g.,   ) to the object (§7.4); (2) morphologically, by suffixing the letter   - to the object (§7.6.1); and (3) contextually (§7.6.2).

7.6.1 THE ACCUSATIVE/DIRECTIONAL ENDING (-)

A suffixed   - on some words indicates the direction or goal of verbs of motion—where the subject of the verb is going:

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[35] We will see another combination—but still a maximum of four elements—when we discuss pronominal suffixes.

and he got up and went *to the house* (2 Kg 9.6)

and Joseph returned *to Egypt* (Gn 50.14)

and he spread his hands *toward the sky* (2 Ch 6.13)

and they turned aside *to that place* (Jg 18.15)

Since Ugaritic[36] suggests that this is a remnant of an accusative case ending,[37] it has come to be called "accusative -". Unlike prepositions, the accusative - occurs on only a few words, the most frequent of which are listed here.[38]

1. *Nouns* (common and proper)

Lexical Form	With Accusative/Directional -	Frequency[39]	
		Locative	Total
	to[*ward*] *the ground*	87x	2504x
	to[*ward*] *the house, inward*	8x	2036x
	to[*ward*] *the house*	20x	
	to[*ward*] *the mountain/hill country*	14x	547x
	to[*ward*] *Jerusalem*	5x	641x
	to[*ward*] *the wilderness*	18x	271x
	to[*ward*] *Egypt*	29x	680x
	to[*ward*] *the city*	9x	1086x
	to Sheol	10x	65x
	to[*ward*] *heaven/the sky*	12x	421x

2. *Adverbs*

Lexical Form	With Accusative/Directional -	Frequency	
		Locative	Total
there	*to*[*ward*] *there/that place*	142x	831x
where?	*to where?*	39x	42x

---

[36] The "Semitic" languages are spoken by the people groups traditionally identified with the "sons of Shem" listed in Gn 10. They are commonly divided between Eastern (Akkadian, which includes the dialects of Assyria and Babylonia) and Western (Ugaritic; Aramaic, Canaanite [of which Hebrew, Moabite, Edomite, &c. are dialects]; Arabic, and Ge'ez [Ethiopic]). "Comparative linguistics" studies the links between related languages, and uses one language to explain features of another.

[37] Like the rest of the Semitic family, Hebrew certainly had case endings early in its history.

[38] Although the statistics show that the directional - is relatively infrequent (e.g., "to[ward] the house" is expressed some 130 times with the preposition - , but only twenty-eight times with the directional -), there are many forms with directional - in BH, which means that you will need to recognize them.

[39] Occurrences of the directional form and total occurrences of the word are listed on the right.

70

3. *Directions* (see §7.11)

Lexical Form	With Accusative/Directional -	Frequency	
		Locative	Total
sea; west	*to[ward] the west (sea); westward*	64x	392x
north	*to[ward] the north; northward*	53x	153x
east	*to[ward] the east; eastward*	26x	86x
south; Negev	*to[ward] the south (Negev); southward*	29x	110x
south	*southward*	13x	24x

7.6.2 DIRECTIONAL OBJECTS

In addition to prepositions and the directional   -, the place toward which someone is moving may simply be named, and the "movement to[ward]" understood from the combination of a verb of motion and the name of the place. Objects may also indicate a location rather than a direction (2 Sam 11.9).

… … and he summoned Rachel and Leah *to the field*, to his flock (Gn 31.4)

From that land he went out *to Ashur* (Gn 10.11)

Uriah slept *at the door* of the king's house (2 Sam 11.9)

… and go down *to the threshing floor* (Ru 3.2)

N.B. These are *not* three different functions, merely different ways of realizing the same function.

7.7 PREPOSITIONAL CLAUSES

HEBREW RARELY USES the verb "to be" for clauses that describe the location of a person or thing. Instead, BH simply juxtaposes the noun and prepositional phrase, leaving the time frame ("tense") to be inferred from the context:

David [*was*] *in* the wilderness of Ziph (1 Sa 23.15)

and Jotham, the king's son, [*was*] *over* the palace (2 Kg 15.5)

and YHWH's glory [*was*] *over* the temple (2 Ch 7.3)

now the Canaanites [*were*] then *in* the land (Gn 12.6)

7.8 CONCEPTS

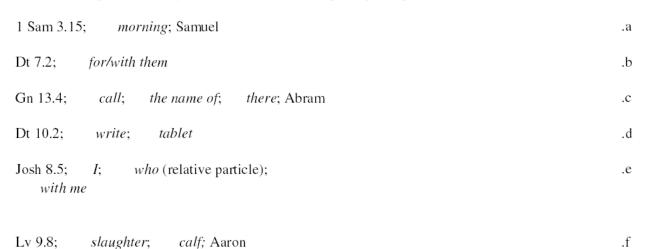|		
accusative	directional	preposition
assimilation	inseparable preposition	prepositional phrase
comparative linguistics	locative	Semitic
compound form(s)	nunnation	separable preposition

7.9 Vocabulary

gift, offering, tribute	.90	*behind, after* (locative and temporal)	.82
to, as far as; until, while	.91	*to, toward*	.83
leave, forsake, abandon	.92	*cubit; forearm*	.84
on, upon, over; against; concerning	.93	*in, with, by, on, against, …; when, while* (with inf. const.)	.85
with	.94	*between*	.86
innocent, just; righteous (adj.)	.95	*like, as, according to; about, approximately* (with numbers); *when, while* (with inf. const.)	.87
innocence; righteousness (n.)			
lie down, sleep; have sexual relations with	.96	*to, for* (indicates indirect object); *have* (showing possession)	.88
under, beneath; instead of, in place of	.97	*from, out of; some of; than* (in comparisons)	.89

7.10 Exercises

1. When you have studied the inseparable prepositions and   , and can recognize the presence of the article, identify the elements of these forms and provide English glosses for them.

.e	.c	.a
.f	.d	.b

2. Please represent these *phrases* and *clauses* in English, parsing the verbal forms.

1 Sam 3.15;   *morning*; Samuel   .a

Dt 7.2;   *for/with them*   .b

Gn 13.4;   *call*;   *the name of*;   *there*; Abram   .c

Dt 10.2;   *write*;   *tablet*   .d

Josh 8.5;   *I*;   *who* (relative particle); *with me*   .e

Lv 9.8;   *slaughter*;   *calf;* Aaron   .f

Jg 20.27;   *ask* (when the middle radical is a guttural, it has a *hatef*-vowel rather than *šewa*; words beginning with a *beged-kefet* letter that immediately follow a word ending in -,   -, or - regularly lack *dageš lene*); ;   *sons of*   .g

2 Chr 2.16; *count*; Solomon	.h
Gn 1.5; *light*	.i
Ex 18.24; *his father-in-law*; Moses	.j
Josh 24.25; *nation, people*; *that*; Joshua	.k
1 Kgs 2.10; - *his* (the - - shows that the noun is plural); David	.l
Ex 2.24; *their* [- 3mp] *groaning, complaint, lament*; *his covenant*; *remember*; has both functions in this v.	.m

7.11 ENRICHMENT: DIRECTIONS

As the Abram/Abraham stories progess, the divine promises become increasingly specific. YHWH first promised to *show* Abram a "land" (Gn 12.1), then that he would *give* "this land" to his descendants (Gn 12.7). In Gn 13.14-15, he tells Abram that what he can see "from the place where [he was] standing", using the cardinal directions with the accusative - to identify the general extent of the now-promised land, which he declares that he will give to *both* Abram and his descendants.

> *… to the north,* and *to the Negev* [south], *and to the east, and to the sea* [west] (Gn 13.14-15)

In the ancient Near East [ANE], orientation was toward the east (Lat. *orient*), so that *y mîn* could mean either "right side", "right hand", or—reflecting one's eastward orientation—"south", the right side pointing south. This may seem strange to us, since we "orient" ourselves (and our maps) to the north, but that reflects the eventual use of magnetic means of direction-finding, such as lodestones or the compass. Without such tools, sunrise functioned as the primary directional indicator.

LESSON 8 COMMANDS & PROHIBITIONS

THE IMPERFECT conjugation can function modally with the sense of "should" or "must" (Lesson 5); the *imperative* conjugation is used for positive commands. Like the imperative in English, which has only an implicit subject ("Go to bed!"), commands in BH rarely name the subject. Like the imperfect and preterite, however, the imperative in BH identifies the gender and number of its subject, using the PGN *endings* (only) of the second person imperfect.

8.1 FORM

THE IMPERATIVE occurs only in the second person, and uses the subject [PGN] endings of the imperfect *without* the subject prefixes.

Person	Gender	Singular	Plural
2ⁿᵈ	Masc.	no ending *or* -	-
	Fem.	-	-

8.2 THE *QAL* IMPERATIVE

WHEN THE AFFIXES of the imperative and the vowels of the *qal* imperative are added to the verbal root, the paradigm of the *qal* imperative is:

Person	Gender	Singular	Plural
2ⁿᵈ	Masc.	*Rule!*	*Rule!*
	Fem.		

1. The *hireq* under the first radical with vocalic endings avoids consecutive vocal *šewa*s (when the prefix is removed from the imperfect, the *šewa* under the first radical becomes vocal).[40]

2. It is not uncommon for the 2ms imperative to have the ending   -, which, in the *qal*, yields a form that looks just like 3fs *qal* perfect (   ), and can be distinguished from it only by the context.

3. As in the imperfect and preterite, II- and III-guttural verbal roots form their imperative with *patah* rather than *holem*; III-   roots have *qames*.

Person	Gender	Singular	Plural
2ⁿᵈ	Masc.		
	Fem.		

---

[40]This explanation is pedagogical, not technical.

8.3   FUNCTION   HBI §2.2.4c

1. Positive *commands* use the imperative.

> *Summon* Hushai the Archite … (2 Sa 17.5).
> Land, land, land, *hear* YHWH's word (Jr 22.29).

> Son of man, *stand* on your feet! (Ezk 2.1)
> *Hear* this word! (Am 3.1)

2. *Prohibitions* (negative commands) are formed with the *imperfect* (*not* imperative) negated by   or   . There may be a slight tendency for prohibitions with   to be more universal or permanent than those with   (which would then refer to an immediate or specific situation), but this must be determined for each case; it is not a general rule.

> *Do not steal* (Ex 20.15).
> *Do not cross over* against me (Nu 20.18).
> *Do not call* her name Sarai (Gn 17.15).
> *Do not bury me* in Egypt (Gn 47.29).
> But my son *do not take back* there (Gn 24.9)

FREQUENCY: Imperatives are relatively infrequent, accounting for only slightly more than one in twenty (**5.8%**) of all verbs in BH. Although we might expect to see them in covenantal books such as Leviticus (1.7%) and Deuteronomy (4.3%), they are proportionately more frequent in Psalms (11.95%), Song (11.4%), Jeremiah (7.3%), and Isaiah (7.1%).

8.4   OTHER VOLITIONAL VERBS

THE TERM "VOLITIONAL" refers to speech in which the speaker asserts his or her will (volition) toward another person. The imperative (above) is the most obvious form of volitional speech, but not all declarations of a speaker's will are directed to the hearer. Some may indirectly command another person ("He should …", "Rebecca ought to …", "Let Ezra do it" [*not* in the sense of "allow" or "permit"]), or summon a group (of which the speaker is part) to do something ("Let's …", "We should …").

8.4.1 COHORTATIVE   HBI §2.2.4a

The first person forms of the imperfect can show *volition*—the subject's determination to do something. This is technically another modal use of the prefix conjugation, although this form can occur with an added   -. It is parsed in the conjugation column as "c" (for "cohortative").

> You and I *shall make* a covenant (Gn 31.44) *or* "We—you and I—shall make a covenant"
> I *shall send* a letter … (2 Kgs 5.5)
> We *shall send* men before us … (Dt 1.22)
> We *shall sacrifice* to YHWH (Ex 5.17)

When it occurs with the conjunction after another cohortative, imperfect, or imperative, the cohortative may be *telic*, showing purpose or result; this is contextually determined (including especially the relationship between the functions of the two verbs):

…	Let there be an oath … that we *may make* a covenant with you (Gn 26.28)
…	Call Hushai …, *that we may hear* (2 Sam 17.5)
…	… … we'll cast lots *so that we may know* … (Jn 1.7)

8.4.2 JUSSIVE HBI §2.2.4b

In the third person the prefix conjugation can also have volitional force, which is called *jussive* (Latin *jussus*, a command). This functions rather like a third person imperative, i.e., "Let him …" in the sense of "He should/must/ought …", but probably *not* with the sense "Allow him to …". Because there is no special form[41] for this function, grammarians differ on which verbs are jussive and which are not (especially in biblical poetry); in Gn 41.35, for example, Joseph is clearly offering Pharaoh advice, so the verbs are probably jussive):

…	"*Let them gather* all the food … and *let them store* grain …" (Gn 41.35); i.e., "*They should …*" "*Let* the Hebrew *hear*!" (1 Sam 13.3); i.e., not permission, but exhortation. *May* he *guard* your life *or* He shall guard your life (Ps 121.7)

8.5 THE VOLITIONAL PARTICLE (   )

THE IMPERATIVE, cohortative, and jussive may be followed by the particle   (with or without *maqqef*). Although   is often translated "please", or "I pray" (in the archaic sense of "ask"), its function seems to be inconsistent, which means that its function is not clear. A verb followed by   , however, is *always* volitional. When a volitional verb is negated, it may be preceded by   or   :

> "*Hear* this dream which I dreamed (Gn 37.6).
>
> They said to him, "*Say* 'Shibbolet' " (Jg 12.6).
>
> He said, "Do not abandon us, …" (Nu 10.31).

8.6 THE VOLITIONAL SUMMARY PARTICLE (   ) HBI §3.3.8

THE PARTICLE   (+ ; traditionally, "And now") usually introduces an imperative, cohortative, or jussive, which directs the hearer to pursue a course of action based on the preceding discourse. Volitional forms occur frequently without   , but you should expect to find a volitional verb (negative or positive) within the following context. When it occurs without a volitional form, it functions as a temporal particle, "now". Note that the volitional form is often *not* the following word; additional information or reasons can precede the command or declaration of intent.

> *Therefore*, my son, *listen* to my voice (Gn 27.8)

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[41]In a *few* types of verbal root the imperfect and jussive can be distinguished by their vowels (below).

(cont'd.)

Therefore, *let* the power of my Lord *be great* (Nu 14.17)

Therefore, *write* this song (Dt 31.19)

Therefore, *let* my lord the king *hear* (1 Sam 26.19)

8.7   CONCEPTS

cohortative   imperative   prohibition
command   jussive   volitional

8.8   VOCABULARY

love, loyalty, kindness (trad. "lovingkindness")	.106	*stone* (cf. , Ebenezer, "the stone of help")	.98
possess, subdue; dispossess [someone] (H)	.107	*ground* (cf. Gn 2.7)	.99
silver	.108	*boundary; territory* (i.e., land inside a boundary)	.100
write	.109	*blood*	.101
night (m.)	.110	*gold*	.102
something appointed (place, time); *season*	.111	*remember*	.103
(m.) *work, deed, thing done*	.112	*seed* (sg. & coll.)	.104
untranslatable particle indicating volition (trad. "please"); follows imv., coh., juss.	.113	*strength; army; wealth*	.105

8.9   EXERCISES

After learning the forms of the *qal* imperative, please gloss the clauses, parsing the verbs. Since the imperative is always second person, you can simply label the PGN by gender and number (e.g., "ms" or "fp"). **N.B.** Not all verbal forms in these biblical quotations are imperative.

1 Kg 20.39   .a

Ru 3.13;   *until*;   *morning*   .b

Gn 45.17;   *your* [- 2ms] *brothers*; Pharaoh, Joseph   .c

Ex 20.15;   *steal*   .d

Pr 5.7;   (see §8.6);   *to me*   .f

1 Kgs 22.5;   *seek, search*; *king of*;   *today*;   *word of*   .e

Pr 3.1;   *my son* (vocative);   .g
my teaching;   *forget*

Ex 16.9;   *assembly of*;   *sons of*;   .h
    before, in the presence of

Dt 5.28;   *the sound of*;   *your words*   .i

Ex 8.25;   *call to, summon*;   *go*   .j
(2mp Q V of   );   *sacrifice*;   - *your*
(2mp); Pharoah, Moses, Aaron

Dt 9.7   .k

Josh 9.6;   *for* [*with*] *us*   .l

2 Kgs 4.36;   *call to, summon*;   .m
Gehazi, Shunamite

Hg 2.11;   *ask*   .n

Gn 27.43;   (see §8.4.2);   - *my*   .o
(1cs)

Dt 6.4;   *our* [- 1cp] *god*;   .p
one

8.10 ENRICHMENT: VERBAL EUPHONY IN POETRY

The first eight lines of Psalm 100 contain seven commands: "Shout …! Serve ..! Enter …! Know …! Enter
…! Thank …! Bless …!" Even though Hebrew poetry does not use rhyme, the repeated PGN affix - on the
string of 2mp imperatives links this series of commands by both form and sound (imperatives are *italicized*).
Nearly every line in the psalm (after the title [1a]) begins with a word ending in –*u*, and several (2a-b, 4a-b)
end with a word that begins with the preposition - (**with**). Read these lines aloud until you can begin to hear
their repeated sounds.

Shout to YHWH, all the earth;   1b

Serve YHWH **with** joy;   2a

Come before him **with** a glad shout;   2b

Know that YHWH is God.   …   3a

Enter his gates **with** thanks,   4a

His courts **with** praise,   4b

Thank him,   4c

Bless his name;   4d

Reading the Hebrew text reveals effects such as this aural repetition that are invisible in English, so that we
can enjoy both *what* they said and *how* they said it.

78

LESSON 9   NOMINAL MODIFICATION (III): THE CONSTRUCT

T HE ENGLISH WORD "OF" signals many relationships, including possession ("the sword of Goliath"), relationship ("son of David"), and modification ("an altar of gold"). These can also be signalled by the "possessive 's'" ("God's kingdom", "the scribe's son") or an adjective ("a golden altar"), or even by juxtaposing two nouns ("a stone wall").

Hebrew expresses these relationships with the construct chain, in which each word is "linked to" the following word. Words are said to be in either the "construct" or "absolute" state. Nouns thus have one of two states:[42] they are either "absolute" (from Latin, meaning "unconnected" or "independent") or "construct". About **one-third** of all nouns in BH occur in the construct state.

9.1   THE CONSTRUCT CHAIN

TO MODIFY (in language) is to restrict. A major way to modify a word's referent in English and Hebrew is by means of the "of" relationship. Consider, for example, "the girl's book", "the author's book", and "his book". In each case the words before "book" restrict what "book" can refer to. In fact, these phrases do not mean the same thing, since "the girl" may own [a copy of] "the author's" book. In order to show this relationship, BH places two or more substantives side-by-side in a sequence of words called a *construct chain*, in which each word is linked to the following word by the "of" relationship:

1.   *a father of a king* or *a king's father*

2.   *the father of the king* or *the king's father*

3.   *the daughter of the king* or *the king's daughter*

4.   *the document of the teaching/law*

5.   *the house of the king of the land*

6.   *the house of the king of Israel*

1.   The order is not arbitrary, and may not be changed (e.g., #1 cannot mean "a father's king").
2.   Each noun is *in construct* to the *following* word.
3.   The last word in a construct chain is in the absolute state.[43] The vocabulary form of a noun is also its form in the *absolute*.
4.   A construct chain therefore consists of a series of words, each of which (except the last) is modified by the rest of the series.

9.1.1 FORMS
1.   Masculine singular and feminine plural nouns have the same consonants in both states. Feminine singular and masculine plural nouns, however, have separate endings for absolute and construct. The   - of the fem. construct singular and the   - of the plural replaces the   - of the singular; if the absolute ends in   -, the absolute and construct singular endings are the same. The   - of the masculine plural absolute drops off, and the form has *sere* instead of *hireq*, as in the following table.[44]

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[42]Unfortunately, the words "construct" and "absolute" can refer to a word's *function* (i.e., "linked" or "independent") or its *form* (since the construct spelling of many words differs slightly from their absolute [lexical] form). You will need to note which sense applies.

[43]We shall note the single exception to this when we discuss pronominal suffixes (below).

[44]The following paradigms list the singular and plural forms for each word—regardless of the point being illustrated—as they occur in BH. If a form is not listed, it does not occur.

79

	Singular		**Plural**	
	Absolute	Construct	Absolute	Construct
Masc.	*horse*	*horse of*	*horses*	*horses of*
Fem.	*mare*	*mare of*	*mares*	*mares of*

2. Even if the ending is the same (as in ms and fp), the vowels of words in construct often differ from their lexical form, since words in construct "lose" some of their accentual "weight".

	Singular		**Plural**	
	Absolute	Construct	Absolute	Construct
Masc.	*house*	*house of*	*houses*	*houses of*
	son	*son of*	*sons*	*sons of*
Fem.	*wife*	*wife of*	*wives*	*wives of*
	daughter	*daughter of*	*daughters*	*daughters of*

3. This does not apply to long internal vowels (cf.   , above), i.e., those written with a *mater* (which are thus called "unchangeably long"):

	Siangular		**Plural**	
	Absolute	Construct	Absolute	Construct
Masc.	*man*	*man of*	*men*	*men of*
Fem.	*city*	*city of*	*cities*	*cities of*

4. Three fairly common nouns form their construct singular by adding   - (has the same form in both states):

Singular		**Plural**	
Absolute	Construct	Absolute	Construct
father	*father of*	*fathers*	*fathers of*
brother	*brother of*	*brothers*	*brothers of*
mouth	*mouth of*		
fruit	*fruit of*		

5. The construct singular of nouns with two vowels with either *waw* or *yod* between them "collapses" or "simplifies" into a single long vowel (-*awe*- > -*ô*-; and -*ayi*- > -*ê*-):

Singular		**Plural**	
Absolute	Construct	Absolute	Construct
death	*death of*		
house	*house of*	*houses*	*houses of*
eye; spring	*eye/spring of*[45]	*eyes*	*eyes of*

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[45]   is the first part of the names of many water sources, e.g.,   (*En-gedi*) "Well of [the] Kid".

80

9.1.2 Syntax

1. Although the form of a word often signals that it is in the construct, the primary signal of a construct chain is an *uninterrupted series of two or more substantives*, the last of which is often definite, being either an articular noun or proper name.[46]

    > *the stars of the sky*
    >
    > *the son of David   David's son*
    >
    > *the cities of Judah   Judah's cities*
    >
    > *the daughters of Zelophehad   Zelophehad's daughters*
    >
    > *the altar of gold   the golden altar*

2. The definiteness of the *last* element in a construct chain determines the definiteness or indefiniteness of *every* element in that chain. If the last element is definite, the entire chain is definite; if it is indefinite, then the entire chain is indefinite. A substantive can be definite because it is articular, or because it is a proper name, or because it is construct to something that is definite (see note 30).

a man's son	*the son of the man (the man's son)*
houses of a city	*the houses of the city*
a king's song	*the song of David (David's song)*

3. On the other hand, some words in construct with a definite noun may be definite, but are not exclusive. The phrase ⟨ ⟩, *an abomination of* YHWH, for example, describes many things in Scripture, none of which is "the [implicitly: only] abomination of YHWH".

4. Nothing can come between words in a construct chain except the locative ⟨ ⟩ - without breaking the chain. This includes prepositions and the conjunction ⟨ ⟩, which can only be prefixed to the first word in the chain.

5. Articular words, proper names (and substantives with a pronominal suffix, below) cannot occur within a chain. When they occur, the construct chain ends. Since they are all definite, they make the entire chain definite. This means that the first noun in a construct chain cannot have the article or be a proper name.[47]

6. Each word in a construct "belongs to" the next word. This is never reversed. ⟨ ⟩ (the first example above) cannot mean "the sky of the stars".

7. Most construct chains have either two or three parts (as above), but construct chains can [rarely] have as many as six elements (six-element chains are extremely rare[48]):

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[46] Or a noun with a pronominal suffix (Lesson 14).

[47] The apparent exception to this, the phrase ⟨ ⟩ (traditionally rendered "LORD of hosts" but now "Sovereign LORD" [NIV] or the like), may be probably more apparent than real. It occurs fifteen times in the form ⟨ ⟩, "YAHWEH, God of hosts" (e.g., 2 Sam 5.10; 1 Kgs 19.10, 14; Ps 89.9), which may suggest that ⟨ ⟩ is a shortened form of the same phrase. It also occurs six times as ⟨ ⟩ (Ps 59.6; 80.5, 20; 84.9; ⟨ ⟩ occurs twice [Ps 80.8, 15]). ⟨ ⟩ may not, therefore, be in construct to ⟨ ⟩, but rather in apposition to an implicit [culturally understood] ⟨ ⟩. On the other hand, however, ⟨ ⟩ may be a true exception.

[48] In Nu 14.5, the form ⟨ ⟩ is a compound preposition the second element of which is ⟨ ⟩, *face, presence*; in Jg 9.1, the last form is compounded from ⟨ ⟩, *mother*, and -⟨ ⟩, *his*.

in the presence of all [of] the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel (Nu14.5)   [six elements]

and to all [of] the clan of the household of the father of his mother (Jg 9.1)   [six elements]

for all [of] the labour of the tabernacle of the house of God (1 Ch 6.33; cf. 1 Ch 28.13, 20)   [five elements]

the number of the days of the life of his vanity [his vain life] (Qo 6.12)   [five elements]

9.1.3 FUNCTION

Construct chains are functionally *attributive*—they modify a word by limiting its range to the "of" term. "Brother", e.g., could refer to many males; "brother *of David*" limits the potential referents to seven. This modification often shows possession, but it can also carry any of the nuances identified for, e.g., the genitive in Greek, or "of" in English.

Construct chains have three primary functions: objective, subjective, or adjectival. Two examples: "the love of God" can refer to one's love *for God*, or God's love *for someone/thing*, and "YHWH's word" refers to a message from YHWH. Possession—a common function of the construct—is subjective, so that "Goliath's sword" refers to "the sword that Goliath has (had/owns/uses/&c.)". The following list of functions of the construct is not meant to suggest that the biblical authors chose to use a particular "type" of construct (any more than we think about "which" function of "of" we are using). It merely illustrates the types of relationships that the construct can indicate.

1.   *Possession*. The item named by the first word belongs to the second.

>   *Goliath's sword* or *the sword of Goliath* (1 Sa 21.10)
>
>   *Solomon's throne* or *the throne of Solomon*

2.   *Attribution*. The second word modifies the first, and is often glossed like an adjective. This type of construct chain often has a pronominal suffix (Lesson 14) on the final word.

>   *my holy mountain* or *the mountain of my holiness* (Ps 2.6)
>
>   *the gold altar* or *the altar of gold* (Nu 4.11)

3.   *Relationship*. The construct chain describes people who are related to one another.

>   *a king's daughter; a daughter of a king* (2 Kg 9.34)
>
>   *Canaan's father; the father of Canaan* (Gn 9.18)

4.   *Definition*. Generic terms are often defined more closely by a proper name:

>   *the river Euphrates* (Gn 15.18)
>
>   *the land of Canaan* (Gn 17.8)

5.   The noun   —"all, every, each" is in construct to the noun that it modifies. Its construct form is   (with or without *maqqef*):

>   *all* the people of the land (2 Kgs 11.20)

82

to *all* the king's sons and to the leaders of the army
(1 Kg 1.25)

6.   Since the entire chain cumulatively modifies the first word, *only the first word* in a construct chain can
      be the subject, object, or indirect object of a clause, or the object of a preposition. This will become
      increasingly clear as you read more Hebrew.

9.2   THE "POSSESSIVE" *LAMED*

A CONSTRUCT CHAIN is either entirely definite ("*the* servant of *the* king", "*the* city of *David*") or entirely
indefinite ("*a* servant of *a* king"). To show possession when the owner is specific but the thing possessed is
not ("*a* servant of *the* king", "*a* prophet of *YHWH*"), Hebrew prefixes the preposition   (cf. §7.1) to the
"owner". The context determines whether the construction is a phrase "a X of Y" ("Y's X") or clause ("Y
has/had an X").

> *a* prophet *of YHWH* (1 Kgs 18.22)
>
> *a* psalm *of David* (e.g., Ps 3.1)
>
> Now Rebeccah had *a* brother (Gn 24.29)
>
> Now Naomi had *a* relative by [*or* of] her husband (Ru 2.1)

9.3   CONCEPTS

absolute	attributive; attribution	modification; to modify	possessive	state
adjectival	construct (chain)	objective	relationship	subjective

9.4   VOCABULARY

prophet	.123	*love, like; desire* (cf. Amnon, 2 Sam 13)	.114
inheritance, property	.124	(f.) *mother; ancestress*	.115
young man (upper class)	.125	*gather, take in*	.116
guilt, trespass, sin [49]	.126	*chest, box; ark* (of the covenant)	.117
inward part	.127	*garment, clothing*	.118
inside, within		*morning*	.119
foot, leg	.128	*glory, honor, wealth*	.120
peace, health, welfare	.129	*camp, army*	.121
teaching, instruction (trad., "law")	.130	*messenger* (, Malachi, "my messenger"); *angel*	.122

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[49] The Masoretes pointed this word with what looks like two consecutive vowels. It is pronounced, however, as though a *waw*
preceded the *holem*: `a · w n (i.e., as though it were spelled   ).

83

9.5   Exercises

Please gloss these phrases and clauses, parsing the verbal forms, and identifying any construct chains. Use the "rules" for glossing the construct (Lesson 5):
1. Words in construct are indicated by '-of' as the last element in their English word-group.
2. All elements of a construct are visually linked by em-dashes (i.e., *the-house-of – the-king*).
3. Words that are construct to a definite form are represented with the definite article 'the'.

.i	.e	.a
.j	.f	.b
.k	.g	.c
.l	.h	.d

Josh 10.6; Gibeon, Joshua   .a

Ex 10.7;   *to him*   ...   .b

Gn 46.19; Rachel, Jacob, Joseph, Benjamin   .c

Ex 24.8;   *here is*   .d

1 Kgs 14.19;   *rest of*;   *are written*; note the possessive near the end; Jeroboam, Israel   .e

Ex 6.25;   *these* [*are*];   *according to*; (name);   - *their* (3mp); Levites   .f

2 Kgs 14.16;   *his fathers*; *and he was buried*;   *his son*;   *in his place*; Jehoash, Samaria, Jeroboam   .g

Josh 13:23;   *and it was* (3ms Q Pr ,); Reuben, Jordan   .h

Gn 16.7;   *find*; Hagar   .i

1 Sam 4.4;   *to Shiloh*;   *they took*; *there* (+)   .j

Nu 3.21;   *these* [*are*]; Gershonites   .k

84

9.6   ENRICHMENT: SEMANTIC CLUSTERS

You have now learned enough Hebrew words that you will begin to find it helpful to group and learn words by their *semantic domain*—their shared "area of reference". Here are few examples, taken from the vocabulary in Lessons 2-9 (numbers are the number of the lesson):

Human relationships (family)		Human relationships/rôles (society)	
father; *male ancestor*	2	*lord, master*	4
brother, male relative	3	*humanity, humankind, man*; *Adam*	3
man, husband; *each*	2	*enemy*	6
(f.) *mother*; *ancestress*	9	*people* [group], *nation, folk*	3
woman, wife	2	*priest*	2
women, wives		*king, monarch*	2
son, male descendant	2	*messenger*; *angel*	9
daughter, female descendant	6	*rule, reign*	5
daughters		*servant, slave*	2
clan, extended family	3	*official, leader, ruler*	5

Parts/Aspects of the Body/Person		Terms that Refer to Deity	
heart	2	(*my*) [divine] *Lord, Master*	4
(f.) *life, self*	2	*god, God*	2
eye [water-source, well]	3	*gods, God*	
face, presence	3	*YHWH* (proper name)	4
head, top, peak	4	*Yah* (proper name)	
voice, sound	5		
(f.) *breath, wind, spirit*	5		
(II) *nose, nostril*; *anger* (n.)	6		
foot, leg	9		

Seeing how terms are related to each other will help you remember their gloss(es), since you will learn them according to their semantic function, rather than merely in isolation. As you learn more words, a semantic "map" will also help you realize the [sometimes slight] differences between apparent synonyms, although this often comes only by studying the occurrences of a pair (or set) of closely related words to see how each one is used.