

Chapter 23a – Sentence Syntax

Normal Word Order in a Verbal Sentence

In Hebrew, normal word order for a verbal sentence is
verb (v) - subject (s) - object (o).

O **S** **V**
וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת-נֹחַ
(And) God remembered Noah.
(Gen 8:1)

O **S** **V**
וַיַּחְלֵם יוֹסֵף חֲלֹם
(And) Joseph dreamed a dream.
(Gen 37:5)

O **S** **V**
וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל
(And) Moses called to all Israel.
(Ex 24:16)



Chapter 23b – Sentence Syntax

Syntax of the Hebrew Verb: Part 1

In the syntax of a verbal sentence, the verb is normally at the beginning of the sentence.

וַיִּקָּם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם

(And) a new king **arose** over Egypt.

(Ex 1:8)

בְּטַחַתִּי בְּחֶסֶד-אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד

I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.

(Ps 52:10 [English 52:8])

שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה שִׁיר חָדָשׁ

Sing to Yahweh a new song.

(Ps 96:1)



Chapter 23c – Sentence Syntax

Syntax of the Verb: Part 2

In a verbal sentence, the verb may be preceded by an adverb of time, an adverbial phrase, הִנֵּה (behold), a temporal modifier (וַיְהִי or וַהֲיֶה), an expression that provides context or circumstantial information, an independent personal pronoun or a negative particle.

עַתָּה יֵדַעְתִּי כִּי־גָדוֹל יְהוָה מִכָּל־הָאֱלֹהִים

Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all gods (Ex 18:11).

אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם

After these things, the word of Yahweh came (was) to Abram (Gen 15:1).

וְהִנֵּה נָפְלוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בַחֶרֶב

And *behold*, our fathers have fallen by the sword (2 Chr 29:9).

וַיְהִי בְהִיּוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל־הַבֵּל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ

When they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother and he killed him (Gen 4:8).

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים

And *you* will be to me a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:6).



Chapter 23d – Sentence Syntax

Syntax of the Subject: Part 1

In the syntax of a verbal sentence, the verb is normally followed immediately by its subject if one is specified.

וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחָשׁ אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה

The *serpent* said to the woman.
(Gen 3:4)

וַיִּשְׁכֵּן כְּבוֹד-יְהוָה עַל-הַר סִינַי

The *glory of Yahweh* dwelt upon Mount Sinai.
(Ex 24:16)



Chapter 23e – Sentence Syntax

Syntax of the Subject: Part 2

In a verbal sentence, the verb may be preceded by its subject to emphasize that subject, though there are other reasons for this type of variation.

יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד

Yahweh will reign forever and ever.
(Ex 15:18)

וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים

And *Moses* went up to God.
(Ex 19:3)

וְנֹחַ מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה

And *Noah* found favor in the eyes of *Yahweh*.
(Gen 6:8)



Chapter 23f – Sentence Syntax

Syntax of the Object: Indirect Object

The indirect object is the person or thing that is indirectly affected by the action of the verb. It is usually marked with either the preposition לְ (to, for) or אֶל- (to, for) and may either precede or follow the direct object (if any).

יִדְעֵתִי כִּי־נָתַן יְהוָה לְכֶם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ

I know that Yahweh has given *to you* the land.
(Josh 2:9)

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל

(And) Moses called *to all Israel*.
(Deut 5:1)



Chapter 23g – Sentence Syntax

Syntax of the Object: Direct Object

A direct object will frequently stand immediately after the verb or its subject (if any). It may either precede or follow an indirect object.

בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

God created *the heavens* and *the earth*.

(Gen 1:1)

The verb may be preceded by its object to emphasize that object, though there are other reasons for this syntax.

אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא

Yahweh your God you shall fear.

(Deut 10:20)



Chapter 23h – Sentence Syntax

Conditional Sentences in Hebrew

A conditional sentence consists of two clauses. The first clause states the condition and is called the *protasis* (“if-clause”). The second clause states the consequence of the condition and it is called the *apodosis* (“then-clause”). The protasis will often begin with **אם** (if) but it may also begin with **כִּי**, **הִן** or **אֲשֶׁר** followed by a Perfect, Imperfect or Participle.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ בָּרַק
אִם-תֵּלְכִי עִמִּי וְהֵלַכְתִּי
וְאִם-לֹא תֵלְכִי עִמִּי לֹא אֵלֶךְ.

Barak said to her, “**If** you will go with me, **then** I will go; **but if** you will not go with me, **(then)** I will not go.”
(Judg 4:8)

Condition (Protasis)

“if (**אם**) you will go”

“but if (**וְאִם**) you will not go”

Consequence (Apodosis)

“then (**וְ**) I will go”

“(then) I will not go”



Chapter 23i – Sentence Syntax

Hebrew Adverbs

An adverb is a word that is used to modify, describe, limit or qualify a verb, adjective or another adverb. Adverbs are generally divided into four categories: adverbs of time (then, now), place (here, there), degree (very, extremely) and manner (swiftly, gently).

— *Adverb of Time* —

עַתָּה יִדְעָתִי כִּי־יִרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶתָּה

Now I know that you fear God (Gen 22:12).

— *Adverb of Place* —

וַיִּשֶׂם שָׁם אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצַר

And he placed *there* the man whom he had formed (Gen 2:8).

— *Adverb of Degree* —

עֵינַי תָּמִיד אֶל־יְהוָה

My eyes are *continually* on the Lord (Ps 25:15).

— *Adverb of Manner* —

וַיָּבֹא אֲלֵיהֶם יְהוֹשֻׁעַ פְּתָאִם

And Joshua came upon them *suddenly* (Josh 10:9).



Chapter 23j – Sentence Syntax

Disjunctive Waw: Introduction

A **conjunctive Waw** is usually *prefixed to a verb* and links clauses sequentially, temporally, logically and often consequentially.

A **disjunctive Waw** is *prefixed to a non-verbal form* and is non-sequential, that is, it introduces some kind of a break or interruption in the narrative. The disjunctive Waw may be used in a number of different ways. Four of the major uses are:
(1) parenthetical, (2) circumstantial,
(3) contrastive and (4) introductory.



Chapter 23k – Sentence Syntax

Disjunctive Waw: (1) Parenthetical Use

In this use, the disjunctive clause interrupts the narrative flow in order to provide some *explanatory information* that is important for understanding the narrative.

וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ כִּי שָׁמַעַ יוֹסֵף
כִּי הָמַלִּיץ בֵּינֵיהֶם

Now they did not know that Joseph was understanding them because there was an interpreter between them.
(Gen 42:23)

The disjunctive Waw on the independent personal pronoun (וְהֵם) introduces a parenthetical comment that explains why Joseph's brothers spoke openly with one another.



Chapter 23I – Sentence Syntax

Disjunctive Waw: (2) Circumstantial Use

In this use, the disjunctive clause introduces or identifies *circumstantial information that relates to the main action of the narrative*. These disjunctive clauses are often helpful for understanding or visualizing the action of the narrative.

וַיְהִי כִּהְיוֹם הַזֶּה וַיָּבֹא הַבַּיְתָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכְתּוֹ
וְאֵין אִישׁ מֵאֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת שָׁם בַּבַּיִת

(And) one day, he went into the house to do his work *and* none of the household servants were there in the house.

(Gen 39:11)

The disjunctive Waw on וְאֵין (וַיְאֵין) introduces a circumstantial comment that is important by way of setting up the attempted seduction of Joseph by Potiphar's wife.



Chapter 23m – Sentence Syntax

Disjunctive Waw: (3) Contrastive Use

In this use, the disjunctive Waw introduces a *contrastive idea* and is often translated as “but.”

וַיִּשַׁע יְהוָה אֶל-הֶבֶל וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ
וְאֶל-קַיִן וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה

The Lord looked favorably on Abel and his offering *but* on Cain and his offering he did not look favorably (Gen 4:4b-5a).

The disjunctive Waw on אֶל-קַיִן (וְאֶל-קַיִן!) contrasts the Lord’s response to the two men and their offerings.



Chapter 23n – Sentence Syntax

Disjunctive Waw: (4) Introductory Use

In this use, the disjunctive Waw may *begin a new narrative* or *introduce a new idea or theme* within a narrative.

וְהַנְּחָשׁ הָיָה עָרוּם מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the creatures that the Lord God had made (Gen 3:1).

The disjunctive Waw on **וְהַנְּחָשׁ** (**וְהַנְּחָשׁ**) introduces the temptation narrative of Adam and Eve.

