

BBH Workbook p. 32 #5
(Job 42:15)

נְשִׁים יְפוֹת

נְשִׁים

נְשִׁים is the irregular plural of the feminine noun אִשָּׁה, "woman."

MORPHOLOGY

Remember that most masculine nouns are made plural by the addition of יִם to the singular form. Some feminine nouns, however (e.g., אִשָּׁה), are also made plural in this way.

אִשָּׁה, "woman," is an irregular plural in two senses. First, as we have noted, אִשָּׁה is made plural by the addition of the typically masculine plural ending יִם. Second, the base of the plural form (נְשִׁים) differs from that of the singular form (אִשָּׁה).

יְפוֹת

יְפֹתִים is the feminine plural form of the adjective יְפֵה, “beautiful.”

יְפֹתִים modifies the noun נְשִׁים. Though נְשִׁים and יְפֹתִים differ with respect to their endings, they agree in gender (feminine) and number (plural).

MORPHOLOGY

Whereas a plural noun ending in םִי may be either masculine or feminine (though it is usually the former) and a plural noun ending in ותִּי may be either masculine or feminine (though it is usually the latter), *all adjectives* which end in םִי are masculine plural and *all adjectives* which end in ותִּי are feminine plural.

Similarly, all adjectives which end in תִּי are feminine singular. Masculine singular adjectives do not take an inflectional ending.

We may summarize the previous remarks by saying that the gender and number of any Hebrew adjective can be determined by observing the adjective’s ending (or lack thereof).

MORPHOLOGY

When inflectional endings (such as וֹת) are added to adjectives ending in the vowel letter Seghol He (הֶ), the Seghol He drops off.

We have remarked that the adjective יְפוֹת is modifying the noun נְשִׁים. Remember that an adjective can modify a noun either attributively or predicatively. (If an adjective is acting substantively, it is not modifying a noun but rather functioning as one itself.) How is יְפוֹת modifying נְשִׁים here?

Because neither נְשִׁים nor יְפוֹת is articular, it will take a bit of thought to determine whether יְפוֹת is attributive or predicative. In order to help us, let's look at a few constructions similar to but different from יְפוֹת נְשִׁים.

Similar Construction #1: הַנְּשִׁים הַיְפוֹת

Here יְפוֹת

- (a) follows נְשִׁים, and
- (b) agrees with נְשִׁים in gender, number, and definiteness.

These data tell us that יְפוֹת is attributive. הַנְּשִׁים הַיְפוֹת means "the beautiful women."

Similar Construction #2: הַנְּשִׂיִם יְפוֹת

In this case יְפוֹת

- (a) follows הַנְּשִׂיִם, and
- (b) agrees with הַנְּשִׂיִם in gender and number but not in definiteness.

יְפוֹת is therefore predicative. הַנְּשִׂיִם יְפוֹת means “the women are (or, were) beautiful.”

We know that the indefinite adjective יְפוֹת is predicative here because it disagrees in definiteness with the definite noun הַנְּשִׂיִם. (Note, however, that a predicate adjective is *always* indefinite; thus if a predicate adjective is modifying an indefinite noun, the two will agree in indefiniteness.)

GRAMMAR

A predicate adjective – unlike an attributive adjective – may either precede or follow the noun it modifies. Thus הַנְּשִׂיִם יְפוֹת and יְפוֹת הַנְּשִׂיִם are both acceptable ways of saying “the women are/were beautiful.”

Our Construction: נְשִׂיִם יְפוֹת – Two Possibilities

In the expression יְפֹת־נָשִׁים יְפֹת־, the adjective יְפֹת־

- (a) follows נָשִׁים־, and
- (b) agrees with נָשִׁים־ in gender, number, and indefiniteness.

In יְפֹת־נָשִׁים יְפֹת־, the adjective יְפֹת־ could be **attributive** (in which case יְפֹת־נָשִׁים יְפֹת־ would mean “beautiful women”) because an attributive adjective always

- (a) follows the noun it modifies, and
- (b) agrees with it in gender, number, and definiteness (or indefiniteness).

On the other hand, in יְפֹת־נָשִׁים יְפֹת־, the adjective יְפֹת־ could be **predicative** (in which case יְפֹת־נָשִׁים יְפֹת־ would mean “women are/were beautiful”) because a predicative adjective

- (a) can follow the noun it modifies, and
- (b) is always indefinite (and thus it will agree in indefiniteness with the noun it modifies if that noun is indefinite).

Final Translation

either

beautiful women

or

women are/were beautiful

Whether יָפֹת־ is functioning attributively or predicatively in Job 42:15 may be discovered by examining the surrounding words in that verse.