

BBH Workbook p. 33 #6
(Ps 25:8)

טוֹב־וַיִּשָׁר יְהוָה

טוֹב

טוֹב is a masculine singular adjective meaning “good.” To determine its function in the present sentence, we must keep reading.

וַיִּשָׁר

וַיִּשָׁר consists of

- the conjunction Waw
- the masculine singular adjective וַיִּשָׁר, “upright, just”

To determine the function of וַיִּשָׁר in the present sentence, we must again keep reading.

יְהוָה

The proper noun יהוה is usually transliterated “Yahweh” or translated “the Lord.” Like טוב and ישר, יהוה is masculine singular.

Excursus: Three Kinds of Adjectival Function

Because טוב, ישר, and יהוה are all masculine singular, we can deduce that the adjectives טוב and ישר are in some way modifying the noun יהוה.

Adjectives can function in any of three ways: substantively, attributively, and predicatively.

A **substantive adjective** is usually (but not always, especially in poetry) articular and does not modify a noun; rather, it itself acts as a noun. The following adjectives are functioning substantively:

הטוב והישר	the good and the right	(Deut 12:28)
	(i.e., what is good and what is right)	

היפה	the beautiful one	(Song 1:8)
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העצל	the lazy person	(Prov 10:26)
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In our sentence, טוב and ישר are modifying a noun (יהוה); thus they cannot be functioning substantively.

An **attributive adjective** agrees in definiteness or indefiniteness with and always follows the noun it modifies. The adjectives in the following phrases are functioning attributively:

הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה	the good land	(Deut 1:35)
רָעָה גְדוֹלָה	great calamity	(Dan 9:12)
צֶמַח צְדִיק	a righteous branch	(Jer 23:5)
גּוֹי גְדוֹל עֲצוּם וְרַב	a great, mighty, and numerous nation	(Deut 26:5)

A **predicate adjective** never takes the article. It therefore

- agrees in indefiniteness with the noun it modifies if that noun is indefinite; e.g.,

רַחֲמֵי רְשָׁעִים	the compassion of the
אֲכֹזֵרִי	wicked is cruel
	(Prov 12:10)

- disagrees in definiteness with the noun it modifies if that noun is definite; e.g.,

זָקֵן הָאִישׁ	the man was old
	(1 Sam 4:18)

A predicate adjective may precede or follow the noun (or, as in the following cases, the pronoun) it modifies. For example,

טָמֵא הוּא	it is unclean	(Lev 11:4)
הוּא חָכֵם	he is wise	(Isa 31:2)

Summary: טוב־ויִשָׁר יִהְיֶה

In the sentence טוב־ויִשָׁר יִהְיֶה, the adjectives טוב and יִשָׁר

- (a) precede the noun they modify, יִהְיֶה, and
- (b) disagree in definiteness with יִהְיֶה, which is a proper noun and is therefore definite.

Either one of these facts is enough to tell us that טוב and יִשָׁר are not functioning attributively, but predicatively.

Predicate adjectives may either precede or follow the noun. In our sentence, טוב and יִשָׁר happen to precede יִהְיֶה, though they might have followed (i.e., טוב־ויִשָׁר יִהְיֶה expresses the same basic thought as יִהְיֶה טוב־ויִשָׁר).

GRAMMAR

One way Hebrew expresses a predicate relationship is by placing an adjective next to a noun. In English we usually

indicate such a relationship by linking a noun and an adjective with a verb that denotes a state of being: e.g.,

glass *is* translucent

the clouds *look* dark

she *seems* delightful

In our translation of טוב־וַיֵּשֶׁר יְהוָה, we must therefore supply a form of the linking verb *to be*. Context tells us that *is*, the present indicative 3ms form, is appropriate.

Final Translation

Yahweh is good and right.

or

Good and right is Yahweh.