

BBH Workbook p. 38 #11
(Josh 24:17)

הַאֲתוֹת הַגְּדִלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה

The morphology of the words in this example is relatively straightforward.

הַאֲתוֹת

הַאֲתוֹת, "(the) signs," consists of

- the definite article (הַ)
- אֲתוֹת, the plural of the noun אוֹת, "sign"

MORPHOLOGY

In the Bible, the Holem Waw of אוֹת is always spelled defectively (as Holem) when the noun is plural. That is, the plural form is always אֲתוֹת and never *אוֹתוֹת.

GRAMMAR

אוֹת in the present verse takes the plural ending וֹת (as opposed to יִם) because it is a feminine noun.

MORPHOLOGY

When the definite article is prefixed to **אֵתוֹת**, the Daghesh Forte of the article is rejected by the Alef of **אֵתוֹת**, and the Pathach of the article lengthens to Qamets in compensation.

הַגְּדֹלוֹת

הַגְּדֹלוֹת, "great," consists of

- the definite article
- **גְּדֹלוֹת**, the feminine plural form of the adjective **גָּדוֹל**, "great"

MORPHOLOGY

When the feminine plural suffix **וֹת** is added to **גָּדוֹל**, the syllable **גְּ** changes from a pretonic syllable (**גְּדוֹל**) to a propretonic syllable (**גְּדוֹלוֹת**). When this happens, the Qamets under the Gimel reduces to (Vocal) Shewa.

GRAMMAR

The adjective **הַגְּדֹלוֹת** follows the noun **הָאֵתוֹת** and agrees with it in gender (fem.), number (pl.), and definiteness (both have the article). **הַגְּדֹלוֹת** is therefore an attributive adjective modifying **הָאֵתוֹת**.

Recall that הַגְּדִלּוֹת cannot be substantive in the present verse because it modifies a noun. In addition, הַגְּדִלּוֹת cannot be predicative in the present verse because, like the noun it modifies (הָאֲתוֹת), it is definite.

הָאֵלֶּה

הָאֵלֶּה, “these,” consists of

- the definite article
- אֵלֶּה, the plural demonstrative which refers to things nearby, or in close proximity

(With אֵלֶּה we may contrast הֵם/הֵמָּה, “those (m.),” and הֵן/הֵנָּה, “those (f.),” which are demonstratives referring to things in distant proximity.)

MORPHOLOGY

אֵלֶּה has common gender; that is, its form remains the same whether it refers to masculine or feminine nouns.

MORPHOLOGY

When the definite article is prefixed to אֵלֶּה, the Alef rejects the Daghesh Forte of the article, and the Pathach of the article lengthens to Qamets in compensation:

הַ + אֵלֶּה → הָאֵלֶּה

הָאֵלֶּה follows הָאֲתוֹת and agrees with it in gender (fem.), number (pl.), and definiteness (both have the article). The demonstrative אֵלֶּה is therefore functioning as an adjective.

GRAMMAR

Whereas in Hebrew a demonstrative adjective always follows the noun it modifies (e.g., הָאֲתוֹת הָאֵלֶּה), in English a demonstrative adjective precedes the noun it modifies (e.g., “these signs”).

GRAMMAR

The English demonstrative adjective replaces an article (e.g., “the signs” → “these signs”). The Hebrew demonstrative adjective, on the other hand, almost always has a definite article prefixed to it (e.g., הָאֲתוֹת הָאֵלֶּה).

Excursus: Syntax

Our present phrase consists of three words:

הָאֲתוֹת	(the) signs
הַגְּדֹלוֹת	great
הָאֵלֶּה	these

Note the Hebrew order:

הָאֵלֶּה	הַגְּדֹלוֹת	הָאֲתוֹת
DEMONSTRATIVE ADJ.	ATTRIBUTIVE ADJ.	NOUN

In Hebrew, if a noun is modified by several adjectives and one of these adjectives is a demonstrative, the demonstrative adjective comes last, after the other adjective(s).

Moreover, when in Hebrew a noun is modified by any number of attributive adjectives, the noun precedes the adjective(s).

Consider, for example:

הַשָּׁנִים הַטֹּבֹת הַבָּאִת הָאֵלֶּה
these good years which are coming
Heb. order: (the) years – good – which are coming – these
(Gen 41:35)

Notice that in the Hebrew phrase above, the demonstrative (הָאֵלֶּה) comes last, whereas in the English translation the demonstrative comes first (“these”).

Final Translation

these great signs