

BBH Workbook p. 126 #1

(Gen 12:10)

וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ נִינְוֶה וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצֹּרְיִמָּה לְגֹזֵר שָׁם
כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ

וַיְהִי

וַיְהִי, “now (or, and) there was,” is the Qal Imperfect 3ms of הָיָה with Waw Conversive.

MORPHOLOGY

When Waw Conversive (וַיְ) is prefixed to the Imperfect form הָיָה, the He at the end of הָיָה drops off (as is typical of III-ה verbs). The loss of the He causes the preceding vowels to change. Thus the form to which the Waw Conversive is prefixed ends up being וַיְהִי.

When וַיְ is prefixed to הָיָה, the Daghesth Forte of the Waw Conversive disappears, yielding וַיְהִי.

Note that, like the Daghesth Forte of Waw Conversive, the Daghesth Forte of the definite article (הַ) often disappears when it is added to words beginning with either הַ or הַ. E.g.,

תִּלְדִּים + הַ → תִּלְדִּים
מִבְּשָׂר + הַ → מִבְּשָׂר

TRANSLATION

Because Gen 12:10 begins a new narrative section, “now there was” is, in addition to “and there was,” an appropriate translation for וַיְהִי.

רָעָב

The masculine noun רָעָב means “famine.”

TRANSLATION

וַיְהִי often acts as a “temporal modifier” which introduces past-tense narrative. As such it may be left untranslated or rendered “and it came about that.” When וַיְהִי acts as a temporal modifier, it has no explicit subject.

In Gen 12:10, the subject of וַיְהִי is the following noun, רָעָב, “famine.” וַיְהִי here is not therefore acting as a temporal modifier.

וַיְהִי רָעָב may be translated “now there was a famine.”

בְּאֶרֶץ

The prepositional phrase בְּאֶרֶץ, “in the land,” consists of

- the preposition בְּ, “to”
- the definite article
- the feminine noun אֶרֶץ, “land”

MORPHOLOGY

When the definite article is prefixed to אֶרֶץ, the Alef rejects the Daghesh Forte of the article and the Pathach of the article lengthens to Qamets in compensation. Additionally, the first Seghol of אֶרֶץ becomes Qamets: הָאֶרֶץ.

When the preposition בְּ is prefixed to הָאֶרֶץ, the Bet of the preposition replaces the He of the article, yielding בְּאֶרֶץ.

Summary: וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ

Now there was a famine in the land.

וַיָּרֶד אֲבָרָם

וַיֵּרֶד, “and (he) went down,” is the Qal Imperfect 3ms of יָרַד with Waw Conversive.

אַבְרָם, “Abram,” is the subject of וַיֵּרֶד.

MORPHOLOGY

The Qal Imperfect 3ms of יָרַד is יֵרֵד. When Waw Conversive is prefixed to יֵרֵד, the accent moves back a syllable, yielding וַיֵּרֶד.

The final syllable of וַיֵּרֶד (which in יָרַד was accented) is a closed unaccented syllable: רֶד. Because a closed unaccented syllable must take a short vowel, the Tseré in the final syllable of יָרַד shortens to Seghol in וַיֵּרֶד.

TRANSLATION

Because Abram’s going down to Egypt is a consequence of the famine in the land, we might translate וַיֵּרֶד “so he went down.”

מִצְרַיִם

מִצְרַיִם, “to Egypt,” consists of

- the proper noun מִצְרַיִם, “Egypt”
- the directional He ending הָ, “to”

לָגוּר

A footnote indicates that the verbal form לָגוּר may be translated “to sojourn.”

שָׁם

The adverb שָׁם means “there.”

Summary: וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצְרַיִם לָגוּר שָׁם

Now there was a famine in the land, so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there.

כִּי

כִּי introduces the final clause of Gen 12:10. כִּי has a number of functions and possible translation values; here it is a conjunction equivalent to English “for” or “because.”

GRAMMAR

Remember that the English word “for” is (a) sometimes a conjunction meaning “because” or “since,” and (b) sometimes a preposition:

(a) “FOR” AS CONJUNCTION

for we are brothers

(Gen 13:8)

for I have spoken

(Ezek 28:10)

for the people will not eat until he comes

(1 Sam 9:13)

(b) “FOR” AS PREPOSITION

the Lord is a refuge **for** the oppressed

(Ps 9:9 [10])

an ordinance **for** you and your children

(Exod 12:24)

that they might be . . . for renown, for praise, and for glory

(Jer 13:11)

Note that in the examples under (a) above the Hebrew word behind each “for” is כִּי, whereas in the examples under (b) the Hebrew word behind each “for” is לְ.

כָּבֵד

The form כָּבֵד is ambiguous. It might be either

- (1) the Qal Perfect 3ms of כָּבַד, meaning “(it) was heavy, severe”
- (2) a ms adjective meaning “heavy, severe”

If כָּבֵד is (1) above, כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ is a verbal clause:

for	the famine	was severe	in the land
	SUBJECT	VERB	PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

If כָּבֵד is (2) above, כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ is a verbless clause:

for	the famine	(was) severe	in the land
	SUBJECT	ADJECTIVE	PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

In the latter case, the verb “was” must be supplied based on the context.

MORPHOLOGY

The Kaf of כָּבֵד has no Daghesh Lene because the preceding word ends in a vowel:

כִּי-כָבֵד

הָרָעָב

הָרָעָב, “the famine,” consists of

- the definite article
- the masculine noun רָעָב, “famine”

בְּאֶרֶץ

The prepositional phrase בְּאֶרֶץ, “in the land,” consists of

- the preposition בְּ, “in”
- the definite article
- the feminine noun אֶרֶץ, “land”

MORPHOLOGY

When the definite article is prefixed to אֶרֶץ, the Alef rejects the Daghesh Forte of the article and the Pathach of the article lengthens to Qamets in compensation. Additionally, the first Seghol of אֶרֶץ becomes Qamets: הָאֶרֶץ.

When the preposition בְּ is prefixed to הָאֶרֶץ, the Bet of the preposition replaces the He of the article, yielding בְּאֶרֶץ.

Final Translation

Now there was a famine in the land, and (or, so) Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.