

# Biblical Parallels and Biblical Hebrew Syntax

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Biblical parallels exhibit variations in spelling, content, vocabulary, and syntax.<sup>2</sup> The main interest of this paper is syntactic variants. Their investigation contributes to the understanding of Biblical Hebrew syntax in particular and syntactic structures in general. Syntactic parallel variations are especially interesting from a linguistic point of view, because the linguistic differences and similarities are not just a consequence of interpretation but are visible in the texts. In these instances a language speaks for itself.

The following are selected syntactic variations that occur in biblical parallels: alternation in verb conjugations, alternation between absolute infinitive and imperative, distinct word order patterns, relative clauses versus participles, interchange between particles, active versus passive, predicate versus object status for a third member of an existential clause, and negative versus rhetorical question.

The following sections demonstrate and discuss each of these types of variation, and suggest Biblical Hebrew and general syntax perspectives.

## 2 Alternation in verb conjugations

In Biblical Hebrew linguistics the use of tenses is still considered one of the most complicated issues. New works on this topic continue to be published, but a final satisfactory explanation that answers all problems is still missing.<sup>3</sup> The exact relationship between the use of Biblical Hebrew tenses and word order, though it undoubtedly exists, is also still a matter of controversy. Whether Biblical Hebrew word order demands a certain type of verb, or whether a certain type of verb demands a specific word order, seems akin to the chicken or the egg question, and a final answer is not yet available. How does Biblical Hebrew speak for itself on this matter?

The following is a long list of pairs of Biblical Hebrew parallel verses of which one includes a suffix and the other a prefix conjugation verb. The majority of these instances clearly show that though the context is evidently similar, when a noun, a

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<sup>2</sup> For collecting the parallels I have used Bendavid 1972. The English translation of biblical verses is based on *RSV*.

<sup>3</sup> A selection of recent works on this topic is as follows: McFall 1982, Rainey 1986, 1990, Niccacci 1990, Hendel 1996, Hataf 1997, Goldfajn 1998, Cook 2001.



noun phrase, or a prepositional phrase initiates a clause, a suffix conjugation verb is in use for expressing past. When a verb initiates a clause it is usually a prefix conjugation verb prefixed by a consecutive *wāw* that expresses the past. Though this observation is not new,<sup>4</sup> it should be noted that the context of each two Biblical Hebrew parallels is identical, and that there was evidently no contextual trigger that forced one type of verb or one word order on the other. Moreover, earlier versus later biblical instances show no preference for any of the word orders, a fact that negates the possibility of relating a certain word order to a particular language period. One is bound to admit that at least in these cases the suffix verbs and the prefix conjugation verbs prefixed by a consecutive *wāw* are free variants in terms of aspect and tense, and are chosen for employment only according to word order, namely, preceding or following a noun, a noun phrase, or a prepositional phrase.<sup>5</sup>

Pairs of parallel instances demonstrating these variations follow, and the verbs, nouns, noun phrases, or prepositional phrases relevant to this argument within them are set in bold>.

1.
  - i. 2 Sam. 5:5 – **בְּחֶבְרוֹן מָלַךְ עַל-יְהוּדָה שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וְשֵׁשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים וּבִירוּשָׁלַם מָלַךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים –** “At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.”
  - ii. 1 Chron. 3:4 – **שֵׁשָׁה נִוְלְדָּלוּ בְּחֶבְרוֹן וַיִּמְלֹךְ-שָׁם שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וְשֵׁשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים וּשְׁלֹשִׁים –** “Six were born to him in Hebron, where he reigned for seven years and six months. And he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem.”
2.
  - i. 2 Sam. 24:4 – **וַיִּתְחַזַּק דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל-יֹאבָב –** “But the king’s word prevailed against Jo’ab”
  - ii. 1 Chron. 21:4 – **וַיִּדְבַּר-הַמֶּלֶךְ חֲזָק עַל-יֹאבָב –** “But the king’s word prevailed against Jo’ab.”
3.
  - i. 1 Kgs. 5:1 – **וּשְׁלֹמֹה הִנִּיחַ מוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל-הַמְּמַלְכוֹת מִן-הַנְּהָר –** “Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphra’tes...”
  - ii. 2 Chron. 9:26 – **וַיְהִי מוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל-הַמְּלָכִים מִן-הַנְּהָר –** “And he ruled over all the kings from the Euphra’tes.”

<sup>4</sup> See Kropat 1909:25, §8. I would like to thank Ronald Hendel for mentioning this reference to me.

<sup>5</sup> Language variation usually has a reason, and one should always look for diversity in meaning among language variants, as adequately expressed by Jenni regarding Biblical Hebrew (Jenni 2002. I thank Prof. T. Muraoka for this reference). However, the case is different when variants occur not just in resembling contexts but in exact parallel texts, which share the same contents.



- 4.
- i. 1 Kgs. 8:64 – “The same day the king consecrated the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD.”
  - ii. 2 Chron. 7:7 – “And Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD.”
- 5.
- i. 2 Kgs. 8:27 – “He also walked in the way of the house of Ahab.”
  - ii. 2 Chron. 22:3 – “He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab.”
- 6.
- i. 2 Kgs. 16:3 – “He even burned his son as an offering, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.”
  - ii. 2 Chron. 28:3 – “... and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominable practices of the nations ...”
- 7.
- i. 2 Kgs. 16:5 – “Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remali’ah, king of Israel, came up to wage war on Jerusalem.”<sup>6</sup>
  - ii. Isa. 7:1 – “In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzzi’ah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remali’ah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it.”<sup>7</sup>
- 8.
- i. 2 Kgs. 16:7 – “So Ahaz sent messengers to Tig’lath-pile’ser king of Assyria.”
  - ii. 2 Chron. 28:16 – “At that time King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help.”
- 9.
- i. 2 Kgs. 20:4 – “The word of the LORD came to him.”
  - ii. Isa. 38:4 – “Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah.”

Only one pair of instances, 1 below, presents an initial suffix conjugation verb, preceding a noun or a prepositional phrase rather than following it. Only one pair of instances, 2 below, presents a prefix conjugation verb preceded by a prepositional phrase, though its noun subject still follows it. Instance 3 below, which presents a prefix and a suffix conjugation verbs in similar position, exhibits a special structure

<sup>6</sup> On *וַ* introducing a prefix conjugation verb referring to the past, see Kautzsch 1910:314–315, §107c, Joüon 1947:304, §113i, Joüon & Muraoka 1996:369–370, §113i, and Rabinowitz 1984.

<sup>7</sup> In this case a whole clause introduces the suffix conjugation verb.



of an extraposition. Although the exact reason for choosing distinct verbs, either suffix or prefix, for identical word order is not clear in these instances, the verbs themselves are still free variants in terms of aspect and tense, since the context and sequence in which they appear are wholly alike.

1.
  - i. 2 Kgs. 18:36 – וְהִתְרִישׁוּ הָעָם וְלֹא־עָנוּ אֹתוֹ דְבָר – “But the people were silent and answered him not a word.”
  - ii. Isa. 36:21 – וַיִּתְרִישׁוּ וְלֹא־עָנוּ אֹתוֹ דְבָר – “But they were silent and answered him not a word.”
2.
  - i. 1 Kgs. 15:1 – וּבִשְׁנַת שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂרָה לְמֶלֶךְ יִרְבֵּעָם בְּיָרְבֵּעַט מֶלֶךְ אֲבִיָּם עַל־יְהוּדָה – “Now in the eighteenth year of King Jerobo’am the son of Nebat, Abi’jam began to reign over Judah.”
  - ii. 2 Chron. 13:1 – בִּשְׁנַת שְׁמוֹנֶה עָשָׂרָה לְמֶלֶךְ יִרְבֵּעָם נִימְלֵךְ אֲבִיָּה עַל־יְהוּדָה – “In the eighteenth year of King Jerobo’am Abi’jah began to reign over Judah.”
3.
  - i. 1 Kgs. 8:4 – וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־אֲרוֹן ה’ וְאֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּאֵהֶל וַיַּעֲלוּ – “And they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up.”
  - ii. 2 Chron. 5:5 – וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־הָאֲרוֹן וְאֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת־כָּל־כֵּלֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּאֵהֶל הַעֲלוּ – “And they brought up the ark, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up.”

The following are prefix conjugation indicative and imperative verbs followed by another verb expressing consequence or promise by either a prefix conjugation indicative, a lengthened prefix verb, or a suffix verb prefixed by a consecutive *wāw*. Again, the similar modal context revealed in pairs of parallel instances supports the suggestion that at least in these cases the prefix indicative, lengthened prefix, and suffix conjugation verbs play equal modal roles, and can sometimes function as free variants. However, the chronological explanation is also possible here, since the absolute infinitive, which disappeared in Late Biblical Hebrew, appears here only in an early source, 2 Samuel, and the lengthened prefix conjugation after *wāw* in 1<sup>st</sup> person, which is frequent in Late Biblical Hebrew, appears here in a late source, 1 Chronicles.<sup>8</sup> Suffix verb prefixed by a consecutive *wāw* appears in both early and late texts.

1.
  - i. 2 Sam. 5:19 – וַיִּשְׁאַל דָּוִד בְּה’ לֵאמֹר הֲאֵעֲלֶה אֶל־פְּלִשְׁתִּים הַתְּתַנֵּם בְּרִדִי וַיֹּאמֶר ה’ אֶל־דָּוִד – “And David inquired of the LORD, ‘Shall I

<sup>8</sup> For references on the absolute infinitive disappearance in Late Biblical Hebrew, see §3 below. For the lengthened prefix conjugation after *wāw* following an imperative both in Classical and Late Biblical Hebrew, see Waltke & O’Connor 1990:577–578, §34.6. Note that the functions of this form are expanded in Late Biblical Hebrew (Waltke & O’Connor 1990:544, §33.1.1, especially note 2, 576–577, §34.5.3).



go up against the Philistines? Wilt thou give them into my hand?' And the LORD said to David, 'Go up; for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.'"

Verb sequence: prefix indicative + prefix indicative, imperative + prefix indicative

- ii. 1 Chron. 14:10 – וַיִּשְׁאַל דָּוִד בַּאֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר הֲאֶעֱלֶה עַל־פְּלִשְׁתִּים פְּלִשְׁתִּים וְנִתְּתִים בְּיָדִי – “And David inquired of God, ‘Shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt thou give them into my hand?’ And the LORD said to him, ‘Go up, and I will give them into your hand.’”

Verb sequence: prefix indicative + suffix following consecutive *wāw*, imperative + suffix following consecutive *wāw*

## 2.

- i. 2 Sam. 24:2 – וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־יֹאבֵב שַׂר־הַחַיִל אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ שׁוֹמְרֵי כָּל־שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִדָּן וְעַד־בְּעֵר שִׁבְעַתְּוָם – “So the king said to Jo’ab and the commanders of the army, who were with him, ‘Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, and number the people, that I may know the number of the people.’”

Verb sequence: 2 imperatives + suffix following consecutive *wāw*

- ii. 1 Chron. 21:2 – וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־יֹאבֵב וְאֶל־שָׂרֵי הָעָם לֵכּוּ סַפְּרוּ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִבְּעֵר שִׁבְעַתְּוָם – “So David said to Jo’ab and the commanders of the army, ‘Go, number Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, and bring me a report, that I may know their number.’”

Verb sequence: 2 imperatives + lengthened prefix following the conjunction *wāw*

### 3 Alternation between absolute infinitive and imperative

While there is no doubt in Biblical Hebrew grammars that absolute infinitives might be used instead of finite verbs, it is still remarkable to see that both absolute infinitives and imperatives appear in parallel pairs expressing identical contents. The existence of such pairs in Biblical Hebrew has been indicated by many scholars. Gesenius mentions a use of an absolute infinitive as an emphatic imperative, e.g., Exod. 20:8, Deut. 5:12,<sup>9</sup> but does not include the parallel instances presented below in his discussion. The parallelism evident in these instances between regular imperatives and absolute infinitives supports a similar interpretation of both rather than suggesting that one is more emphatic than the other. The non-emphatic interpretation of this imperative is also supported by Muraoka.<sup>10</sup> Joüon mentions the two pairs of instances cited below,<sup>11</sup> but differentiates between the use of the absolute infinitive as an equivalent to an imperative, to which he relates the instances below, and its use as

<sup>9</sup> Kautzsch 1910:346, §113bb.

<sup>10</sup> Joüon & Muraoka 1996:429, note 1. Muraoka’s opinion regarding this matter follows the translation of the original note.

<sup>11</sup> Joüon 1947:356, §123u, 356, note 2, and Joüon & Muraoka 1996:429, §123u and 429, note 2.



an equivalent to injunctive future, to be found in Biblical Hebrew laws and commands, including Exod. 20:8, Deut. 5:12.<sup>12</sup>

In any case, such use of a Semitic original form *qatāl-* is known elsewhere in Semitic. Both Gesenius and Joüon refer to the similarity between the Biblical Hebrew absolute infinitive and the Arabic form *qatāli*.<sup>13</sup> Kropat observed that the use of the absolute infinitive in its imperative and injunctive future meaning disappeared in Late Biblical Hebrew, and its replacement by a regular imperative in Chronicles, evident in the first pair of instances below, supports his argument.<sup>14</sup>

1.
  - i. 2 Sam. 24:12 – הָלוּךְ וְדַבַּרְתָּ אֶל-דָּוִד – “Go and say to David.”
  - ii. 1 Chron. 21:10 – לֵךְ וְדַבַּרְתָּ אֶל-דָּוִד – “Go and say to David.”
2.
  - i. 2 Kgs. 20:5 – שׁוּב וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל-הֶחָקְנָהוּ – “Turn back, and say to Hezekiah ...”
  - ii. Isa. 38:5 – הָלוּךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל-הֶחָקְנָהוּ – “Go and say to Hezekiah ...”

#### 4 Distinct word order patterns

Distinct word order patterns were discussed above (§2) in relation to the employment of distinct types of verbs. The following sets of parallel instances present other word order variations which shed light on certain questions related to the functional or logical organization of a clause, to nominal clause word order, etc.

In the following set of three instances the phrase אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה is a logical predicate. The first instance exhibits two clauses. The first clause, בְּן-שָׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה דָּוִד בְּמָלְכוֹ, is a nominal clause in the order of predicate – subject, and its grammatical and logical predicate<sup>15</sup> is בְּן-שָׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה is. The grammatical predicate of the second clause, אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה, is a verb, since it is a verbal clause, and its logical predicate is אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה. Both logical predicates stand in first position. By contrast, in the second and third instances a nominal clause presents a subject – predicate word order, and its gram-

<sup>12</sup> Joüon 1947:356–357, §123u,v, Joüon & Muraoka 1996:429–430, §123u,v. This use of the absolute infinitive is reviewed once more with many references in Waltke & O’Connor 1990:593–594, §35.5.1.

<sup>13</sup> Kautzsch 1910:346, note 2, Joüon 1947:356, note 1, Joüon & Muraoka 1996:429, note 1, Wright 1890:196, and see more references in Waltke & O’Connor 1990:593, note 49.

<sup>14</sup> Kropat 1909:23, §7. See also Eskhult 2000:90, Fassberg 2000:102, Muraoka 2000:195, Smith 2000:260. Note also the use of the absolute infinitive as a finite verb in the Akkadian of El-Amarna in letters from Byblos, which suggests that there were Canaanite or Proto-Hebrew roots to this usage (Moran 1950).

<sup>15</sup> The grammatical predicate and the logical predicate in a nominal clause are actually identical, because in Biblical Hebrew and in most Semitic languages a nominal clause does not contain a verb which should necessarily be interpreted as a grammatical predicate, and its logical predicate is put in a status of a grammatical predicate. For this explanation, see Polotsky 1962:415–416, §2, Goldenberg 1977:127, 1983b, 98, note 3, Zewi 1994:145–146, §1. For various definitions of subject and predicate, see Zewi & van der Merwe 2001. See more approaches to the nominal clause in Biblical Hebrew, see in Miller 1999.



matical and logical predicate, אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה, stands in second position. This variation tells us first that both predicate – subject and subject – predicate word orders are possible in Biblical Hebrew nominal clause. Second, it shows that a predicate – subject word order in a nominal clause might attract a logical predicate in a verbal clause to stand in initial position. Again, these phenomena were previously observed in both nominal and verbal clauses in Biblical Hebrew and other Semitic languages,<sup>16</sup> and this evidence does not change any conclusion but strengthens the previous ones.

2 Sam. 5:4 – בְּשָׁלְשִׁים שָׁנָה דָּוִד בְּמָלְכוֹ אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה מָלַךְ – “David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.”

1 Kgs. 2:11 – וְהַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר מָלַךְ דָּוִד עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה – “And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years.”

1 Chron. 29:27 – וְהַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר מָלַךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה – “The time that he reigned over Israel was forty years.”

Below are pairs of instances in which the word order varies without any apparent reason. The functional or logical interpretation was in these cases probably left to intonation, not rendered in a written text. In certain cases these variants might be explained by consideration of language change and foreign influence. Kropat, for instance, suggests that the subject-object-verb instead of subject-verb-object sequence, revealed in instances 1 and 4 below, is due to Aramaic influence.<sup>17</sup>

1.

2 Sam. 7:20 – וְאַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ – “For thou knowest thy servant.”

1 Chron. 17:18 – וְאַתָּה אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ יָדַעְתָּ – “For thou knowest thy servant.”

2.

2 Sam. 10:9 – וַיִּרְא יוֹאָב כִּי־הִתְחַמָּה אֵלָיו שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְחָמָה מִפְּנֵים וּמֵאָחֹר – “When Jo’ab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear...”

1 Chron. 19:10 – וַיִּרְא יוֹאָב כִּי־הִתְחַמָּה שְׁנֵי־הַמַּלְחָמָה אֵלָיו שְׁנֵים וְאָחֹר – “When Jo’ab saw that the battle was set against him both in front and in the rear...”

3.

2 Sam. 10:11 – וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־תַּחֲזֹק אֲרָם מִמֶּנִּי – “And he said, ‘If the Syrians are too strong for me...’”

1 Chron. 19:12 – וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־תַּחֲזֹק מִמֶּנִּי אֲרָם – “And he said, ‘If the Syrians are too strong for me...’”

4.

2 Sam. 10:12 – וְנָהַי יַעֲשֶׂה הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינָיו – “...and may the LORD do what seems good to him.”

1 Chron. 19:13 – וְנָהַי הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינָיו יַעֲשֶׂה – “...and may the LORD do what seems good to him.”

5.

2 Sam. 22:50 – עַל־כֵּן אוֹדֶךָ ה' בְּגוֹיִם – “For this I will extol thee, O LORD, among the nations.”

<sup>16</sup> On the structure of Biblical Hebrew nominal clauses, see Zewi 1994. On functional word order in nominal and verbal Biblical Hebrew clauses, and its reflections in Bible translations, see, e.g., Zewi 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Kropat 1909:59, §21.



Psalms 18:50 – על-כן אודך בגוים ה' – “For this I will extol thee, O LORD, among the nations.”

6.

1 Kgs. 10:5 – ולא־היתה בה עוד רוּחַ – “There was no more spirit in her.”

2 Chron. 9:4 – ולא־היתה עוד בה רוּחַ – “There was no more spirit in her.”

7.

Isa. 2:2 – והנה באַתְּרִית הַיָּמִים נֶכּוֹן וְהָיָה הַר בֵּית־ה' בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים – “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains.”

Micah. 4:1 – והנה באַתְּרִית הַיָּמִים וְהָיָה הַר בֵּית־ה' נֶכּוֹן בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים – “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountain.”

## 5 Relative clauses versus participles

As explained by Goldenberg, Semitic adjectives are complex constructions containing quality or state, implicit pronominal representation of the carrier of the quality or state, and an attributive relation between them. Participles are special formations related to a verbal paradigm, whose components are equal to those of adjectives, and therefore participles should be considered verbal adjectives.<sup>18</sup> Relative clauses basically function as attributive clauses. They actually are the syntactic equivalents of the morphological formations of adjectives and participles, and they contain likewise quality or state, pronominal representation, and an attributive relation.<sup>19</sup> This linguistic interpretation is true for many languages, including Biblical Hebrew.

What is interesting in the following pair of parallels is that Biblical Hebrew speaks for itself on this matter, and confirms this interpretation by using a relative clause and a definite participle in parallel verses

Ezra 2:2 – אָשֶׁר־בָּאוּ עִם־זְרֻבָּבֶל – “They came with Zerub’abel...”

Neh. 7:7 – הַבָּאִים עִם־זְרֻבָּבֶל – “They came with Zerub’abel...”<sup>20</sup>

## 6 Interchange between particles

The various meanings and shades of meaning of particles in any language can sometimes be difficult to trace. The following pairs of parallel Biblical Hebrew verses support the range of meanings already recognized as expressed by Biblical Hebrew כִּי.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Goldenberg 1983:171–172, §2, 1995:5–11, §5–§6.

<sup>19</sup> Goldenberg 1995:333, §16 (=1998:181–185, §16), 1995: 11–15, §7.

<sup>20</sup> Note that the *RSV* translation for both is identical.

<sup>21</sup> For the range of meanings of כִּי, see, e.g., Kautzsch 1910:491–492, §157,492, §158b, 497–498, §159aa–bb,ee, 500–501, §163, 502, §164d, 505, §166b, Joüon & Muraoka 1996: 589–



Instances introducing a causal clause in parallel to other causal particles are 1–2 below:

1.

2 Sam. 6:8 – וַיִּחַר לְדָוִד עַל אֲשֶׁר פָּרַץ ה' פָּרִץ בְּעֵזָה – “And David was angry because the LORD had broken forth upon Uzzah.”

1 Chron. 13:11 – וַיִּחַר לְדָוִד כִּי־פָרַץ ה' פָּרִץ בְּעֵזָה – “And David was angry because the LORD had broken forth upon Uzzah.”

2.

Neh. 13:2 – כִּי לֹא קָדְמוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בֶּלֶחֶם וּבַמַּיִם – “For they did not meet the children of Israel with bread and water.”

Deut. 23:5 – עַל־דִּבַּר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־קָדְמוּ אֶתְכֶם בֶּלֶחֶם וּבַמַּיִם בְּדַרְךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם – “Because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came forth out of Egypt.”

The two above pairs (1–2) are interesting because they exhibit a parallelism between *כִּי* and other causal particles, but also because they present an interchange between content clauses expressing cause introduced by *כִּי* and relative clauses introduced by *אֲשֶׁר*, which plays a part in causal prepositional expressions, namely *עַל אֲשֶׁר* and *עַל־דִּבַּר אֲשֶׁר*.<sup>22</sup> This alternation between content clauses, which form substantive clauses in replacement of nouns on the one hand, and relative clauses, which form substantive clauses in replacement of adjectives on the other, is interesting from the point of view of the development of content and relative clauses and the process of nominalization in Biblical Hebrew.<sup>23</sup>

As mentioned above (§5), relative clauses function as clause substitutes of adjectives. They fulfill a basic adjectival role, which is the syntactic role of an attribute. Relative clauses play other syntactic roles mostly when they are independent, namely their explicit heads are omitted, and they acquire their status. Nevertheless, many languages show a certain level of diffusion among relative and content clauses. This is particularly clear through the common use of equal particles for both.<sup>24</sup> Together with the replacement of both Classical Hebrew relative particle *אֲשֶׁר* and content particle *כִּי* by *שֶׁ* in Late Biblical Hebrew, Biblical Hebrew also holds instances in which relative particles introduce content clauses, such as 1 Sam. 18:15 – וַיִּרְא שָׂאוּל אֲשֶׁר־הוּא – “And when Saul saw that he was successful, he dreaded him.” The cause of this diffusion between relative and content particles most likely originated in the use of both relative and content clauses for adverbial roles, namely as

591, §157,a,c,e, 617, §164b, 618–619, §165a–e, 627, §166o,p, 629–633, §167c,e,i,p,q,s, 636, §169e, 640–641, §171a, 642, §172c.

<sup>22</sup> On this similar use of *כִּי* and *אֲשֶׁר*, see, e.g., Kautzsch 1910: 492, §158b. See also Kropat 1909:68, §31.

<sup>23</sup> The term ‘content clause’ for nominalized clauses was introduced by Jespersen (Jespersen 1909–1949 V. III: 23–24, §2.1). On content clauses in Biblical Hebrew, see Zewi (forthcoming).

<sup>24</sup> For references, see Goldenberg 1965:9, §2, and *ibid.* note 2.



complements of a clause.<sup>25</sup> The instances above show exactly such use in Biblical Hebrew parallel verses.

Though the following pair (3) presents an interchange of כֹּאשֶׁר in a comparative meaning and כִּי, the latter seems to function here as a causal particle, and the parallel verses appear to have intended a different meaning for their subordinate clause.<sup>26</sup>

3.  
2 Sam. 10:2 – וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶעֱשֶׂה־חֶסֶד עִם־חֲנָנִי בֶן־נָחָשׁ כֹּאשֶׁר עָשָׂה אָבִיו עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד –  
“And David said, ‘I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me.’”

1 Chron. 19:2 – וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶעֱשֶׂה־חֶסֶד עִם־חֲנָנִי בֶן־נָחָשׁ כִּי־עָשָׂה אָבִיו עִמָּי חֶסֶד –  
“And David said, ‘I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, for his father dealt loyally with me.’”

The following pair (4) introduces a temporal clause by either כִּי or כֹּאשֶׁר in its temporal meaning.<sup>27</sup>

4.  
2 Sam. 7:1 – וְנִהְיֶה כִּי־יָשֵׁב הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּבֵיתוֹ – “Now when the king dwelt in his house ...”

1 Chron. 17:1 – וְנִהְיֶה כֹּאשֶׁר יָשֵׁב דָּוִד בְּבֵיתוֹ – “Now when David dwelt in his house ...”

The following pair (5) shows parallelism of כִּי and ׀. Since כִּי regularly introduces object content clauses following a verb of speech in Biblical Hebrew, more interesting in the following instance is the unusual use of ׀ in this position. Taking into consideration the deterioration in the use of the Classical Biblical Hebrew tenses in Late Biblical Hebrew, revealed, for instance, in the use of the 1<sup>st</sup> per. *wayyiqtol* form נֶאֱגַד in the same verse, 1 Chron. 17:10,<sup>28</sup> the irregular use of ׀ in this verse might be due to deterioration of Classical Biblical Hebrew as well.<sup>29</sup>

5.  
2 Sam. 7:11 – וְהִגִּיד לְךָ ה' כִּי־בִיַּת יַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ ה' – “Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.”

1 Chron. 17:10 – וְנֶאֱגַד לְךָ יְהוָה יְבַנֶּה־לְךָ ה' – “Moreover I declare to you that the LORD will build you a house.”

<sup>25</sup> About the development of this use, see Givón 1974:12, §6, 15, §6.2.2, 17–19, §6.3, 1991:282, §4.2, 287–297, §5.2, and Zewi (forthcoming).

<sup>26</sup> This pair is mentioned in Kropat 1909:68, §31, though the exact meaning of כֹּאשֶׁר in this case is not indicated.

<sup>27</sup> References to the temporal meaning of כִּי are, e.g., Kautzsch 1910:502, §164d, Joüon & Muraoka 1996:627, §1660. On the parallel use of כִּי and כֹּאשֶׁר see Fassberg 2000:104.

<sup>28</sup> Joüon & Muraoka 1996:405, §119za.

<sup>29</sup> Note that ׀ introducing an object content clause is rare but not unique. Another such instance appears in Genesis 47:6 as indicated by Kogut 1984:89.



## 7 Active versus passive

Active and passive in Semitic and non-Semitic languages have enjoyed much research.<sup>30</sup> That active and passive serve in parallel contexts in Biblical Hebrew is not surprising since these constructions are generally considered free variants.<sup>31</sup> Kropat mentions the use of intransitive and transitive verbs and the use of active and passive in parallel verses as related phenomena, and does not ascribe to these differences any special syntactic intention.<sup>32</sup> Though no tendency can be traced in the following first six pairs of parallel instances regarding active or passive preference in Classical versus Late Biblical Hebrew,<sup>33</sup> a clear tendency is revealed in the burial formula (instances 8–12 below), in which the book of Chronicles evidently avoids the use of passive.<sup>34</sup>

1.

passive: 2 Sam. 5:13 – וַיִּוְלְדוּ עוֹד לְדָוִד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת – “...and more sons and daughters were born to David.”

active: 1 Chron. 14:3 – וַיִּוְלַד דָּוִד עוֹד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת – “...and David begot more sons and daughters.”

2.

active (impersonal): 2 Sam. 5:17 – נִישְׁמְעוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי־מָשַׁח אֶת־דָּוִד לְמֶלֶךְ – עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל – “When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel...”

passive: 1 Chron. 14:8 – נִישְׁמְעוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי־נִמְשַׁח דָּוִד לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל – “When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over all Israel...”

3.

active: 1 Kgs. 3:12 – הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לְךָ לֵב חָכָם וְנֹבֵן – “Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind.”

passive (participle): 2 Chron. 1:12 – הַחֵקְמָה וְהַמַּדְעָה נָתוּן לְךָ – “Wisdom and knowledge are granted to you.”

4.

active: 1 Kgs. 22:15 – עֲלֵה וְהִצַּלְחָה וְנָתַן ה' בְּיַד הַמֶּלֶךְ – “Go up and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.”

passive: 2 Chron. 18:14 – עֲלֵה וְהִצַּלְיָחוּ וְיִשְׁתַּבְּחוּ בְּיָדְכֶם – “Go up and triumph; they will be given into your hand.”

<sup>30</sup> On passive in Semitic languages, see, e.g., Brockelmann 1913:142–144, §73. On passive in other languages, see, e.g., Keenan 1985. On passive in Biblical Hebrew see, e.g., Bicknell 1984.

<sup>31</sup> Though Bicknell asserts that “active and passive verbs do not signify synonymous action in Biblical Hebrew” (Bicknell 1984:5), it is clear that they function as free variants at least in Biblical Hebrew parallels.

<sup>32</sup> Kropat 1909:14–15, §4.

<sup>33</sup> The seventh pair below is not included, since both its instances are from Kings.

<sup>34</sup> Also see Fassberg 2000:101.



5. passive: 2 Kgs. 11:2 – “Thus she hid him from Athali’ah, so that he was not slain.”  
 active: 2 Chron. 22:11 – היא – “Thus Jeho-shab’e-ath, the daughter of King Jeho’ram and wife of Jehoi’ada the priest, because she was a sister of Ahazi’ah, hid him from Athali’ah, so that she did not slay him.”
6. active, passive, passive: 2 Kgs. 11:15–16 – ויצו והוֹנִדָּע הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־שָׂרֵי הַמִּיּאוֹת – “Then Jehoi’ada the priest commanded the captains who were set over the army, ‘Bring her out between the ranks; and slay with the sword any one who follows her.’ For the priest said, ‘Let her not be slain in the house of the LORD.’ So they laid hands on her; and she went through the horses’ entrance to the king’s house, and there she was slain.”  
 passive, active, active: 2 Chron. 23:14–15 – וַיּוֹצֵא וְהוֹנִדָּע הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־שָׂרֵי הַמִּיּאוֹת – “Then Jehoi’ada the priest brought out the captains who were set over the army, saying to them, ‘Bring her out between the ranks; any one who follows her is to be slain with the sword.’ For the priest said, ‘Do not slay her in the house of the LORD.’ So they laid hands on her; and she went into the entrance of the horse gate of the king’s house, and they slew her there.”
7. active: 2 Kgs. 17:6 – “In the ninth year of Hoshe’a the king of Assyria captured Sama’ria.”  
 passive: 2 Kgs. 18:10 – “And at the end of three years he took it. In the sixth year of Hezeki’ah, which was the ninth year of Hoshe’a king of Israel, Sama’ria was taken.”

## The burial formula:

8. passive: 1 Kgs. 11:43 – “And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father.”  
 active (impersonal): 2 Chron. 9:31 – “And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father.”
9. passive: 2 Kgs. 14:20 – “And they brought him upon horses; and he was buried in Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David.”



- active (impersonal): 2 Chron. 25:28 – נִישָׂאָהוּ עַל־הַסּוּסִים וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו – בעִיר יְהוּדָה – “And they brought him upon horses; and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David.”
10.  
passive: 2 Kgs. 15:38 – נִישָׁכַב יוֹתָם עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּקְבְּר עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו בְּעִיר דָּוִד אָבִיו – “Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father.”  
active (impersonal): 2 Chron. 27:9 – נִישָׁכַב יוֹתָם עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ בְּעִיר דָּוִד – “And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David.”
11.  
passive: 2 Kgs. 16:20 – נִישָׁכַב אַחָז עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּקְבְּר עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו בְּעִיר דָּוִד – “And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David.”  
active (impersonal): 2 Chron. 28:26 – נִישָׁכַב אַחָז עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּקְבְּרוּהוּ בְּעִיר – בִּירוּשָׁלַם – “And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem.”
12.  
passive: 2 Kgs. 21:18 – נִישָׁכַב מְנַשֶׁה עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּקְבְּר בְּגַן־בֵּיתוֹ – “And Manas’sseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his house.”  
active (impersonal): 2 Chron. 33:20 – נִישָׁכַב מְנַשֶׁה עִם־אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּקְבְּרוּהוּ בֵּיתוֹ – “So Manas’sseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his house.”

## 8 Predicate versus object status for a third member of a nominal clause containing a verbal copula

The interpretation of the role of the third member in a nominal clause containing a verbal copula (= subject + verbal copula *היה* + a third member) is subject to linguistic dispute. The existential verb is sometimes understood as a copula and the third member as the actual predicate of the clause. Others regard the existential verb as a predicate and the third member as its complement. These two distinct interpretations result in a distinct syntactic analysis for each.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, as Biblical Hebrew teaches us, this controversy exists sometimes in the languages themselves. The verb *היה* might function as a copula in Biblical Hebrew in two meanings, viz. ‘be’ and ‘become’. In its second meaning it may or may not be followed by the preposition *ל* attached to the third member of the sentence. The fact that Biblical Hebrew holds these two variants, and that the preposition following *היה* clearly marks the third member as an indirect object, show that the dispute regarding the syntactic status of the third member exists not just among linguists but in the language itself. In the first type, in which no prepositional particle introduces the third member, it might be interpreted either as a predicate or as an object. But the

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Matthews 1981:113–117. Jespersen indicates that in many languages a predicative might follow not only copulative verbs but prepositions as well (Jespersen 1924:131–132).



second type leaves us no choice but to analyze it as an object, and according to the preposition employed in Biblical Hebrew, it serves there as an indirect object.

More examples of this controversy exist in other Semitic languages. Both in Ge'ez and Classical Arabic the third member following a verb of existence, *كان* (*kāna*) in Arabic, and *ህሌወ, ኮነ, ነበረ* (*hallawa, kona, nabara*) in Ge'ez, while functioning as a copula, is marked by a direct object case.<sup>36</sup> Ge'ez also sometimes employs nominative where accusative is expected, which is explained by Dillmann either as “carelessness on the part of a copyist, or a different conception of the sentence,” which takes the third member as the subject of the verb instead of its predicate.<sup>37</sup> As suggested to me orally by Gideon Goldenberg, the interchange between accusative and nominative in such cases might also be due to different textual traditions or to dialectal variants.

The following instances (1–5) are Biblical Hebrew pairs of parallel uses of *היה + ל* and *היה* without *ל*. Both constructions appear in Classical and Late Biblical Hebrew, and there is no preference for either the two periods.<sup>38</sup>

1.
 

ל היה ל 2 Sam. 5:2 – *וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה לְנֹגֵד עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל* – “...and you shall be prince over Israel.”

היה 1 Chron. 11:2 – *וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה נֹגֵד עַל עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל* – “...and you shall be prince over my people Israel.”
2.
 

ל היה ל 2 Sam. 8:2 – *וַתְּהִי מוֹאָב לְדָוִד לְעֹבְדִים וַיָּבִיאוּ מִנְחָה* – “And the Mo’abites became servants to David and brought tribute.”

היה 1 Chron. 18:2 – *וַיְהִיו מוֹאָב עֹבְדִים לְדָוִד וַיָּבִיאוּ מִנְחָה* – “And the Mo’abites became servants to David and brought tribute.”
3.
 

ל היה ל 2 Sam. 8:6 – *וַתְּהִי אַרְם לְדָוִד לְעֹבְדִים וַיָּבִיאוּ מִנְחָה* – “And the Syrians became servants to David and brought tribute.”

היה 1 Chron. 18:6 – *וַיְהִי אַרְם עֹבְדִים לְדָוִד וַיָּבִיאוּ מִנְחָה* – “And the Syrians became servants to David, and brought tribute.”
4.
 

היה 2 Sam. 8:14 – *וַיְהִי כָל-אֲדָוִם עֹבְדִים לְדָוִד* – “And all the E’domites became David’s servants.”

היה 1 Chron. 18:13 – *וַיְהִיו כָּל-אֲדָוִם עֹבְדִים לְדָוִד* – “And all the E’domites became David’s servants.”
5.
 

היה 1 Kgs. 22:22 – *וְהָיִיתִי רוּחַ שָׁקֶר* – “I... will be a lying spirit...”

ל היה ל 2 Chron. 18:21 – *וְהָיִיתִי לְרוּחַ שָׁקֶר* – “I... will be a lying spirit...”

<sup>36</sup> For Ge'ez, see Dillmann 1907:441–442, §177, and for Classical Arabic, Brockelmann 1913:107, §55. Reckendorf 1921:102–104, §57, and Wright 1898:99–100, §41. For both languages, see Lipiński 2001:273, §33.5, who considers it a predicate state.

<sup>37</sup> Dillmann 1907:442, §177.

<sup>38</sup> Kropat 1909:14, §3.



## 9 Negative versus rhetoric question

The use of rhetoric questions similarly to negative clauses is well known in many languages. Biblical Hebrew shows this variation by using once a rhetoric question and once a negative clause, both in a single verse and in parallel passages.<sup>39</sup>

One verse:

1 Kgs. 12:16 – מה־לנו חֶלֶק בְּדָוִד וְלֹא־נַחֲלָה בְּבִן־יֵשׁוּ – “What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.” (= 2 Chron. 10:16).

Parallel passages:

2 Sam. 7:5 – לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל־עַבְדִּי אֶל־דָּוִד כֹּה אָמַר ה' הֲאֵתָה תִּבְנֶה־לִּי בַיִת לְשִׁבְתִּי – “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘Would you build me a house to dwell in?’”

1 Chron. 17:4 – לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל־דָּוִד עַבְדִּי כֹה אָמַר ה' לֹא אַתָּה תִּבְנֶה־לִּי הַבַּיִת לְשִׁבְתִּי – “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: ‘You shall not build me a house to dwell in.’”

## 10 Final words

The evidence revealed in Biblical parallels regarding syntactic variation in Biblical Hebrew is most important since it arises from within the language itself rather than from linguistic interpretations. This evidence shows that in many cases more than one syntactic use is possible for similar contents and in the same periods of Biblical Hebrew, and it supports linguistic interpretations that analyze certain constructions as equal in essence, at least in one point of time.

## Bibliography

Abbreviations:

- ANES* = Ancient Near Eastern Studies  
*JCS* = Journal of Cuneiform Studies  
*JNSL* = Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages  
*RSV* = May H. G. & Metzger, B. M. 1977. eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version*. New York & Oxford.  
*VT* = Vetus Testamentum  
*ZAH* = Zeitschrift für Althebraistik

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<sup>39</sup> See discussion of rhetoric questions in Biblical Hebrew, see Gesenius 1910: 474, §150d. More on the connections between questions and negation see in Kirtchuk-Halevi 1997.



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## Abstract

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Biblical parallels have long been subject to investigation and research in several disciplines. Biblical scholars have usually been interested in the differences that Parallels exhibit in content and vocabulary. Syntactic variations revealed in biblical parallels are usually woven into other syntactic discussions and have not yet acquired the attention they deserve. The aim of the paper is to present meaningful Biblical Hebrew syntactic variations that occur in biblical parallels and linguistically to analyze the distinctions they provide.