

Biblical Hebrew Grammar for Beginners

Agreement

The term “agreement” is commonly used to describe the relationships between nouns and adjectives or subject and verb in the Biblical Hebrew sentence.

In phrases with a noun-adjective combination, agreement is observed in gender, number, and definiteness. If the noun is masculine, so is the adjective that modifies it. If the noun is plural, so is the adjective, and if the noun is definite, so is the adjective.

Observe the adjectives גדל “large, great” and קטן “small” in the following verse:

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת-הַמְּאֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַיּוֹם
וְאֶת-הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים. (Genesis 1:16)

So God made the two *great lights*: The *greater light* for governing the day, the *lesser light* for governing the night, and the stars.

The noun מְאֹר *luminary, light* appears three times: twice in the singular, and once in the plural. In all three cases, both the noun and the following adjective are definite, and since the noun is masculine, the adjectives too take a masculine form. When the noun appears in the singular, the adjective is in the singular, and when the noun is plural, so is the adjective.

For comparison, observe the feminine nouns with the adjective גדל *large, great* in the verses below.

וַיְהִי כִּי יִהְיֶה לְפָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּכְּסֶם מִכָּה-גְּדוֹלָהּ בְּגִבְעוֹן ; וַיִּרְדְּפֶם דָּרָךְ מֵעֵלָה
בֵּית-חֹרֹן וַיִּכְּסֶם עַד-עֶזְקָה וְעַד-מַקְדָּה. וַיְהִי בְּנִסְסֵם מִפְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵם בְּמוֹרֵד
בֵּית-חֹרֹן וַיְהִי הַשְּׁלִיךְ עֲלֵיהֶם אֲבָנִים גְּדֹלוֹת מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם עַד-עֶזְקָה וַיָּמָתוּ
רַבִּים אֲשֶׁר-מָתוּ בְּאֲבָנֵי הַבָּרָד מֵאֲשֶׁר הִרְגוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחֶרֶב. (Joshua 10:10-11)

The Lord utterly confused them before Israel, and they inflicted upon them a *great defeat* at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and smote them all the way to Azekah and Makedah. Now as they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon, the Lord hurled *large stones* down on them from the sky, all the way to Azekah, and there were more who died from the hailstones than those that the Israelites killed by the sword.

וּרְאִיתֶם אִם-דָּרָךְ גְּבוּלוֹ יַעֲלֶה בֵּית שֶׁמֶשׁ הוּא עֹשֶׂה לָנוּ אֶת-הַרְעָה הַגְּדוֹלָה
הַזֹּאת ; וְאִם-לֹא וַיִּדְעֶנּוּ כִּי לֹא יָדוּ נִגְעָה בָנוּ מִקָּרָה הוּא הָיָה לָנוּ. (I Samuel 6:9)

*You should watch it [the cart]. If it goes up through its [Israel's] own territory toward Beth Shemesh, then He has brought this **great disaster** upon us. But if it does not, we will know that it was not His hand that struck us, and that it happened to us by chance.*

The agreement in definiteness is observed in phrases only (as in the examples above: *the great disaster, the lesser light*, etc., where both noun and adjective have the definite article). In clauses where an adjective serves as predicate, we do not see such agreement. See further in [Adjectives](#).

As for subject and verb agreement, we commonly say that the verb agrees with the subject in person and number. That is, if the subject is a third person masculine singular (he, David, the boy, and the like), the verb will take the third person masculine singular form. If the verb is a third feminine plural (Ruth and Naomi, the women, and the like), the verb will take the third feminine plural form.

Very often, if the sentence has more than one subject, the verb will agree with the first subject on the list, creating a situation in which the verb is in the singular while the subject is a plural entity.

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת-קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מְתַהַלֵּךְ בְּגֵן לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם ; וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם
וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הַגֵּן. (Genesis 3:8)

*They heard the voice of the Lord God strolling in the garden, with the day's breeze. So the **man and his wife hid [singular]** from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל-הַנַּעַר הַמַּגִּיד לוֹ ; אֵיךְ יָדַעְתָּ כִּי-מֵת שָׂאוּל וַיהוֹנָתָן בָּנוּ?
(II Samuel 1:5)

*Then **David said** to the youth who brought him the news: "How do you know that **Saul and his son Jonathan have [singular] died?**"*

The verb **וַיְהִי** *there was/ it was/it happened*, technically a third person masculine singular form, appears with nouns of any gender or number. **וַיְהִי** is routinely used in introducing a set of events within a narrative, and can be regarded as a formulaic, frozen form.

וַיְהִי כָל-הָאָרֶץ שְׂפָה אַחַת וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים. (Genesis 11:1)

*Now the **whole earth [feminine] was [masculine]** of one language and uniform words.*

וְלוֹ שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם אַחַת חַנָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פְּנִינָה ; וַיְהִי לַפְּנִינָה יְלָדִים וּלְחַנָּה
אֵין יְלָדִים. (I Samuel 1:2)

He had two wives: The name of one was Hannah, and the other was called Peninah. There were [singular] children to Peninah, but to Hannah there were no children.

[Agreement: Exercise](#)