

The Sequential Forms in Biblical Hebrew: An Illustration from the Marginal

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1. Introduction¹

The verse that seals the 25th chapter of the Book of Genesis also closes the curtain on the first act in the family drama pitting Jacob against Esau. After Esau fell for the trap that his twin brother had set for him and sold Jacob the birthright, the first half of that same verse (v. 34) informs us that “Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew.”² The Edomite’s reaction is depicted at the end of the passage by means of a chain of five verbs: ויאכל - וישת - ויקם - וילך - ויבז (עשו את הבכרה). This succession, linking five forms of ויקטל, serves as the present author’s point of departure for evaluating the meaning of consecutive forms in Biblical Hebrew (hereafter: BH).³

The questions that will be raised in this particular context are twofold: what is the chronological relation between the forms in verse 34? And what can be gleaned from the answer to the first question with respect to the chronological relations among other consecutive forms? By virtue of our familiarity with Scripture, it is evident that Esau eats and drinks and rises before leaving. However, what about the order in which he partakes of his meal? Does Esau finish eating his bread and stew and only then quench his thirst, or perhaps he eats and drinks intermittently? The chronological relation between the verb ויבז and the preceding chain of verbs is just as difficult to fathom: does Esau spurn the birthright as a result of the eating, drinking, etc? Or perhaps it is a preconceived attitude to the birthright that causes him to behave in this fashion? These are the types of questions that will be broached throughout this article in the hopes of shedding light on consecutive forms in the Bible.

1. This article was translated by Avi Aronsky, whom I thank for his work and friendship.

2. All the English translations of the Biblical text have been taken from the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1999).

3. As per the structuralist approach, the meaning of a verb form is determined by its sum total of contrasts *vis à vis* the rest of the forms in a given system. For a discussion on the broad systematic meaning of this form within the framework of the Biblical verbal system, see O. Cohen, *The Verbal Tense System in Late Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2008), 30–34, 49–57, 96–116 [Hebrew]. Although the data in this article are based on the corpus of Biblical prose from the Second Temple Period, which I described in my doctoral thesis, many of the conclusions that were drawn therein can be applied to First Temple prose as well.

2. History of Research

The consecutive forms ויקטל and וקטל constitute one of the most intricate theoretical challenges facing BH scholars. The primary objective of this article is to shed light on the chronological meaning consecutive forms in BH. The main difficulty lies in characterizing the exact chronological function of these forms. Although the present study concentrates on the ויקטל form, many of the arguments that will be raised are germane to וקטל as well. Before turning to the actual texts, the article will open with a brief survey of the major solutions that have been proposed for “the sequential conundrum” through the ages.

The field of the BH verbal system constitutes an immense thicket of works promulgating manifold and often disparate views about the meaning of this system. For the sake of brevity, I will content myself with a review of the landmark interpretations that have shaped the approach of the majority of scholars in the field. Until the late eighteenth century, the prevailing explanation of the BH verbal system was that verb forms express tense. This theory, which was introduced by Jewish grammarians during the Middle Ages, is widely known as the “*waw conversive*” (וההיפוך). In 1766, N. W. Schröder published a (somewhat forgotten) grammar of BH that was written in Latin.⁴ While maintaining his loyalties to the traditional outlook (what he referred to as the “*waw Conversiva*”), Schröder nevertheless sought to mount an alternative explanation. He dubbed the וקטל form preceded by a *waw*—“the *futurum relativum*” and contended that it was to be understood in the following manner:

Apart from these various usages, the future form has another usage which is clearly unique and peculiar to the Hebrews, in that it receives the force of our past, and designates a matter as really past, not, however, by itself and absolutely, but in relation to a past action which has preceded it. For when a number of events are to be narrated that follow one another in some kind of continuous series, the Hebrew writers consider the first action as past, the others, however, which follow it on account of what has gone before are considered as future, since something is described which in relation to another past action is itself later and future, so it may be called the *relative future*.⁵

In sum, Schröder advocated a relative approach according to which וקטל expresses the future tense and וקטל the past. Moreover, his alternative to the problematic *waw conversive* indeed attracted a cadre of adherents from the mid-eighteenth until the mid-nineteenth century.⁶

4. See N. W. Schröder, *Institutiones ad Fundamenta Linguae Hebraeae in usum Studiosae Juventutis* (Groningen, 1766), 340.

5. This citation is taken from McFall’s translation of Schröder’s work: L. McFall, *The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System, Solutions from Ewald to the Present Day* (Sheffield, 1982), 14. Schröder does not distinguish between the ויקטל and וקטל forms. The heading of this section is “*Futurum relativum cum waw Conversiva, aut sina ea.*”

6. A summary of the various studies drew inspiration from Schröder can be found in *ibid.*, 21–24, 57–59, 177–79). One of the most prominent scholars to adopt this approach was L. Nordheimer, *A Critical Grammar of the Hebrew Language* ([New York, 1841], vol. 2), who expatiated on the consecutive form at great length. However, Nordheimer’s approach somewhat differs from his predecessors, as he distinguishes between the prime forms וקטל and ויקטל, which in his estimation express absolute tenses, and the secondary forms וקטל and ויקטל, which express relative tenses. See Nordheimer’s concluding remarks (1841: 160–61).

One of the scholars who followed in Schröder's footsteps was Samuel Lee, whose Hebrew grammar⁷ offered a comprehensive linguistic comparison between absolute and relative tenses:

In the first place, then, any writer commencing his narrative will necessarily speak of *past*, *present*, or *future time*, with reference to the period in which his statement is made. . . This use of the tenses may, therefore, be termed *Absolute*. In the next place, a person may speak of past, present, or future events, with reference to some other period or event, already introduced into the context. This may be termed the *Relative* use of the tense.⁸

From a morphological standpoint, Schröder and his successors did not draw a distinction between the ויקטל and יקטל forms. They postulated that in passages consisting of several successive actions, the Hebrew author intended the first to be a past action and the ensuing actions to signify a future act relative to the first.

The theory that Schröder launched left its mark on many works of grammar from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.⁹ During this period the term *waw relativum* replaced the venerable *waw conversive*; and from the mid-nineteenth century on, the "*waw relativum*" approach was gradually edged out of the books of Hebrew grammar, as "*waw consecutive*" became the concept of choice among Hebrew language researchers—a standing that it maintains to this very day. Driver claimed that the term was minted by the Hebrew scholar Böttcher in 1827 and was subsequently picked up by Ewald and others.¹⁰ In any event, the premise behind *waw consecutive* is that the consecutive form signifies an action which transpires after the one expressed by the anterior verb in any particular sequence. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* phrases it thus:

The *imperfect* with *wāw consecutive* serves to express actions, or states which are to be regarded as the temporal or logical sequel of actions or states mentioned immediately before.¹¹

Driver articulated the same idea in a slightly different fashion: "וַיֹּאמֶר is thus properly not *and he said*, but *and he proceeded to say*."

At first glance, the terms "*waw relativum*" and "*waw consecutive*" appear to convey two separate ideas: relativity and sequentiality. However, the manner in which researchers used these concepts suggests that they are both predicated on a similar assumption whereby the function of the *consecutive form* is to report on an event that takes place after the event that is expressed by the anterior form.

The validity of the claim according to which ויקטל signifies an action that transpires after its preceding verbal cohort in a shared sequence largely rests on the linguistic evidence. An analysis of nearly 2,000 occurrences of ויקטל in both First and Second

7. S. Lee, *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language* (London, 1844).

8. Ibid., 336. The latter also served as a professor of Arabic and was highly influenced by both the classical Arabic grammarians and classical Arabic itself. This background is probably what led him to believe that Hebrew contains only two tenses: the preterite (יקטל and קטל) and the present (ויקטל and ויקטל). In contrast, Schröder and his like viewed יקטל and קטל to be forms that express the present tense rather than the future.

9. Among the most prominent of these grammarians were Samuel Johnson, Samuel Lee, and Isaac Nordheimer.

10. S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1892).

11. Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, 1910), §111a.

Temple prose indicates that there is indeed a chronological succession in roughly 85% of the cases. Against this backdrop, the first example is from 2 Chr. 35:22–24:

1. וְלֹא הָסֵב יִאֲשִׁיהוּ פָנָיו מִמָּוֶן כִּי לֹהֲלֹחַם בּוֹ הִתְחַפֵּשׂ וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֶל דְּבָרֵי נָכוֹ מִפִּי אֱלֹהִים וַיָּבֹא לִהְלָחֵם בְּבִקְעַת מְגִדּוֹ: וַיְרֹו הַיָּרִים לַמֶּלֶךְ יִאֲשִׁיהוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ לַעֲבָדָיו הַעֲבִירוּנִי כִּי הִחֲלִיתִי מֵאֲדָ: וַיַּעֲבִירוּהוּ עֲבָדָיו מִן הַמֶּרְפֶּזָּה וַיַּרְפִּיבֻהוּ עַל רֶכֶב הַמִּשְׁנָה אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וַיּוֹלִיכֻהוּ יְרוּשָׁלַם וַיָּמָת וַיִּקְבְּרוּ בְּקִבְרוֹת אֲבֹתָיו וְכָל יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם מִתְאַבְּלִים עַל יִאֲשִׁיהוּ:

From a chronological standpoint, each of the highlighted actions occurs after the preceding action: the chain begins with Josiah's arrival to the Megiddo Plain; whereupon he is shot by archers; the king then orders his servants to whisk him away; and so on and so forth. A decisive majority of the studies on the ויקטל form base their conclusions on the prevalence of this particular usage, whereas the exceptions to the rule are perceived as aberrations and are sometimes ignored. However, recent studies have reemphasized this problem, as will be discussed below in section 4.

Be that as it may, the present article endeavors to shift the vantage point. Instead of underscoring those cases in which a chronological continuum exists and categorizing non-sequential instances as anomalies, the emphasis will be turned upside down: the 15% of instances without a chronological succession between the various forms of ויקטל will constitute the heart of this discussion. Not only do the exceptions merit attention in their own right, but they may be endowed with the wherewithal to present the majority of occurrences in a whole new light and thus enhance our understanding of the entire system.

3. Cases without Chronological Succession

3.1. Another Aspect of the Same Event

One category of non-chronological consecutive ויקטל forms consists of those that convey two different aspects of the same action. The speaker's intention of expressing different aspects of the same event or occurrence is likely to derail the advancement of the reference-time point along the time axis. For example:

2. וַיֹּאסְפוּ אֶת אֲחֵיהֶם וַיִּתְקַדְּשׁוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ כְּמִצְוַת הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּדִבְרֵי יְהוָה לְטָהֵר בֵּית יְהוָה: וַיִּבְּאוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים לִפְנֵימָה בֵּית יְהוָה לְטָהֵר וַיּוֹצִיאוּ אֶת כָּל הַטְּמֵאָה אֲשֶׁר מִצָּאוּ בְּהִיכַל יְהוָה לַחֲצֹר בֵּית יְהוָה וַיִּקְבְּלוּ הַלְוִיִּם לְהוֹצִיא לְנַחַל קִדְרוֹן חוּצָה: וַיַּחֲלִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֲדָשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן לְקַדֵּשׁ וּבָיִם שְׁמוֹנָה לַחֲדָשׁ בָּאוּ לְאוֹלָם יְהוָה: (2 Chr. 29:15–17)
3. וַיָּבֹא יְהוֹשֻׁפָט וְעַמּוֹ לְבֹז אֶת שְׁלָלָם וַיִּמְצְאוּ בָהֶם לָרֶב וּרְכוּשׁ וּפְגָרִים וְכָלִי חֲמֹדוֹת וַיַּנְצִילוּ לָהֶם לֹאִין מִשָּׂא וַיִּהְיוּ יָמִים שְׁלוֹשָׁה בָּזִזִּים אֶת הַשָּׁלָל כִּי רַב הָיָה: (2 Chr. 20:25)
4. וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָל הַקָּהָל הַשְּׂבִיִּים מִן הַשְּׂבִי סִכּוֹת וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בְּסִכּוֹת כִּי לֹא עָשׂוּ מִיָּמֵי יִשׁוּעַ בֶּן נֹון בֶּן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וַתְּהִי שְׂמֵחָה גְדוֹלָה מֵאֲדָ: (Neh. 8:17)¹²

The shift in example 2 from a succession of verbs to ויחלו entails a transition from a description of the actions themselves to a description of when they occurred (the time frame). In other words, the last verse refers to the same event from a different vantage point. Example 3 contains a similar transition from a chain of actions to the verb ויהיו. Likewise, the rejoicing in the fourth example, which is introduced by ותהי, probably began before the series of preceding actions concluded; it is merely another aspect of

12. Also see Esth. 3:6; Neh. 8:3, 4–5, 17, 18; 12:43–44; and 2 Chr. 11:17; 14:5–6; 20:25; 26:6, 7; 29:15–16, 17; 30:25–26.

the same event. In all three passages, there is no outward sign that the continuum has terminated due to the transition from the set of chronologically-arrayed actions to the actions expressing another dimension of the same event. Therefore, the relationship between the forms in each context can only be discerned by observing how the narrative is arranged (the frame story and the details therein).

3.2. Generalization and Specification

The next category, which to some extent resembles the first, features chains of ויקטל forms that signify relations of generalization and specification:

5. ואריבה את הסגנים ואמרה מדוע נעזב בית האלהים ואקבצם ואעמידם על עמדם: (Neh. 13:11).
6. ונקם ריבעם בן נבט עבד שלמה בן דויד וימרד על אדניו: ויקבצו עליו אנשים רקים בני בליעל ויתאמצו על ריבעם בן שלמה וריבעם היה נער וכך לבב ולא התחזק לפניהם: (2 Chr. 13:6–7).
7. ובעת הצר לו ויוסף למעול ביהוה הוא המלך אחז: ויזבח לאלהי דרמשק המפים בו ויאמר כי אלהי מלכי ארם הם מעזרים אתם להם אזבח ויעזרוני והם היו לו להכשילו ולכל ישראל: ויאסף אחז את כלי בית האלהים ויקצץ את כלי בית האלהים ויסגר את דלתות בית יהוה ויעש לו מזבחות בכל פנה בירושלם: (2 Chr. 28:22–24).
8. וישב ריבעם בירושלם ויבן ערים למצור ביהודה: ויבן את בית לחם ואת עיטם ואת תקוע: ואת בית צור ואת שוכו ואת עדלם: ואת גת ואת מרשה ואת זיף: ואת אדורים ואת לכיש ואת עזקה: ואת צרעה ואת-אילון ואת חברון אשר ביהודה ובבנימן ערי מצודות: ויחזק את המצודות וימן בהם נגידים ואצרות מאכל ושמן ויין: ובכל עיר ועיר צגות ורמחים ויחזקם להרבה מאד ויהי לו יהודה ובנימן: (2 Chr. 11:5–6)¹³

In example 5, the verbs ואקבצם and ואעמידם provide the details of the actions that were introduced by the verb ואריבה, and the same can be said for the next two samples. In all three cases, the verb signifying the generalization is situated before the chain that unveils the details. Conversely, the verb at the end of example 8 (ויהי) can be viewed as a recapitulation or generalization of the entire chain of anterior actions. This example corresponds to the verse regarding Jacob and Esau that headlines the article wherein the verb ויבו summarizes the chain of actions that preceded it.

3.3. Hendiadys

Hendiadys is a grammatical phenomenon in which a single idea is expressed by means of two successive words that lack any explicit signification concerning the hierarchical relations between them. For example:

If a **resident alien** [גר ותושב] among you has prospered, and your kinsman being in straits, comes under his authority and gives himself over to the **resident alien** [גר ותושב] among you, or to an offshoot of an alien's family (Lev. 25:47)

The phrase גר (ו)תושב refers to but one person.¹⁴ Although this particular sample involves nouns, a *hendiadys* can also consist of verbs. In other words, two verbs can de-

13. See also Gen. 25:34; Neh. 13:11, 25; 2 Chr. 11:5–12; 13:6–7, 16–17; 17:1–2; 21:4; 28:5, 22–24.

14. Kaddari enumerated several structures that BH apparently utilizes for the purpose of creating complex semantic units: the syndetic conjunction (e.g., גר ותושב); the asyndetic conjunction (e.g., גר תושב), which Rosén referred to as a “juxtaposition”; and a subordinated structure (e.g., a construct chain). See M. Z. Kaddari, “Identification of Complex Hebrew Semantic Units,” *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies*:

note one full-fledged event (examples 9 to 14 below)¹⁵ or two actions that are perceived as a single event (example 15):¹⁶

9. וַתַּעַן אֶסְתֵּר וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂאֵלֹתַי וּבִקְשֹׁתַי: אִם מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: (Esth. 5:7–8)¹⁷
 10. וְאַשְׁמַע קוֹל אָדָם בֵּין אוֹלֵי וַיִּקְרָא וַיֹּאמֶר גְּבִרְיָאֵל הֵבֵן לְהִלֹּץ אֶת הַמֶּרְאָה: (Dan. 8:16)¹⁸
 11. וַיָּבֹן וַיְדַבֵּר עִמִּי וַיֹּאמֶר דְּנִיָּאל עֲתָה יֵצְאֵתִי לְהִשְׁפִּילֶךְ בֵּינָה: (Dan. 9:22)
 12. וַיִּשְׁמַע סִנְבַלֵּט הַחֹרָנִי וְטִבְיָה הָעֶבֶד הָעֲמוֹנִי וְגִשְׁם הָעֶרְכִּי וַיִּלְעָגוּ לָנוּ וַיִּבְזּוּ עָלֵינוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ מָה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹשִׂים הֵעַל הַמֶּלֶךְ אַתֶּם מַרְדִּים: (Neh. 2:19)
 13. וַיְהִי כֹאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע סִנְבַלֵּט כִּי אָנַחְנוּ בּוֹנִים אֶת הַחוֹמָה וַיַּחֲר לֹו וַיִּכְעַס הַרְבֵּה וַיִּלְעַג עַל הַיְּהוּדִים: (Neh. 3:33)
 14. וַיִּזְקֹן יְהוֹיָדָע וַיִּשְׁבַּע יָמִים וַיָּמָת בֶּן מֵאָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה בְּמוֹתוֹ: (2 Chr. 24:15)
 15. וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּשִׁמְחָה גְּדוֹלָה: (1 Chr. 29:22)¹⁹

The examples in this group are not on an equal footing in all that concerns the similarity between their constituent parts. This is likely to have both pragmatic and syntactical implications on each category of *hendiadys*.²⁰ In the case of synonymous verbs, like examples 12 to 14, it is impossible to interpret, say, the phrase *וַיַּחֲר וַיִּכְעַס* as “*וַיַּחֲר* and *וַיִּכְעַס*” (example 13) because the verbs have the same exact meaning. Conversely, the phrase *וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיֹּאכְלוּ* (example 15) can be understood as “*וַיִּשְׁתּוּ* and *וַיֹּאכְלוּ*”; however, given the context, they are perceived as denoting the same event.²¹ That said, the disparate levels of congruence between the verbs in each passage do not change the fact that none of these examples comprises a chronological continuum, but rather two actions representing a single occurrence. Consequently, the *hendiadys* phenomenon

Papers (Jerusalem, 1968), 2.135–43 [Hebrew]; and H. Rosén, *Good Hebrew: Studies in Syntax* (Jerusalem, 1977), 128–29 [Hebrew].

15. In examples 9 to 11, the second verb in the continuum is the conversive *וַיֹּאמֶר*. Despite the fact that on the pragmatic level these verbs mark the beginning of a direct speech, these instances have been included in the discussion because, in the author’s estimation, there is no essential difference between these and the other examples in all that concerns the signification of chronological relations. Consequently, the examples are subject to restraints that do not exist elsewhere. For more on the role of these verbs within the framework of signifying direct speech, see G. Goldenberg, “Direct Speech and the Hebrew Bible,” in: K. Jongeling et al., eds., *Studies in Hebrew and Aramaic Syntax Presented to J. Hoftijzer* (Leiden, 1991), 79–96; and G. Hata, “Time Movement in Biblical Hebrew,” *Hebrew Linguistics* 47 (Ramat-Gan, 2000), 63–84 [Hebrew].

16. For more on the tandem *וַיֹּאכְל וַיִּשְׁתּוּ*, see B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, 1990), 653.

17. See also Gen. 18:27; 24:50; 27:37, 39; 31:14; 31:31 etc.; Esth. 7:3; 1 Chr. 12:18; 2 Chr. 29:31.

18. See also Gen. 3:9; 12:18; 19:5; 20:9 etc.

19. For further examples of this phenomenon, see Gen. 24:54; 25:34; 26:30; Esth. 2:4, 9, 17; 3:1; 4:10; 5:7; 7:3; Dan. 8:16; 9:22; Ezra 10:2, 12; Neh. 2:19; 3:33; 1 Chr. 12:18, 29:20, 22; 2 Chr. 14:10; 24:15; 29:31.

20. E.g., Kuzar shows that in contemporary Hebrew there are assorted behavioral criteria for distinguishing a pair of actions linked in a simple bond from two actions constituting a *hendiadys*. One of the criteria that he offers is omission. While in the sentence “Dani sneezed and closed the window,” one of the components can be omitted (“Dani sneezed and did not close the window”), in the sentence “The Prison Service held negotiations [נִשְׂא וְנָתַן] with Deri,” it is impossible to erase just one of the verbs, for “The Prison Service held negotiations [נִשְׂא אֲבָל לֹא נָתַן]” makes no sense. As a result, the omission can only encompass the entire phrase: “The Prison Authority [נִשְׂא וְנָתַן] with Deri.” See R. Kuzar, “The Consecutive Modal Verb Construction in Israeli Hebrew,” *Lešonenu* 68 (Jerusalem, 2006), 119–38 [Hebrew].

21. An in-depth account of the *hendiadys* phenomenon must take into account the fact that between two verbs in succession that are devoid of any semantic link and two synonymous verbs arrayed in succession and expressing a single unit, there are a slew of intermediary situations in which the verbs maintain various levels of propinquity.

constitutes yet another application of the ויקטל form. In this sense, “two that are one” is akin to a chronological sequence, for both patterns involve a semantic implication that stems from the context²² and neither is concerned with the meaning of the verb forms themselves.

3.4. Change in the Actor

As in the cases featuring a new perspective of the same action, a change in actor is likely to curtail the advancement of a chronological succession along the time axis. Similarly, the ויקטל form does not contain any signification that attests to such a development. In other words, a change in the actor does not, *ipso facto*, denote a break in the succession. Therefore, in order to determine the nature and extent of the continuum, it is incumbent upon readers to rely on their understanding of the situation at hand:

16. וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחִשְׁוֶרֶשׁ יֵשְׁנוּ עִם אֶחָד מִפָּזָר וּמִפָּרָד בֵּין הָעַמִּים. כָּל מְדִינֹת מְלֹכֶתָּךְ . . . וְיִסֵּר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת טַבַּעְתּוֹ מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתְּנָהּ לְהָמָן בֶּן הַמְּדֵתָא הָאֲגָגִי צָרָר הַיְּהוּדִים: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהָמָן הֲפָסֶף נָתוֹן לְךָ וְהָעָם לַעֲשׂוֹת בּוֹ כַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ: וַיִּקְרָא סִפְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּחֲדָשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּשָׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ נִקְרָא כָּל אֲשֶׁר צָוָה הָמָן: (Esth. 3:8–12)
17. וַאֲבֹאֲאֵל פְּחוֹת עֶבֶר הִנֵּהר וַאֲתַנָּה לָהֶם אֶת אֲגָרוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁלַח עָמִי הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׂרִי חֵיל וּפְרָשִׁים: (Neh. 2:9)
18. וַיַּחֲזִקוּ אֶת מַלְכוּת יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמְצוּ אֶת רַחֲבֵעַם בֶּן שְׁלֹמֹה לְשָׁנִים שְׁלוֹשׁ כִּי הָלְכוּ בְּדֶרֶךְ דָּוִיד וּשְׁלֹמֹה לְשָׁנִים שְׁלוֹשׁ: וַיִּקַּח לוֹ רַחֲבֵעַם אִשָּׁה אֶת מַחֲלַת בִּן (בַּת) יְרִמּוֹת בֶּן דָּוִיד אֲבִיהֶיּא בַת אֱלִיאָב בֶּן יִשִׁי: וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ בָּנִים אֶת יַעֲוִשׁ וְאֶת שְׁמֶרְיָה וְאֶת זָהָב: (2 Chr. 11:17–19)
19. וַיִּכְנַעַנּוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעַת הַהִיא וַיֹּאמְצוּ בְנֵי יְהוּדָה כִּי נִשְׁעֲנוּ עַל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם: וַיִּרְדֹּף אֲבִיהָ אַחֲרֵי יִרְבֵּעַם וַיִּלְכְּדוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עָרִים אֶת בֵּית אֵל וְאֶת בְּנוֹתֶיהָ וְאֶת יִשְׁנָה וְאֶת בְּנוֹתֶיהָ וְאֶת עַפְרוֹן (עֶפְרָיו) וּבְנֹתֶיהָ: (2 Chr. 13:18–19)²³

Notwithstanding the change in actor, the activities in example 16 are aligned in chronological order. In contrast, the substitution in example 17 revokes the chronological continuum, for the dispatch of army officers and cavalry obviously preceded the arrival of the letters. The next passage combines elements of examples 16 and 17, as the shift from the nation to Abijah that corresponds to the verbs וַיֹּאמְצוּ and וַיִּקַּח makes it difficult to pinpoint the chronological relationship between the two forms. Conversely, the transition in the second half of this passage between the individuals that accompany the verbs וַיִּקַּח and וַתֵּלֶד, respectively, does not necessarily disturb the chronological succession. Lastly, the chronological link in example 19 between the verbs that are attached to the various actors remains open to interpretation.

These passages bolster the argument whereby consecutive forms do not, in and of themselves, determine the nature of the chronological relationship between their respective actions. In certain circumstances, a change in actor might facilitate a

22. From a terminological standpoint, the inability to differentiate between the semantic and syntactical sphere occasionally results in a profusion of terms. To wit: in the event of a chronological succession, the *waw* is customarily termed a “*waw* consecutive,” whereas in the case of a *hendiadys*, it is called a “*waw explicativum*.” See D. W. Baker, “Further Examples of the *Waw Explicativum*,” *VT* 30 (1980), 129–36; and Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction*, 649. These terms exclusively refer to the semantic level, as from a syntactical standpoint the *waw* fills a similar role in both chronological successions and *hendiadys*. According to Joüon and Muraoka “There is even less sense of succession when the *Waw* has explanatory value. . . . The very frequent occurrence of *wayyiqtol* in narration brought about an ever-broadening use and misuse of this form.” See Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed. (Rome, 2006), §118j–k.

23. See also Judg. 16:2–3; Neh. 2:9; 4:2, 3, 4, 5; 9:4; 1 Chr. 10:13, 14; 2 Chr. 11:17, 18; 13:18, 19; 14:11, 12; 15:9, 10; 28:6–8; 29:20–30; 30:21, 22.

chronological succession, while in other circumstances it might turn back the clock or induce an ambiguous chronological relationship between two successive actions.

3.5. Chronological Ambiguity

There are other instances of ויקטל in which the chronological relationship between its assorted forms is less than clear. Most of these cases involve a string of actions that are somehow linked to one another and embedded in a shared context:

20. וכבילות כל זאת יצאו כל ישראל הנמצאים לערי יהודה וישברו המצבות ויגדעו האשרים וינתצו את הבמות ואת המזבחות מפל יהודה ובנימן ובאפרים ומנשה עד לכלה (2 Chr. 31:1).
21. ויתחזק ויבן את כל החומה הפרוצה ויעל על המגדלות ולחוצה החומה אחרת ויתחזק את המלוא עיר דויד ויעש שלח לרב ומגנים: ויתן שרי מלחמות על העם (2 Chr. 32:5–6).
22. וילך שמו עד לבוא מצרים כי החזיק עד למעלה: ויבן עזיהו מגדלים בירושלם על שער הפנה ועל שער הגיא ועל המקצוע ויתחזקם: ויבן מגדלים במדבר ויתחזב ברות רבים (2 Chr. 26:8–10).

In all three examples, it is impossible to determine the exact chronological relationship between the actions. The “list-like” nature of these chains places the verbs on an equal footing and thus prevents us from reaching any definitive conclusion with respect to the chronological order of these events.

3.6. ויקטל at the Outset of Narrative Units

As in the previous category, forms of ויקטל do not necessarily signify a chronological succession when opening a narrative unit. Bauer²⁵ cited this particular function when criticizing Driver²⁶ for assuming that the “*waw* consecutive” invariably denotes a chronological or logical continuation of the preceding form(s).²⁷ According to Bauer, the fact that eleven of the Bible’s books commence with forms of ויקטל unequivocally negates the interpretation according to which ויקטל serves exclusively as a signifier of chronological successions with anterior counterparts. Some of the examples that have been cited above indeed testify to the fact that Bauer’s criticism of Driver is not without basis.

The use of ויהי is one of the most prevalent examples of ויקטל at the outset of a new narrative unit, as in the following verse:

23. ויהי בימי אחשוורוש הוא אחשוורוש המלך מהדו ועד פוש שבע ועשרים ומאה מדינה: (Esth. 1:1).

One of the most important contributions of discourse analysis to the study of BH verbal forms has been to turn scholars’ attention to the relationship among large textual units. Schneider’s work constitutes the first large-scale attempt at writing a grammar of BH from this perspective.²⁸ In fact, it was the widespread use of the verb ויהי at the start of textual units, which Schneider dubbed “*Einleitungsformeln*,” that initially caught his eye.²⁹ According to Schneider, these verbs function as “macro-syntactical border mark-

24. See also 2 Chr. 10:21–22, 23; 13:21; 21:1; 26:14–15; 29:6–7; 36:19.

25. See H. Bauer, “Die Tempora im Semitischen, ihre entstehung und ihre Ausgestaltung in den einzel-sprachen,” *Beiträge zur Assyriologie und Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* 8/1 (1910), 35–39.

26. Driver, *Treatise*.

27. For a summary of Bauer’s arguments, see McFall, *Enigma*, 93–94.

28. W. Schneider, *Grammatik des biblischen Hebräisch* (Munich, 1974).

29. *Ibid.*, 251.

ers” (*Übergangssignal*).³⁰ In other words, *ויהי* forms that are positioned at the confluence of a pair of textual units are charged with marking the beginning of a new unit.³¹ Following in the footsteps of Schneider, Talstra claims that in addition to demarcating the border between two primary textual units, the *ויהי* form can help distinguish a story’s main plot from its supplementary information.³² To bolster his argument, Talstra points to the following example:

24. ויהי אחרי מות שאול ודוד שב מהכּוֹת אֶת הָעַמְלֵק וַיָּשָׁב דָּוִד בְּצִקְלָג יָמִים שָׁנִים: וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַהֲיָה אִישׁ בָּא מִן הַמִּחְנֶה מֵעַם שְׂאוּל וּבְגָדָיו קָרָעִים. וַאֲדָמָה עַל רֹאשׁוֹ וַיְהִי בְּבֹאוֹ אֶל דָּוִד וַיִּפֹּל אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ: (2 Sam. 1:1–2).

In Talstra’s estimation, *ויהי* forms not only set different narrative units apart from each other, but can also signify a return to the primary storyline.

Although Hatav basically continues along the lines of her predecessors, she draws a distinction between the “predicative” and “segmentational” functions of the forms *ויהי* and *והיה*. As such, Hatav claims that the predicative function of these verb forms constitutes an integral part of the tense system and thus digresses from the rest of the verb forms (קטל, יקטל, and קוטל) from the same root. That said, when filling a segmentational role, they serve as particles that mark the textual divide, rather than predicative forms.³³ One of the criteria that Hatav has established for distinguishing between these two categories is the topic of agreement. When assuming predicative functions, the verb is always in agreement with the subject, while in segmentational roles the verb always assumes the third person singular, regardless of the subject. To substantiate her argument, Hatav cites the following passages:

25. וַתִּבְטֹשׁ אֲשֶׁתוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נָצִיב מֶלֶח (Gen. 19:26).

26. וַיְהִי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בָּאָה (Gen. 15:17).

27. וַיְהִי הֵם קִבְרִים אִישׁ וַהֲגָה רָאוּ אֶת הַגְּדֹד (2 K. 13:17).³⁴

The topic of agreement in BH is rather complicated, and the “introductory *ויהי*” is not the only occasion in which there is no agreement. For instance, in example 26 the lack of agreement extends into the next clause: “When the sun set and it was [הָיָה] very dark” (Gen. 15:17). Furthermore, there are exceptions to Hatav’s rule, at least in the corpus of the Second Temple prose:

28. וַתְּהִי צַעֲקַת הָעָם וּנְשֵׁיהֶם גְּדוֹלָה אֶל-אַחֲיהֶם הַיְּהוּדִים (Neh. 5:1).

29. וַיַּחֲזֹק אֶת הַמְּצוּרוֹת וַיִּתֵּן בָּהֶם נִגִּידִים וְאַצְרוֹת מֵאֶכָל וְשָׁמֶן וַיִּיּוּ: וּבְכָל עִיר וְעִיר צָנוֹת וּרְמָחִים וַיַּחֲזִקם לְהַרְבֵּה מְאֹד וַיְהִי לוֹ יְהוּדָה וּבְנֵימִן: (2 Chr. 11:11–12).

In example 28 the verb form *ותהי* introduces a new narrative unit while agreeing with the subject. Conversely, the verb form *ויהי* in the next example is not arrayed at the start of a narrative unit, yet “disagrees” with the ensuing clause.³⁵

30. Ibid., 261–62.

31. Loc. cit.

32. E. Talstra, “Text Grammar and Hebrew Bible. [Part] I: Elements of a Theory,” in *Bi. Or.* 35 (1978), 173.

33. See G. Hatav, *The Semantics of Aspect and Modality, Evidence from English and Biblical Hebrew* (Amsterdam-Philadelphia, 1997), 70–83. The contention that these verb forms do not fill a predicative role is problematic. The fact that certain verb forms serve as a border marker between textual units on the discursive level does not necessarily determine their syntactical status within the sentence.

34. Ibid., 72, 76.

35. It is worth noting that according to BH’s rules of agreement, when a compound subject is accompanied by its constituents’ details, the agreement is often with the first subject: for example, “Miriam and

As we have seen, there are many cases in which ויקטל forms eschew the task of advancing a reference-time point along the time axis for the role of providing the reader with different perspectives of the same event. Quite a few occurrences of ויהי can be interpreted in this fashion, including the following passage:³⁶

30. וַיִּמְלֹךְ יְהוֹשָׁפָט בְּנוֹ תַחְתָּיו וַיִּתְחַזַּק עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיָּתֶן חֵיל בְּכָל עָרֵי יְהוּדָה הַבְּצֻרוֹת וַיָּתֶן נָצִיבִים בְּאַרְצָה יְהוּדָה וּבְעָרֵי אֶפְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לְכַד אֶסָּא אָבִיו: וַיְהִי יְהוָה עִם יְהוֹשָׁפָט . . . וַיָּכֶן יְהוָה אֶת הַמַּמְלָכָה בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּתֶּן כָּל יְהוּדָה מִנְחָה לַיהוֹשָׁפָט וַיְהִי לוֹ עֶשֶׂר וְכַבּוּד לָרֹב . . . וַיְהִי פָחוֹד יְהוָה עַל כָּל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶצוֹת אֲשֶׁר סָבִיבוֹת יְהוּדָה (2 Chr. 17:1–10).

This category of ויהי forms can indeed be viewed as evidence for Schneider's theory. Even if these units are rather small, the argument can be made that each incident of ויהי signifies the beginning of a new textual unit. Nevertheless, an interpretation that underscores the correlation between the forms' usage herein and the above-mentioned occurrences of ויקטל, which denote another element of the same action, appears to be no less beneficial than espousing Schneider's perspective. For instance, it is instructive to compare the way the various instances of the verb ויהי in the present example change the reader's vantage point of the same event, with how this is accomplished by the verb ויחל in example 2:

2. וַיֵּאסְפוּ אֶת אֲחֵיהֶם וַיִּתְקַדְּשׁוּ וַיָּבֵאוּ כְּמִצּוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּדִבְרֵי יְהוָה לְטַהֵר בֵּית יְהוָה: וַיָּבֵאוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים לִפְנֵימָה בֵּית יְהוָה לְטַהֵר וַיּוֹצִיאוּ אֶת כָּל הַטֹּמֶאֶת אֲשֶׁר מִצָּאוּ בְּהִיכַל יְהוָה לְחֹצֵר בֵּית יְהוָה וַיִּקְבְּלוּ הַלְוִיִּם לְהוֹצִיא לְנַחַל קִדְרוֹן חֹצֵה: וַיַּחֲלִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֲדָשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן לְקַדֵּשׁ וּבַיּוֹם שְׁמוֹנֶה לַחֲדָשׁ בָּאוּ לְאוֹלָם יְהוָה (2 Chr. 29:15–17).

As can be seen, ויחל assumes the same function as ויהי. Therefore, although ויהי is indeed the most prevalent signifier, other verb forms of ויקטל also introduce new textual units:³⁷

31. וַיָּשֻׁבוּ שָׂרֵי הָעָם בִּירוּשָׁלַם וּשְׂאֵר הָעָם הִפִּילוּ גֹרְלוֹת לְהִבְיֵא אֶחָד מִן הָעֶשְׂרָה לְשִׁבְתָּ בִירוּשָׁלַם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְתִשָּׁע הַיָּדוֹת בְּעָרֵים: (Neh. 11:1).

32. וַיִּקְהַל דָּוִיד אֶת כָּל שָׂרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׂרֵי הַשְּׁבָטִים וּשְׂרֵי הַמַּחְלָקוֹת הַמְּשֻׁרְתִּים אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ: (1 Chr. 28:1).

33. וַיִּתְחַזַּק שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן דָּוִיד עַל מַלְכוּתוֹ וַיְהִי אֱלֹהֵיו עֲמֹ: (2 Chr. 1:1).

These three examples are taken from the opening verses of various chapters. In all of them, the verse opens a textual unit that presents a new topic, and there is no difference between the ויקטל forms in these instances and their counterpart ויהי.

3.7. Repetition of the Same Verb³⁸

The corpus under examination contains quite a few verbal successions with two identical forms of ויקטל.³⁹ In these cases, commentators would be hard-pressed to contend

Aaron spoke [וַיְדַבֵּר] against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married" (Num. 12:1); see, inter alia, Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar*, §150q. In any event, this topic seems to be more complicated than commonly thought and thus warrants a comparison with BH's other rules of agreement.

36. See also 2 Chr. 20:29; 29:32; 30:26.

37. See also Neh. 3:1; 11:1; 1 Chr. 4:39; 5:25; 28:1; 2 Chr. 1:1.

38. See Esth. 7:5; Dan. 1:7; 8:2–3, 9–10; Ezra 10:3; Neh. 2:20; 3:34; 4:7; 7:5; 8:3, 16–17; 1 Chr. 29:10; 2 Chr. 2:10–11; 11:5–6; 17:9; 31:10, 20.

39. Like the rest of the occurrences of ויקטל, this phenomenon is not unique to the Hebrew language of the Second Temple period. See J. Blau, "On the Repetition of the Predicate in the Bible," in B. Uffenheimer,

that there is a chronological relationship between the two forms, as they both refer to the same action. Furthermore, this phenomenon cannot be considered a tautology or an extraneous repetition of the same verb, for the two clauses that host the respective verbs invariably differ from one another. If the subject in one of the clauses is explicit, the subject of the other might be implied (as in sample 34 below); if one describes a place, its counterpart might refer to an object (example 36). In addition, this model is likely to appear in a variety of sentence patterns:

34. Subject-Object

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה מִי הוּא זֶה וְאֵי זֶה הוּא אֲשֶׁר מְלָאֵוּ לְבֹו לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן:
40. (Esth. 7:5)

An explicit subject (Ahasuerus) is attached to the first clause, while an indirect object and a direct quote of the former (the king) inform the second clause, which refrains from referring to the subject in an express manner.

35. Object-Subject

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם סִפּוֹת אִישׁ עַל גִּגּוֹ וּבְחֻצְרֵיהֶם וּבְחֻצְרוֹת בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים וּבְרְחוֹב שְׁעַר אֶפְרָיִם:
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָל הַקָּהָל הַשְּׂבִיִּים מִן הַשָּׂבִי סִפּוֹת (Neh. 8:16–17).

This case is similar to example 34, except that the order is reversed: in the first verse, the object is attached to the verb, whereas in the second the subject is spelled out for the reader (“The whole community that returned from the captivity”).

36. Adverb-Object⁴¹

וַאֲנַעְמִיד מִתְחַתִּיּוֹת לְמָקוֹם מֵאַחֲרֵי לְחֻמָּה בַּצַּחַחִיִּים (בְּצַחַחִיִּים) וְאֶעֱמִיד אֶת הָעָם לְמִשְׁפָּחוֹת עִם חֲרִבְתֵּיהֶם:
רְמִיָּהוּם וְקִשְׁתֵּיהֶם: (Neh. 4:7).

In this particular verse, the first clause provides a description of a location and a direct object inhabits the second.

37. Object-Adverb⁴²

וַיִּחַל שְׁלֹמֹה לְבָנוֹת אֶת בֵּית יְהוָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם בְּהַר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר נִרְאָה לְדָוִיד אָבִיהוּ אֲשֶׁר הָכִין בְּמָקוֹם דָּוִיד
בְּגִרְוֹ אֲרָנָו הַיְּבוֹסִי: וַיִּחַל לְבָנוֹת בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנִי בִּשְׁנַת אַרְבַּע לְמַלְכוּתוֹ: (2 Chr. 3:1–2).

As opposed to the previous example, the complete predicate *ויחל לבנות* in the first verse is followed by a direct object, while the second verse informs the reader when the event took place.

38. General Object-Specific Object⁴³

וַיָּשֶׁב רְחִבְעָם בִּירוּשָׁלַם וַיָּבֹו עָרִים לְמִצּוֹר בִּיהוּדָה: וַיָּבֹו אֶת בֵּית לָחֶם וְאֶת עֵיטָם וְאֶת תְּקוּעָה:
(2 Chr. 11:5–6).

In this passage, the verb in the first clause is accompanied by a general object (towns), and the second verse fills in the details of that same object (“Bethlehem, and Etam, and Tekoa”).

ed., *Bible and Jewish History: Studies in Bible and Jewish History, Dedicated to the Memory of Jacob Liver* (Tel-Aviv, 1971), 234–40 [Hebrew].

40. See also 2 Chr. 31:10; 34:10–11.

41. See also Neh. 3:34; 2 Chr. 17:9.

42. See also Neh. 8:3, 8; 2 Chr. 31:20.

43. See also Dan. 1:7; Neh. 7:5.

39. Adverb-Adverb (Two Different Aspects of the Same Description)

וּמִן הָאֵחֶת מֵהֶם יֵצֵא קֶרֶן אֶחָת מִצְעִירָהּ וְתִגְדֹּל יֵתֵר אֶל הַגִּבּוֹ וְאֶל הַמְּזֹרֶחַ וְאֶל הַצִּבִּי: וְתִגְדֹּל עַד צִבְאָה הַשְּׂמִימִים
(Dan. 8:9–10).

Each verse illustrates a different aspect of the same object (a he-goat's horn)—its horizontal and vertical protrusion, respectively.

These cases give rise to the following questions: What is the nature of this phenomenon? And once its characteristics have been discerned, how should the chronological role of these forms be understood? A comparison of cases involving the iteration of verbs other than the ויקטל form may shed some light on this construction.

In an article titled “On the Repetition of the Predicate in the Bible,” Blau examined verses that adhere to the following pattern:

40. וְיִשְׂרָף אֹתוֹ עַל עֲצִים בְּאֵשׁ. עַל שֹׁפְךְ הַדֶּשֶׁן יִשְׂרָף: (Lev. 4:12).

(He shall) burn it up in a wood fire; it shall be burned on the ash heap.

Blau offered two different interpretations for the iteration model. The first is to regard it as an example of the common conversive phenomenon known as the “afterthought,” whereby the second clause constitutes a sort of appendix to the first. Blau provided a modern example of this model: וּו קטן עליו—אני שם (I put a check mark on him—a small check mark on him).⁴⁴ The second possibility is to consider the second clause a “cleft sentence.”⁴⁵ The latter is a construction in which the language turns a part of a passage into a logical predicate (usually by means of a nominal clause or a copular verb), and the other part, which tends to contain a verb, is designated a nominal clause. Goldenberg formulated the phenomenon thus:

The formation of the cleft sentence may be described in brief as forming the “logical predicate” into a predicate of a nominal, or a copular, sentence, the rest of the utterance being nominalized so as to become the subject of that nominal or copular sentence. The subject-clause is most often placed in extraposition, and is represented pronominally . . .⁴⁶

Accordingly, Blau suggested that the verb in the first clause (of example 40) serves in the “usual” role as a predicate or rheme. However, insofar as the second clause is concerned, it is difficult to argue that the verb ישרף constitutes the sentence’s rheme because it is taken from the immediate context. In consequence, the adverb על שפך הדשן “on the ash heap” should be viewed as the sentence’s logical predicate (*vedette*), and the element that bears the primary stress, while ישרף serves as the clause’s subject (*glose*).

Goldenberg’s aforementioned definition was liable to raise doubts with respect to Blau’s contention, for there is nothing to suggest that the verb constitutes a subordinated form. However, many languages, BH included,⁴⁷ feature cleft sentences in which the *glose* (subject) is unmarked:

44. Blau, *Repetition*, 237.

45. The term “cleft sentence,” which derives from the Danish grammar, was first used in the linguist O. Jespersen’s English grammar; see G. Goldenberg, “Imperfectly-Transformed Cleft Sentences,” in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1977), 127–28, n. 5.

46. Ibid., 80. Goldenberg provides the following examples in *ibid.*, 128: זה אני שהלכתי (Hebrew); אָנא הוּא דאפיקית (Babylonian Aramaic); “It is he who has done it” (English); and “C’est lui qui l’a fait” (French).

47. Ibid.

מִי הוּא יִרְשִׁיעֵנִי (Isaiah 50:9)
 or
 מָה זֹאת עֲשִׂיתָ (Genesis 12:18)
 versus
 מִי אֲשֶׁר חָטָא לִי אֶמְחֶנּוּ מִסִּפְרִי (Exodus 32:33)

Goldenberg, who dubs these sorts of cases “imperfectly-transformed cleft sentences,” posits that in the absence of any formal morphological designation of a cleft, the language is likely to turn to other means of signification. For example, in spoken language, mere intonation can lead the reader to the conclusion that a sentence is a cleft.⁴⁸

On the other hand, Blau’s second suggestion is nuanced and even buttressed by Goldenberg’s definition. The repetition of the same verb in two adjacent clauses that are informed by a consecutive form in the first clause and a *קטל* or *יקטל* form in the second, raises the possibility of another syntactical route (in addition to the alternatives that Goldenberg enumerates) through which the language marks the inherently rhematic components as non-rhematic. In other words, this construct can also be viewed as an imperfectly-transformed cleft sentence.⁴⁹

In his taxonomy of iterations, Blau classified instances of consecutive forms plus *קטל* and *יקטל* (such as the above-mentioned verse from Lev. 4:14) and pairs of successive verbs (such as the above-noted examples of *ויקטל-ויקטל*), in the same category.⁵⁰ However, the question that begs asking is whether Blau’s decision to group them together was indeed justified? Even if the two constructions share an outward resemblance—both contain a repetition of the same verb and a change with respect to the supplement—there is a substantial difference between them, which will be discussed herein. Moreover, this distinction has important implications on our understanding of the chronological role of these consecutive forms.

For the purpose of underscoring the structural difference between the two models, two cases will be evaluated. The first consists of a chain that is comprised of two identical forms of *ויקטל*, and the second contains a chain of two different forms of the same verb—*קטל* and *ויקטל*:⁵¹

36. ויקטל-ויקטל
 וַאֲנַעְמִיד מִתַּחֲתֵיּוֹת לְמָקוֹם מֵאַחֲרֵי לַחֹמֶה בַּצַּחֲחִיִּים (בְּצַחֲחִיִּים) וַאֲנַעְמִיד אֶת הָעָם לְמִשְׁפָּחוֹת עִם חֲרִבְתֵּיהֶם
 רָמַחֵיהֶם וְקִשְׁתֵּיהֶם: (Neh. 4:7).
 41. ויקטל-קטל

52. וַיַּעַשׂ יְרִיעֵת עֲזִים לְאַהֶל עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן עָשִׂיתִי עֲשֶׂרָה יְרִיעֹת עֲשָׂה אֹתָם: (Exod. 36:14).

The second example concords with Blau’s claim, as it falls under the rubric of imperfectly-transformed cleft sentences. Although the cleft in the second clause is unmarked,

48. Ibid., 132.

49. Taube refers to cleft sentences as “echo patterns.” See M. Taube, “Echo construction in Yiddish,” in M. Bar-Asher, ed., *Massorot: Studies in Language Traditions and Jewish Languages* 9–11 (Jerusalem, 1997), 397–420 [Hebrew]. For information concerning the origins of this moniker, see *ibid.*, 397, n. 1.

50. Blau, *Repetition*.

51. These are the same examples cited in *ibid.*

52. See also Gen. 43:15; Exod. 36:17; 37:7, 23–24; 38:3–6; Num. 31:7–8. There are instances in which the same exact verb form of *קטל* appears more than once: for example, “And God created man in His image, in the image of God He **created** [בָּרָא] him; male and female he **created** [בָּרָא] them” (Gen. 1:27).

it can be deduced from its context. In terms of the “theme” and “rheme,” these clauses appear to signify the verb supplements, rather than the verbs, as their rheme.⁵³

To constitute a cleft sentence, a verb must be capable of serving (by means of an explicit marker or otherwise) as a subordinated form; in other words, it must undergo a process of nominalization. The clauses in example 41 meet this condition, as its verb forms can be presumed to have been subordinated. In BH, the verb form *קטל* tends to turn up in continuums where it abuts subordinate particles (for example, *אשר קטל* is an acceptable phrase).

Passages that are structured along the lines of Neh. 4:7 differ from the pattern represented by Exod. 36:14 in that it is uncertain as to whether the former possesses a “cleft clause.” From a syntactical standpoint, what sets the consecutive form apart is the fact that it cannot be subordinated. On account of the proclitic *waw* in consecutive forms, the structure of a subordinate particle followed by an unpartitioned consecutive form—*אשר ויקטל* or *אשר וקטל*—is impossible in BH. In other words, the basic condition, whereby a cleft sentence must contain a verb form capable of being subordinated (even if it is not marked as such), does not pertain to consecutive forms, so that Blau’s explanation is inapplicable to these sorts of cases. Moreover, the fact that these forms are syntactically “insubordinatable” appears to be connected to their chronological meaning.

4. *The Sequential Forms in Biblical Hebrew: An Illustration from the Marginal*

Having seen that consecutive forms allow for a wide range of complex relations, not least constructions without chronological continuums, we can return to the question that was broached at the beginning of the article: what do these forms essentially express? In light of the manifold examples that have been sampled above, the author would like to suggest that the cases in which these forms do not comprise a chronological succession necessitate a change in the way consecutive forms are viewed in general, even though these occurrences comprise a minority of the aggregate total of consecutive forms.

53. Blau noted that this phenomenon also exists in other languages, among them classical Arabic, Arab dialects of Central Asia, the new Aramaic of Ma'aloula, and Modern Hebrew as well. Blau cites an example from S. Yizhar’s *Days of Ziklag* (Tel Aviv, 1970), 64, line 15 [Hebrew].

הכל נגמר בשני פגרים, נורא מהר נגמר

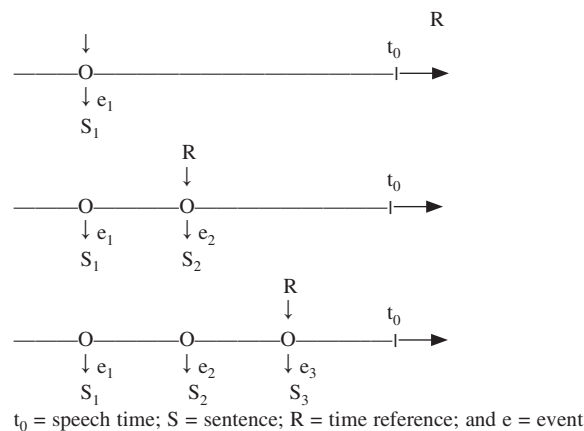
“It all ended with two carcasses, terribly fast did it all end.”

See Blau, *Repetition*, 238–39.

Azar elaborates on a Modern Hebrew syntactic structure in which the iteration of the same element marks the text that is to be found between the two occurrences of the same word. He dubs this phenomenon the “sandwiched focus,” namely the focus of the information (the logical subject); see M. Azar, “Towards an Understanding of Structure of the Emphasized Sentence in Contemporary Hebrew,” in Uzi Ornan et al., eds., *Hebrew: A Living Language* (Haifa, 1992), 1.96 [Hebrew]. This model also exists in Yiddish. Taube examines a string of Yiddish structures, which he refers to as “echo patterns.” This Yiddish model, “which at first glance appears to be a mere profusion of extraneous words, is basically a pattern consisting of designated functions in the sphere of the message: an over-characterization of the thematic relations in a sentence. This is accomplished by repeating components that are endowed with ‘natural’ rhemes, such as verb groups and question pronouns, so as to designate them as non-rhemaic and simultaneously designate the unrepeatable component as rhematic.” See Taube, *Echo*, 418. In the present author’s estimation, Taube’s description of Yiddish can be applied word for word to BH in chains of the successive form *קטל-יקטל*.

reference-time axis.⁶⁰ One of the fundamental differences between an absolute and relative tense system concerns the characteristics of the deictic axis upon which the various forms are chronologically arrayed. In an absolute system, every form is defined with respect to its position vis à vis both the Speech-time and Reference-time parameters. As seen in Reichenbach's above-noted examples, the chronological meaning of the English past perfect can be characterized as $E < R < S$, the future perfect as $S < E < R$, and so on. On the other hand, in a relative tense system, the chronological characterization of each form is predicated exclusively on its chronological link to the Reference-time point, while ignoring the absolute time that is established as per the Speech-time point. For example, the chronological meanings of קטל and יקטל forms in BH are $R \geq E$ and $E \geq R$, respectively.⁶¹

Hatav has published a number of articles on the question of consecutive forms in BH.⁶² Hatav's assessment is largely based on Reichenbach's ideas and the work of the linguists Kamp and Rohrer.⁶³ According to the latter, the function of the consecutive form is to advance the reference-time point along the time axis. Kamp and Rohrer's chart⁶⁴ demonstrates how a consecutive form interjects a new reference-time point (R) into a speech:



Accordingly, Hatav contends that the function of consecutive forms in BH is to advance the Reference-time point along the time axis. She thus assumes that the aforementioned examples of non-chronological consecutive forms are exceptions which have no bearing on the majority (i.e., chronologically oriented sequential forms). However, it appears that Hatav's claim is basically a later reincarnation of the argument put forth by Schröder some 250 years ago. To wit: the above-mentioned findings reveal

60. For a definition and comparison of the terms "absolute time" and "relative time," see Cohen, *Late Biblical*, part I, sec. 2.1.2.

61. Ibid.

62. See Hatav, *Time Movement*; and G. Hatav, "Anchoring World and Time in Biblical Hebrew," *Linguistics* 40 (2004), 491–526.

63. H. Kamp and C. Rohrer, "Tense in Text," in R. Bauerle et al., eds., *Meaning, Use and Interpretation in Language* (Berlin-New York, 1983), 250–69.

64. Kamp and Rohrer, *Tense*, 253.

the problems involved in attempting to force-feed these constructions forms charged with marking the chronological relations that go beyond the chronological boundaries of the forms themselves.

In order better to understand the meaning of consecutive forms, let us return to the examples consisting of two identical verbs of the ויקטל form. As already noted, this category is not to be equated with two different verbal forms from the same root that appear in sequence and refer to the same action. The fact that a consecutive form does not maintain a hierarchical syntactic relation with the verb forms in its vicinity is apparently a key factor, among others, in all that concerns the discernment of its chronological meaning. More specifically, this form does not convey the nature of its chronological relations with the other forms in the continuum. This argument follows in the footsteps of and bolsters the view of Washburn.⁶⁵ In fact, the same exceptions that have been surveyed herein led Washburn⁶⁶ to describe Biblical successions in the following manner: “. . . the *waw*-consecutive should be understood as an inflectional morpheme, signaling a separate thought not syntactically connected with what precedes it.” This article develops this argument and demonstrates its mechanism.

The examples presented in this study attest to the fact that it is incumbent upon Hebrew linguists to reevaluate the meaning of ויקטל forms that are arrayed in both chronological and non-chronological successions. Moreover, these examples highlight the fact that the advancement of the Reference-time point along an absolute-time axis is not an intrinsic feature of consecutive forms. In consequence, quite a few of these passages lack any formal signification that the chronological succession has been breached.

Among the phenomena that have long constituted a challenge for BH scholars is the fact that, in contrast to the קטל, קוטל, קטל, and וקטל forms, which assume any of the absolute tenses (past, present, and future), the ויקטל form is only to be found in the absolute past throughout the entire corpus of Biblical prose.⁶⁷ What is more, the premise that the ויקטל form is historically connected to the ancient preterite (*yaqtul*) form has led many scholars to perceive it as a preterite.

This assumption gives rise to the following question: should ויקטל be perceived as an exceptional form that signifies the absolute past within a system that is entirely predicated on the expression of relative time? The argument can be made that this form is a remnant of an earlier system which does not adhere to the rules of the BH system. However, research would be better served by comparing ויקטל to all the other forms in the system. The fact that ויקטל always appears, at least throughout Biblical prose, in the absolute past is a direct result of its connection to both the Reference-time

65. D. L. Washburn, “Chomsky’s Separation of Syntax and Semantics,” *Hebrew Studies* 35 (1994), 32–34.

66. *Ibid.*, 27.

67. Throughout the Biblical prose of both the First and Second Temple periods, there are practically no exceptions to this rule. There are, however, several instances of ויקטל forms donning the absolute future in the songs and poetic prophecies. See Joüon - Muraoka, *Grammar*, §118s; and Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction*, 557. The poetic corpus warrants a closer look. One possible direction is to examine whether these forms link up to none other than the modal axis, and not the Reference-time axis. If it can be shown that in these texts there is blurriness in the connection to the modal axis, then scholars may be able to account for the existence of these forms in the future tense.

and modal axes.⁶⁸ In other words, since ויקטל is an indicative form which signifies that the Reference-time and Event-time constitute one unit [R, E], it can only appear in the past. This restriction stems from both the function of ויקטל and the fact that a corresponding form, וקטל, emerged in the Biblical verbal system and seized control of the modal sphere.

The clear distinction that arose in consecutive forms, wherein a pair of morphemes correspondingly took root in the indicative (ויקטל) and modal (וקטל) fields, did not occur in other forms. The development of two parallel consecutive forms should enable scholars to make a clean break that would explain why ויקטל forms only appear in the absolute past.⁶⁹ Although the above-noted affiliation with the preterite (*yaqtul*) form is significant from the standpoint of comprehending diachronic processes, relying exclusively on this particular aspect diverts attention away from its synchronic function. A comprehensive disquisition on its synchronic role cannot ignore either the fact that ויקטל, unlike the historical preterite, forms a compound with the proclitic *waw* or its complementary distribution with the modal consecutive וקטל form.

The view that ויקטל, similar to the other verb forms in this system, does not maintain a link to Speech-time ($S > [E, R]$) appears to be a more straightforward and elegant solution than the opposite approach. In other words, the author prefers this position because, like the rest of the Biblical forms, ויקטל is only bound to a single deictic axis—the Reference-time axis [E, R]—and because the form's relegation to the realm of the past is a direct corollary of its relation to the modal axis, namely the indicative meaning of this form.

The ויקטל form's chronological meaning should be discerned from the disposition of all the other forms in the BH verbal system. Since the present author presumes that the system is a relative one whose forms are arranged around the signification of chronological relations to the Reference-time (R-time) point,⁷⁰ their usage should be limited to conveying a new Reference-time in speech. In other words, they express the fact that the Event-time (E) and Reference-time (R) points constitute a single unit [E, R]. From a chronological standpoint, they are thus independent forms that are to be classified on an individual basis. Consequently, they do not comprise a chronological succession in and of themselves.

This argument can perhaps best be explained by drawing an analogy between a consecutive construction and a slide presentation, whereby each form is akin to a slide.⁷¹ Regardless of the circumstances, consecutive forms invariably give rise to a new Reference-time. A 'narrative' continuum is constructed by running slides sequentially, so that the 'final product' is the direct result of the manner in which the various slides are organized, to include the juxtaposition of one particular slide next to another.

68. In this regard, the present author is following in the footsteps of Hatav: "The interpretation of *wayy-iqtol* in the past sphere only is entailed from the combination of its features [+SEQ] [–MOD]." See Hatav, *Semantics*, 84–85.

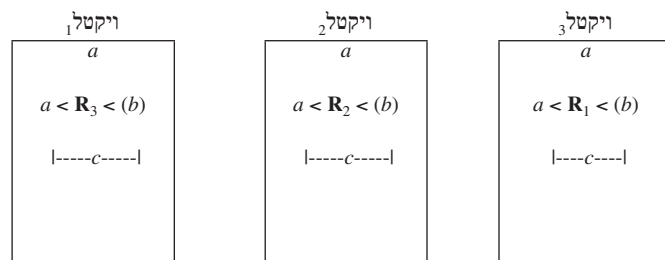
69. The fact that these forms conveying the absolute future in songs and poetic prophecies does not necessarily have a bearing on the doubts that exist with respect to its chronological function, as the forms therein also evince the relationship between the Event and Reference-time points [E, R]. Perhaps these cases from the corpus of Biblical poetry point to a problem with this form's linkage to the modal axis; in other words, these instances attest to a level of flexibility that enables ויקטל to serve in modal contexts as well.

70. See Cohen, *Late Biblical*, 24–30.

71. I am indebted to Prof. Goldenberg for bringing this image to my attention.

Put differently, a chronologically-ordered narrative continuum is but one possible consequence of a structural feature in which every verb introduces a new Reference-time into the speech. The narrative sequence thus reflects the vantage point of the text's addressee and does not constitute an integral part of the form's meaning. Alternatively, when every slide is considered—and arrayed as—a distinct unit, the “story” can be expanded and the plot thickened by adding background material, new twists, and the like. And this is the job of the *קוטל*, *קטל*, and *יקטל* forms.

This entire idea can be illustrated in chart form:⁷²



R = Reference-time; *a* = *קטל*; *b* = *קטל*; and *c* = *קוטל*

Each square in this chart represents a slide. Since the different slides do not necessarily maintain a chronological link with their neighbors, they are capable of expressing a broad array of chronological relations, and not just successions. Therefore, it appears as though the widespread interpretation of consecutive forms as signifiers of chronological successions is but one possible application of their general structural function—introducing a new Reference-time into a speech and designating the Event-time and Reference-time points as a single unit.

72. This presentation basically corresponds to the definition in text linguistics according to which consecutive forms denote the foreground and relative forms denote the background; see A. Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, trans. W. G. E. Watson (Sheffield, 1990). For more on the relations between *יקטל* and the other verb forms, see Cohen, *Late Biblical*, §2.2.4. The fact that throughout Biblical prose *יקטל* appears almost exclusively in the absolute past is in all likelihood a direct corollary of its connection to the modal axis, namely the form's indicative rather than its chronological meaning. See *ibid.*, §2.3.