

THE SYNTAX OF THE VERB IN BIBLICAL HEBREW POETRY:
THE TEXTLINGUISTIC THEORY OF ALVIERO NICCACCI

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Ps. 2:12

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this project is to describe a method of analysis for Biblical Hebrew poetry that would provide a proper syntactical analysis of the verb forms, and a proper rhetorical analysis of the features and marks of poetic discourse. In doing so, the author set out to present the verbal theory of Alviero Niccacci, apply it to certain poetic texts, and then critically analyze his theory's explanation of those texts.

To achieve that goal two main discussions took place. First, a method for the analysis of Hebrew poetry was set forth in which the focus rested on the joining together of verbal theory (syntax) and verse structure (rhetorical). There, aspects of biblical parallelism were examined, as well as the distinguishing marks of BH poetry. An important step was added into the method of analysis so that syntax could be analyzed. Since communication in poetry occurs through parallelism (segmentation) rather than logical and sequential communication (prose), it was deemed necessary that syntactic analysis was better realized prior to poetic devices. In cases such as ellipsis, where parallelistic structure is crucial to meaning, rhetorical study is seen to serve syntax, not *vice-a-versa*.

A second discussion undertaken was the “enigma” of the Biblical Hebrew verb system. A brief summary was given to the most prevalent solutions offered over the past two centuries – tense, aspect, comparative-historical, and discourse-oriented – before an appeal was made for how textlinguistics offered a solution to the problem, suggesting that there is no *essential* difference between the syntax of poetry and prose. Afterwards, a full-blown explanation of Niccacci's textlinguistic was done. In explaining Niccacci's theory, a treatment was given to the

linguistic model proposed by Harald Weinrich (textlinguistics), as well as that model's first application to Biblical Hebrew (W. Schneider).

After these discussions, the application of Niccacci's textlinguistic took place with the syntactic analysis of Jonah 2:3-10, Psalm 1, and Psalm 2. In each text Niccacci's theory was able to make sense of the verb forms as linguistic signs, respecting the verb forms as they were encountered, on their own terms. His major contributions to the study of poetic syntax are his solutions to alternating *qatal/yiqtol* constructions, parallel *qatal-wayyiqtol* and *w-yiqtol/weqatal*, and using ellipsis to better understand the *<x->yiqtol* construction in reference to the past.

THE SYNTAX OF THE VERB IN BIBLICAL HEBREW POETRY:
A PRESENTATION, APPLICATION, AND EVALUATION
OF THE TEXTLINGUISTIC THEORY OF ALVIERO NICCACCI

Introduction

The linguistic study of the verb in Biblical Hebrew is typically split up into several categories: morphology (the study of forms), semantics (the study of meaning), and syntax (the study of the relationship between different levels in the text, e.g., words in a clause or clauses in a sentence). Though this paper is only concerned with a particular sub-category of the syntax of the verb, understanding how verbs are formed (morphology) and if each form carries with it a particular meaning (semantics) may help to make sense of the entire verbal system.

Biblical Hebrew verbs begin with a basic root, which is usually tri-consonantal, e.g. קטל (qtl). These consonants have been vocalized using a system of points, which indicate vowels, accents, stresses, pauses, etc. (e.g., qtl can be vocalized as *qatal* or *yiqtol*). This basic combination of consonants and points also provides person, number, and gender distinctions through a series of prefixes or suffixes, which are generally accompanied by specific modifications within the word (e.g., *qatal* is third person, masculine, and singular, while *qatalti* is first person, common, and singular). There are four specific verb conjugations that have received much attention throughout the last few centuries regarding the syntax of the verb: *qatal* (קטל), *yiqtol* (יקטל), *wayyiqtol* (ויקטל), and *wəqatal* (וקטל).¹ The basic, or simple,

¹ These four conjugations are also known by different names, though this paper will use the terms above, as they describe the form of the verb rather than name it in accordance with a verb theory (e.g., past tense, or perfect).

vocalization of the Hebrew verb is the *Qal* stem of the *qatal* conjugation. Most of the other conjugations and stems are built from this simple conjugation and stem.

The inherent lexical meaning of the root consonants (including active or stative significance), combined with the broad meaning of the verbal stem (*qal*, *niphal*, *piel*, etc.) and conjugation (*qatal*, *yiqtol*, etc.) add to the semantic value of a particular verbal form. It is not until one places the verbal form into a particular context and within a particular verbal system, however, that the full meaning of a verbal form can be appreciated. For example, if one approaches the verbal system with a tense-based theory of the verb, a *qal qatal* form will have a simple past tense value inherent within the morphology of the verb, whereas an aspectual approach will have the tendency to understand the *qatal* form as inherently containing a perfective value within its morphology. Though one can enter into the particular textual context of a specific verb form by simply reading a text, scholars have had a much harder time understanding how exactly the verbal system functions within Biblical Hebrew.

One only needs to survey the ongoing scholarly conversation to get a sense of the difficulty many have had in understanding the Biblical Hebrew verb system, in both narrative and poetic texts. For the purposes of this paper, it is significant that scholars have yet to present a sufficient theory of the verb that is able to handle the special problems that arise for the interpretation of verbal conjugations in Biblical Hebrew poetry.²

Psalm 7:16 can serve as an example of the difficulty scholars have had. The text reads,

בּוֹר כָּרַה וַיַּחַפְּרֵהוּ וַיַּפֵּל בְּשַׁחַת יַפְעֵל. In this verse, there is a *qatal* conjugation, two

The *qatal* conjugation is also known as the perfect, or suffixed conjugation; the *yiqtol* is also known as the imperfect, prefixed, non-perfective, or present-future; the *wayyiqtol* is known as the *imperfect waw-consecutive*, and the *wəqatal* as the *perfect waw-consecutive*. See *WHS* §161-182 for a more full description of these four forms.

² This is not to say that a majority of scholars have accepted a system of the verb that works consistently in prose texts. That is a discussion that must take place in another setting. For this paper's concerns, focus must remain on the verb system in Biblical Hebrew poetry. In the end, however, the final solution to the verb must be able to work well in both prose and poetic texts.

wayyiqtol conjugations, and a *yiqtol* conjugation. Major English versions have translated it as follows:

ESV	He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made.
CSB	He dug a pit and hollowed it out, but fell into the hole he had made.
JPS	He hath digged a pit, and hollowed it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made.
KJV	He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made.
NAU	He has dug a pit and hollowed it out, And has fallen into the hole which he made.
NIV	He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made.
RSV	He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole which he has made.

In these examples, the *qatal* is translated as a present (ESV, RSV), a participle (NIV), a simple past (CSB, KJV), and a perfect (JPS, NAU). The *wayyiqtol* are translated as infinitives (ESV, RSV), presents (ESV, NIV, RSV), simple pasts (CSB, JPS, KJV, NAU), perfect presents (JPS, KJV), and perfects (NAU). The *yiqtol* has been translated as perfect (ESV, CSB, NIV, RSV) and simple past (JPS, KJV, NAU). Though translation is only able to provide limited access to the functions and meaning(s) of syntactic structures, these examples illustrate well that current translating principles are inconsistent in their interpretations (especially in how each translator handled the two consecutive *wayyiqtol* forms). For example, what is the relationship between *qatal* followed by *wayyiqtol*, or *wayyiqtol* followed *yiqtol*, in poetic texts? Or, what is the meaning of *qatal* and *yiqtol* conjugations when they are in parallelism?

Available introductory and intermediate grammars help little towards finding a solution. Little, if anything, is said about poetry, let alone how the verb system functions grammatically and syntactically within poetry. There are several reasons for this. First, grammars typically treat prose before poetry because prose syntax is generally considered more consistent than poetic syntax.³ To some degree this is justified. Second, given the controversy over the syntax of verbs in prose texts throughout the previous century (see below), it is not surprising that

³Tal Goldfajn has noted, “It is generally assumed that the verbal system in classical narrative is relatively systematic and homogeneous, and contrasts with the use of tenses in both BH poetry, where the tenses are regarded as even less comprehensible, and in late biblical Hebrew, where the waw-prefixed forms *wayyiqtol* and *weqatal* are less frequent.” In *Word Order and Time in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 19.

poetry has been given a secondary position, if any position at all, in beginning and intermediate grammars. In other words, attention was necessarily given to prose texts over poetic texts. The idea was that a solution to the verb in prose texts would lead to a solution to the verb in poetic texts.

It is not because of lack of attention, though, that the poetic genre has been given a secondary treatment. Many scholars, such as Berlin, Alter, and Watson, have contributed much to the rhetorical study of Biblical Hebrew poetry.⁴ The focus on rhetorical study, though very helpful, has only produced minimal observations concerning the sequence and syntax of verbs. For instance, Berlin's *Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* only explicitly treats the subject twice, while Alter only addresses its "ambiguity" once.⁵ This led to Arto Antturi's observation that "throughout the 1980s a wealth of studies dealing with aspects of Hebrew poetry and its verse structure emerged... Still, even in 1993 it has been correctly observed that one of the things that need further attention is the use of verbs."⁶ In a footnote to this statement, he even went so far as to ask, "Does this suggest that the study of poetic syntax has been utterly unproductive?"⁷ The answer to that question is simply, No. It would be unfair to call the advances in understanding parallelism "utterly unproductive." It must be said, though, that the discussion of Hebrew poetry is certainly left incomplete without any kind of consensus concerning the verb conjugations.

⁴ Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism: Revised and Expanded* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books/Perseus Book Group, 1985); Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Technique* (JSOTSS 26, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984).

⁵ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 35-36 and 136-37; Robert Alter, *Biblical Poetry*, 131.

⁶ Arto Antturi, 'The Hebrew Verb in Poetic Context: Psalm 44' (A paper presented at the University of Leiden, March 1994), 1. Used by permission through e-mail correspondence (April 3, 2008).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1n5.

In regard to this lack of consensus, Alviero Niccacci has observed among his contemporaries, “It was and still is fairly a common opinion among scholars, although not always openly declared, that the verbal forms in poetry, more than in prose, can be taken to mean everything the interpreter thinks appropriate according to his understanding and the context.”⁸ Similarly, in the introduction to their Psalms commentary, Hossfeld and Zenger have commented, “There is no consensus among scholars as regards the system of tenses or the determination of the several levels in poetic texts.”⁹ Their remarks, again, point to a lack of consensus which is easily observed in the review of recent grammars and monographs.

Joüon-Muraoka states, “In poetry the choice of a particular [verb] form may not always be dictated by grammatical considerations, but, for instance, by some metrical necessity.”¹⁰

Likewise, Nicholas P. Lunn stated in his recent monograph,

When one considers the overall meaning of...parallelism it is hard to accept that the author really intended to assign both verbs their own inherent tense and aspect independent from each other... We consider...that both verbs are to be understood as having identical aspectual and temporal reference, even though they differ in form. In this matter we endorse Buth’s treatment of tense-shifting in which he describes the phenomenon taking place here as the ‘alternation of verb forms for purely poetic reasons...’. He is surely right to identify this as ‘a poetic device’ and not a semantic distinction.¹¹

These scholars represent the general attitude of many in the field (and, in this sense, a consensus in the field); namely, that the actual form of the verb loses its temporal and aspectual meaning

⁸ Alviero Niccacci, “The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System in Poetry” in Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz, eds., *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 247.

⁹ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalm 51-100* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), xi. Though they acknowledge a lack of consensus among Biblical Hebrew scholars, they do claim to move forward in their own translation using more recent observations from the field. Regrettably, they do not go into any detail describing what these new observations might be.

¹⁰ Joüon-Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1996), §111.

¹¹ Nicholas P. Lunn, *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 118. It is hard to refrain from being cynical: is it really that “tense-shifting” has occurred, or is it that a proper explanation has yet to be put forward.

when used in parallelism. Stated differently, the context of poetic parallelism is said to remove the normal distinction between i.e. a *qatal* and a *yiqtol*.

An example of this is in Psalm 2:1,

למה רגשו גוים

ולאזמים יהגור־ריק

Why have/do [*qatal*] the nations conspire(d),
and the peoples plot(ted) [*yiqtol*] a vain thing?

In translation, interpreters typically either decide for a present or perfect past understanding of the verb forms, and then translate both forms the same way. The verb form in line A is said to provide the context for any verb form in line B. In the above example, this means that *qatal* in line A is the canonical form, providing the context for its parallel verb form in line B (*yiqtol*). The *yiqtol* in line B functionally acts like a *qatal*, with its variation in form being a literary, aesthetic feature (a ‘poetic device’). Thus, even if the form in line B were a participle or an infinitive, it would theoretically *mean* the same thing (*function* in the same way) as the *yiqtol* conjugation. Even if one disagrees with this view, at the very least, what these scholars have recognized is that there seems to be a change in the way syntax governs the use of verb forms in Biblical Hebrew poetry.

Other scholars have not been so willing to revert to “poetic devices” for “purely poetic reasons.” They continue to posit, “It is only reasonable to assume that if a writer uses different verb forms, he has in mind different temporal or aspectual references. Our task is to interpret his mind on the basis of the verb forms he uses.”¹² In this view, the verb forms themselves are still used as a guide to understand what is happening in the text, and serve to clue in the reader on the authorial intent of the passage. Using the same example as above, an alternative translation has been offered by Niccacci, “Why did the nations conspire, while the peoples were plotting in

¹² Alviero Niccacci, “Poetic Syntax and Interpretation of Malachi,” *LASBF* 51 (2001), 59.

vain?”¹³ Here, *x-yiqtol* in 2:1b is taken as a circumstantial construction (background) linked to its preceding verbal form (foreground). Somewhat similar to the observations noted above, Niccacci uses the verb form in line A as the “canonical” form, with the form in line B finding its context using the form in line A.¹⁴ Niccacci, however, does this for reasons differing from poetic devices (these will be discussed later). In this case, he understands the *qatal* to express past, “single information,” while the *x-yiqtol* expresses “repetition/habit/explication/description.” Though one might disagree, Niccacci has raised an important point: if an author wanted to use the same temporal or aspectual meaning for the verb form, then why were two different forms used? Others, like Niccacci, share the same sentiment that it is too early in research to revert to “poetic devices” as a solution.¹⁵ Whether or not Niccacci is moving in the right direction for understanding verbal syntax in poetry will be answered later in this paper.

The preceding debate serves to show that much work still needs to be done in regards to poetic syntax. Scholars will continue to debate the Biblical Hebrew verb system until a solution in poetic texts is found. If a theory of the Biblical Hebrew verb does not work in poetry, it cannot, in any legitimate sense, be said to work at all (*contra* Gropp).¹⁶

¹³ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 259.

¹⁴ Niccacci does not use the term “canonical”, though it could fit into his theory. The term is only used here to show the similarity between his theory and the theory of Lunn. Their views are different in that Lunn uses the canonical form to define how the form in line B is translated, whereas Niccacci uses it to define what temporal axis one is one (past, present, or future) – the form in line B can be related to the form in line A in a number of ways.

¹⁵ E.g., Eep Talstra, “Reading Biblical Hebrew Poetry – Linguistic Structure or Rhetorical Device?” (*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 25/2, 1999), 101-126. This is not to say that the poet might purposefully stretch the language for rhetorical reasons. For example, the confusing use of the verb conjugations in Lamentations 3 might be due to the intention of the author to leave the reader in a state of confusion, rather than using the conjugations in their normal usage. A theory of the verb in poetry must be open to such rhetorical possibilities.

¹⁶ Douglas M. Gropp, “The Function of the Finite Verb in Classical Biblical Hebrew” (*HAR* 13), 45.

The Aims of This Paper

The goal of this paper is not to lay claim to a final solution to the problem of the verb in Biblical Hebrew poetry. Rather, its aim is to present the verbal theory of Alviero Niccacci, apply it to certain poetic texts, and then critically analyze his theory's explanation of those texts. In presenting this analysis, the paper will move forward in several directions.

First, there will be a brief discussion about the peculiarities of Biblical Hebrew poetry. In this section rhetorical phenomena will be discussed, such as parallelism and conciseness (brevity/density). In the sub-section on method, there will be an interaction with different proposals as to whether the study of verbal syntax in poetry should begin by looking at clauses or lines. In this respect, Talstra has made a cogent argument that poetry should first be analyzed in terms of a linguistic system before entering the domain of rhetorical study.¹⁷

Second, there will be a short summary of what several verb theories propose about the Biblical Hebrew verb system. An appeal will be made for how textlinguistics can offer a solution to the problem, suggesting that there is no *essential* difference between the syntax of poetry and prose; rather, the difference lies in communicating through a parallelistic structure (poetry) versus a sequential, logical structure (prose).

Third, there will be a presentation of the Biblical Hebrew verbal system according to Alviero Niccacci. This section will begin with an overview of textlinguistics and its application to Biblical Hebrew. Afterwards, a full presentation of Niccacci's theory will be undertaken, beginning first with prose, and then finishing with poetry.

¹⁷ Eep Talstra, "Reading Biblical Hebrew Poetry." To the author's knowledge, no one else has made this argument, though it seems to be an important one that may provide a better environment for the future study of the subject. For example, one would interpret a verse such as Psalm 2:11-12 differently if approach linguistically rather than rhetorically, as will be seen in later analysis.

This section will be followed by a fourth, which will apply Niccacci's theory to three complete poetic texts: Jonah 2, Psalm 1, and Psalm 2. These texts have been carefully selected to include as many different verb conjugations as possible (particularly *qatal*, *yiqtol*, *weqatal*, and *wayyiqtol*) in as little verses as possible.

Fifth, and last, there will be an evaluation of Niccacci's verbal theory. Does it produce any results? Does he offer any direction for future study of the Biblical Hebrew verb system in poetry? Questions such as these must be answered to determine if Niccacci's work will (or even should!) have any lasting impact.

The Features and Forms of Biblical Hebrew Poetry

The characteristic feature of Biblical Hebrew poetry is parallelism.¹⁸ Parallelism, in its most basic definition, is simply “the correspondence of one thing to another.”¹⁹ It plays such an important role in how Biblical Hebrew poetry is understood that to talk about poetry one often talks about parallelism, and to talk about parallelism one talks about poetry. The link between the two is derived from their first formal study, which is usually traced to Robert Lowth, an eighteenth century language scholar. In his *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, and in his introduction to *Isaiah*, Lowth observed three kinds of semantic parallelism: synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic.²⁰ Even though these observations were made in late eighteenth century, they remained seminal in studies of parallelism until rather recently.

¹⁸ W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 114.

¹⁹ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 2.

²⁰ Synonymous parallelism refers to the repetition of line A in line B using different words, antithetic parallelism refers to the reversal of ideas in line B from line A, and synthetic parallelism is somewhat of a catch-all category, usually referring to how line B adds to or explains better line A.

The modern study of Biblical Hebrew poetry in many ways peaked in the mid-1980s. There were several lines of influential scholarship at that time. Some followed in the footsteps of Lowth, while others approached the subject from a modern linguistic standpoint. Those who followed Lowth continued to focus on semantic and syntactic relationships between parallel lines, while those coming from a linguistic standpoint sought to describe morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, and phonological relationships between parallel lines.

The most notable scholars following Lowth were Kugel and Alter.²¹ What makes their research significant is their fundamental disagreement with Lowth's tripartite semantic division of parallelism. Instead of preserving, modifying, or expanding upon Lowth's categories (as others had done previously), Kugel argued for one overarching semantic category – A, what's more, B – which could be realized in a wide variety of ways. For many, this observation proved to be a major turning point in the study of Biblical Hebrew parallelism (and poetry).

The modern linguistic approach to the subject has been dominated by Adele Berlin.²² Her scholarship has focused on grammatical, morphological, lexical, and phonological features of parallelism, though she has not by any means excluded the valuable insights made by those studying the semantic and syntactic features of parallelism. Indeed, these two schools are not opposed to one another, but are complementary, as Berlin makes quite clear, "My linguistic description of parallelism...provided a confirmation and an explanation of the conclusions reached through other means by Alter and Kugel."²³ One might say that Alter and Kugel

²¹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: BasicBooks, 1985); and James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

²² Adele Berlin, *Dynamics*.

²³ Berlin, *Dynamics*, xvii.

observed the literary effect of parallelism, while Berlin made an effort to explain theoretically how their observations were upheld from a linguistic standpoint.

Kinds of Biblical Parallelism

Berlin has identified four aspects of biblical parallelism: grammatical, lexical, semantic, and phonological. In general, the grammatical aspect is concerned with the structural organization of a language; that is, its morphology and syntax. Grammatical parallelism occurs in a text when there is a “pairing of two different grammatical structures in parallel stitches.”²⁴ When the pairing of grammatical elements is the same, she labeled these repetitions, not parallelisms.

Within the grammatical aspect, Berlin identifies two kinds of parallelism: morphological and syntactical. Morphological parallelism involves “the morphological equivalence or contrast of *individual constituents* of the lines,” whereas syntactical parallelism is concerned with the “syntactic equivalence of one line with another line.”²⁵ More specifically, morphological parallelism is concerned with pairing of parallel *terms* from different morphological classes (parts of speech), or from the same morphological class but containing different morphological components.²⁶ In other words, “Whenever a word from one part of speech parallels a word from a different part of speech we have a form of morphological parallelism.”²⁷ For instance, there can be parallelism between a noun and a pronoun, a noun and a relative clause, or even between a substantive and a verb. Usually morphological parallelism is between elements that can take on the same syntactic slot in a sentence.

²⁴ Adele Berlin, “Grammatical Aspects of Biblical Parallelism,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 50 (1979), 20. Berlin’s “stitch” is this paper’s “line” or “colon.”

²⁵ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 31.

²⁶ Berlin, “Grammatical Aspects,” 20.

²⁷ Berlin, “Grammatical Aspects,” 21.

In syntactical parallelism, a line may be paralleled by one with the same syntactical surface structure (no transformation) or by one with a different surface structure. What is important is that the deep structure of the two lines is the same.²⁸ She identifies several types of syntactical parallelism: positive-negative, change in grammatical mood, subject-object, and nominal-verbal.²⁹

Lexical parallelism is very closely related to semantic parallelism. In essence they are only different in that lexical parallelism observes the equivalence of individual word pairs in parallel lines, as distinct from grammar, while semantic parallelism is concerned with the relationship between the meaning of parallel lines.³⁰ To relate Berlin's aspects to earlier studies, Lowth made his observations exclusively about the semantic aspect of parallelism. Thus, Berlin greatly expands the scope of parallelism compared with earlier studies. Within lexical and semantic parallelism, she argues that the equivalence between word pairs (lexical) and parallel lines (semantic) is either paradigmatic or syntagmatic. A paradigmatic equivalence is when one thought (or word) is substituted for another, while syntagmatic equivalence refers to semantic continuation, which is a progression of thought.³¹ These relationships can be manifested in a number of ways, as noted in Berlin's discussion.

The final aspect of parallelism that Berlin makes note of is phonological, which relates to the sounds of a language. In her study, she limits the discussion of phonological parallelism to the repetition and contrast of sounds in parallel lines, and to sound pairs in particular. A sound

²⁸ Berlin defines deep structure as "the underlying level of structural organization" (*Dynamics*, 156). This is the opposite of surface structure, which is "the form of the phrase or sentence as it occurs in the text." (157).

²⁹ For further details see "Grammatical Aspects," 35-38, and *Dynamics*, 53-63.

³⁰ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 88.

³¹ See Berlin, *Dynamics*, 90. In earlier studies, Lowth observed predominately paradigmatic parallelism, while Kugel seems to, by definition, exclude it.

pair exists in parallel when there is “repetition in parallel words or lines of the same or similar *consonants* in any order within close proximity.”³² To put a control on the amount of phonological parallelism recognized between two lines, and to reduce the subjectivity involved in deciding what is or is not phonological parallelism, she qualifies her definition in three ways: 1) there must be at least two sets of consonants involved, 2) the sets must be in close proximity, and 3) the consonants involved must be identical phonemes, an allophone, or two closely-articulated phonemes.³³ She also notes that sound pairs can occur with word pairs and non-word pairs. The main effect of this aspect of parallelism is to enhance the perception of correspondence between two lines.

In the end, it can be observed that there is a multi-aspect and multi-level nature to parallelism; that is, “parallelism may involve semantics, grammar, and/or other linguistic features, and it may occur on the level of the word, line, couplet, or over a greater textual span.”³⁴ The complexity of parallelism is one of its greatest marks, and its potential uses are nearly endless, leaving open many options for the biblical authors, who showed a mastery of the Hebrew language.

The Distinguishing Marks of Biblical Hebrew Poetry

Parallelism, though the chief mark of Biblical Hebrew poetry, is only one of its many distinguishing marks. What makes parallelism the chief is that it is the structuring device upon

³² Berlin, *Dynamics*, 104.

³³ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 105.

³⁴ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 25.

which the whole poem it built.³⁵ There are a number of other characteristics that also help distinguish poetry from prose.

Watson calls these characteristics *indicators*, and groups them together in four sets of criteria: broad or general, structural, devices concerning sound, and negative, which refers to the absence of prose elements.³⁶ The broad indicators of Hebrew poetry include devices such as the presence of line-forms, ellipsis (also called ‘gapping’), unusual or archaic vocabulary, conciseness, unusual word order, rhyme and meter, and regularity and symmetry. The structural criteria include the various forms of parallelism, word-pairs, chiasmic patterns, repetition, and tricolon. Sound devices are those associated with rhyme or wordplay, and negative criteria includes the lack of the definite article, the object marker, and *wayyiqtol* verb conjugations, amongst others. In particular, Berlin singles out the combination of terse language and parallelism, while Watson seems to make much of the presence of ellipsis, particularly verb gapping.³⁷

On top of this list, Niccacci observes another crucial characteristic of poetry which sets it apart syntactically from other forms of direct speech (discourse): segmental communication.³⁸ He notices that prose texts generally convey information logically, in a sequence, while poetic texts convey information non-linearly, in parallelism. It is as one scholar noted, “Prose proceeds, poetry repeats; instead of sequence, there is equivalence.”³⁹ Comparing Judges 4:19 and 5:25, Berlin comes to a similar conclusion, “Each clause [in 5:25] does not have a unique temporal slot

³⁵ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 6.

³⁶ Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 45-60.

³⁷ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 7; Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 48.

³⁸ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 248.

³⁹ Talstra, “Reading Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” 104.

in a sequence as it does in the prose version [4:19]...the poetic version is more nonlinear.”⁴⁰

This will become a very important observation in later analysis.

A Method for Analyzing Poetry

What is needed for a solution to the enigma of the verb system in poetry is a method of analysis which brings together a theory of the Biblical Hebrew verb and a theory of Biblical Hebrew verse structure.⁴¹ On the one hand, a theory of the verb must note how the verb conjugations function within prose and poetry. A theory which only works in prose or poetry, but not both, is unacceptable.⁴² On the other hand, a theory of verse structure must take into consideration how Biblical Hebrew poetry works rhetorically and compositionally.⁴³ Whatever the solution is to the syntax of Biblical Hebrew poetry, it must begin with the joining of these hands. The method being proposed in this section is an attempt to accomplish such a task.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Berlin, *Dynamics*, 13.

⁴¹ In many discussions *verse* can refer to the genre of poetry, in contrast to prose, or it can refer to a particular level within a poem, usually the same as a strophe. Here, *verse* is being used in the sense of genre.

⁴² For instance, if a verb theory based on tense cannot account for the forms which exist in poetry, then tense cannot be the concept which begins solves the problems of verbal forms. The same would apply for aspectual and textlinguistic/discourse analysis accounts as well.

⁴³ Thus, a rhetorical analysis of the text is broadly considered here. Without any specific scholar in mind, such analysis seeks to describe the function of the distinguishing marks of poetry listed above.

⁴⁴ Different scholars refer to different elements in a poetic text with different terms. This can sometimes lead to confusion. For clarity throughout the remainder of this paper, terms will be defined as follows, from the smallest unit to the largest: hemistich (the subdivision of the colon, which is generally half the length of the colon), colon (a single line of poetry, may also be referred to simply as ‘line’), strophe (a verse-unit of one or more cola; when a strophe consists of one colon it will be called a monocolon; when it consists of two cola, a bicolon; three cola, a tricolon; etc.), stanza (a sub-section of the poem, made up of one or more strophes), and poem (an independent unit of poetry, made up of one or more stanzas; may also be referred to as a ‘poetic text’). These definitions are in line with those used by Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (New York: T & T Clark, 2001), 11-15.

Essentially, the method is the same one put forward by Watson, only with an additional step for syntactic analysis using Niccacci's textlinguistic.⁴⁵ As far as analysis is concerned for this paper, a major focus will be on this step of the method. This means that a full analysis of each poetic text will not take place, but only that part of the analysis which takes into consideration the function and effect of the use of the various verb conjugations. Thus, for sake of brevity, only this step will be explained.

The sevenfold method involves delineation, syntactical analysis, segmentation, inner-strophic analysis (rhetorical analysis), isolation of poetic devices, tabulation of poetic devices, and functional analysis.⁴⁶ There is much overlap between syntactical analysis and the step following it, segmentation (the dividing of the poem into its various units). The assumption behind including this step before rhetorical analysis is a simple one, and is best stated by Talstra,

Poetic devices make use of the same grammar as do prose texts, though they exhibit a different selection, making repeated and preferred choices from the available possibilities. One should differentiate between the linguistic system in general and the special markers which together create a specific poetic composition. This will help in the description of a poetic text as discourse, i.e. as a process rather than as a 'thing of beauty', a more or less static picture, as is often done in proposals on rhetorical analysis. The task, therefore, is to begin the analysis of pieces of literary art in terms of a linguistic system: clause patterns, verbal system, pronominal reference, topicalisation, etc., before entering the world of lexical repetition, chiasmus and inclusions.⁴⁷

By approaching poetic analysis using this method, linguistic features of the text can be observed on their proper foundation, since linguistic analysis cannot be based on rhetorical categories, but on systems of grammar and syntax. Analysis, then, should proceed from linguistic to poetic categories, and not *vice-a-versa*.

For instance, in Jonah 2:3, which will be analyzed below, a typical translation reads,

⁴⁵ Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 15-30.

⁴⁶ For functional analysis, see Watson's detailed research in *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, §11.01-18.

⁴⁷ Eep Talstra, "Reading Biblical Hebrew Poetry – Linguistic Structure or Rhetorical Device?" *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 25/2 (1999), 101.

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| (1) I called out of my distress to Yhwh, | [<i>qatal</i>] |
| (2) and <i>then</i> He answered me; | [<i>wayyiqtol</i>] |
| (3) From the depth of Sheol I cried for help, | [<i>x-qatal</i>] |
| (4) You heard my voice. | [<i>qatal</i>] |

A rhetorical analysis of this verse would note the parallelistic structure between lines one and three, and between lines two and four. It would also see no significant difference between the *qatal* → *wayyiqtol* in lines one and two, and the *x-qatal* → *qatal* in lines three and four. These would simply be taken as referring to the same event, which is being repeated.

A linguistic analysis, on the other hand, notes that although the *qatal* in line four is in parallel with the *wayyiqtol* in line two, it does not indicate the same exact information as the *wayyiqtol*. The *wayyiqtol* indicates the past action of the Lord continuing forward from the preceding *qatal*. The *qatal* in line four does not *continue forward* the preceding background *x-qatal* (it is not a continuation verb form), but focuses the reader on the stative fact of God's previous action. In other words, the *wayyiqtol* looks at the action itself in connection with Jonah's cry, while the *qatal* looks the result or end of that action, that God heard his voice. Thus, the *qatal* in line four fills in the missing (yet implied) information that the Lord had heard Jonah's call.

A method which gives precedence to rhetorical analysis before linguistic analysis will often create problems for a grammatical approach, "not because it would be unfitting for poetry, but because it is premature in the procedure," as was seen in the above example.⁴⁸ Talstra rightly observes that "once poetic categories have been chosen, an analysis in textlinguistic or text-grammatical terms becomes very difficult."⁴⁹ A premature rhetorical analysis at the very least makes the syntactical analysis much more difficult to assess.

⁴⁸ Talstra, "Reading Biblical Hebrew Poetry," 111-112.

⁴⁹ Talstra, "Reading Biblical Hebrew Poetry," 113.

It is not that rhetorical analysis is unimportant, or should be denied, but that it should be reserved for its proper place. This may be helpful when analyzing special features in poetry, such as ellipsis (gapping). Miller notes, “From a linguistic point of view, ellipsis involves constructions in which a grammatically required element is omitted by the speaker, thus creating a structural hole or gap. By this definition, ellipsis produces utterances which are *grammatically* incomplete in their surface structure.”⁵⁰ The task of the biblical scholar in this case is to “recognize that ellipsis has occurred and then...transform the sentence fragment into a meaningful sentence.”⁵¹ To do so, the scholar must make use of parallelism (a rhetorical device). In the end it is not that the two analyses compete with one another, but that they work hand in hand to derive the correct meaning from the text. With ellipsis, this must be done by using both syntactical and rhetorical analyses. Thus, a careful discernment between the linguistic description of poetic texts and their literary, rhetorical analysis, is critical for proper poetic exegesis.

The “Enigma” of the Biblical Hebrew Verb System

The verb system in Biblical Hebrew has proved an “enigma” to several generations of capable scholars, who have approached solutions from several different directions. The controversy was, and still is to some degree, concerned with how to understand the four conjugations mentioned above: *qatal*, *yiqtol*, *wəqatal*, and *wayyiqtol*.⁵² Essentially, scholars have debated whether these

⁵⁰ Cynthia Miller, “A Linguistic Approach to Ellipsis in Biblical Poetry,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 13.2 (2003), 252.

⁵¹ Miller, “Ellipsis in Biblical Poetry,” 253.

⁵² *WOC* §29.1b, also include *wəyiqtol* in their review.

conjugations indicate temporal action, aspectual action, both, or neither.⁵³ The view of the majority of Hebrew scholars today is that the conjugations indicate aspect, not tense.⁵⁴ Scholars, however, are not unified on *how* aspect is indicated.⁵⁵ Significantly, no single solution to the enigma of the verb has presently won over any consensus in the scholarly community.

Historically-speaking, the first grammatical treatment of the Biblical Hebrew verb system followed a tensed understanding of the verb forms. It was undertaken by the medieval Jewish grammarian Saadia Gaon.⁵⁶ Gaon distinguished three parts of speech (nouns, verbs, and particles), as well as three verb tenses: past tense (*qatal*), present tense (infinitive and participle forms), and future tense (*yiqtol*). This view of the verb system, accompanied later by the *waw*-conversive theory, was the basic and prevailing view until the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁷

⁵³ Several very good summaries have already been done to this end, and to simply reword what has already been said would be somewhat redundant. For a more thorough summary see the following: *WOC* §29; Leslie McFall, *The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982); and for more information regarding textlinguistic theories, see: Eep Talstra, “Text Grammar and Biblical Hebrew: The viewpoint of Wolfgang Schneider” (*JOTT* 5/4, 1992), 267-297, and Eep Talstra, “Tense, Mood, Aspect and Clause Connections in Biblical Hebrew: A Textual Approach” (*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 23/2, 1997), 81-103.

⁵⁴ A sample of those beginning and intermediate grammars which advocate an aspectual approach include: Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, “A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Russell T. Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi, “Invitation to Biblical Hebrew: A Beginning Grammar” (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006); Duane Garrett, “A Modern Grammar for Classical Hebrew” (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002); *GKC*; J. C. L. Gibson, “Davidson’s Introductory Hebrew Grammar: Syntax” (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1994); Edwin C. Hostetter, “An Elementary Grammar of Biblical Hebrew” (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Page H. Kelley, “Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar” (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992); Allen P. Ross, “Introducing Biblical Hebrew” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001); C. L. Seow, “A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew” (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995); Jacob Weingreen, “A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew” (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959); R. J. Williams, “Williams’ Hebrew Syntax: third edition, revised and expanded by John C. Beckman” (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); *WOC* §29.

⁵⁵ This difference can be observed particularly in how Waltke and O’Connor have treated the verb (§29).

⁵⁶ Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time*, 39.

⁵⁷ Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time*, 39, which recognizes Menaham’s *Mahberet* as the first grammar to treat the *waw*-prefixed forms.

At that time G. H. Ewald and S. R. Driver developed a new theory which has become known as the aspectual approach.⁵⁸ Generally speaking, the aspectual approach is concerned with the *duration* of an action, rather than the *time* of the action. Accordingly, tense systems generally signify when an action took place chronologically (past, present, or future), while aspect systems generally signify the internal quality of an action as it is happening (completed/perfective, or incompleting/imperfective).⁵⁹

A third, and somewhat recent attempt to understand the Biblical Hebrew verb system, has come from discourse-oriented approaches.⁶⁰ The major difference between discourse-oriented approaches and those preceding it is two-fold. First, discourse-oriented approaches are nearly unified in finding a synchronic solution to the enigma of verb tenses. Goldfajn has noted,

Much of the work done on this central question of BH grammar in the last two centuries has been diachronic in method: the basic concern has been to establish the genetic links between the BH verb forms and those of other Semitic and Hamitic languages, especially with the Akkadian system. A more systematic synchronic approach to the Hebrew tenses is a relatively recent development.⁶¹

⁵⁸ G.H. Ewald, "Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament" (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1891), translated by James Kennedy, re-printed by Wipf and Stock (Eugene, OR), 2004, and S. R. Driver, "A Treatise on the Use of the Tense in Hebrew" (London: Oxford University Press, 1894).

⁵⁹ Many who presently argue for an aspectual verb system do not hold such a simple view as Ewald and Driver once did. A cogent example is *WOC* §29.6. The same can be said for tense systems, such as that represented in Joüon-Muraoka.

⁶⁰ According to chronology, the next approach undertaken was the comparative-historical approach. Unlike the approaches preceding it, this one began with the assumption that Biblical Hebrew was not a coherent linguistic system, but a combination of multiple linguistic systems. H. Bauer and G.R. Driver were the early pioneers in this approach, who sought to use comparative linguistics to describe the historical development of Biblical Hebrew from its nearest neighbors. As Goldfajn has pointed out, though, it is questionable to assume that syntactic features from multiple languages can be combined into a new language without any significant alteration. He suggested that it seems more likely that the value of a verbal form should be judged by its actual use within a corpus (synchronic), rather than its historical origin (diachronic). All the same, once a synchronic solution is offered, it should be able to fit into a diachronic study. The assumption here is that priority should be given to the study of Biblical Hebrew as it stands in the Hebrew Bible.

⁶¹ Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time*, 13.

Though some synchronic solutions describe the verb system as tense-based or aspectual, many scholars recognize the value of a discourse-oriented approach.

The second distinctive of discourse-oriented approaches is a focus on syntax which goes beyond the level of phrases and clauses, to that of texts or discourses. Accordingly, Biblical Hebrew is described “not on the basis of sentences, but on the basis of texts.”⁶² By looking beyond sentence grammar, scholars are beginning to recognize the value in studying how sentences relate to one another within the larger discourse, or text.⁶³ An important implication of looking at texts, rather than sentences, is that the whole of the discourse is in view.

Though discourse-oriented approaches have been divided between those which are only concerned with how texts communicate meaning (textlinguistics), and those which also take into consideration conversational concerns (discourse analysis), one thing is for certain: by looking at whole texts (discourses) scholars are able to better analyze how meaning is conveyed through a medium. Along these lines Talstra has remarked,

The claim that the text is the largest unit of linguistic description has to do with another methodological decision: a language should be analysed according to its function: as a means of human communication... This implies that the linguistic and literary analysis of a text is not interested in the... feelings of its author, but in the linguistic forms used and in their functions. Not why an author used an imperfect has to be explained, but the effect of its use in a particular text.⁶⁴

⁶² Eep Talstra, “Text Grammar and Hebrew Bible. I: Elements of a Theory,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 35 No. 3/4, 169.

⁶³ Yoshinobu Endo, *The Verbal System of Classical Hebrew in the Joseph Story* (Assen, the Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996), 22-26. In particular, Endo has noted how the discourse grammars have been able to show that ‘tense’ still plays an important role at the level beyond the sentence.

⁶⁴ Talstra, *Elements of a Theory*, 169. Talstra also wants to argue that a linguistic and literary study of a text is not interested in the purposes of the author, implying that the author’s feelings and purposes are the same thing. Textlinguistics, as used in this paper, disagrees with Talstra at this point, and for this reason, textlinguistics should be distinguished from discourse analysis. A textlinguistic, as the term is used here, though not concerned with the feelings of the author, *relies* on the linguistic and literary analysis of a text to arrive at an author’s purpose and intention. Thus, the effect of the use of an imperfect within a text will also provide the reason why such an imperfect was used by the author. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, is by its very nature concerned not only with texts, but with numerous features of a communicative act that are not text related.

The central question, then, for discourse approaches is what function each verb form has in the process of communication.⁶⁵ Discourse approaches (in particular textlinguistics) are not concerned with an author's inward dispositions, but are concerned with the actual words of the communicative act. This sets textlinguistics apart from the approaches previously discussed: aspectual theories approach the verb in terms of *duration* or *type of action*, tense theories in terms of *time of action*, and discourse theories in terms of *type of communication*.⁶⁶

Another distinguishing mark within discourse-oriented circles concerns the concept of a distributional methodology. Van der Merwe has identified the two main strands of discourse approaches based on how each handles the question of distribution and function.⁶⁷ The first strand is the *functional approach*, which is mainly concerned with treating specific problem areas in the description of Biblical Hebrew in terms of a particular modern linguistics or discourse theory.⁶⁸ Here, different functional elements are first defined and then a specific form from the text is shown to 'fit' into that function.

The second strand is the *form-to-function approach*, which favors an entire re-evaluation of existing grammatical knowledge in terms of a new look at all the Biblical Hebrew data. Here, before assigning the different conjugations a function, discourse analysts tend to first note how each form is distributed in the Hebrew text.⁶⁹ Van der Merwe observed that these two paths are

⁶⁵ Talstra, *Elements of a Theory*, 170.

⁶⁶ This distinction will be thoroughly explained below.

⁶⁷ C. H. J. van der Merwe, "Discourse Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew Grammar: The Road Ahead," in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, ed. R. B. Bergen (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 38. He also showed in this section how the recent interest in discourse approaches is different than the path most other grammars currently pursue, such as Waltke and O'Connor.

⁶⁸ He identified Robert Longacre and F. I. Andersen as scholars of this approach.

⁶⁹ He identified W. Richter, W. Gross, and E. Talstra as scholars of this approach.

not mutually exclusive, but serve to complement one another. He concluded that a proper discourse approach to biblical Hebrew must account for all the data (form-to-function), but also must allow for “imaginative hypotheses” based on observations from other languages and from particular modern linguistic theories.⁷⁰

The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System According to Alviero Niccacci

This section is an overview of the syntax of the verb according to Alviero Niccacci. He approaches the verb system from a textlinguistic standpoint, founded upon the linguistic theory of Harald Weinrich, and the initial work done by Wolfgang Schneider and Eep Talstra in applying that theory to Biblical Hebrew.⁷¹ Niccacci himself has had an evolution in his understanding of syntax in poetic texts, and one cannot appreciate his conclusions unless an understanding of his work in prose texts is first presented, along with an overview of his changing view of poetic texts.

The Textlinguistic of Harald Weinrich

As stated above, Niccacci has built his theory of the Biblical Hebrew verbal system having made much use of the linguistic work of Harald Weinrich.⁷² The linguistic theory attributed to Weinrich has been labeled “textlinguistics,” and has been explained as “a method used in linguistics to describe all the elements of a language, including the function these have in oral

⁷⁰ Van der Merwe, “Discourse Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew Grammar,” 38-39.

⁷¹ H. Weinrich, *Tempus: Besprochene und erzählte Welt*, 4th edition (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985); W. Schneider, *Grammatik des Biblischen Hebraischen: Ein Lehrbuch* (München: Claudius, 2001); E. Talstra, “Text Grammar and Hebrew Bible I: Elements of a Theory” (*Bibliotheca Orientalis* 35, No. 3/4, May-July 1978), 169-174; E. Talstra, “Text Grammar and Hebrew Bible II: Syntax and Semantics” (*Bibliotheca Orientalis* 39, No. 1/2, Jan-Mar 1982), 26-38; and E. Talstra, “Text Grammar and Biblical Hebrew: The Viewpoint of Wolfgang Schneider” (*Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 5 no 4, 1992), 269-297.

⁷² The main resources for this summary were found in Niccacci, *Syntax* (§2-5), and from E. Talstra, “Text Grammar and Biblical Hebrew,” *JOTT* 5/4 (1992), 269f.

and written texts.”⁷³ Essentially, textlinguistics understands all verb forms, particles, variations in word order, etc. as syntactic signals which orient the author (speaker) to the reader (listener). These signs function to inform one of the genre of text he or she is reading or listening to, speaking in terms of *type of communication*, rather than *time of action* (tense) or *duration/type of action* (aspect).

Taking these cues, one can summarize textlinguistics as describing the function of the elements of a language in oral and written texts. For Weinrich, an *oral or written text* is “a logical (i.e. intelligible and consistent) sequence of linguistic signs, placed between two significant breaks in communication.”⁷⁴ This means that the sequence or arrangement of linguistic signs in a text plays a crucial role in textlinguistics. In this light, syntax can be defined as “all the grammatical signals in a text that produce a preliminary sorting of the world of speaker and listener (obstinate linguistic signs).”⁷⁵ These linguistic signs, then, have two important roles in textlinguistics. First, they are the principal signals in a text which indicate breaks, as well as whether or not a break is significant or insignificant. Second, they organize or arrange the textual world between the speaker and the listener. This dual role of linguistic signs provides the foundation for the primary goal of the linguist: to observe what elements of a language are associated with different kinds of texts, and then describe how those elements function within that text.

From a detailed study of modern written texts, Weinrich concluded that there are two sets of “tenses” with separate functions within any text. On the one hand, he observed that some verbal forms refer to the actual situation of communication (that is, the present “tense” event of

⁷³ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §2.

⁷⁴ Niccacci, “Syntactic Analysis of Ruth,” *LASBF* 45 (1995), 105.

⁷⁵ Talstra, “Text Grammar,” 270.

two people communicating with each other), while, on the other hand, other verbal forms refer to acts or facts outside the domain shared by the speaker and the listener (that is, events not “present” in the act of communication). The first set of verbal forms he labeled “discourse” or “comment,” while the second set he labeled “narration.”⁷⁶ Thus, *discourse* or *comment* indicates verbal referents present within the actual conversation between speaker and listener, while *narration* indicates verbal referents prior to, subsequent with, or still approaching, but not present in the communicative act.

From these observations he concluded that “verbal forms should be described not on the basis of their time reference outside the world of text nor on the basis of reference to the mode of action (either completed or continuous) but rather as linguistic signs that guide and determine the *mode of communication*.”⁷⁷ For Weinrich, verb systems are not inherently tense-based, nor aspectual, but are systems of linguistic signs that orient the speaker to the listener. Any tensed or aspectual nuances are only secondarily part of verb systems.

For example, one of the modern languages which Weinrich studied was English. He found that the English language most often uses present, present perfect, and future verbal forms to refer directly to the domain of speaker and listener (‘direct speech’), but uses imperfect, simple past, pluperfect, and conditional verbal forms to refer to what lies outside the domain of speaker and listener (‘narrative’).

⁷⁶ It may be helpful to call all the verbal forms associated with direct speech (discourse) as being in *the tense of direct speech*, while those associated with narration as being in *the tense of narration*. This is a different way of using “tense” than is normally attributed to the term. Instead of using “tense” later, the term *linguistic attitude* will be applied (e.g., the attitude of direct speech, or the attitude of narration).

⁷⁷ Talstra, *Text Grammar*, 271. Hence the delineation made above of *type of communication* from *time of action* or *duration of action*.

Table 1: The Distribution of English Verb Tenses		
temporal axis \ LA	direct speech	narrative
past	present perfect	simple past past perfect
present	present	imperfect
future	future	conditional

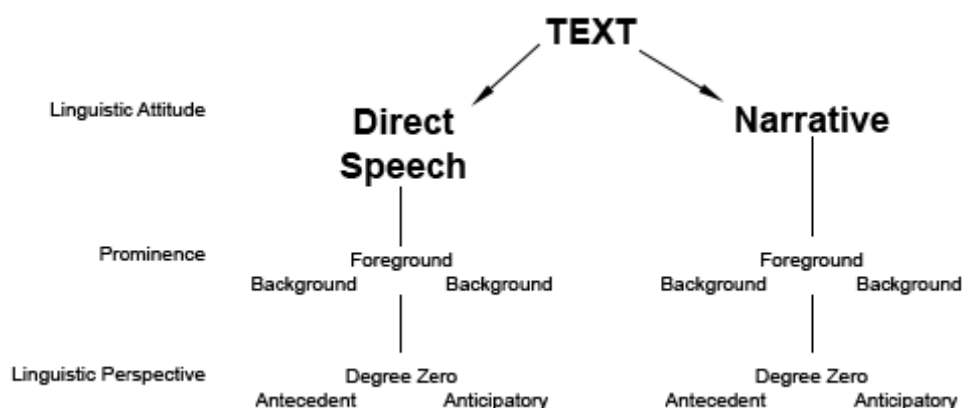
Beyond these two general verb *tenses* (direct speech and narration), Weinrich also described texts from three *aspects*: linguistic attitude, prominence, and linguistic perspective.⁷⁸ Linguistic attitude refers to the *orientation* of the text (that is, the *orientation* of the author/speaker to the reader/listener). In the table above, the columns *direct speech* and *narrative* are examples of linguistic attitude (LA).⁷⁹ Prominence refers to emphasis or highlighting in a text. From this aspect come the concepts of foreground and background. In Weinrich's theory, some verbal forms occupy the 'foreground' or main line of the text, and are the verb forms which push the story or conversation forward. Other verbal forms occupy the 'background', or secondary line of communication. These provide some kind of background information (antecedent, contemporaneous, anticipatory, etc.) which is usually critical to understanding the main story line.

The third aspect, linguistic perspective, refers to three specific areas of the text: retrieved information, degree zero, and anticipated information. Retrieved information is a kind of flashback or a reference to information antecedent to the 'present' of the narrative, while anticipated information is a disclosing of information which will be revealed later on in the story.

⁷⁸ The use of the terms "tense" and "aspect" in this way can be somewhat confusing, and, if misunderstood, very misleading. For example, according to Weinrich, there are three *aspects* of a text, one of which is *tense*. The remaining parts of this paper will attempt to be consistent to use the following terms: *tense*, which refers to narration or direct speech in this theory, will be called "orientation," for it *orients* the speaker/author to the listener/reader. For Weinrich, these 'tenses' are text-types, or genres – one of which is historical narrative and the other direct speech. The word *aspect* will be retained, though, for it does not refer to anything like *mode of action* or *kind of action*, as it is used in other aspectual theories of the verb. Weinrich uses the term according to its standard definition, as referring to the different parts or elements of his theory.

⁷⁹ Thus, the *aspect* of "linguistic attitude" is synonymous with tense.

These also make up what Weinrich calls the background, or secondary line of communication. Degree zero refers to the level of the story itself, the ‘present’ of the text, and is sometimes called the *mainline* or the *main storyline* of the text (the ‘foreground’). It is helpful to recognize a correspondence between background and secondary line information, and between the foreground and degree zero. The following illustration may help:



A final element of Weinrich’s textlinguistic for this discussion is *tense shifting*.⁸⁰ Tense shifting occurs in a text when there is a transition between one of the three aspects, and it can either be homogeneous or heterogeneous. It is homogeneous when there is a change of verb form within the same linguistic perspective (e.g. from a foreground verb form to a background verb form within direct speech), but is heterogeneous when it occurs between verb forms that belong to different linguistic perspectives (e.g. from a foreground form in narrative to a foreground form in direct speech). Transitions are uniform when there is a succession of verb forms which all belong to the same linguistic perspective (homogeneous). This will be explained in more detail when applied to Biblical Hebrew.

To summarize, Weinrich’s linguistic model provides certain key elements for Schneider and Niccacci. These can be described from three different aspects: linguistic attitude,

⁸⁰ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §4.

prominence, and linguistic perspective. Linguistic attitude reveals two levels in a text: narrative and direct speech; prominence (or emphasis) reveals two levels: foreground and background; and linguistic perspective reveals three levels in a text: antecedent information, degree zero, and anticipated information. Every text also progresses through a series of tense shifts. When applied to Biblical Hebrew, the combination of all these elements provides a rich textual relief, which serves to sort out the world of the author/speaker to the reader/listener.

Schneider's Application of Textlinguistics to Biblical Hebrew

Wolfgang Schneider's grammar was important because he was the first Biblical Hebrew grammarian to use the views of Weinrich in an attempt to understand the use of Biblical Hebrew verbal forms and sequences.⁸¹ By doing so, Schneider stressed the importance of the text by looking at linguistic units beyond phrases and clauses, concentrating on the formal structure of texts. Before him, almost all discussion of syntax was concentrated on phrases and clauses.⁸²

This was an important change in the study of Biblical Hebrew syntax. Ever since then "a description of syntax should take into account the various linguistic forms which accompany the process of information."⁸³ Many Biblical Hebrew grammars advocate a functional view of grammar where different functional elements of language are first defined and then a specific form in Biblical Hebrew is shown to "fit" that function. With Schneider, however, forms are first described, and then are shown to have a certain function within a text. This principle

⁸¹ C. H. J. van der Merwe, "An Overview of Hebrew Narrative Syntax," in Ellen van Wolde, ed., *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 9.

⁸² See the grammars by Gesenius and Joüon for examples.

⁸³ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §5.

enabled Schneider to define syntax much like Weinrich, as “the description of linguistic forms that carry out the process of communication.”⁸⁴

When Schneider looked at the distributional data he found that in narrative texts, 75% of the verbal forms were *wayyiqtol* forms, while in non-narrative texts, 50% of the verbal forms were *yiqtol* forms and about 20% were *w-qatal* forms. From these statistics, Schneider concluded:

The two verbal forms *wayyiqtol* and *yiqtol* can be called the main tenses because they can be implemented as the main opposition in the scheme designed by Weinrich. In his grammar, therefore, the use of *wayyiqtol* or *yiqtol* is not determined by time reference nor by verbal aspect – that is, by any type of incomplete (imperfect) action. Rather, it is determined by the orientation of the speaker in the text.⁸⁵

Having made this initial conclusion, he made the following observations. First, he noted that *wayyiqtol* forms build the main storyline of narrative texts, while *yiqtol* and *qetol* (participle) forms are used primarily in direct speech sections of narrative texts. Using Weinrich’s terminology, the *wayyiqtol* is the primary (foreground) “orientation” form in narrative texts, while the *yiqtol* is the primary (foreground) “orientation” form in discursive, or direct speech, texts.

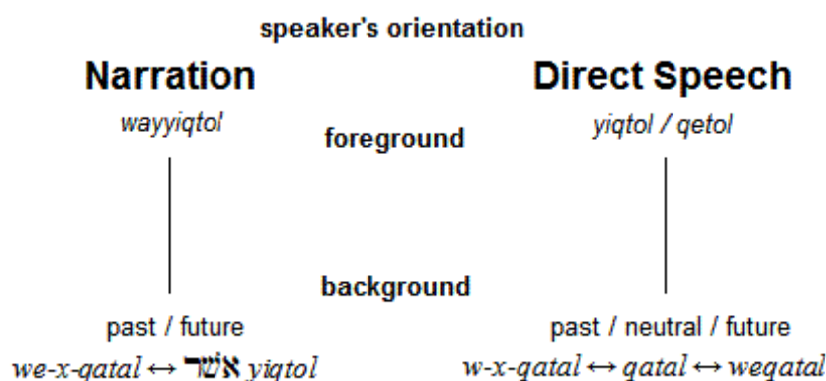
The second observation Schneider made concerned foreground and background in both narrative and discursive texts. In Biblical Hebrew, the *qatal* conjugation is what Schneider called a “secondary” tense. He thought that *qatal* clauses referred to “situations already existent prior to that of communication (either logically or chronologically).”⁸⁶ For narrative texts, this meant that when a *qatal* clause was employed by the author the main storyline was slowed down so that background information could be introduced into the plot. The plot was continued once

⁸⁴ Talstra, “Text Grammar,” 269.

⁸⁵ Talstra, “Text Grammar,” 275-276.

⁸⁶ Talstra, “Text Grammar,” 277.

another *wayyiqtol* form was employed.⁸⁷ Talstra made a special note that this distinction between background and foreground was helpful to explain the observations made by earlier grammarians.⁸⁸ Building off of the previous illustration (pg. 31), this one shows how Schneider would describe the basic elements of Biblical Hebrew texts:



A final area of summary for Schneider's system is how an author transitions between narrative texts and discursive texts. In Biblical Hebrew, Schneider understood that there were two *domains* of communicators: the domain between the author and reader, and the domain between two characters within a narrated story.⁸⁹ In each set, the speaker is "oriented" to the listener in one of two ways: narration, or discourse.

Narration orients the speaker/narrator to the listener/reader through the recounting of historical events. When in the domain of the author/reader, the observations noted above about

⁸⁷ Another background form recognized by Schneider in narrative texts was אָשַׁר + *yiqtol*, which referred to anticipated background activity or facts. In discursive texts, there are several background forms to the foreground forms *yiqtol* and *qetol*: *w-x-qatal* for antecedent or recovered information, *qatal* for present or concurrent information, and *weqatal* for anticipated or future information.

⁸⁸ For instance, GKC §111c identified the ability of *w-x-qatal* clauses to replace *wayyiqtol* clauses in narrative texts, but could not explain why this was so using his theory about the verb (aspectual). Talstra responded by saying, "One might suggest that traditional grammar found the right distributional data but did not find a way to implement these data in an overall theory for using the tenses." (Talstra, "Text Grammar", 278)

⁸⁹ Here, *domains* refers to the two sets of speakers/listeners within the biblical text.

historical narrative texts apply (*wayyiqtol* as the mainline form, *qatal* as a secondary form). The author can transition out of this orientation in two ways. First, he can change from narration into direct speech (a change in domain from author to speaker), or make a comment directly to the reader/listener (using the verb forms of direct speech). Talstra summarizes this well,

No new speaker has been introduced apart from the narrator, as is usually the case in direct speech. Only the speaker's orientation has changed from that of a narrative domain to a discursive one. This means that the speaker/writer has changed from narrating a situation outside the domain shared by writer and reader to a discursive type of speech about something now present within the domain of both writer and reader... The result is a kind of direct speech that proceeds in one direction from the writer to the reader.⁹⁰

To signal this new “orientation” the author will use a phrase such as **עַל-כֵּן**, and often making use of a *yiqtol* form (c.f. Genesis 2:24-25). Though the orientation between narrator and reader has changed, it is important to note that the domain has not changed.⁹¹

A domain change happens when two characters within a story begin to communicate with each other. In this case, the narrator himself becomes virtually silent, and the characters are allowed to speak for themselves. The main markers in a narrative text to signal this change are **אָמַר** or **דִּבֶּר** in *wayyiqtol* or infinitive forms. Once this change in domain is signaled by the grammatical forms in the text, the “actors” within the narrative text now take on the roles of speaker and listener, creating a new domain. Within this new domain, the speaker's perspective can have either a discursive or narrative orientation, just as the narrator in the author-reader domain. Though Schneider does not seem to delineate any syntactical difference between the

⁹⁰ Talstra, “Text Grammar,” 280-281.

⁹¹ Remember, *domain* refers to who is communicating. In Biblical Hebrew, there are two domains: 1) author-reader, and 2) characters within the narrative itself. *Orientation* refers to the communicative situation between the speaker and listener in either of the domains above. There are two ways a speaker can be oriented to a listener: 1) narration, and 2) comment.

narrator as speaker and an actor in the story as speaker, Niccacci does. In this regard, Niccacci goes beyond Schneider, which the table below reflects:

Table 2: Domain and Orientation		
Schneider		
Domain \ Orientation	Narration	Discourse
Author and Reader and Two characters in plot	Narration	Comment / Direct Speech
Niccacci		
Domain \ Orientation	Narration	Discourse
Author and Reader	Historical narrative (past axis)	Comment (present/future axis)
Two characters in plot	Oral narrative (past axis)	Direct speech (present/future axis)

Summary

Schneider represents a paradigm shift in the study of Biblical Hebrew grammar and syntax. Though those who follow Schneider build from his work in several different directions, there are certain elements of his application of Weinrich to Biblical Hebrew that stand out. These include: a focus on units longer than the sentence, a distributional approach to syntax ('form-to-function'), and the textlinguistic aspects of linguistic attitude (orientation), prominence (foreground and background), and linguistic perspective (axes of past, present, and future).

The Textlinguistic Approach of Alviero Niccacci

Alongside Weinrich and Schneider, Niccacci believes that "the verb forms in a narrative constitute the main clue to the author's perspective in presenting his information."⁹² In this regard, "Verb forms should be seen as linguistic signs at the speaker's or writer's disposal to

⁹² Niccacci, "Analysis of Biblical Narrative," in Robert D. Bergen, ed., *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 175.

present his information in a meaningful, forcible way so as to influence and guide the response of the listener or reader.”⁹³ As with Weinrich, Niccacci does not view *tense* as the same thing as *time*: *tense* refers to the author’s attitude (narration or direct speech), which orients the reader to the author’s strategy, while *time* is a temporal category referring to either the past, present, or future.

Beyond the work of Weinrich and Schneider, Niccacci contributes much to the study of Biblical Hebrew syntax. The bedrock of his theory is the distinction between a verbal sentence, in which a finite verb form is in the first-position in the sentence (e.g., *wayyiqtol*), and a compound nominal clause, in which the finite verb is in the second place (e.g., *x-qatal*). Outside of this, his main contribution is in the area of direct speech, where he goes into much greater detail than Schneider, including his comments on the syntax of poetic texts.

First-Position vs. Second-Position in the Sentence

For Niccacci there are two main criteria in analyzing verb forms: position in the sentence, and position in the text.⁹⁴ When a verb form comes first in a sentence it is a verbal sentence, and can be used to give degree zero, or mainline information (e.g., *wayyiqtol* in narrative). When a verb form comes second in a sentence, it is no longer considered a verbal sentence, but a compound nominal clause. As a rule, these can only be used to indicate information on the subsidiary line of communication. This simple distinction serves to show that the keystone of Niccacci’s approach is the distinction between the first-position in a sentence and the second.⁹⁵

⁹³ Niccacci, “Analysis of Biblical Narrative,” 175.

⁹⁴ Niccacci, “Analysis of Biblical Narrative,” 176.

⁹⁵ Niccacci, “Finite Verb in the Second Position of the Sentence: Coherence of the Hebrew Verbal System,” *ZAW* 108 (1996), 434.

In its most basic form, this distinction can be described as follows, “A verbal clause begins with a verb, [and] a noun clause begins with a noun.”⁹⁶ As Longacre notes, “[GKC passed on to us] a certain insistence of the Arab grammarians that any clause that starts with a noun should be regarded as a noun clause (whether or not it has a finite verb), while any clause that starts with a verb should be regarded as a verb clause.”⁹⁷ As in Gesenius’ day, this is still a point of contention among Hebrew scholars. Even so, for Niccacci’s theory to work, this basic distinction must be made.⁹⁸

Once it is made, one can properly talk about the categories of prominence and linguistic perspective. This is because Niccacci sees a correspondence between a clause-initial finite verb form and the foreground (mainline of communication), and between a second-position finite verb form and the background (subsidiary line of communication). This is based on the fact that “in narrative a verbal sentence is a linguistic sign of *connection*, while a nominal sentence (simple or compound) is a sign of *interruption* in the mainline of communication.”⁹⁹ As signs of interruptions, nominal clauses contain dependent verbs from a syntactic viewpoint, and a subsidiary line of communication (background) from a textlinguistic standpoint.¹⁰⁰ The distinction between these two kinds of sentences (verbal and nominal) is the foundation of Niccacci’s verbal theory.

⁹⁶ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §6.

⁹⁷ Robert Longacre, *Joseph* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 62, and GKC, §141-142.

⁹⁸ Niccacci also further delineates two kinds of nominal clauses: a simple nominal clause (SNC) and a compound nominal clause (CNC). A SNC contains no verbal element at all, while a CNC is one in which an ‘x’ element is followed by a finite verb (e.g., *x-qatal* or *waw-x-yiqtol*).

⁹⁹ Niccacci, “Analysis of Biblical Narrative,” 177.

¹⁰⁰ Niccacci, “Analysis of Biblical Narrative,” 177-178.

Narration

In essence, narration is the recounting of events or states which are *not present* or current in the relationship involving the narrator and the reader, while direct speech is the present interaction between the speaker and listener. As with Schneider, Niccacci considers *wayyiqtol* as the dominant form of narrative, while *yiqtol* is the dominant form of direct speech.¹⁰¹ *Qatal*, in both narrative and discourse, is usually employed as a secondary form (*w-x-qatal*). The following description of the verb forms in narration is only rudimentary. For questions regarding more advanced grammar, refer to Niccacci's *Syntax* or one of the several articles listed in the bibliography.

To begin a historical narrative text, Biblical Hebrew usually employs secondary line forms. "All the necessary information previous to a story is conveyed by nominal constructions having a finite verb form in the second position, a *wəqatal* or a sentence with no finite verb form at all."¹⁰² The following forms convey antecedent information or setting: *waw-x-qatal* is used for an event or information that occurred in the past, *waw-x-yiqtol* and *wəqatal* are used for a repeated or continuous event or information, and *waw-simple nominal clause (with or without a participle)* is used for a contemporary event or information.¹⁰³

The mainline of the narrative does not properly begin until a narrative *wayyiqtol* form is used. *Wayyiqtol* is also the form used to continue the mainline forward, usually in a

¹⁰¹ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §22. For *yiqtol* in direct speech, Niccacci particularly notes the different roles for indicative *yiqtol* and volitive *yiqtol* (jussive/cohortative). All these verb forms are on the main line of communication.

¹⁰² Niccacci, "Coherence of Hebrew Verb System," 438.

¹⁰³ A "short independent narrative" can also be considered antecedent information. When this happens, usually a *waw-x-qatal* construction is followed by a string of *continuation wayyiqtol*. In this case, the *wayyiqtol* are not narrative forms and take on the *time* value of the previous verb form. See Niccacci, "Basic Facts and Theory of the Biblical Hebrew Verb System in Prose," in Ellen van Wolde, ed., *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 172-173; *Syntax*, §27.

chronological sequence. This narrative sequence can be broken when the author wants to convey information on the secondary level, to express a number of events or states in relation to the mainline event.

The same constructions used at the beginning of a narrative to provide antecedent information are also used here, but can function in slightly different ways: the *waw-x-qatal* construction can be used to express an antecedent circumstance, simultaneous event, contrast, or emphasis;¹⁰⁴ a simple nominal clause, usually preceded by a *waw*, can be used to express a simultaneous circumstance;¹⁰⁵ and the *wəqatal* and *(waw-)x-yiqtol* constructions can be used to express background, repeated action.¹⁰⁶

In all of these constructions a homogeneous tense shift occurs, moving from the foreground (*wayyiqtol*) to the background, but remaining in the same linguistic perspective. When these secondary line forms are linked to a preceding *wayyiqtol* the background forms indicate a pause in the narrative, providing relief in the text. When they are linked to a following *wayyiqtol*, these same background forms no longer indicate a pause in the text, but a significant break in the text, which delimits one text from another.¹⁰⁷ In this case, the background forms are actually providing antecedent information previous to the beginning of a new narrative chain. In this case, a new episode or text has begun, and a new analysis can take place.

The following chart provides a summary of the basics of BH narrative syntax:

¹⁰⁴ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §40-42, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §43, 82.

¹⁰⁶ The only difference between *wəqatal* and *waw-x-yiqtol* is that the *waw-x-yiqtol* construction adds emphasis to the 'x' element. See Niccacci, *Syntax*, §46.

¹⁰⁷ This kind of break can either indicate the beginning of a new text, or simply the beginning of a new episode within the same text. In this case, one needs to appeal to semantic criteria (literary devices, context, change in characters or setting, and meaning) to judge whether a break is significant (new text) or insignificant (new episode, same text). "By itself, syntax can only signal a break; it cannot signal the textual significance of that break" (Niccacci, "Analysis of Biblical Narrative," 179).

Table 3: The Biblical Hebrew Verb System in Historical Narrative ¹⁰⁸		
ANTECEDENT Beginning of Narrative (secondary level)	FOREGROUND → Main line (main level, narrative sequence)	BACKGROUND → Secondary line (secondary level)
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>x-qatal</i> → (a single event in the past; can be extended into a short independent narrative with continuation <i>wayyiqtol</i>)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>non-verbal sentence</i> → (contemporaneous state w/o ptcp, contemporaneous action w/ ptcp)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>x-yiqtol</i> → or <i>wəqatal</i> → (repeated, habitual action)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">→ <i>wayyiqtol</i> sequence</p> <p style="text-align: center;">→ <i>qatal</i> or <i>w-x-qatal</i> (only in the two-element syntactic construction with or without a preceding <i>wayehi</i>, c.f. <i>Syntax</i> §126-127)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">→ <i>(w-)x-qatal</i> (anteriority, simultaneity, contrast, emphasis)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">→ <i>(w-)non-verbal sentence</i> (contemporaneity)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">→ <i>(w-)x-yiqtol</i> or → <i>wəqatal</i> (repetition, habitual)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">→ <i>yiqtol</i> (anticipatory, c.f. Gen 2:19b)</p>

This table helps to show that Niccacci does not outright deny the presence of tense and aspect:

We can affirm that verb forms have *fixed temporal reference* when they are verbal sentences and/or indicate the mainline of communication both in narrative and in direct speech. On the other hand, they have a *relative temporal reference* when they are nominal clauses and indicate a subsidiary line of communication. . . . Aspect, in the sense of mode of action, is . . . a legitimate category of the Hebrew verbal system in the subsidiary line of communication. But in the mainline of communication we can readily admit tenses.¹⁰⁹

Accordingly, fixed tense (as in temporal reference) corresponds to the foreground (verbal sentences), while aspect corresponds to background (nominal sentences).

Direct Speech

In narrative texts there is only one mainline (which lies on the past temporal axis), but in direct speech there are three mainlines corresponding to the three temporal axes (past, present, future).

As an outcome, the author has more freedom to switch from past, present, and future, than he did in the domain of historical narrative. As before, this present summary only reviews the basic elements of the verb forms in direct speech.

¹⁰⁸ Adapted from Niccacci, "Interpretation of Malachi," 56.

¹⁰⁹ Niccacci, "On the Hebrew Verbal System," in Robert D. Bergen, ed., *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 129.

The past in direct speech is represented by ‘oral narrative.’ Unlike historical narrative, oral narrative cannot begin with antecedent information. Instead, it begins with the mainline, which is started by a *qatal*, an *x-qatal*, or even a *simple nominal clause* (with or without a participle). Like historical narrative, oral narrative progresses forward, usually chronologically, with *wayyiqtol* forms, and uses the same secondary forms as historical narrative.

The future also has a mainline in direct speech, as contrasted with narration, where it only has a secondary, anticipatory form (*yiqtol*). The foreground of the future can be expressed using indicative *x-yiqtol*, volitive forms (jussive/cohortative/imperative), or the *simple nominal clause*. The indicative future (non-volitive) begins its mainline with a *non-verbal sentence* or an initial *x-yiqtol*.¹¹⁰ The mainline is continued through the use of a *wəqatal*, which can then transition to background with a *w-x-yiqtol*.¹¹¹ The transition *wəqatal* → *w-x-yiqtol* is typical in discourse, and is used to express contrast between two characters or events.¹¹²

The volitive future begins its mainline with any of the direct volitive forms: jussive, cohortative, or imperative. For Niccacci, every *first-place yiqtol* is jussive, though an *x-yiqtol* can be either indicative or jussive.¹¹³ In the latter case, “an x-YIQTOL (or WAW-x-YIQTOL) construction can be labeled as jussive when preceded by one of the direct volitive forms.”¹¹⁴ These first-place volitive forms can be carried forward by *w-yiqtol* constructions in the foreground, or by *x-imperative* or *x-yiqtol* forms to express secondary line (background) information.

¹¹⁰ This is the only way to indicate the simple future in Hebrew at the beginning of a discourse. A *yiqtol* in the first position would be a *jussive* (according to Niccacci).

¹¹¹ Niccacci notes that although *wəqatal* always begins a sentence, it can never be used at the beginning of an independent text unit; it is a continuation, foreground form (*Syntax*, §57).

¹¹² Niccacci, *Syntax*, §11.

¹¹³ C.f. Niccacci, *Syntax*, §55.

¹¹⁴ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §55 (p.78).

The present in direct speech is much simpler: the *simple nominal clause* indicates both the main line and subsidiary line. Often, a *simple nominal clause* beginning with *waw* (w-SNC) indicates background information.

The table below is representative of the major functions of the verb forms in direct speech (these will also be the major functions of the verb forms in poetry):

Table 4: The Biblical Hebrew Verb System in Direct Speech/Poetry¹¹⁵		
Temporal Axis	Main level of communication (foreground)	Secondary level of communication (background)
Past	<p><i>(x-)qatal</i> → <i>wayyiqtol</i> (continuation) <i>SNC (noun + ptcp)</i> → <i>wayyiqtol</i></p> <p>or</p> <p><i>SNC</i> → <i>wayyiqtol</i> (c.f. Ex. 6:2-3) (SNC seems to provide 'speaker' information)</p>	<p>→ <i>x-qatal</i> (antecedent/retrospective circumstance)</p> <p>→ <i>SNC</i> (synchronous circumstance, contemporaneity)</p> <p>→ <i>x-yiqtol</i> or → <i>wəqatal</i> (repetition, habit, explication, description)</p> <p>→ <i>yiqtol</i> (prospective, anticipatory)</p>
Present	<i>SNC (with or without ptcp)</i>	<i>(waw-) SNC (with or without ptcp)</i> (contemporaneous circumstance)
Future Indicative	<p><i>SNC</i> (esp. with <i>ptcp</i>) → <i>wəqatal</i> or initial <i>x-yiqtol</i> → <i>wəqatal</i> (sometimes as the 'habitual' present)</p>	<p>→ <i>x-yiqtol</i> (habitude, custom)</p> <p>(<i>wəqatal</i> → <i>w-x-yiqtol</i> indicates emphasis on 'x')</p>
Future Volitive	<p><i>imperative</i> → <i>w-(x-)yiqtol</i> or <i>(x-)yiqtol</i> (coh/juss) → <i>wəyiqtol</i></p>	<p>→ <i>x-imperative</i></p> <p>→ <i>x-yiqtol</i></p>
	<p><i>Note:</i> Imperative → (volitive) <i>wəyiqtol</i> = purpose ('in order to') Imperative → (indicative) <i>wəqatal</i> = consequence/result ('thus', 'therefore')</p>	

Poetic Syntax

Niccacci suggests that “the Biblical Hebrew verb system is basically the same in prose and in poetry...at least, the same system is to be applied unless it proves impossible.”¹¹⁶ In this regard, “The functions of the verbal forms in poetry are basically the same as in prose, more precisely in

¹¹⁵ Adapted from Niccacci, “Interpretation of Malachi,” 58.

¹¹⁶ Niccacci, “Interpretation of Malachi,” 60n9.

direct speech.”¹¹⁷ Niccacci did not come to this opinion in a short period of time; rather, it was an evolving work of his which is still in the realm of hypothesis. In this section of the paper, the goal is to note different stages of his hypothesis of BH poetry and summarize his current view, noted above.

Niccacci made his first real explanation of BH poetry in his *Syntax*.¹¹⁸ There he commented, “Although it is possible to obtain a reasonably consistent account of how verb forms are used in prose, for poetry the problem is much more complicated.”¹¹⁹ He then outlined a few of the “problems” which he then had with the verb system in BH poetry.¹²⁰ The first problem he listed was with the universality of *yiqtol* for past narrative, the present, and the future tenses.¹²¹ Much of the debate centered around the relationship between an archaic use of the *yiqtol* used in reference to the past and the *wayyiqtol* form. A second problem that Niccacci observed was the use of *qatal* and *yiqtol* forms in parallel lines in reference to the same tense.¹²²

These two “problems” led him to conclude that “the verb forms in poetry do not have a fixed tense,”¹²³ and that “it is at least likely that for the use of verb forms poetry had its own rules which were not the same as for prose.”¹²⁴ In the end he asked the question, “What was the

¹¹⁷ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 247.

¹¹⁸ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §168-174.

¹¹⁹ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §171.

¹²⁰ By “problem,” Niccacci meant that the verb forms used in poetry seem inconsistent and are much more complicated to explain. Then, and now, the use of the verb forms in BH poetry was a matter open for much debate among his contemporaries.

¹²¹ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §171.

¹²² Niccacci, *Syntax*, §172. These two “problems” will also be two of the main ones addressed in his most recent article.

¹²³ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §173.

¹²⁴ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §170.

guiding criterion in poetry for choosing between the various verb forms?”¹²⁵ At this point in his research his answer and conclusion was intellectually honest,

This problem has yet to receive a complete answer. Style, the desire for variety, the chiasmic arrangement of constituents...etc. can explain some of the cases; but well-defined criteria which can throw light on the problem as a whole have yet to be found. Whereas prose usually provides clear indications of the tense when the action takes place...poetry often gives no such clues. The tense of a verb form, therefore, has to be determined on the basis of context and other exegetical factors. This explains the differences, often quite marked, among the various translations.¹²⁶

His descriptions about the apparent problems of the Hebrew verb in poetry were on target, and his conclusions at the time seemed appropriate, yet he remained somewhat optimistic about an approach he thought would yield useful results. As with the verb system in prose, Niccacci saw no resolution in appealing primarily to the aspect of an action. For him, a helpful direction was to look at how the fundamental driving point of the first position in a sentence in BH prose does not seem to apply in BH poetry. This he stated in a footnote, “It would seem, then, that in poetry the criterion of first position in the sentence, which is fundamental in prose, does not apply. This fact could provide an important key to understanding the verb system in poetry which still remains a mystery.”¹²⁷ At that point in his scholarship, though he had an idea that the first-position in the sentence would play an important role in the solution, Niccacci could not find any well-defined criteria which could shed light on the problem as a whole. Since then, he has written several important articles which specifically address the use of verb forms in poetic texts.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §174.

¹²⁶ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §174.

¹²⁷ Niccacci, *Syntax*, 206n94.

¹²⁸ In chronological order, these appear: *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, JSOTSS 86 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990); “Syntactic Analysis of Jonah,” *LASBF* 46 (1996), 9-32; “Analyzing Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 74 (1997), 77-93; “Poetic Syntax and

One of those articles, “Analyzing Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” has an important role in Niccacci’s future research. In it Niccacci set out to provide “a simple, unpretentious, yet effective way of analyzing BHP starting from the smallest units.”¹²⁹ He did so by indicating the three main characteristics of poetry versus prose.

First, he listed *segmented versus linear communication*. By this he meant that narrative is marked by sequence and linear progression, whereas poetry is marked by repetition and a round-about way of communicating. Second, he listed “parallelism of similar bits of information versus sequence of different bits of information.”¹³⁰ This second characteristic is closely linked to the first, and is in essence, how the first plays itself out. The round-about way of communicating (segmented) is almost always a parallelism of similar bits of information. In doing so, he notes that “the four kinds of parallelism identified by A. Berlin – grammatical, lexical, semantic, and phonologic – constitute the best description of BHP known to me. Normally, they agree and strengthen each other.”¹³¹ These first two characteristics begin to draw together a syntactical and rhetorical study of BH poetry, which was discussed earlier in this present paper.

Niccacci’s third observation is more relevant to this paper; namely, that poetry consists of a non-detectable verbal system versus the detectable system of prose. In this regard, his view

Interpretation of Malachi,” *LASBF* 51 (2001), 55-107; and “The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System in Poetry” (in Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz, eds., *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting: Typological and Historical Perspectives*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 247-268. Several other articles were also written by Niccacci that deal with poetry, but they are written in Italian, a language not translatable by the present researcher. These are: “Proverbi 23,12-25,” *LASBF* 47 (1997), 33-56; “Proverbi 23,26-24,22,” *LASBF* 48 (1998), 49-104; “Osea 1-3: Composizione E Senso,” *LASBF* 56 (2006), 71-104. Given the repetition of ideas often given in Niccacci’s articles, it is assumed that the points made in these Italian articles are also made in his English articles.

¹²⁹ Niccacci, “Analysing Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” 77.

¹³⁰ Niccacci, “Analysing Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” 77.

¹³¹ Niccacci, “Analysing Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” 90.

had not changed much since his *Syntax*. He states, “BHP remains a mystery from the point of view of the verbal system used while prose shows a substantial coherence.”¹³² He identifies the “free alternation” of *qatal*, *yiqtol*, and *wəqatal* forms as the “most remarkable area of disagreement.” He also identifies a variety of word order and ellipsis (gapping) as continuing problems. Niccacci had not yet identified the key features of poetry which would bring syntax and rhetoric together.

By the time Niccacci published “Poetic Syntax and Interpretation of Malachi” (2001), he had changed his mind on the “detection” of the verb system. In fact, he made the following comment in a footnote, “I have become more and more convinced that the BH verb system is basically the same in prose and in poetry.”¹³³ The major turning point for Niccacci seems to have been the combination of prose syntax and segmented communication. In early articles he noted an apparent contrast between the two concepts, whereas now he seems to have embraced them as brothers. In other words, what had previously blinded him from detecting a verb system in poetry now gave him the vision to see more clearly how syntax in poetry functioned. Segmented communication has as its consequence the ability for verb forms to switch “from one temporal axis to the other more freely than direct speech. This results in a great variety of, and more abrupt transition from, one verb form to the other.”¹³⁴ Thus, he “detected” a verb system that looked much like the one present in prose (direct prose), though he had not been able to describe how this system functioned.

Several years later he finally published an article which dealt wholly with the verbal system in poetry, “The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System in Poetry” (2006). It is the most

¹³² Niccacci, “Analysing Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” 91.

¹³³ Niccacci, “Interpretation of Malachi,” 60n9.

¹³⁴ Niccacci, “Interpretation of Malachi,” 59.

complete articulation of a textlinguistic solution to syntax in Biblical Hebrew Poetry to date (by any author). In it, Niccacci brings all of his observations together.

He begins by reminding the reader that he has changed his mind about the verbal forms in Hebrew poetry in two ways. First, he now thinks that the verb forms in poetry need to have different functions, as they do in prose. Second, he thinks that these functions are *basically* the same as in direct speech prose. The main difference between direct speech prose and direct speech poetry is the way they communicate. He observed, “Prose in general, consists of information conveyed in a sequence, while poetry communicates segments of information in parallelism.”¹³⁵ This allows poetry to more freely switch from one temporal axis to another than direct speech prose. In many ways this makes the analysis of poetic texts more difficult, but in his view, more fruitful.

Along these lines, Niccacci also identified two syntactic constructions that are crucial for his analysis: 1) the variation of *qatal/yiqtol*, and 2) first-place *yiqtol*. Concerning the variation of *qatal/yiqtol*, which most scholars simply smooth over in their translations, he noted that “one should expect different verbal forms to play different functions and analyze the texts accordingly.”¹³⁶ Thus, the normal rules of direct speech apply, and in Niccacci’s theory, fruitful observations will be made when the exegete keeps these in mind.

Concerning first-place *yiqtol*, he first reminds the reader about his view that “sentence-initial *yiqtol* is volitive, or jussive, even though its vocalization is not distinctively jussive or is not jussive at all.”¹³⁷ For him, a problematic use of the “jussive *yiqtol*” still remained when it

¹³⁵ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 248.

¹³⁶ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 250. Niccacci gives ample illustrations of how he analyzes this phenomenon in the same article.

¹³⁷ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 251.

was used to describe the past, in which case it does not clearly have a volitive function. In order to address this problem, Niccacci took three sections to discuss first place *yiqtol* as a double-duty modifier (<x-> *yiqtol*), the volitive functions of *yiqtol*, and a final section on the protasis function of volitive *yiqtol*. Though these specific discussions will not be taken up here, where appropriate in the following analyses they will be further explained.

In conclusion to this article, he made several important summary statements for the use of the various verb forms in poetry. First, he summarized that there is no justification for taking *qatal* or *yiqtol* as equivalent verb forms. They are used for different function in BH poetry, as are their continuation forms: *qatal* → *wayyiqtol*, *yiqtol* → *weqatal* (indicative), and *yiqtol* → *weyiqtol* (indirect volitive).

Second, he noted that each of the verb forms refers to its own temporal axis, as in direct speech. In this regard, *qatal* and *wayyiqtol* indicate the past axis, while *x-yiqtol* and *weqatal* indicate the axis of the future. An exception to this general rule occurs when *x-yiqtol/weqatal* are in parallel with *qatal/wayyiqtol* and indicate the past. In this case, “the former indicate repeated/habitual/explicatory/descriptive information (background) while the latter punctual/single information (foreground).”¹³⁸

Third, and finally, he observed that sentence-initial *yiqtol* and its continuation form *w-yiqtol* convey volitive information. When they are used in the axis of the past (the problem noted earlier), they seem to indicate purpose, which he called ‘volitive consequence.’¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 266.

¹³⁹ See his discussion in “Verbal System in Poetry,” 261-263.

Summary

According to Niccacci, the verb in BH poetry functions basically the same as it does in direct speech prose. The main difference between the two is the kind of communication generally used between them: segmental communication (poetry) vs. sequential communication (prose). The fact of sequential communication (also observed by Berlin) has important effects on the analysis of BH poetry.

First, it means that the reader must slow down. As Niccacci notes, “This analysis poses a challenge not easy to face.”¹⁴⁰ The analysis of poetry becomes much more difficult, but also more respectful of the text and the nuances of meaning present in the verbal forms. Analyzing poetry is not the same as analyzing prose, and the reader should expect to take longer to observe the relationships between clauses and lines. Second, it means that the reader must pay careful attention to alternating verb forms, particularly *qatal* and *yiqtol*, and their continuation forms. In this regard, a syntactic analysis of texts, before rhetorical function analysis, seems most beneficial. Third, and finally, it means that a rhetorical analysis of the text is very important. Though earlier rhetorical studies of BH poetry were left incomplete because they had trouble providing a clear syntactic analysis, the current study would likewise suffer if it did not finish its work with rhetorical analysis. The linguistic is concerned both with the syntax of the clause and the structure of the line.

Application through Analysis and Evaluation

Using the previous discussions concerning poetry and textlinguistics, the following texts will be analyzed: Jonah 2, Psalm 1, and Psalm 2. The most important methodological and syntactical presuppositions coming into this analysis are shared with Niccacci:

¹⁴⁰ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 267-268.

As a norm one should assign to the various verb forms their usual function(s) and interpret the text accordingly, rather than to make the analysis of the various verb forms dependent on one's own interpretation. It is only reasonable to assume that if a writer uses different verb forms, he has in mind different temporal or aspectual references. Our task is to interpret his mind on the basis of the verb forms he uses.¹⁴¹

Syntactic analysis should always guide the interpretation. Our understanding of syntax should never follow the lead of interpretation and semantics, because it is possible that an author may choose to change the order of events for his own reasons. The interpreter has no right to redress the "real order," giving the verb forms a tense values that he chooses himself. The author is free and sovereign over his information. We interpreters should try to understand and respect the author's choice, whatever the logic and strategy may be.¹⁴²

This will be the foundation of the following analyses, and as a matter of choice, all verb forms will be analyzed using Niccacci's verb chart (pg. 44). Periphery discussions will be undertaken when deemed important to the analysis of the text. By way of reminder, this is meant to be a syntactic analysis, not a rhetorical one. As mentioned in the earlier section on methodology, syntactic analysis precedes rhetorical analysis, such that former is supported by the latter. In some instances below (e.g., Psalm 2:7), clause division may be different than line division.

Jonah 2

The first test case for the textlinguistic approach of Alviero Niccacci is the poetic text of Jonah 2. This seems an obvious choice, since Niccacci himself has done a syntactic analysis of Jonah as a whole.¹⁴³ It also serves to show how a narrative text can shift into direct speech, and out of

¹⁴¹ Niccacci, "Interpretation of Malachi," 59. Again, as mentioned in a previous note, textlinguistics, as it is used here, is concerned with authorial intent. The main contention of this paper is that the verb forms themselves guide the interpreter so that he or she may correctly interpret the intention of the author. As a consequence, it is important to distinguish between the feelings of the author and the author's intent. A good author, which is presupposed of the biblical authors, will mean what he says and say what he means.

¹⁴² Niccacci, "Analysis of Biblical Narrative," 182. See also his discussion on 181-182.

¹⁴³ Niccacci, "Syntactic Analysis of Jonah," *LASBF* 46 (1996), 9-32. His comments concerning the syntax of the poetic section (§3) are sparse compared to his notes for the rest of Jonah. This is most likely due to the development of his poetic syntax, which was summarized above. Hopefully some of the details will be filled in here.

direct speech back into narrative. For discourse approaches, only Chisholm and Tucker have been consulted in correlation with Jonah.¹⁴⁴ The most accessible commentators make little mention of the verb tenses in their works. In this regard, perhaps this section might have something to contribute to the discussion.¹⁴⁵

Narrative Introduction to the Poetic Section (2.1-3a)

וַיִּמֶן יְהוָה דָּג גָּדוֹל לִבְלַע אֶת־יוֹנָה	Yhwh appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah.
וַיְהִי יוֹנָה בְּמֶעִי הַדָּג	And it was ¹⁴⁶ that Jonah was in the stomach of the fish
שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים וּשְׁלֹשָׁה לַיְלֹת:	three days and three nights.
וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל יוֹנָה אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו	Jonah prayed to YHWH his God
מִמֶּעִי הַדָּגָה:	from the stomach of the fish,
וַיֹּאמֶר	and he said,

The narrative text which sets up the poem is fairly straightforward, following the normal “rules” of prose texts. The *wayyiqtol* forms give progression to the narrative along the mainline of communication, showing continuation along the narrative timeline. The poetic section is embedded using **וַיֹּאמֶר**, and, as such, remains on the mainline of communication.¹⁴⁷ The prayer, as an event, should be seen as one event on the narrative plot line, even though the actual prayer itself is an embedded direct speech discourse. It gives the reader a snapshot into the mind of Jonah, providing an entire section of relief and offering a dramatic pause on the storyline.

¹⁴⁴ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “A Workbook for Intermediate Hebrew” (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006); W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., “Jonah: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text” (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006). Robert Longacre also has written an article on the textlinguistics of Jonah, but he chose not to make any comments on the poetic section.

¹⁴⁵ For syntactic analysis in this section consistent reference will be made to the table on page 44.

¹⁴⁶ Tucker notes that **וַיְהִי** should not be taken as the macro-syntactic sign of narrative as in 1:1 and 3:1, but is only a mainline discourse form in the course of a scene (*Handbook*, 48).

¹⁴⁷ Tucker, *Handbook*, 50.

Within the embedded prayer, Jonah speaks primarily toward God, but also to the reader. Sometimes it is helpful to think of the narrative storyline as a motion picture. If this were the case, the audience would see and hear Jonah speaking from the fish's stomach. If the transition verb were **לֵאמֹר**, then the audience would see Jonah praying from the fish, but would be listening to the voice of the narrator recounting Jonah's prayer.

Stanza 1, Strophe 1: Jonah's Call and God's Answer (2:3b-e)

קָרָאתִי מִצָּרָה לִי אֱלֹהֵי-יְהוָה	"I called out of my distress to YHWH,	A 2.3b
וַיַּעֲנֵנִי	and then He answered me;	B 2.3c
מִבְּטֶן שְׂאוֹל שָׁוַעְתִּי	From the depth of Sheol I cried for help;	C 2.3d
שָׁמַעַתָּ קוֹלִי:	You heard my voice.	D 2.3e

The first stanza in Jonah's prayer serves to provide a great example of how lines in parallel can develop along foreground/background lines of communication, as well as recount historical information in a segmented sequence. Chisholm has noted, "Verses 3-8 form a narrative of sorts, but it does not proceed in an *a to z* sequential manner."¹⁴⁸ Instead of following sequential chronology, the poet will again and again revisit different parts of the narrative sequence in a more segmented, non-linear manner.

The analysis begins with the *qatal* verb form **קָרָאתִי**. In historical narrative this form functions to provide antecedent, background information,¹⁴⁹ but according to Niccacci's theory it

¹⁴⁸ Chisholm, *Workbook*, 56.

¹⁴⁹ C.f. Tucker, *Handbook*, 50. It is also important to understand Tucker's terminology. For him, the poetic section (2:3-10) is, in its entirety, an off-line expository discourse. Here, Tucker has the whole text (the book of Jonah) in view. Within the off-line embedded oral narrative (beginning in 2:3), the initial *qatal* is a mainline form. That is, it is a mainline form in an off-line discourse.

begins the foreground, or mainline, of an *oral narrative* in the past axis.¹⁵⁰ Thus, according to Niccacci, Jonah is recounting the narrative past on the discourse mainline, recalling a time when he formerly called out of the Lord in distress.¹⁵¹ This is new information in the story, as before the poem no mention is made of Jonah's cry for help.

Line B (2.3c) is made up of the *wayyiqtol* form וַיַּעֲנֵנִי. Having already begun the oral narrative, this form simply carries it forward as one would expect in direct speech; first, Jonah called for help, then the Lord answered him. As Chisholm notes, "The *wayyiqtol* is sequential to the preceding verb."¹⁵² These two lines, 2.3b-c, are paralleled by 2.3d-e.

Line C (2.3d) is the first 'pause' in the oral narrative recounted by Jonah, made up of an *x-qatal* clause. In this pause, Jonah revisits the events he just referenced in line A (2.3b). In the first half of the stanza there is a sequence of events from initial *qatal* → *wayyiqtol* forms, while in the second half of the stanza there is no such development (*x-qatal* → *qatal*). The second part of the stanza simply revisits the previous recounted events and looks at those events as whole events: Jonah recognizes that he called to the Lord, and that the Lord had heard his voice. This is a clear example of segmented communication.

Another helpful example of the difference between continuation *wayyiqtol* and simple *qatal* is provided by lines B and D, which are in parallel (as are lines A and C). Though the *qatal* in 2.3e is in parallel with the *wayyiqtol* form in 2.3c, it does not indicate the same exact information as the *wayyiqtol*. The *wayyiqtol* indicates the past action of the Lord, continuing forward from the *qatal* form which preceded it. The *qatal* in 2.3e does not *continue forward* the

¹⁵⁰ Niccacci even claims that "QATAL is always non-initial in [historical] narrative" (*Syntax*, §15). Historical narratives are given by the narrator, while 'oral narrative' or 'narrative discourse' is undertaken from the point of view of a character in the story being narrated.

¹⁵¹ C.f. Chisholm, *Workbook*, 273.

¹⁵² Chisholm, *Workbook*, 57.

background *x-qatal* which precedes it, but focuses the reader on the stative fact of God's previous action. In other words, the *wayyiqtol* looks at the action itself in connection with Jonah's cry, while the *qatal* looks the result or end of that action, without the logical connection to Jonah's cry. Thus, the *qatal* in line E fills in the missing (yet implied) information that the Lord had heard Jonah's call.¹⁵³

This is significant for the meaning of the prayer in the context of the overall narrative in the book. Syntactically and rhetorically the Lord raised Jonah "from the depths of Sheol" (2:3) before the fish swallowed him.¹⁵⁴ That is, as he is praying from the belly of the fish, he is looking back to a time when he had already cried out to the lord from the depths of the ocean. It is as Price and Nida have observed, "The tense of the verbs...[imply] that the prayer is uttered by someone looking back in gratitude to a deliverance that has already taken place, not looking forward to some future rescue."¹⁵⁵ As Jonah prays from the fish's belly he has already been rescued.

Adding to the segmented nature of poetic discourse, the rest of the psalm will be repetitions of this first stanza, which will also be observed in the analysis of Habbakuk 3 below. The second stanza (2:4-5) will give more details concerning the distress of Jonah, as well as how he called out to the Lord. The third stanza (2:6-7) revisits Jonah's distress (without mentioning his cry), focusing more on the events of how the Lord answered him. The fourth stanza (2:8-10)

¹⁵³ Some might contend that the Lord answering Jonah is the same event as the Lord hearing him, given the parallelistic structure of the strophe (both phonetically and "sequentially"). But, iff so, why not use a continuation *wayyiqtol* in 2.3 instead of a *qatal*? If a *wayyiqtol* was used, then such a argument would be more valid. However, as noted in analysis, the poet had another intention than to make that contention, which is found by closely analyzing the verb forms. As it stands, the author did not choose a sequential sequence of verbs, and thus, did not intend us to view the second line sequentially.

¹⁵⁴ This must be the case since Jonah is recalling how the Lord answered him (2.3), something which happened prior (note the antecedent *qatal* forms) to him being in the fish's belly praying to Yhwh.

¹⁵⁵ Price and Nida, *Translator's Handbook*, 36.

recounts Jonah’s distress and deliverance, but focuses largely on the content of Jonah’s cry to God.

Stanza 2, Strophe 1: Jonah’s Misfortune (2:4)

וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִצִּוּלָה	You cast me into the deep,	A 2.4a
בְּלִבְבַּי יָמִים	into the heart of the seas,	B 2.4b
וְנָהַר יִסְבְּבֵנִי	While the current continually engulfed me,	C 2.4c
כָּל־מִשְׁפָּרֵיךָ וְנִלְיָךְ	all Your breakers and billows,	D 2.4d
עָלַי עָבְרוּ:	over me they had passed.	E 2.4e

The second stanza opens up with a *wayyiqtol* form, וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי. Following Niccacci, we would expect a mainline *qatal* form here instead of the *wayyiqtol*. Interestingly, though, Niccacci himself understands this as a “continuation” form of the *wayyiqtol*, as does Tucker.¹⁵⁶ Even though the event referenced by the *wayyiqtol* is chronologically previous to the preceding mainline forms (*qatal* → *wayyiqtol*, 2.3bc), by appealing to segmented communication, rather than sequential or linear communication, Niccacci is still able to see this as a continuation form on the mainline of communication. It may perhaps be better to speak of these kind of *wayyiqtol* forms as continuing the poetic thought forward, rather than the usual understanding, which sees them as progressing the narrative through consecutive actions or states.

Line B (2.4b) is a prepositional phrase syntactically dependent on the previous clause by ellipsis (“You cast me into the deep // [you cast me] into the heart of the seas”). Its purpose is to provide more information to better complete the imagery which began in line A (2.4a). Line C (2.4c) is a *yiqtol* form which lies in the axis of the past, and is thus a background form. Such forms focus on the repetitive nature of the action (here, the continual action of the current). It is

¹⁵⁶ Niccacci, *Jonah*, 29; Tucker, *Handbook*, 52.

not a continuation form, but is circumstantial to the mainline of communication.¹⁵⁷ As background action, it is further describing Jonah's train of thought behind line A (2.4c), where he referenced the Lord casting him into the deep.

Line D (2.4d) is elliptically connected with line E (2.4e). The *qatal* in line E is in parallel with the previous *yiqtol*, providing further background to the *wayyiqtol* in line A (2.4a). This *x-qatal* clause seems to serve as the end of the first section of the poem. In contrast to the repetitive nature of the action as meant by *yiqtol*, this construction looks at the result of the casting (*wayyiqtol*) in line A (2.4a). Tucker explains that the *x-qatal* construction functions in narrative discourse as a form of topicalization, which is a focus-shifting device used to give new information.¹⁵⁸ If such is the case, the emphasis would be placed on the fronted 'x' element, "all Your breakers and billows."

The final analysis of the syntactic structure of the verbs in this strophe is as follows. Line A (2.4a) provides the mainline *wayyiqtol* form. It recounts how God had cast Jonah into the sea. Line B (2.4b) is a prepositional phrase, elliptically dependent on line A, contributing figurative imagery that helps better understand 'the deep' of line A. Line C (2.4c) is a background *w-x-yiqtol* clause, emphasizing the continual action of the current engulfing Jonah. Lines D and E (2.4de) are in parallel and are both functioning as background to the mainline *wayyiqtol* in line A. The *x-qatal* clause in line E combines with the *w-x-yiqtol* clause in line C by looking at the result of the casting from line A. The resulting picture is of Jonah, having been cast into the seas, where the billows and breakers had passed over him and the current had continually engulfed him.

¹⁵⁷ Niccacci, *Jonah*, 30. Tucker also gives the following explanation (*Handbook*, 52-53): "The *yiqtol* form may be understood as having an 'incipient past non-perfective' aspect...in this form the speaker has in view the initial and continuing phases within the internal temporal structure of a past situation."

¹⁵⁸ Tucker, *Handbook*, 53 and 107.

Stanza 2, Strophe 2: Prayer (2.5)

וַאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי	So, I said (to myself),	A 2.5a
נִגְרַשְׁתִּי מִנֶּגְדַי עֵינֶיךָ	'I have been expelled from Your sight;	B 2.5b
אַךְ אוֹסִיף לְהִבִּיט	Yet/Nevertheless, let me look again	C 2.5c
אֶל־הַיְקָל קִדְשֶׁךָ:	toward Your holy temple.'	D 2.5d

This second strophe in stanza two is Jonah's response to his situation in strophe one. The fronted pronoun **אני** helps signal this shift in focus.¹⁵⁹ The *w-x-qatal* construction in line A (2.5a) could be an indicator of background information following the *wayyiqtol* in 2.4a, but it could also be a mainline *x-qatal* form.¹⁶⁰ Considering its context as introducing the response of Jonah to his situation, it is more likely to be a mainline form. This fits with Tucker's analysis: "The verb **אמר** signals that within the embedded oral narrative discourse (vv3-4) another direct speech discourse will appear – a brief expository discourse in verse 5 appears embedded within the larger oral narrative discourse (which is embedded within the larger expository discourse of the entire poem)."¹⁶¹ Syntactically, line A is set apart from what follows, since it is introducing them as direct discourse.

The *qatal* clause in line B (2.5b) summarizes the whole of Jonah's journey, and functions as a mainline form in the axis of the past. As a stative verb in *qatal*, it looks at the event of the past as a whole (Jonah has been expelled from the Lord's sight). Stanza three will revisit these themes again, providing even more depth into Jonah's plight.

¹⁵⁹ Chisholm, *Workbook*, 59.

¹⁶⁰ Niccacci, *Verbal System in Poetry*, 248.

¹⁶¹ Tucker, *Handbook*, 54. This is the deepest embedded structure of the poem.

In line C (2.5c) there is an axis change from the past into the future. Prior to this point in the poem, all the verbs were providing information on the past axis. As Jonah quotes himself, though, there is for the first time an indication of the future. The ׀ִן serves as a marker of the change in temporal axes. Though this point in the text has been a point of contention in textual criticism, syntactically there is nothing wrong with the MT.¹⁶² Following Landes, “Given the context of the poem, Jonah had no other recourse than to resolve to turn to Yahweh in prayer.”¹⁶³ This also corresponds well with the volitive *yiqtol* which follows ׀ִן, which is a mainline form of the future.¹⁶⁴ The prepositional phrase in line D (2.5d) simply finishes the thought of line C.¹⁶⁵

The effect of this strophe is to show that even while Jonah is sinking beneath the waves and the current (2.4), he is able to have confidence that he can look again towards the presence of God. Such an understanding of this line seems to correspond well with the upcoming *wayyiqtol* in 2.7c, where Jonah recounts that he continues to sink to the roots of the mountains, where God then brought him up from the pit.

¹⁶² Hans Walter Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 179.

¹⁶³ As summarized in Tucker, *Handbook*, 54-55. Tucker also calls this a “focus particle”, which is meant to place a limitation with respect to the content of a previous expression (55).

¹⁶⁴ Niccacci, *Verbal System in Poetry*, 248. Of note is the JPS translation, which interprets Jonah’s resolve as a question rather than a cohortative. Normally, this line is translated, “Yet I will look again...” (ESV, HCSB, NAS, NIV, etc) or “Will I look again...?” (JPS), both interpreting the verb form as in the indicative future axis. None translate as a cohortative, in the volitive future, as is suggestive by Niccacci’s theory, which understands all first-place *yiqtol* as volitives.

¹⁶⁵ Considering the Hebrew poetry is known for its terseness, there are three ׀ִן prepositions in the poem (2.3, 2.6, 2.8) that may be linked together exegetically: in 2.3 Jonah is calling out *to* the Lord; in 2.6 he is looking *toward* the holy temple; and in 2.8 prayer is coming *toward* the holy temple. All of these imply the presence of the Lord.

*Stanza 3, Strophes 1 and 2: Jonah's Misfortune (2.6-7)*¹⁶⁶

אֶפְפוּנֵי מַיִם עַד־נֶפֶשׁ	Water encompassed me, up to the neck;	A 2.6a
תְּהוֹם יִסְבְּבֵנִי	while the great deep continually surrounded me,	B 2.6b
סוּף חִבּוּשׁ לְרֹאשִׁי:	weeds were wrapped around my head.	C 2.6c
לְקַצְבֵי הַרִים יָרַדְתִּי	To the roots of the mountains I descended,	D 2.7a
הָאָרֶץ בְּרַחֲתֶיהָ בְּעַדִּי לְעוֹלָם	As for the earth - its bars were around me forever;	E 2.7b
וַתַּעַל מִשְׁחַת חַיִּי	Then you brought up my life from the pit,	F 2.7c
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי:	O YHWH my God.	G 2.7d

As in the previous strophes, this one begins with an initial *qatal* form, אֶפְפוּנֵי, on the mainline of the axis of the past. As Tucker explains, “Following the direct speech in verse 5, the psalm returns to embedded oral narrative discourse.”¹⁶⁷ Line B (2.6b) is an *x-yiqtol* construction, and offers the first opportunity to comment on *qatal-yiqtol* in parallelism, which has been frequently observed by scholars.¹⁶⁸

Niccacci begins his discussion of alternating *qatal/yiqtol* by stating,

Most scholars fairly disregard the verbal forms appearing in the texts and translate according to their own understanding, while some assume archaic peculiarities in the use of verbal forms, especially an alternating occurrence, or variation, of *qatal* and *yiqtol* for the same event or information.¹⁶⁹

This use of *qatal* and *yiqtol* seems to be at work in lines A and B, where water encompasses Jonah (initial *qatal*) and the deep surrounds him (*x-yiqtol*), respectively. And, as Niccacci

¹⁶⁶ Though there are two strophes in this stanza (lines A-C, lines D-G), they will be dealt with together to better show why the MT text can be supported by Niccacci's theory. Thus, there is no need to layout the text as the BHS editors have done.

¹⁶⁷ Tucker, *Handbook*, 55.

¹⁶⁸ See M. Held, “The YQTL-QTL (QTL-YQTL) Sequence of Identical Verbs in Biblical Hebrew and in Ugaritic,” *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 281-290; M. Dahood, *Psalms III* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 420-423; and D. Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53*, JSOTSS 1 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1976), 47-48.

¹⁶⁹ Niccacci, *Verbal System in Poetry*, 249.

indicated, most major translations smooth over the verbal forms, translating both as simple pasts (e.g., the ESV, “The waters closed in over me...the deep surrounded me”).

Niccacci goes on to say, “Now, in BH *x-yiqtol* and *w^eqatal* occur along with *qatal* and *wayyiqtol* in prose texts referring to the past not only in historical narrative but also in direct speech.”¹⁷⁰ Thus, it is not surprising to find an initial *qatal* followed by an *x-yiqtol*.

Additionally, he notes, “When both *qatal* and *yiqtol* refer to the axis of the past, they signal a shift from main-line, punctual information (*qatal*) to secondary-line, repeated/habitual/explicatory/descriptive information (*yiqtol*).”¹⁷¹

In the analysis, line A (initial *qatal*) conveys a single/punctual piece of historical information while line B (*x-yiqtol*) expounds the ensuing continuous situation.¹⁷² That is, the first narrates (foreground), and the second describes (background). An attempt to capture this relationship is reflected in the translation from the table above, “Water encompassed me up to the neck // while the great deep continually surrounded me.”

Following the division of the text by the traditional text, the above layout and translation accords with poetic syntax.¹⁷³ In this layout, the simple nominal clause (2.6c) provides background information to line B (2.6b). Tucker’s comments are in agreement with Niccacci’s theory, “Within embedded oral narrative discourse, the participles provide background

¹⁷⁰ Niccacci, *Verbal System in Poetry*, 250.

¹⁷¹ Niccacci, *Verbal System in Poetry*, 253.

¹⁷² See Niccacci, *Verbal System in Poetry*, 257-258, where he similarly analyzes a *wayyiqtol* → *x-yiqtol* construction, in Psalm 78:44.

¹⁷³ Noteworthy, even the text as it stands in BHS still follows Niccacci’s theory, where the initial *qatal* in line D is a mainline form continued by the *wayyiqtol* in line F. Lines E and G would be simple nominal clauses functioning on the level of background.

information. Thus the clause does not move the narrative forward, it simply enhances the image being presented through providing additional information.”¹⁷⁴

The *x-qatal* of **וַיִּקְרָא** (line D, 2.7a) is a mainline form in poetic oral narrative, and begins this strophe as the others before it. It is followed by a simple nominal clause (2.7b), which functions as background, and then a *wayyiqtol* (2.7c), which is a mainline continuation form of *qatal* in oral narrative.¹⁷⁵ There is, then, a perceived sequence of events in vv6-7. This general chronology, though somewhat rare, is also well-attested in other poetic texts (e.g., Psalm 78). As mentioned previously, it revisits Jonah’s distress and how the Lord intervened to bring his life up from the pit. The Lord’s intervention in Jonah’s situation is certainly related to how the Lord answered Jonah (2:3). As the poem progresses, the reader is given a clearer and clearer picture of Jonah’s plight.

The poem has moved along several directions, all guided by syntax and parallelism. The main storyline was set up in 2:3, where the reader is informed that Jonah called out to God and that his call was answered. The second stanza recounts how Jonah was expelled from the Lord’s sight (2:4) and how Jonah prayed to the Lord (2:5) while sinking beneath the current and the waves. The storyline continues in (2:6-7) by recounting how Jonah continued to go down to the foundations of the earth, but was rescued out of death through divine intervention. Other verb forms have helped to provide background information that has further filled out the main line, offering relief and textual depth.

¹⁷⁴ Tucker, *Handbook*, 56.

¹⁷⁵ Niccacci, *Verbal System in Poetry*, 248.

Stanza 4, Strophe 1: Prayer (2.8)

בְּהִתְעַטֵּף עָלַי נַפְשִׁי	"When my life was fainting within me	A 2.8a
אֶת־יְהוָה זָכַרְתִּי	YHWH I remembered;	B 2.8b
וַתָּבוֹא אֵלַיךָ תְּפִלָּתִי	Then my prayer came to You,	C 2.8c
אֶל־הַיְקַל קִדְשֶׁךָ:	into Your holy temple.	D 2.8d

One might expect that the temporal clause in 2.8a is a background clause, forming a pause in the poem. In actuality, Niccacci would describe this as the protasis of a two-element syntactic construction, in which 2.8b forms the apodosis.¹⁷⁶ This would put the whole of the construction (2.8a-b) on the mainline of the past.¹⁷⁷

The two-element syntactic construction is followed by a continuation *wayyiqtol* in line C (2.8c) and a background, prepositional phrase in line D (2.8d). These forms are fairly straightforward and do not require much explanation. Of note, however is the 'holy temple' of the Lord. In 2:5 Jonah expressed his desire to look again toward the temple of the Lord, and here, that temple is identified as the place where God dwells.

Stanza 4, Strophe 2: Prayer (2.9-10)

מְשַׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי-שָׁוְא	'Those who honor the vanities of emptiness,	A 2.9a
חֲסִדָּם יַעֲזֹבוּ:	They will forsake their faithfulness/mercy.	B 2.9b
וְאֲנִי בְּקוֹל תּוֹדָה אֲזַבְּחָה לָּךְ	So I, with a voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you,	C 2.10a
אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתִּי אֲשַׁלְּמָה	that which I have vowed I will pay.'	D 2.10b
יְשׁוּעָתָה לִיהוָה: ס	Salvation is from YHWH."	E 2.10c

¹⁷⁶ Niccacci's explanation of this construction begins in §95 of his *Syntax*. For the temporal clause of preposition + infinitive, see §106.

¹⁷⁷ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §126.

This is the first strophe is the poem that does not begin in the axis of the past. Instead, the poet uses a *non-verbal sentence with a participle*, which is on the main level of communication (foreground) in the future indicative axis.¹⁷⁸ Line B continues in the axis of the future with an indicative *x-yiqtol* construction functioning as “the apodosis of a double sentence.”¹⁷⁹ The protasis is the *casus pendens* in 2.9a. Chisholm notes, “Jonah seems to be generalizing here, so the imperfect has a characteristic or habitual present function.”¹⁸⁰ The effect is to isolate this couplet in contrast to what follows.

What follows are two jussive *yiqtol* forms (called “cohortative” in the first person).¹⁸¹ The first (2.10a) is doubly fronted. Tucker notes that this marks “not only the exclusive role of a particular discourse activity entity, but also...a particular quality of the discourse active event as well.”¹⁸² Here, this means that Jonah, in the first person, is brought to the forefront, as well as his voice of thanksgiving. The second jussive *yiqtol* (2.10b) is also fronted, helping to emphasize the relative clause, which is the ‘x’ element. The emphasis of this verse falls on Jonah’s voice of thanksgiving and that which he vowed to God. Now, after his deliverance, Jonah wishes to respond to God as the Gentile sailors had earlier. Jonah is resolved to worship God at the end of this poem.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ Niccacci, *Verbal System in Poetry*, 248.

¹⁷⁹ Niccacci, *Jonah*, 30.

¹⁸⁰ Chisholm, *Workbook*, 275.

¹⁸¹ Niccacci, *Jonah*, 30.

¹⁸² Tucker, *Handbook*, 61.

¹⁸³ Chisholm notes that these cohortatives express Jonah’s resolve or intention (*Workbook*, 275). This corresponds with Jonah’s change of heart in the next scene, beginning in 3:1.

The only statement in the axis of the present is line E (2.10c). Niccacci calls this “a short proclamation of faith.”¹⁸⁴ In many ways, this is the most important line of the poem. Tucker comments, “The final clause in the poem is actually the only clause in which there is a mainline verbal form for expository discourse – a verbless clause. The previous clauses have all been off-the-line forms that have provided background information to the central claim of the poem. In essence, the entire poem has been constructed as an argument which culminates with the primary thesis...being presented in [2.10c].”¹⁸⁵ One can learn from Jonah’s distress, cry, and deliverance that salvation originates with God, and no other.¹⁸⁶

Terminating the Scene (2:11)

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְדָג	Then the LORD spoke to the fish,	2.11a
וַיִּקֵּא אֶת־יֹנָה אֶל־הַיַּבֵּשָׁה: פ	then it vomited Jonah onto the dry land.	2.11b

Just as the analysis began with the narrative introduction to the poem, so here it ends with the narrative conclusion to the scene (the *terminus*). The *wayyiqtol* picks up the narrative from the mainline form in 2.3a, and continues in the axis of the past with another continuation *wayyiqtol* (2.11b).

Final Analysis of the Poem

Following the poetic syntax of Niccacci, the poem in Jonah 2 was a fairly straightforward text to interpret. Throughout the analysis *yiqtol*, *wayyiqtol*, and *qatal* forms were encountered, and there was no difficulty following the mind of the writer, even within segmented communication.

¹⁸⁴ Niccacci, *Jonah*, 30. There is also a lexical resumption between *שועתי* (2:3) and *ישועתה* (2:10) which helps to establish this point.

¹⁸⁵ Tucker, *Handbook*, 61-62.

¹⁸⁶ Chisholm, *Workbook*, 66.

In fact, the segmented communication allowed the writer to better reflect and meditate on previous actions.

Though this way of communicating slows down the reader from the narrative pace he or she is used to, it also helps to heighten and bring out certain elements that are important to the writer that a reader might miss from simple narrative. In the end, Niccacci's theory for poetic syntax not only proved plausible, but also proved helpful.

Psalm 1

This psalm was chosen because it has many different constructions than Jonah 2. Unlike Jonah, which is largely an oral narrative, Psalm 1 switches between all three temporal axes regularly, displaying a rich array of verbal forms. There are patterns, however, to how the verb forms are used. For instance, the three *x-qatal* clauses found in 1:1 are mirrored by three *x-yiqtol* clauses in 1:3. The former use negatives to positively describe "the man," while the latter seem to give a description of that man's blessing as a result of his delight in the Torah of Yhwh (1:2).

The psalm is structured as a chiasm: the first stanza (A, 1:1) contrasts the blessed man with wicked men, the second (B, 1:2-3) gives an image of the blessed man as a tree, the third (B', 1:4) gives an image of the wicked as chaff, and the fourth (A', 1:5-6) contrasts the wicked with the righteous ones. In Jonah, such a structure was not present. There, the first stanza served as a template upon which following stanzas revisiting and gave further commentary. Here, repetition will exist primarily in the contrast between the blessed man and the wicked, which the chiasmic structure of the psalm supports.

Stanza 1 (1:1): The Blessed Man vs. the Wicked

אֲשֶׁר־הָאִישׁ	O the blessings of the man ¹⁸⁷	1.1a
אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים	Who never walked in the counsel of the wicked	1.1b
וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד	Nor in the way of sinners ever stood	1.1c
וּבְמוֹשָׁב לְצִים לֹא יָשָׁב:	Nor in the seat of scoffers ever sat.	1.1d

The first stanza of the psalm begins with *a nominal phrase*. Niccacci does not have a category for this kind of statement, but it seems to function as a *simple nominal clause* in the foreground of the present axis.¹⁸⁸ It is not parallel to anything which follows it, which may indicate that this opening clause as *casus pendens*. Particularly, it may be an *anacrusis* (that is, an introductory formula or title before the first line of the psalm). In this case, it could be the title for the Psalter, or simply be the title for the opening two psalms.¹⁸⁹ It may help to think of the poet speaking directly to the reader at this point, “O the blessings of the man!” Whoever this man is, the emphasis is being placed on his *blessings*.

The next three clauses are all of the same type: *negative (w-)x-qatal*. All three function as retrospective circumstantial clauses, each building from the initial relative, and each completing the nominal phrase in 1.1a.¹⁹⁰ This places each of them in the background of the past axis, each indicating lifelong conduct. Functionally, these clauses describe the character of the blessed man. The initial relative (אֲשֶׁר) shares a strong phonetic link to the blessings (אֲשֶׁר־) of

¹⁸⁷ For a thorough explanation of why this is not simply any man, but “the man,” see Robert L. Cole, “(Mis)Translating Psalm 1,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 10/2 (Fall 2005), 35-50.

¹⁸⁸ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 248.

¹⁸⁹ The lack of a superscription in both psalms, as well as numerous points of contact between them, most notably the inclusio of אֲשֶׁר־ in 1:1 and 2:12, add to the support of reading these two psalms together as a unit.

¹⁹⁰ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §92.

the man in 1.1a, bringing together a closer relationship between present blessings and the man's proven conduct.

The syntactic analysis of this stanza reveals that the present state of the “blessings of the man” (1:1) are dependent on his proven conduct. The negative clauses, which reveal the previous conduct of the man, will also be used to contrast the wicked with his future actions (1:2), which are brought to completion in 1:3.

Stanza 2 (1:2-3): The Blessed Man as a Tree

כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה הִחְפָּצוּ	Rather, the Torah of Yhwh is his delight	1.2a
וּבְתוֹרַתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה:	and on his Torah he will continue to meditate day and night	1.2b
וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שֶׁנִּטַּע עַל-פְּלִי מַיִם	And he will be like a tree transplanted by streams of water	1.3a
אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיָּו יִתֵּן בְּעִתּוֹ	Which will give its fruit in its season,	1.3b
וְעָלְהוּ לֹא-יִבּוֹל	And whose leaf will not wither;	1.3c
וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:	And whatever he shall do, he shall succeed	1.3d

The next stanza begins with a **כִּי אִם** conjunction followed by a *simple nominal clause*. It is on the foreground of the present axis, and, like 1.1a, indicates basic information about “the man.” The **כִּי אִם** conjunction expresses a strong contrast from what has preceded.¹⁹¹ Van der Merwe even notes that with this particular conjunction “the speakers make it very clear that not only is an alternative involved, but that it is the only possible alternative.”¹⁹² This suggests that there are only two paths that one can take, the way of blessing and righteousness, or the way of wickedness. In this respect, the clause previews the final point made by the poet in 1:6.

¹⁹¹ Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax, Third Edition*, Revised and Expanded by John. C. Beckman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §447, 449, 555.

¹⁹² Van der Merwe, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 303.

The next clause (1.2b) is an *x-yiqtol* clause, and it is a foreground form in the future indicative axis. Within Niccacci's verbal theory, this clause can be interpreted in one of two ways. First, it can serve as another example of a two-element syntactic construction. Here, the **אֵין** + *SNC* + (*x*)-*yiqtol* makes up the protasis, while the *weqatal* in 1.3a makes up the apodosis.¹⁹³ In this scenario, the future axis of *weqatal* in 1:3a must be carried back into 1.2b, making the *x-yiqtol* clause a future indicative.

A second option, which is more likely, is that the *x-yiqtol* clause, though being in the future indicative axis, is being used as an "habitual present." In this scenario, the present delight in the Torah (1.2a) will yield a future, continuing habit of meditating on the Torah night and day (1.2b), hence the translation above. The benefit of this interpretation is that the *weqatal* in 1.3a can remain a continuation form.¹⁹⁴

Rhetorical analysis also helps to support this syntactic analysis, especially the parallelistic relationship between 1:4 and the 1:1-3. First, 1:4 begins with a *nominal phrase* in the present axis, corresponding to the same construction in 1.1a. Second, the **לֹא** particle in 1.4a is reminiscent of 1.1b-d, where one finds three negative *x-qatal* clauses. Third, the **אֵין** + *simple nominal clause* in 1.4b corresponds to the same construction in 1.2a. In both clauses, the present is indicated. Fourth, the *x-yiqtol* clause in 1.4c is parallel to the *w-x-yiqtol* → *weqatal* construction in 1.2b-1.3a. This last correspondence signifies that the two constructions are synonymous, both indicating the indicative future (the "habitual present" use).

¹⁹³ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §108. See also the analysis of Jonah 2:8 above.

¹⁹⁴ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §57. In other words, it functions to continue the *x-yiqtol* from 1.2b.

The next clause (1.3a) begins with a *weqatal* on the foreground of the indicative future. It functions as the continuation of the foreground from the *x-yiqtol* in 1.2b.¹⁹⁵ If the וְהָיָה were the macro-syntactic sign of the future, then the verb form would enjoy a greater independence from what preceded it.¹⁹⁶ This, however, is simply not the case. The verb plays an important role in the clause itself, not in the discourse as a whole. This means it is not the macro-syntactic sign, but a continuation *weqatal*.¹⁹⁷

The *x-yiqtol* clauses (1.3b-c) describe the nature of this transplanted tree, and are both guided by the אֲשֶׁר in 1.3b, making them background forms. A third *x-yiqtol* clause appears in 1.3d, but this clause is on the foreground. It takes the image of the tree given in 1.3a-c and further explains that the man from 1.1a will prosper in all of his undertakings.

Interestingly, the clause in 1.3a introduces the metaphor of the man being like a tree into the psalm. Without this image, there would be an immediate connection between 1.2b and 1.3d, two clauses finding very close parallels with Joshua 1. This connection is broken by the garden imagery (1.3a-c), which is placed right in the middle of it. This brings together two important themes for the rest of the Psalter: a return to the Garden, and the prospering of the king in relation to his meditation on the Torah. It also associates the man in this psalm with a king. This psalm provides no guide to interpret the significance of the image, but semantic links and

¹⁹⁵ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §57.

¹⁹⁶ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §156.

¹⁹⁷ In other words, when the verb functions as a discourse marker (macro-syntactic sign), it should not play a significant role in the clause which it precedes. Thus, it could be removed altogether and not affect the meaning of the clause. When it is the finite verb of the clause, it cannot be the macro-syntactic sign. A clear example of these two functions is in Micah 5:6, 9. In 5:6, the verb functions as the continuation *weqatal*, continuing forward the events from the previous verse. In 5:9, however, it functions as the macro-syntactic sign, and could be removed from the clause without any grammatical damage.

parallels with Psalm 2 may provide the key, also making the connection between this man and a future king.

Syntactically, this stanza functions to complete the picture painted in the first one. While the first stanza used the past axis to describe the lasting conduct of the blessed man, this stanza uses the future axis to further explain the substance of those blessings received by him.

Stanza 3 (1:4): The Wicked as Chaff

לֹא־כֵן הַרְשָׁעִים	Not so the wicked;	1.4a
כִּי אִם־כַּפְזִים	Instead, they are like chaff,	1.4b
אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ:	which the wind will continue to drive away.	1.4c

This next stanza is quite short (one tri-colon), but offers some interesting syntax. The *nominal phrase* in 1.4a is exactly like the *simple nominal clause* which opens up the psalm (1.1a). In fact, according to the chiasmic structure of the psalm, this stanza provides the contrasting image to the blessed man. As noted earlier, the comparative syntax between 1:1-3 and 1:4 helps to strengthen such correspondence. Like 1.1a, then, it is a basic sentence in the present tense.

The **כִּי אִם** conjunction also has an adversative function in this verse, much like its counterpart in 1.2a. Here, as in 1.2a, the *simple nominal clause* continues in the present axis. In 1:2, the contrast was between the past action of the wicked and the present delight of the man. Here, the contrast is between the future blessings of the man and the future fate of the wicked. tense in 1.4a to the future tense in 1.4b. This final clause in the tri-colon is an *x-yiqtol*, which indicates the foreground of future indicative. It further completes the contrast between the fate of the man and the fate of the wicked.

The net effect thus far of the verb forms on the interpretation of the poem is as follows. The two main characters of the poem, the blessed man and the wicked (pl.), are introduced in the axis of the present. The former is introduced positively, in correlation to the blessing he receives in 1.3 as a result of his past and future actions (1.1b-1.2b), while the latter is introduced in utter contrast to such blessing (1:4). In this respect, the **לֹא** of 1.4 is reminiscent of the three **לֹא** clauses of 1:1. In 1.4a and 1:1 the past actions of both parties are in focus, one resulting in the continual, delightful meditation on the Torah (1.2) and the future resurrected life in the garden (1.3), and the other resulting in an unsteady and constantly shifting future (1.4b-c).

Stanza 4 (1:5-6): The Wicked versus the Righteous

עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט	Therefore, the wicked will not arise in the judgment	1.5a
וְחַטָּאִים בְּעֵצַת צְדִיקִים:	Nor the sinners in the congregation of the righteous (pl.)	1.5b
כִּי־יֹדֵעַ יְהוָה דְּרֹךְ צְדִיקִים	For Yhwh knows the way of the righteous	1.6a
וְדֹרֵךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד:	But the way of the wicked will perish.	1.6b

Prior to this stanza, segmented communication was seen in the parallel structures which contrasted the blessed man with the wicked. Starting here, though, the parallel structure moves to the couplet. For the first time in the poem the righteous (pl.) are mentioned in comparison with the wicked. The relationship between the righteous and the blessed man will not be made clear until the final clause in the next psalm (2:12).

The first verb form in this stanza is *lo-yiqtol* (1.5a). The **עַל־כֵּן** functions as a *casus pendens*, being set apart from the rest of the clause. Van der Merwe notes that it serves to introduce a fact after a statement of grounds.¹⁹⁸ Thus, 1:5 provides the main lesson for what has

¹⁹⁸ Van der Merwe, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.15.

been discussed in 1:1-4; namely, that neither the wicked will not arise (resurrect) in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous (pl.). This seems to contrast the fate of the blessed man in 1.4, who will be like a tree planted by streams of water.

Another poetic device to notice in 1.5a-b is ellipsis (verb gapping). This tightens the correspondence between the two lines, as does phonological parallelism, which creates two bonds. The first is between the resurrection (arising) in 1.5a and the righteous in 1.5b, and the second between ‘the wicked in the judgment’ (1.5a) and ‘the sinners in the congregation’ (1.5b). Could the tie between the resurrection and the righteous in 1:5 imply that the man in 1:4 is enjoying the blessing of having risen in the judgment?

The final bi-colon of the psalm has a *non-verbal sentence* in parallel with *w-x-yiqtol*. The first line (1.6a) is a basic sentence in the present tense. The ׀ conjunction marks “the motivation given by speakers to explain something they have said.”¹⁹⁹ In this case, it marks the motive of the speaker for the whole preceding argument (1:1-5). In other words, the psalmist is providing evidence for the assertions he has made thus far in verses one to five. This seems to imply that *knowing the way of the righteous* means more than just mental awareness. More likely, it refers to the preservation and protection of the righteous – how the Lord is watching over them and keeping them. The way, then, is a metaphor for a way of life, conduct, or behavior. Significantly, this kind of protection extends far into the future, beyond the grave and into the resurrection.

The final clause in Psalm 1 is a *w-x-yiqtol*. It functions as a mainline verb form in the indicative future, switching from the present in the previous line. In a rather segmented way, it is reminiscent of the announcement made in 1:4. This final bi-colon serves as the motive for the

¹⁹⁹ Van der Merwe, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, §40.9 (pg. 302).

whole psalm. This same phenomenon was found in the final clause in Jonah as well. There, Jonah announced that salvation originated in Yhwh, and in no other. Here, the psalmist is giving his readers this information so that they might understand that Yhwh knows the righteous and protects them, while the wicked he will destroy, as wind blows the chaff.

Final Analysis of the Poem

As in Jonah 2, the verb forms in Psalm 1 were analyzed and were found to make good sense of the discourse. The verb forms represented in this text were far different than those represented in Jonah, but in both cases they fit well into Niccacci's verb theory of direct speech prose.

In this text, the axis of the present was indicated by *simple nominal clauses* in 1.1a, 1.2a, 1.4a, and 1.6a. These are significant because they bring to light the contrast between the fate of the blessed man and that of the wicked, in correlation with the chiastic structure of the psalm as a whole. The axis of the past was only used in 1.b-d to indicate the past actions of the blessed man. This information also gives the reader a way to understand the wicked in 1.4a. The axis of the future was used in every other clause, principally to indicate the fates of the blessed man and the righteous, as contrasted to the fate of the wicked.

In a final word, syntactical analysis seemed to go hand-in-hand with rhetorical analysis. This was predominately seen in how the chiastic structure lent support to help interpret key clauses in the psalm (e.g., 1:4 in relationship with 1:1-3).

Psalm 2

The final analysis of this paper will be applied to Psalm 2. This psalm was chosen because of its connection with Psalm 1.²⁰⁰ Both lack a superscription, adding to their unity as an

²⁰⁰ For a more complete look at the links between Psalms 1 and 2, see Robert L. Cole, "An Integrated Reading of Psalms 1 and 2," *JSOT* 98 (2002), 75-88.

introduction to the Psalter as a whole. Another element of unity across these psalms is blessing, which is used in description of the blessed man (1:1) and of the blessing which come to those who take refuge (trust) in that man (2:12). Reading the two psalms together as a unit, one can identify the blessed man (1:1) as the Son/Messiah from 2:3, 7, the wicked (1:4) with the rebellious nations, peoples, and rulers (2:1-2), and the righteous ones (1:5-6) with those receiving the blessing (2:12) given to the man (1:1).

The structure of Psalm 2 is chiasmic, just as in Psalm 1: stanza one (A, 2:1-3) is linked with stanza four (A', 2:10-12), and stanza two (B, 2:4-6) with stanza three (B', 2:7-9). The effect is that the rebellious kings (stanza one) are told how to respond properly in stanza four, while the Lord establishing his king on Zion (stanza two) by means of a decree (stanza three).

Stanza 1 (2.1-3): Rebellion against Yhwh and his Messiah

Strophe 1 (2:1-2)

לָמָּה רָגַשׁוּ גּוֹיִם	Why did the nations conspire,	2.1a
וְלֹאֲמַיִם יַהֲגוּ־רֵיק:	While the peoples were meditating in vain?	2.1b
יִתְנַצְּבוּ מִלְכֵי־אָרֶץ	<Why> were the kings of the earth/land always taking their stand	2.2a
וְרוֹזְנִים נוֹסְדוּ־יַחַד	While the rulers conspired together	2.2b
עַל־יְהוָה וְעַל־מְשִׁיחוֹ:	against Yhwh and against his Anointed?	2.2c

Strophe 2 (2:3)

נִגְזַתְקָה אֶת־מִוֹסְרוֹתֵינוּ	"Let us tear off from us their binding things,	2.3a
וְנִשְׁלִיכָה מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבֹתֵינוּ:	And let us cast off from us their chords	2.3b

Strophe one (2:1-2) in this stanza is set in the axis of the past by its mainline forms (2.1a, 2.2a).

This puts verses one and two in parallel, offering a chiasmic structure to the verb forms: *qatal-yiqtol // yiqtol-qatal*. Such a structure gives the opportunity to discuss two important aspects of

Biblical Hebrew poetry: the <x-> *yiqtol* construction as a double-duty modifier, and the alternation of *qatal* and *yiqtol*.

According to Niccacci, a sentence-initial *yiqtol* (which appears in 2.2a) is jussive.²⁰¹ The problem is that the *yiqtol* in 2.2a seems to be referring to the axis of the past, where the expression of volition is unlikely. A helpful poetic device in this situation is ellipsis, where a given element that is grammatically expected is omitted. Niccacci notes that this phenomenon occurs frequently in poetry, especially in the form of a “double-duty” modifier. These function to designate “a grammatical element that serves two or more lines although it does not appear in every case but only in the first line or, more difficult to recognize, only in the subsequent parallel lines of a poetic unit.”²⁰²

In the present case, the לְמַהֲלֵךְ of 2.1a is such a modifier, providing double-duty for both verses (2:1-2). It modifies the foreground clauses in 2.1a and 2.2a, while the *x-yiqtol* in 1.1b and the *x-qatal* in 1.2b are circumstantial constructions in the background of the past axis. This sets up the *qatal-yiqtol* // *yiqtol-qatal* structure, which allows the <x->*yiqtol* in 2.2a to have a past temporal reference.

Alternating *qatal-yiqtol*, as noted above in the Jonah analysis, have given interpreters trouble throughout the past few centuries. Allowing the verb forms to speak for themselves, however, Niccacci is able to give a sufficient explanation of the phenomenon. He states, “Clear cases of *x-yiqtol* constructions are attested indicating repetition/habit/explication/description in

²⁰¹ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 251.

²⁰² Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 258.

the axis of the past, in parallelism with *wayyiqtol* and *qatal* forms.”²⁰³ Here, the *x-yiqtol* is in parallelism with a *qatal* form.

In connection with this statement, Niccacci commented on this verse in particular, that “the *yiqtol* constructions convey repetition/habit/explication/description and do not stand on the same level with the *qatal* constructions, which convey single information.”²⁰⁴ Such an arrangement of forms adds depth to the field of the presentation of the event.²⁰⁵ The *qatal* in 2.1a, then, would indicate narrative-punctual event of the conspiring nations, while the *yiqtol* in 2.2a would indicate the habitual-descriptive information about the kings and rulers of the earth.²⁰⁶ Niccacci calls this function of *qatal-yiqtol* “merismus.”²⁰⁷ For him, it is a way of expressing totality in abbreviated form. In the present verse, “the coordinates punctuality vs. habit/description add depth perspective and contribute to a graphic representation of the events that is characteristic of poetry.”²⁰⁸

The second strophe in this stanza is a bi-colon. It presents the rebellious cry of those against Yhwh and his Messiah in 2:1-2. The change in speaker also correlates with a change in temporal axis. Here, the strophe is in the axis of the volitive future. Both lines (2.3a-b) are jussive *yiqtol* in the foreground of the volitive future. They follow the verb chart perfectly.

²⁰³ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 261.

²⁰⁴ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 259.

²⁰⁵ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 259.

²⁰⁶ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 266.

²⁰⁷ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 266.

²⁰⁸ Niccacci, “Verbal System in Poetry,” 266.

Stanza 2 (2:4-6): The Lord is establishing his king on Zion

Strophe 1 (2:4-5)

יֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק The one who sits in the heavens will laugh, 2.4a

אֲדֹנָי יִלְעַג-לָמוֹ: The Lord will hold them in derision; 2.4b

אָז יִדְבַר אֲלֵימוֹ בְּאַפּוֹ Then he will speak to them in his anger, 2.5a

וּבְחֲרוֹנוֹ יִבְהַלְמוּ: While in his fury he will terrify them. 2.5b

Strophe 2 (2:6)

וְאֲנִי נִסְכַּתִּי מֶלֶכִּי "But I myself have established my king 2.6a

עַל-צִיּוֹן הַר-קֹדֶשׁ: Upon Zion, my holy mountain." 2.6b

As in the first stanza, the strophes function to paint a setting (2:4-5) and then give a character in the story an opportunity to speak (2:6). In the first stanza, the psalmist inquired into why many were in rebellion to Yhwh and his Messiah (strophe one), and then gave those rebelling a voice in strophe two. Here, the psalmist paints a picture in strophe one of the Lord responding to the cry of the rebellious. Strophe two offers the spoken response of the Lord.

All four clauses in this strophe one are *x-yiqtol* forms. The temporal marker וְ separates the first two lines from the second two. This allows the first two *x-yiqtol* forms to remain in the foreground, parallel to one another, while the second two form a unit. The *x-yiqtol* in 2.5a is in the foreground of the indicative future, as 2.4a-b, while the *w-x-yiqtol* has a background function, as it indicates descriptive, contemporaneous information.

Strophe two is also fairly easy to analyze. In it there is another change of speaker, from the voice of the psalmist to the voice of the Lord, who sits in the heavens. In his discourse, he speaks in the foreground of the past axis, using a *w-x-qatal* clause. Though it is made up of two poetic lines, syntactically it is only one clause. As lines, this indicates syntagmatic parallelism, which was last seen in 2.2c.

Several elements of this stanza help to make interpretative connections between it and the rest of the poem. For instance, the **עַל** preposition is only used twice in the poem (2:5, 2:7). In both instances it is used identify who the Lord is speaking to. The preposition **עַל** is used in a similar fashion. In verse 2, it used to describe who the wicked are rebelling against, and in verse 7 it is used to describe where the Lord has established his king. The effect of such usage is an element of irony. Lastly, the pronoun **אֲנִי** is used in 2:6 and 2:7 in reference to the same speaker.

Stanza 3 (2:7-9): The Lord's decree concerning his Son

Strophe 1 (2:7)

אֲסַפֶּנָּה אֵל חֵק יְהוָה	Let me recount concerning the decree of Yhwh;	2.7a
אָמַר אֵלַי	He said to me,	2.7b
בְּנִי אַתָּה	"You are my Son,	2.7c
אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יִלְדֶתיךָ:	I, this day, have begotten you.	2.7d

Strophe 2 (2:8)

שְׁאַל מִמֶּנִּי	Ask of me,	2.8a
וְאַתְנַה גּוֹיִם נַחֲלֶתיךָ	In order that I might give the nations as your inheritance	2.8b
וְאַחֲזֶתיךָ אֶפְסֵי-אָרֶץ:	And as your possession, the ends of the earth.	2.8c
תִּרְעֵם בְּשֶׁבֶט בַּרְזֶל	Shepherd/break them with a rod of iron,	2.9a
כְּכֵלֵי יוֹצֵר הַנִּפְצָעִים:	As an instrument of a potter shatter them!"	2.9b

The first strophe in this stanza enters begins with a different speaker. In the previous verse, the speaker was the Lord (2:6), and here it is the Son (2.7c). The focus of his discourse is on the decree which Yhwh spoke to him. In 2:7 the verb forms indicate the past temporal axis, while 2:8-9 indicate the future volitive axis.

The first clause in 2:7 (2.7a) is an initial *yiqtol*, which is jussive. It is on the foreground of the future volitive axis. This clause is followed by a *qatal* form (2.7b), which is the

foreground form in the axis of the past. It also sets up the quoted speech section, which runs from 2.7c through the end of the stanza (2.9b). The quote begins with a *simple nominal clause* in the present temporal axis. This is the first time the present axis has been utilized in this poem. It functions as a basic statement of information, much like the clauses in 1.1a and 1.4a. The *x-qatal* in the following clause (2.7d) switches the discourse from the axis of the present to the axis of the past. It is a foreground verb form. As an *x-qatal*, it has the effect of placing emphasis on the ‘x’ element, which, in this case, is the identification of the speaker: Yhwh (c.f. 2:6).

This strophe makes the first explicit reference to the Davidic covenant in the Psalter. The heart of the speech is the close relationship between the Father and his Son. One also be able to make a case that 2:7 is interpreting 2:6; that is, the Lord established his king upon Zion by issuing the decree the Son (king) is now recounting.

As a note of interest, the BHS editors laid out this strophe in an undiscernable pattern. Syntactically, it is clearly four separate clauses that are easily analyzed, but as poetry, it is difficult to ascertain whether it should be understood as a mono-colon followed by a bi-colon (or even two bi-colon) or as a tri-colon. In any case, syntax is not dependent on strophic analysis.

The second strophe (2:8-9) begins with an *imperative*, which belongs to the mainline of the future. This sets the entire strophe in the volitive future. According to Niccacci, the following cohortative *weyiqtol* form continues the mainline of the future from an *imperative*, indicating purpose. The translation above reflects this function of the verb.

The *nominal phrase* in 2.8c is also on the mainline of the future. The *weyiqtol* in the previous clause also belongs in this clause, creating ellipsis between the two lines. The *volitive* in 2.9a switches from the first-person to the second-person, making it an *imperative*. From here,

another *imperative* is used in 2.9b, but in the background (*x-imperative*). Thus, in 2:9 there is a parallelism of the type AB//BA.

Stanza 4 (2:10-12): A King's Proper Response to Yhwh

Unit 1 (2:10)

וְעַתָּה מְלָכִים הַשְׁפִּילוּ And now, O kings, be prudent 2.10a

הַתְּסִירוּ שַׁפְטֵי אָרֶץ: Be disciplined, O judging ones of the earth. 2.10b

Unit 2 (2:11)

עֲבֹדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה בְּיִרְאָה Serve Yhwh in fear, 2.11a

וְגִילוּ בְרִעְדָּה: and rejoice in trembling; 2.11b

Unit 3 (2:12a-d)

נִשְׁקוּ־בֵר Kiss the Son. 2.12a

פֶּן־יִאֲרָץ Lest he become angry 2.12b

וְתִאֲבְדוּ דְרֹךְ so that you be destroyed in (your) way 2.12c

כִּי־יִבְעַר כַּמְעַט אַפּוֹ For he will burn with his anger quickly 2.12d

Unit 4 (2:12e)

אֲשֵׁרֵי כָל־חֹוֹסֵי בּוֹ: Blessed are all those who trust in him. 2.12e

The final stanza in this psalm has been divided into four units, rather than strophes. The strophic division of these three verses is difficult to ascertain, and may provide difficulty to a proper syntactic analysis. Instead, analysis will be done to complete units.

In this stanza the speaker is again the psalmist, who is now reflecting on all that has been previously recounted. As Niccacci notes, *עַתָּה* is “an important particle which introduces the result arising or the conclusion to be drawn concerning the present action from an event or topic dealt with beforehand. Its force, therefore, is as an adverbial expression of time with logical force: ‘And now, and so.’”²⁰⁹ This stanza, then, is the conclusion to the poem.

²⁰⁹ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §73.

The first unit of thought is a chiasmic pair of clauses which are in parallelism (AB//BA). Both clauses are *imperatives*, and both occur in the mainline of the volitive future. The עתה is functioning as *casus pendens*; it is a macro-syntactic sign.

The second unit of thought is also easy to analyze. Both clauses are *imperatives* that maintain the foreground of the volitive future. The second *imperative*, however, may indicate succession, as it begins with a *waw*.²¹⁰ Combining this unit with the previous one, there is a long string of *imperatives* which are all in the same axis of the future. A proper response to Yhwh elicits all these imperatives together. The commands themselves look back to the rebellious kings' desires against the Lord in 2:3, while the subjects refer back to 2:2.

The third unit begins with another *imperative* which can also be seen as the last in the previous string of imperatives. It is hard to determine whether the וְ refers simply to the imperative in 2.12a or to the entire string of imperatives previous to it (at the very least it refers to the imperative in 2.12a). Niccacci understands the remaining clauses (2.12b-d) to be coordinated dependent clauses.²¹¹ The *weyiqtol* in 2.12c is an indirect volitive form expressing intention or purpose, while the וְ-*yiqtol* clause in 2.12d functions dependently on 2.12c.

The final unit in the stanza is a *simple nominal clause* in the axis of the present. The only other clause sharing the present axis in this poem is 2.7c, in which the Lord says, "You are my Son." This Son is the "him" in 2.12e. He is the one who may become angry, but he is also the one with whom there are many blessings. These blessings seem to include being involved in the victory he will gain as king, sitting with him upon Zion, where his position of authority lies. The connection of blessing between Psalms 1 and 2 also seem to indicate that all of the things

²¹⁰ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §61, 65.

²¹¹ Niccacci, *Syntax*, §55.2 (pg. 80).

predicated to the Son in both psalms are now predicated to anyone who would trust in him.

Thus, it has been observed in all three poems analyzed that the last colon of the poem gave the motive for everything that preceded it.

Final Analysis of the Poem

For the most part, the verb forms in Psalm 2 functioned just as Niccacci's theory anticipated.

The only place of difficulty was in the last stanza, unit three. There, it was somewhat taxing to understand the relationship between the string of imperatives and the coordinate dependent clauses (especially the *weyiqtol* in 2.12c). A solution was presented, however, that remained consistent with the theory.

All three temporal axis were utilized in this poem, and all contributed much towards the proper eschatological interpretation of the text. In the poem, the psalmist is seeking an answer to his question, "Why?" He wants to know why the kings, nations, rulers, and people have all desired to rebel against the Lord and his Messiah. The verb forms show that the psalmist is thinking about their past actions and thoughts.

From the author's perspective, his question is answered by the future actions of the Lord. The Lord will sit in the heavens and laugh, and will one day terrify them by declaring that he has established his king on Mount Zion. This is clearly an eschatological reference. The Son then recounts the plans of Yhwh, and how he will receive his blessings. In a final stanza, the psalmist pleads with those who rebelled earlier to return to Yhwh, that they might serve him with fear, and rejoice in trembling. Instead of breaking off the bonds of the Messiah, they are to kiss the Son. The motive for the entire poem comes out in the very last clause, where it is learned that the blessings of the Son are also the blessings of all those who take refuge in him.

Evaluation

In the foregoing analysis, an clear attempt was made to let Niccacci's verbal theory speak for itself. Though a few clauses posed initial difficulty, by and large his verbal theory was sufficient to analyze the texts in question.

In Jonah 2, the axis of the past was predominately used to recount the journey of Jonah to the bottom of the sea and back up to the shore. In that text, several alternating *qatal/yiqtol* clauses were given an explanation that seemed to fit well into the poet's strategy. When Jonah was not describing his downfall, he spoke in the axis of the future about the hope he had on one day turning to the temple of Yhwh and being in his presence. The final clause in the poem expressed the motive of Jonah; namely, that he thought that salvation originated in Yhwh alone.

In Psalm 1, the axis of the indicative future was predominately used. In that text, a difficult area to study was the relationship between 1:2-3. If one were to divide the poem into strophes by only looking at rhetorical features, one might be tempted to divide the text as 1:1-2 and 1:3. A syntactic analysis showed that 1.2-3 needed to be read together as a unit. In the end, the syntax of verse 4 was most helpful, as it chiastically paralleled 1:1-3. In this regard, rhetorical analysis aided greatly in the interpretation of verbal forms. The main thrust of psalm was shone to exist in the contrast of the blessed man and the wicked. As in Jonah 2, the motive of the psalmist was expressed in the final colon, where he recounted that Yhwh knows the way of the righteous, and that the way of the wicked will perish.

In Psalm 2, there was a rich display of all three temporal axes, though the predominate one seemed to be the volitive future. The poem opened with a description of rebellious people using the past axis, and their volitional desire to break out from the authority of God. In

analyzing this first stanza, several peculiarities of Biblical Hebrew poetry (alternating *qatal-yiqtol* and *yiqtol* as a double-duty modifier) were shown to help interpret the verb forms. The rest of the poem utilized the axis of the volitive future to show that the way of the wicked leads to destruction because the plan of the Lord is to establish his king on Mount Zion. Only in speech quotations are other temporal axes present. As in the previous two poems, the motive of the psalmist was expressed in the final clause, where he communicated that the blessings which belong properly to the Son are also available to anyone who takes refuge in him.

Concerning structure, Jonah 2 used repetition to communicate to the reader. The first stanza told the entire plot of the poem, wherein subsequent stanzas could provide more details and expand on the various elements. The structure of both psalms was chiasmic. Each psalm had four stanzas following an ABBA pattern. Thus, each poem was constructed upon parallelism, within which the poet communicated in terms of segmented speech.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was not to lay claim to a final solution to the problem of the verb in Biblical Hebrew poetry. Rather, its aim was to present the verbal theory of Alviero Niccacci, apply it to certain poetic texts, and then critically analyze his theory's explanation of those texts.

To achieve that goal two main discussions took place. First, a method for the analysis of Hebrew poetry was set forth in which the focus rested on the joining together of verbal theory (syntax) and verse structure (rhetorical). There, aspects of biblical parallelism were examined, as well as the distinguishing marks of BH poetry. An important step was added into the method of analysis so that syntax could be analyzed. Since communication in poetry occurs through parallelism (segmentation) rather than logical and sequential communication (prose), it was deemed necessary that syntactic analysis was better realized prior to poetic devices. In cases

such as ellipsis, where parallelistic structure is crucial to meaning, rhetorical study is seen to serve syntax, not *vice-a-versa*. An example of this was in Psalm 1, where the chiasmic structure of the poem allowed the clauses in 1:4 to help interpret the verb forms in 1:1-3.

A second discussion undertaken was the “enigma” of the Biblical Hebrew verb system. A brief summary was given to the most prevalent solutions offered over the past two centuries – tense, aspect, comparative-historical, and discourse-oriented – before a full-blown explanation of Niccacci’s textlinguistic was done. In explaining Niccacci’s theory, a treatment was given to the linguistic model proposed by Harald Weinrich (textlinguistics), as well as that model’s first application to Biblical Hebrew (W. Schneider).

After these discussions, the application of Niccacci’s textlinguistic took place with the syntactic analysis of Jonah 2:3-10, Psalm 1, and Psalm 2. In each text Niccacci’s theory was able to make sense of the verb forms as linguistic signs, respecting the verb forms as they were encountered, on their own terms.

In conclusion, Niccacci has offered a solution to the verb system in BH poetry that has great potential in both syntactical and rhetorical analysis. What makes Niccacci’s method promising is that it joins together a theory of the verb (textlinguistics) with a theory of verse structure (following Berlin’s modern linguistic approach). This allows the study of syntax to precede rhetoric, yet allow both of them to inform each other. Thus, problem areas such as ellipsis (verb gapping) or double-duty modifiers (in particular, <x-> *yiqtol*, are given a sufficient explanation.

The future of scholarship in this field is able to use Niccacci’s contributions in two specific directions. First, now that a hypothesis of poetic syntax has been set forth by Niccacci that seems to work well with several smaller poetic texts, scholars are now able to test his

hypothesis on other larger texts. Just as Niccacci himself has done with Jonah, Malachi, and several chapters in Proverbs, so now other scholars can join his work. Second, there is also room for improvement in describing the function of verbal forms. Niccacci's textlinguistic, though already well-informed from his research on prose texts, needs tested and more observations need to be made on the actual distribution of forms in poetic texts. Third, greater work can be done to develop a way to divide stanzas and strophes that is based off of initial syntactic analysis. Perhaps the use of asyndeton and *waw* may provide a key to analysis, as it seemed to help in analyzing Psalm 1.²¹²

Though it remains significant that scholars have yet to agree on a sufficient theory of the verb that is able to handle the special problems that arise for the interpretation of verbal conjugations in Biblical Hebrew poetry, those open for a textlinguistic solution to the problem have an option in the textlinguistic theory of Alviero Niccacci.

²¹² See the forthcoming grammar by Garrett (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009).

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