Hebrew Grammar

Intro:

Morphology- changes to form of word
Syntax- function of word or clause in the sentence

Nouns: GNS

Gender- masc or fem. no neuter in Hebrew.
Number- Singular, Plural, Dual- pairs, used mostly of body parts, 2 eyes, ears, hands, etc.
State-
In Hebrew only one case marking הֲנָה marker of direct object
‘And God saw the light’
There may be direct object without this marking
This word is spelled the same as הֲנָה a preposition ‘with’

Construct State
2 nouns side by side in relationship- exact relationship depends on words and context.
head noun and genitive
the main noun, called the ‘head noun,’ is modified
by the other noun, called the ‘genitive’
In Heb. the head noun is inflected- said to be in construct state (related to a genitive)
If not inflected, called absolute state (not related)
absolute = man
construct = man of
inflection of masc. sg. nouns the same for absolute and construct, but all others change for construct.

םֶסֶס horse
םֶסֶס horse of
םֶסֶס horses
םֶסֶס horses of
םֶסֶס mare
םֶסֶס mare of
םֶסֶס mares of

all nouns with object suffixes are in construct state
construct chains, any number of constructs together
e.g. the horses of the sons of the king of Judah
relatively few adjectives in Heb. adjectival functions usually taken by construct chain.
can go both directions
Eccl. 4:4 כָּשֹּׁרָה יְמֵי מַשָּׂה lit. skill of labor = skillful labor
Psa. 24:3 בְּמַעֲקֹת קְדָשָׁה place of His holiness = His holy place
Adjectives
relatively few
agree with noun in gender and number
usually follows noun- the horse the brown speckled
usually last in construct chain- the horses of the sons of the king of Judah
the brown speckled

Adverbs
relatively few
Lexicon is key to understanding function of adverbs

Prepositions
Can be stand alone word or attached to beginning of word
Some prepositions exist in stand alone form and inseparable prefix form
Only a few of them, but they have a wide variety of meaning and function,
Lexicon or Williams grammar is the key to understanding prep function.

Particles
Conjunctions and connecting words
There are few true conjunctions- Ứ does double and triple duty- depends on context
Many other connecting words- Lexicon usually gives function

Verbs/ Verbals
Tense
Only 2 tenses in Hebrew
Translation of tense sometimes tricky, must be from context
Focus of Heb. tense is on aspect
2 tenses  Perfect and Imperfect- not the same as Gk. pf. and impf.
Perfect tense sees action as a completed whole as from the outside
usually translated by Eng. past tense
Imperfect tense sees action as incomplete/in progress as from the inside
usually translated by Eng. pres. or fut. tense
This is from the point of view of the author, not reader.

C.L. Seow, A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew, p. 207- “[tenses] indicate how a situation is viewed by the speaker/writer. In the perfect, the speaker/writer is an outsider considering the situation as a whole, with the beginning and the end both in view. In the imperfect, the speaker/writer views the situation from the inside, making explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of the situation, without explicit reference to the beginning or the end.”

There are plenty of examples of Pf. tense referring to future actions- e.g. God will judge the nations
There are plenty of examples of Impf. tense referring to past events from the standpoint of the author, but the focus is on the process of the event unfolding.
Morphology of tenses

The Perfect tense is characterized by inflecting the suffix for person gender and number

\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{he kept} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{she kept} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{I kept} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{we kept} \]

The Imperfect tense is characterized by inflecting the prefix and sometimes also the suffix

\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{he will keep} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{she will keep} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{I will keep} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{they(masc.) will keep} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{they(fem.) will keep} \]

**NOTE:** These are the most standard terms for Hebrew tense, however, there are many other terms used.

**In Davidson's Analytical Lexicon:**
- “fut.” (future) = imperfect
- “pret” (preterite) = perfect
- “Kal” = Qal

Vav-conversive, Vav-consecutive

\( ^\downarrow \) before a verb usually (but it may not) switches the force of the verb so that a perfect is translated like an imperfect and an imperfect like a perfect.

\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{he will keep impf.} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{and he kept v.c. impf.} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{he kept pf.} \]
\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{and he will keep v.c. pf.} \]

The normal pattern for Hebrew narrative is to start with a perfect tense verb followed by a chain of vav-conversive imperfects.

\[ \overline{0} \quad \text{He ran (pf.) and he jumped (v.c.impf.) and he laughed (v.c. impf.) and he shouted (v.c. impf.) and…… etc.} \]

How to deal with tense

1. learn Hebrew- not too difficult, but beyond this course
2. start with general guidelines given above, governed by context
3. if any question, see how major translations handled the tense.
4. Hebrew grammars all give detailed explanation of tenses
Other Verb forms

Precatives express exhortations, commands, and wishes

Jussive expresses command in the 3rd person

主动性 יָשַׁר ַ- let him keep

Most jussives are identical in form to imperfect and must be distinguished by the context.

Cohortative expresses command in the 1st person

主动性 נֵשָׁמָה ַ- let us keep

Imperative expresses command directly in the 2nd person

主动性 שָׁמָה ַ- keep!

Participles

Hebrew participles are verbal nouns, similar to Gk. ptcp.
Heb. ptcps are inflected for gender number and state and function the same as Heb. nouns.
Qal participles have an active form and a passive form. All other stems take the characteristic of those stems.
Participles have a variety of translation possibilities, some similar to English or Greek, some entirely different.

主动性 שָׁמָה ַ- keeping, keeper, keeps, kept, etc.

Infinitives

Hebrew infinitives are mostly unlike English or Greek infinitives
Heb. infinitives are fairly common and have a wide range of translation possibilities
Heb. infinitives come in two forms, infinitive absolute and infinitive construct.
Infinitive construct often takes a ל prefix and an object suffix

主动性 שָׁמָה ַ- inf. abs. to keep, kept, will keep, etc.
主动性 שָׁמָה ַ- inf. cs. to keep of, kept of, etc.

One interesting use of infinitive absolute that deserves note:
Inf. abs. of same root with finite verb often has intensifying force.
主动性 שָׁמָה ַ- lit. to keep he will keep = he will certainly keep

How to deal with verb forms

1. learn Hebrew- not too difficult, but beyond this course
2. start with general guidelines given above, governed by context
3. if any question, see how major translations handled the verb form.
4. Hebrew grammars all give detailed explanation of verb forms.
Verb Stem

There are 7 major Hebrew Verb stems each characterized by a regular vowel pattern.
Each stem has a unique translation value.
It is best to treat each stem as a different word, as the lexicons separate the meanings by stem.
The stem meanings are **not** interchangeable.
See “Hebrew Verb Concepts” for more information.

How to deal with verb stems

1. learn Hebrew- not too difficult, but beyond this course
2. treat each stem as different word, governed by context
3. if any question, see how major translations handled the verb stem.
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Hebrew Clauses

Hebrew rarely marks the relationship of clauses. More often Hebrew puts two clauses next to each other with no connecting marker (asyndeton), or the conjunction ו (and, but, so, etc.). The connection between the clauses must be inferred from the meaning of the words and the flow of the passage, i.e. context.

A few types of clauses are worth mention:

relative clause-
like in Greek, a relative clause is not a completely independent idea, but gives definition or description to an item in the main clause.
a relative clause is marked by the relative particle ו along with the shortened form (an inseparable prefix)
These are both translated “which” or “who”
e.g. והם וסכן שמעון ויהי “the man who kept horses”

clause of existence or negation
clauses that state the existence or nonexistence of something by using the following particles

particle of existence “there is…”
particle of negation “there is not…”

Eccl. 4:8 שם אלים נאומיסי
lit. “there is one and there is not two” = “there is a man and there is no one else”

interrogative clauses
Hebrew marks questions with a few interrogative particles prefixed particle (don’t confuse with the definite article)
personal interrogative particle “who? whom?”
impersonal interrogative “what? which?”
interrogative adverb of manner “how?”
interrogative adverb of place “where?”
Word order

The normal word order in Hebrew clauses is as follows:

verb – noun subject – noun object – adverb or prepositional phrase

For Example:
Gen. 37:2

their father to bad report of them Joseph he brought
Prep. phrase Direct Object Subj. verb

Gen. 1:27

in His image the man God And He created
Prep. phrase Direct Object Subj. verb

The order often deviates from normal order, but when it does it should be carefully noted, because it is often for emphasis and has exegetical significance

Variations in word order are most commonly for one of these reasons:
1. The word or phrase that is placed first is placed first for emphasis
   a. Gen. 3:13- subject

   he deceived me The serpent
   verb Subj.

   b. II Kgs. 22:8- object

   I found The Law book of
   verb Direct Object

   c. Gen. 3:19- Prep. phrase

   you will eat your face by sweat of
   verb Prep. phrase
2. To signal a break in the narrative sequence
   a. contrast
      I Sam. 1:22
      
      

      

   b. change of subject
      Gen. 27:6
      
      

      

   c. background material or parenthesis
      
      


3. When the clause is a subordinate clause, adverbial
   Josh. 10:9
      
      

   “…by marching all night up from Gilgal.”
Narrative Sequence

There is a common pattern for relating the main events of a narrative. This pattern is to start with a verb in perfect tense (Perf.) followed by a string of vav-conversive verbs in the imperfect tense. (VCImpf.) (The normal pattern for a negative statement in this chain is vav + negative + verb in Perfect tense)

וַיִּשְׁחָתָהוּ אֵשֶׁת-אָדָם

his wife   Eve   he knew (Perf.)   And Adam

וַיִּלְכָּה

And she conceived (VCImpf)

וַיִּלְכָּה נְתָלִיל

Cain   And she bore (VCImpf)

וַיֹּאמֶר

And she said… (VC Impf)

This pattern may be broken for a number of reasons

For emphasis
To show parenthesis or background material
For change of scene or speaker
For contrast
To show subordinate statements

The break can be made by a number of devices

Change of word order (as above)
Change of verb tense
Unusual construction
Unusual conjunction

The word לְכַלּ “look, behold” which usually marks a change of perspective

The original thread of narrative may be picked up by resuming with a VCImpf verb.

This pattern is common, but not always consistent.
In some cases, it is possible to pick out the emphases of a narrative by observing this pattern and the strategic breaks.
An Example of Exegesis from Narrative Sequence

**Judges 3:18-26**

VClmpf forms are flush left. Subordinate clauses are indented. Nonstandard constructions are in bold print. Quotations are italicized. The function of each phrase follows in parentheses.

(18) And it so happened (introductory)
    when he had finished presenting the tribute payment (temporal)
    he dismissed the people who had carried it (sequential)

(19) **But he went back once he reached the carved images** (contrastive)
    which are in Gilgal (relative)
    And he said: (sequential)
        *I have a secret message for you, O King.*
    And he replied: (sequential)
        *Shh!*
    And all his attendants left (sequential)

(20) **When Ehud approached him**, (circumstantial)
    **he was sitting in his ventilated upper room** (synchronic)
    where he was all alone (relative)
    And Ehud said: (sequential)
        *I have a divine message for you*
    And he got up from his throne (sequential)

(21) And Ehud reached with his left hand (sequential)
    and pulled the sword from his right thigh (sequential)
    and drove it into his belly (sequential)

(22) And the handle went in after the blade (sequential)
    and the fat closed around the blade (sequential)

    for he did not pull the sword out of his belly (causal)
    And it went out (sequential)

(23) And Ehud went out into the vestibule (sequential)
    and he closed the doors of the upper room behind him (sequential)
    **and he locked them** (complementary)

(24) **When he had left** (circumstantial)
    his (Eglon’s) servants entered (synchronic)
    and they looked (sequential)
    **And look, the doors of the upper room were locked** (dramatic)
    And they said: (sequential)
        *He must be relieving himself in the upper room*

(25) And they waited so long they became embarrassed (sequential)
    **And look, he did not open the doors of the upper room** (dramatic)
    And they took the key (sequential)
    and opened them (sequential)
    **And look, their master was lying on the floor dead.** (dramatic)

(26) **Now Ehud escaped while they delayed** (dramatic)
    **When he passed by the carved images** (circumstantial)
    he escaped to Seirah (sequential)