The main line of a biblical Hebrew narrative
and what to do with two perfective grams

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Abstract
The interplay between a perfective storyline way-yiqtol and a perfective qatal in biblical Hebrew narrative prose is compared with Talmy Givón’s notions of ‘vivid perfective’ and ‘remote perfective’. It is suggested that a digression to a qatal clause (more precisely wə-x-qatal) codes off-line information in relation to the storyline. This type of narration technique has its roots in an oral society with recitation before a listening audience. It has many affinities with spontaneous oral discourse.

Introduction
The aim of this article is to achieve an understanding of how the biblical Hebrew storyline works and how two perfective verbal grammatical morphemes are utilized to achieve a structure in the text with subtle nuances that are found also in spontaneous oral narration in English.

It could seem presumptuous to discuss the biblical Hebrew storyline once again. Most scholars already agree that the so-called way-yiqtol syntagm codes the biblical Hebrew storyline. Most scholars seem to think that the syntax of narrative prose is reasonably well understood in biblical Hebrew. We propose instead that the syntax of narrative prose is the problem. And if our understanding of narrative prose fails, no wonder that poetry appears as a chaos. We will start with the fact that biblical Hebrew possesses two grammatical morphemes for the coding of the perfective aspect.1

It seems that practically all texts have what could be labeled a ‘main line’. The coding of this main line may vary according to text type and pragmatic setting, but it is from this main line digressions are made in the form of background clauses, circumstantial clauses, quotations, and so on. This paper will

1 Definition: “Perfectives signal that the situation is viewed as bounded temporally. Perfective is the aspect used for narrating sequences of discrete events in which the situation is reported for its own sake, independent of its relevance to other situations” (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994: 54).
penetrate some coding intricacies of the classical Hebrew storyline which is the main line of narrative prose.

The storyline is an archaic human invention. Its unique psychology is probably as old as man itself. In the storyline the listener is moved from his own world and mentally transferred to the now of the story. The ability of the human mind to be temporally transferred to a textually transmitted world seems a universal feature. A considerable number of human languages use a specific – often unmarked – verb form to code this narrative storyline (Dahl 1985: 113). In a narrative context this verbal gram usually expresses a perfective aspect.

Some languages have even two perfective grams. This type of language is discussed by Talmy Givón in his Syntax: An Introduction (2001 I: 298ff.). Givón distinguishes between a ‘remote’ and a ‘vivid’ perfective.

1. Givón’s ‘vivid perfective’
According to Givón, “In many languages a subtle aspectual contrast can be made, in otherwise perfective-coded narrative of past events, between a remote vs. vivid perspective on the event or sequence of events” (Givón I: 298).

The remote vs. vivid distinction can be seen in English in the contrast between the past tense and the simple present when used in past-tense narrative, the so-called ‘historical present’ or ‘diegetic present’.

The distinction can also be observed in Old French for which scholars have remarked on a “seemingly ungrammatical alternation of tenses” in narration (Fleischman 1990: 4, 58). In a similar manner scholars have regarded the alternation of tenses in biblical Hebrew as exceptional, and this is one of the reasons for the notion of ‘conversive waw’, an idea still current in mainstream Hebrew scholarship.

Regarding the distinction ‘remote vs. vivid’ perspective in narrative, Givón states some features as essential:

- “The vivid past codes events in the past as-if they are occurring right now.”
- There are two kinds of storytelling, one using ‘remote’ perfectives and one using ‘vivid’ perfectives.
- The vivid perfective is especially frequent in oral narration, and this concerns both genuinely oral societies without a written tradition and spontaneous oral storytell-

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2 In a similar manner Fleischman has noted the “seemingly idiosyncratic use of tenses” in Old French (1990: 2).
ing in modern written cultures. Also in Old French there is a special marked grammar for narratives “composed for oral recitation before a listening audience—for performance” (Fleischman 1990: 4).

- According to Givón this vivid perfective is more commonly grammaticalized in pre-literate cultures, that is, in oral societies.
- In English and Swedish societies the vivid perfective is especially effective in spontaneous oral discourse, as in Givón’s example ‘See, what happened… This’s at the time I’m getting ‘Freaks’ ready for production’.3
- The contrast between the remote vs. vivid perfective is not the same as between the perfective and imperfective aspects. The remote and vivid pasts in English are both able to code a storyline.

Languages with two perfective grams may use both grams in narration to achieve syntactic distinctions. Givón gives an English example of interaction between two perfectives. It is a piece of “direct-quoted uneducated speech”, “with the remote and vivid alternating in the very same passage” (Givón I: 299). In the example story the imperative ‘See’ is a direct address to the listener.

“…See, what happened… This’s at the time I’m getting ‘Freaks’ ready for production. I’ve got a script, but it needs to work, get rid of some of the more expensive special effects. So I go see my writer and we discuss revisions. Murray’s good, he’s been with me, he wrote all my ‘Grotesque’ pictures, some of the others. He’s done I don’t know how many TV scripts, hundreds. He’s done sitcoms, westerns, sci-fi, did a few ‘Twilight Zone’s… Only now he can’t get any TV work ‘cause he’s around my age and the networks don’t like to hire any writer over forty. Murray has kind of a drinking problem, too, that doesn’t help. Likes the sauce, smokes four packs a day… We’re talking — get back to what I want to tell you — he happens to mention a script he wrote years ago when he was starting out and never sold. I ask him what it’s about.

3 In Dagens Nyheter 29 May 2010 in the article “Mir Abbas sista resa” (p. 34-35 in part I) the Swedish journalist Ann Persson writes about the suicide of an Afghanistan immigrant in Sweden, Mir Abbas. In the following quotation off-sequence clauses have been enclosed within brackets: ‘[Ingen vet vad som hände i Grekland. Sannolikt levde han samma hårda liv som tusentals andra afghaner, sov i parker och försökte ta sig vidare.] 2003 lämnar han en asylansökan till Migrationsverket i Hofors. Ett par månader senare får han avslag. [Året som följde blev ett enda kaos.] Mira Abbas Safari överklagar, tappar kontrollen över sitt liv och blir inlagd för psykvård i Söderhamn. I januari 2005 söker han asyl i Oslo. Två månader senare skickas han tillbaka och placeras av Migrationsverket i en lägenhet i Kiruna.’ The true story line is coded by present tense verbs (‘2003 lämnar han in …’). This modern Swedish newspaper text is characterized by tense-switching. The main structure is formed by a shift between two tenses. The quoted story from Dagens Nyheter is a typical piece of a modern journalese and probably rather close to the syntax of spontaneous everyday Swedish oral narratives.
He tells me. It sounds pretty good, so I take the script home and read it.” Harry paused.

“I read it again, just to be sure. My experience, my instinct, my gut, tells me I have a property here, that with the right actor in the starring role, I can take to any studio in town and practically write my own deal. This one, I know, is gonna take on heat fast. The next day I call Murray, tell him I’m willing to option the script…”

By the imperative introductory clause ‘See, what happened…’ we are still at the reference point of the speaker. The imperative is directly addressed to the listener. This introductory statement is identified by Givón as “by definition off-sequence”. As an introductory clause and imperative it has high saliency but it is nevertheless off-line in relation to the storyline. Instead, the gram which Givón calls ‘vivid’ codes the narrative main line:4

(1) [“…See, <what happened…>] ‘This’s at the time <I’m getting ‘Freaks’ ready for production>’

This first clause of the storyline is coded by the historical present (This is), and it moves us right into the story world. At the same time it is obvious that the main verb clause ‘This’s at the time’ is describing a temporal reference, a state, rather than a sequential event. So being in the story line is not intrinsically a matter of sequentiality. And the storyline is not exclusively performed in the perfective aspect. What triggers the storyline here is the switch to the present tense from a previous past tense in the independent relative clause ‘what happened’. Also the proximate demonstrative ‘this’ (vs. ‘that’) triggers the intimacy of the storyline.5

(2) ‘This’s at the time <I’m getting ‘Freaks’ ready for production>’ [I’ve got a script]’ (Pattern: present tense / anterior)

The next clause ‘I’ve got a script’ (2) represents a digression from the storyline but not to the reference point of the speaker. By the digression ‘I’ve got a script’ we are still in the story world. It is a background information which the listener needs in order to understand the story. The digression is coded by a shift from a

4 Off-line clauses are marked by us with brackets: […]. Relative clauses are marked by <…> and clauses of elaboration are marked {…}.

5 ‘I’m getting ‘Freaks’ ready for production’ is strictly speaking an asyndetic relative clause. By the progressive construction it emphasizes an ongoing event.
historical present (‘This’s at the time’) to anterior aspect (‘I’ve got’). And this digression is further elaborated by two present tense clauses, as is seen in (3).

(3) ‘[I’ve got a script, {but it needs to work}, {(needs to) get rid of some of the more expensive special effects}]’ (Pattern: anterior / present)

The present tense of ‘it needs to’ is the same present gram as that which codes the storyline, and yet this clause ‘but it needs to’ does not belong to the storyline. The clause ‘but it needs to work, etc.’ instead has the function of elaborating the anterior clause. The clause ‘but it needs to work’ adds additional information about the anterior ‘I’ve got a script’. According to Dixon a clause of elaboration is semantically a focal clause that echoes the first clause, “adding additional information about the event or state described” (Dixon 2009: 27). The syntactical coding of an elaboration clause may vary of course, but in this English case the syntactic marking of the clause of elaboration is coded by a digression to present tense clauses. As we can see the gram that is utilized for the storyline, namely the general present, may also, in another position, in relation to another preceding clause, express an elaboration. We can observe in Givón’s text that in relation to the storyline, non-main clauses may exhibit a hierarchy of digressions. The storyline is resumed with two historical present clauses:

(4) ‘So I go see my writer and we discuss revisions.’

In Givón’s sample text a tense-switch always codes a digression from a main clause. The nature of this digression is not uniquely defined by the tense-switch alone but is determined by the context. The reader processes the text and makes automatic conclusions about the function of, say, a switch from general present to perfective-past. This processing function can be called ‘inference’ and plays an important role in all texts, also in Hebrew.

2. The problem: Biblical Hebrew short yiqtol (VprefS)

The biblical Hebrew short yiqtol is a single grammatical morpheme with an astonishing variation of functions and meanings. It is sometimes a modal form, sometimes a narrative perfective, and sometimes a general present.

6 The present tense clause ‘but it needs’ has two dependent infinitive clauses (‘to work’, ‘get rid of’), but this is not what concerns us here.
2.1 Short yiqtol as a narrative perfective referring to a past historical event

As for indicative uses of the short yiqtol, scholars usually assume that the native speakers of standard biblical Hebrew had lost their ability to distinguish between a short yiqtol and a long yiqtol. This is the reason why many believe that the distinction must have been lost also in Ugaritic (Greenstein 2006; Bordreuil and Pardee 2009: 49, criticized by Hackett 2012).

(5) Pattern: VprefS+VprefS+VprefS+VprefS (Ps 18:11-12)

{way-yirkab ʿal kərūb} {way-’yāʾ} {way-yēḏē} ‘al kanpē ʾrūaḥ} {yāšet hōseḵ sitr-ō sōbībōt-āw sukkāt-ō ḫēṣkat mayim ʿābē šēḥāqīm}

‘{He mounted the cherubim} {and flew}; {he soared on the wings of the wind}. {He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him -- the dark rain clouds of the sky’ (transl. NIV 2011)

In (5) the poet relates events regarded as important for his past experience. There are four clauses. In all of them the verb is fronted, and all except the last show the characteristic narrative way-yiqtol form. But also the last verb is distinctively short (yāšet). Even though yāšet lacks a conjunction it is decisively short. All short yiqtols are positioned first in their clauses, regardless of the use of a conjunction wa- or not. Also the yiqtol without wa- has a fronted position (yāšet).  

2.2 Short yiqtol with modal meaning

The modal meaning of the short yiqtol is undisputed. All scholars agree that it is possible to identify a short yiqtol with jussive meaning, even though the morphology is not always distinctive, as in (6). Also ‘jussive’ yiqtols tend to be placed first in the clause.

7 This analysis is confirmed by the recension in 2 Samuel 22, where the corresponding verb turns out to be way-yāšet, a way-yiqtol verb!

8 As Yigal Bloch has shown, this is not only a feature of archaic biblical poetry but is found in later psalms as well (2009: 64-66), in sharp criticism of the traditional position taken by Cross and Freedman (1952) and Robertson (1972).
(6) Pattern: VprefS* (Gen 18:4)

יָעַקַּח-נַּא מֹאָט מַעַיִם
‘Let a little water be brought!’ (transl. NIV 2011)

In (6) the form yuqqah could have been long as well, but no one would assert that it is long, since the meaning is clearly ‘jussive’.

When the semantic meaning is jussive all scholars agree that the native speakers were able to separate a short yiqtol from a long yiqtol.

The jussive meaning is rather close to the present tense in English, which can be used for commands expressing the speaker’s wish or will, as in example (7) and the Hebrew in (8) (Joūon and Muraoka 2006 § 114g).9

(7) ‘Now you wash up the dishes, Tom!’ (Pattern: general present as command)

(8) Pattern: VprefS! (1 Samuel 10:8)

shaweṭ יִמּים תֹּהֶל ‘ad bōʾ-ī ἐλ-κά
‘You must wait seven days until I come to you.’

2.3 Short yiqtol with general present meaning

The general present meaning of the short yiqtol is usually not recognized by the standard grammars.10 There are, however, several cases of a gnomic present

9 Haspelmath (1998: 58): “I suggest that various modal uses can come to be associated with old presents even when not occurring in subordinate clauses. I propose that they may be contributed by the extralinguistic context, and that they are favored by the perfective reading that old presents are given preferentially after the introduction of the new present: A perfective ‘we go’ is quite likely to be meant as ‘let’s go’, because it cannot mean ‘we are going’ – and although the hortative meaning component is not originally part of the gram.”

10 It is recognized by Gross (1976), who discusses VprefS in relation to other types of clauses preceding the way-yiqtol clause: NCl + {wa-VprefS}; PA + {wa-VprefS}; Vsuff + {wa-VprefS}; VprefL + {wa-VprefS}; VN + {wa-VprefS}. 
VprefS in the Psalms and Proverbs and other poetic books of the Bible.\(^\text{11}\)

(9) Pattern: VprefS\(+w\alpha\)-VprefS* (Psalm 25:9)

\[ \text{יָדֵרֶק יָנָנְוִים בָּמִישָפַּי w-יָלָםָּדָּ יָנָנְוִים דָּרוֹכְּל} \]

\[ \text{He leads the humble in what is right, to teach the humble his way.}\(^\text{12}\) \]

(10) Pattern: (PA+){\(w\alpha\)-VprefS!} (Job 5:15)

\[ \text{נִישָׁע מַחְרָב מַפְיִית וְנַיָּד נַחְצָא} \]

\[ \text{But he saves the poor from the sword out of their mouth, from the hand of the mighty.} \]

In (9) the two clauses probably have equal status. In (10) the conjunction \(w\alpha\) is used be-cause the clause is elaborating a preceding participle clause. As soon as a short yiqtol clause is indicative the Masoretes usually vocalize the conjunction as \(w\alpha\), not \(w\alpha\)-. In both cases the verb is as a rule fronted in their clauses.\(^\text{13}\)

There are quite a few examples of a general present short yiqtol in narrative prose, since the temporal reference by the nature of the discourse type is nearly always past time. But one example seems to be Judges 1:21.

(11) Pattern: Onoun-Vsuff+{\(w\alpha\)-VprefS} (Judges 1:21)

\[ \text{חֲרָבֹתָא שֶׁב וּרְשָׁלָם לָא הָוַיִּשׁ בֶּן בְּנֵי מֵי} \]

\[ \text{The Benjamites, however, did not drive out the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites.} \]

(NIV 2011)

\(^{11}\) Other examples are Prov 12:26 and Psalm 85:14. Haspelmath: “proverbs show a strong tendency to be conservative in various ways, so it is not surprising to see them retain the old present tense even in languages where it no longer has habitual meaning” (1998: 49). When a short yiqtol qualifies a preceding clause it is put within curly brackets: PA+{\(w\alpha\)-VprefS}.

\(^{12}\) The \(w\alpha\)-ilammed (\(w\alpha\)-VprefS) should probably be interpreted as a purpose clause, cf. Joüon and Muraoka 2006: § 116.

\(^{13}\) This is an observation made by many scholars, for example Gzella 2012: 229.
In (11) the short *yiqtol* clause (*way-yēšeb*) is not part of the main storyline but is related to the preceding suffix verb clause in a semantic relation of ‘consequence result’ (Dixon 2009: 19, 22). The adverbs in the clause make a perfective interpretation of the short *yiqtol* impossible. The meaning cannot be ‘the Jebusites lived there until this day’. It is an expression of a present state of facts.14

### 2.4 The short *yiqtol* and all its meanings

The manifold meanings of the short prefix verb in biblical Hebrew poses a problem (Isaksson 2009: 126).15 This is a crux in Semitic linguistics and some scholars have supplied at least suggestions to an explanation.

Frithiof Rundgren in “Der aspektuelle Charakter des altsemitischen Injunktivs” (1960) presents the idea of a zero form of the verb, a concept borrowed from Indo-European linguistics. This idea is taken up again by Reinhard Stempel (2012) who discusses the short *yiqtol* as “The injunctive in Semitic”. At some point in Indo-European it is supposed that “the present indicative is further marked by a particle -I (also called the ‘I of hic and nunc’)” (Stempel 2012: 524). This is close to what could be suggested for the innovation of the Central Semitic indicative/imperfective *yaqtulu*, although we are presently unable to identify the suffixes used to form the long form. What we can see is that the old form has survived, but is usually restricted to some specific functions.16

In the light of the recent argument of Jo Ann Hackett on the existence of a distinct short narrative *yaqtul* in Ugaritic I propose that also the native speakers of biblical Hebrew could distinguish a short *yiqtol* from a long *yiqtol*, although the two grams in many instances were not morphologically distinct (Hackett

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14 Another general present VprefS in prose is Gen 44:20 *way-yiwwāter hū ʾlā-badd-ā ʾlā-imm-ā* ‘and he is the only one of his mother’s sons left’.

15 We do not discuss here the problem that the long *yiqtol* (Arabic *yaqtulu*) seems to be formed from the short *yiqtol* by the addition of suffixes (Isaksson 2009: 137). If VprefS possessed no general present or zero meaning, then how could an imperfective be formed from a jussive or from a narrative perfective (not to say a ‘preterite’)?

16 This comes rather close to Fleischman’s ‘zero-interpretation’ of the diegetic present in Old French (1990: 53). Similar verbal formations are discussed in a cross-linguistic perspective by Haspelmath (1998), who calls them ‘old presents’. Such old presents “sometimes show unexpected polysemy patterns and special meanings in certain contexts” (1998: 56). It is striking that such old presents together with expressing jussives could also be used in oral narratives.
2012: 116; Huehnergard 2012: 57). An additional signal of a short *yiqtol* is, as many scholars have observed, a fronted position of the short *yiqtol* (for example Gzella 2012: 229). Another indication is that the long *yiqtol* is usually not fronted in a clause. This observation holds also in the archaic poetry. So when morphology is not enough, syntax can usually decide which of the two *yiqtols* to expect.

To sum up, the short *yiqtol* is definitely not a past tense. Whatever we call this form, it should not be named a ‘preterite’. It is time to recognize an archaic zero-marked gram in biblical Hebrew. And this zero gram could also code a storyline.18

3. The biblical Hebrew storyline

Let us return to the example of spontaneous oral English discourse.

(12) ‘This’s at the time <I’m getting ‘Freaks’ ready for production>’

The story begins with a neutral subject pronoun ‘this’ and a present tense form of the verb ‘to be’. There are striking similarities with the common biblical Hebrew narrative style of introducing an adverbial content by using the bleach-ed verb *hāyā* with a neutral subject:

(13) Pattern: *wa-yhī+[adverb] +VprefS* (Gen 4:3)

\[\text{It was after some time.} \]
\[\text{Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD} \]

The use of *wa-yhī* to introduce temporal clauses and other circumstantial clauses in the story has been named by Hebrew scholars including myself a ‘macro-

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17 In most cases the distinction was upheld by the continuous tradition of reading biblical Hebrew of which the Masoretes represented the final stage, Bloch 2009: 46.

18 In a sense the early biblical narratives are folklore text, and “folklore genres appear to be generally conservative, so it is here we tend to find old presents as narrative tenses” (Haspelmath 1998: 49).
syntactic marker’ (Nicacci 1990; Isaksson 1998). This terminology conceals, however, that {\textit{wa-yhî}} even in such functions is a verb, which can be translated if we want to. We could translate the two clauses in (13) as one ‘After some time Cain brought some of the fruits …’, but this is an accommodation to our western taste for a literary book style. In an oral performance there is nothing wrong with a repetitive pattern, ‘It was after some time. Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil …’.

3.1 The storyline and the two perfective grams in biblical Hebrew

Having got a glimpse of the biblical Hebrew storyline enables us to discuss the interplay between the perfective storyline short {\textit{yiqtol}} gram and a perfective {\textit{qatal}} gram.\textsuperscript{19} In Givón’s English example of spontaneous oral narration we can see how a switch to a past tense codes an off-line comment:

‘… I ask him what it’s about.
He tells me.
It sounds pretty good, so I take the script home and read it.’

[\textit{Harry paused}]
‘I read it again, just to be sure.
My experience, my instinct, my gut, tells me I have a property here …’

The switch to the perfective past tense (Harry paused) breaks the narrative thread and the listener is transferred to another reference point. After this digression, the storyline of diegetic presents is resumed by two new present tense clauses.

In the same way the biblical Hebrew storyline is often interrupted by perfective {\textit{qatal}} clauses coding a diversity of semantic relations to the main line clauses.

(14) Pattern: {\textit{wa-yhî}}+[adverb]+VprefS+[Snoun-Vsuf] (unordered addition)

\(\text{כנל ימי מַקְיִי מִמַּה} \)
\(\text{לָּא מַמְּרִי} \) מַּכְּבָה מְבָּרָה לִיִּתָּם: \)
\(\text{רֹבֶל חָבִי בֵּין} \) מַכְּבָה מְבָּרָה צֶארְיָה יִמְּחֲלָבָהוּ

\textsuperscript{19} We are aware that the Vsuf gram has acquired other meanings than the perfective during its path of grammaticalization (Isaksson 2011: 176-179).
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wa-yhî miq-qēš yāmîm way-yābê’ qayin mip-pōrî hā-’ādâmā minhā la-
YHWH [wa-hebel hēbî’ gam hû’ mib-bəkōrît šō’n-ō ū-mē-helbê-hen]  
‘It was after some time.  
Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD  
[whereas Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock].’

In this digression from the storyline, the qatal clause is clearly perfective.20  
What the text indicates is that Cain presented an offering from the soil, and also  
Abel (gam hû’) presented a gift in the form of fat portions to YHWH. The  
clauses have seemingly the same saliency, the same focality in the sense of  
Dixon (2009: 3). So how can we account for the fact that the Hebrew narrator  
takes care of making a gram-switch from a short yiqtol clause to a qatal clause?  
The two clauses are admittedly related and “involves two distinct events which  
are semantically or pragmatically related but for which no temporal sequence is  
assumed”, as in Dixon’s example Mary peeled the potatoes and John shelled the  
peas (2009: 26). This is a clausal relation that Dixon calls ‘unordered addition’  
and in which both clauses must be classified as ‘focal clauses’ in Dixon’s termin-  
ology.

Examples like (14) are instructive because they show that biblical Hebrew is  
exceptionally sensitive to clausal relations and makes use of syntactic digression  
to code them. Clause combining is a tremendously important topic to under-  
stand biblical Hebrew syntax.

In example (15) the narrative begins with the wa-yhî clause and its adverbial  
expression, so typical for the standard biblical Hebrew narrative style.

(15) Pattern: wa-yhî+adverb+[Snoun-Vsuff]+VprefS (Gen 22:1)  

 יָהִי אָחֵר הָּדָּבָּרִים הַּאֲרֻם  
[וֹהָלָּה יָנָה אֲחַת אֶבּוּרָה]  
לָּא מֵאִרֵי אֲלִין אֲבוֹרָה"  
wa-yhî ’ahar had-dəbārîm hā-’ēlê. [wə-hā-’ēlōhîm nissā ’et ’abrâhām].  
way-yō’mer ’ēl-āw “’abráhām”

20 The qatal gram may have anterior meaning, of course. But it would be unnatural to  
interpret qatal as expressing anterior aspect in this instance. There is nothing in the text  
that would indicate that Abel made his offering prior to that of Kain, so a translation ‘but  
Abel had already brought fat portions from the firstborn …’ has no foundation in the  
context.
'It was after these events.  
[God tested Abraham]. He said to him, “Abraham!”'

After the wa-yhî-clause in (15) comes a perfective qatal clause which functions like Givón’s remote perfective. We are off-line here and the qatal clause works like an introduction, a preamble for the following storyline. It is obvious that the qatal clause cannot express the anterior aspect here. If we want to reword the translation in the oral colloquial style of Givón’s example we would render the passage, ‘It is after these events. [God tested Abraham]. He says to him: “Abraham!”’.

The unordered addition in example (14) is only one of many semantic clausal relations that can be achieved by an interplay between short yiqtol clauses and qatal clauses. Another type of semantic relation is found in (16). In this case the gram-switch from short yiqtol to qatal signals an attendant circumstance with a perfective aspect:

(16) Pattern: VprefS+([Ø-Snoun-Vsuff]+[wə-Snoun-Vsuff]) (1 Kings 18:6)


‘they divided the land by passing over it [in that Ahab went in one direction] [and Obadiah went in another]’

As usual, the storyline is coded by a short yiqtol. A digression from the storyline is marked by a switch to two qatal clauses. The New International Version translates the two non-main clauses as ‘Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another’, but using English ing-forms to render the backgrounding here is not fully correct. It is more faithful to the syntax to translate with English perfective-pasts (or Givón’s ‘remote perfective’), ‘Ahab went …’ and ‘Obadiah went …’. The fronting of the subject personal names in the two qatal clauses expresses a topicalization: Ahab on the one hand and Obadiah on the other. The

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21 We disregard in this instance the circumstantial function of the infinitive clause (la-ʿābār-b-āh) (Isaksson 2007). It is, of course, important, that the two Vsuff clauses are asyndetically inserted (without a wə- before the first Vsuff clause), but this is not the main issue in the present article.
relation of the *qatal* clauses to the short *yiqtol* clause is a relation of perfective attendant circumstance.\(^{22}\)

A similar perfective circumstance is shown in example (17).

(17) Pattern: VprefS+[\(\omega\)-Onoun-Vsuff]+VprefS+VprefS+VprefS (accompanying clause with perfective aspect) (Gen 43:15)

\[
\text{way-yiqhū hā-ʾānāšīm }\overset{\text{et}}{\text{ham-minḥā hāz-zōʾt }} [\text{u-} \text{mišnē } \text{kesep lāqəḥū bə-yād-ām }\overset{\text{wə-}}{\text{et}} \text{binyāmīn} ] \text{ way-yāqūmū way-yērōdū miṣrayim way-yaʿamdu li-} \text{pēnē yōsēp}
\]

‘So the men took the present [and thereby they took double the money with them, and also Benjamin]. Then they went on their way down to Egypt, and presented themselves before Joseph.’

In this passage the chain of short *yiqtol* clauses coding the storyline is interrupted by a Vsuff clause with a fronted topicalized object (*mišnē kesep* ‘double the money’). In this digression we are still on-stage in the same event.\(^{23}\) What is stated is an accompanying action with perfective aspect.

An off-line clause which is also an accompanying action is shown in example (18).

(18) Pattern: VprefS+[\(\omega\)-Spron-Vsuff] (Gen 42:8)

\[
\text{way-yakker yōsēp }\overset{\text{et}}{\text{ ʾeh-āw [wə-} \text{hēm lōʾ } \text{ḥikkūrū-hū]}
\]

A ‘Joseph recognized his brothers [but they did not recognize him]’

B ‘Joseph recognizes his brothers [(but) they did not recognize him]’

The two clauses in (18) are both perfective: Joseph recognized his brothers; they did not recognize him. This is rendered in translation A. The translation renders

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\(^{22}\) They are not as closely connected to the main line clause as the nominalized infinitive clause *la-ʾābār-b-āḥ* ‘by passing over it’.

\(^{23}\) It has been argued that such constructions are utilized to express simultaneity: that the men took the present at the same time or in the same moment as they took the money. But this is to stress the interpretation. Exact simultaneity is not the point here, but instead an accompanying action, that is, an “addition” in the sense of Dixon 2009: 26. See further Isaksson 2013b and Isaksson forthcoming.
the relation between the clauses by the conjunction ‘but’. If we make use of Givón’s distinction between an English ‘vivid perfective’ and ‘remote perfective’ it is possible to translate the clauses with the same type of gram-switch, illustrated in translation B, ‘Joseph recognizes his brothers [they didn’t recognize him]’. Both English clauses express a perfective aspect, and we have managed to render the Hebrew tense-switch with a tense-switch in an English translation. In this case the conjunction ‘but’ is not absolutely necessary, we perceive by the switch of tenses that the English past tense clause is off-line.

The kind of digression shown in example (18) is off-line but the listener is still on stage, still in the story world. The English example digression to a past tense, *Harry paused*, removes the listener from the story world. Also in Hebrew can a perfective qatal clause code off-stage background.

(19) Pattern: VprefS+“…”+[PrP-Vsuff] (off-stage perfective background) (Job 2:10)

\[ビアン・アフイド カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ イマ・アフイド カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェイ カマ・アハガ・ナツウェ이 カ마・아흑아 아瑙 비keypress 한 어취 아 nues

way-yō’mer ʾēl-ēhā

“ka-dabber ʾaḥat han-nəḥālōt tədabbarī gam ʾet-haṭ-tōh nəqabbel mē-ʾēt hā-ʾēlōhīm wa-ʾet-haṭ-rāʾ lōʾ nəqabbel”

[ba-kāl-zōʾ t lōʾ-ḥātāʾ ʾiyyōb bi-špāt-āw]

‘he said: “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” [In all this, Job did not sin in what he said]’

In (19) the listener by the qatal clause receives an off-stage information about Job, that he did not sin in all what he spoke.

A qatal clause with perfective aspect may also signal a break in the narration. In such a case the qatal clause sets a new stage and often a new actant and works as a preamble of the following storyline.

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24 Givón 2001 I: 298. The storyline clause (*way-yakker yōsēp ʾet ṣḥ-āw*) does not express a sequential event in the storyline. The fact that Joseph recognized his brothers is already stated in the previous verse with the storyline sequence *way-yar* yōsēp ʾet ṣḥ-āw *way-yakkir-ēm* ‘Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them’.
(20) Pattern: [Snoun-Vsuff] + wa-VprefS (Gen 26:26)

In (20) the Vsuff clause introduces a pragmatic unit describing a covenant oath between Abimelech and Isaac. The negotiations start on the initiative of king Abimelech who comes to Isaac. It is not natural here to interpret the Vsuff clause with an anterior meaning as some translations render it. Both the Vsuff clause and the VprefS have perfective meaning. The VprefS clause is part of the storyline and its relation to the Vsuff clause is one of temporal succession which in the context receives a nuance of ‘result’ (Dixon 2009: 28). The arrival of Abimelech provoked Isaac to say, ‘Why have you come to me? You hated me and sent me away from you.’

3.2 The storyline and a qatal clause digression with anterior aspect

This paper concerns primarily the interplay between two perfective grams in biblical Hebrew. But since the qatal gram may also express the anterior aspect and this meaning is so commonly encountered in the biblical narratives it deserves a short comment.\(^{26}\)

As we have seen already, an English storyline can be interrupted by a clause with the perfect tense, as ‘I have got a script’ in example (21).

(21) ‘This’s at the time <I’m getting ‘Freaks’ ready for production>’ [I’ve got a script]’ (Pattern: present tense / anterior)

Such an anterior clause supplies background information in the English example, and this is a common syntactical digression also in biblical Hebrew. Hebrew differs, however, in that its qatal gram can be used to code both perfec-

\(^{25}\) Holman Christian Standard Bible 2009.

\(^{26}\) An anterior or ‘perfect’ “signals that the situation occurs prior to reference time and is relevant to the situation at reference time” (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994: 54). The recognition of the qatal gram as a perfect is common property in biblical Hebrew scholarship.
tive and anterior aspect, which conforms to its resultative path of grammaticalization (Bybee et al. 1994: 51-87). A qatal clause digression from the storyline with anterior aspect is shown in (22).

(22) Pattern: VprefS+[Onoun-Vsuff]; (not a break; anterior aspect) (Gen 42:4)

מִיְּדַר אַחֲרֵי נוֹסֵס אל שִׁבַּר וּרֻב מִמְשָׁרֶי [אֲמַרְּנֵי אַחֲרִי נוֹסֵס לַא-שִׁלְצָה
way-yērādū ʾāhē yōsēp ʿāsārā li-šbōr bār mim-misrāyim [wā-ʿet binyāmīn
ʾāhī yōsēp lōʾ šālah yaʿaqōb ʿet ʾēh-āw]

‘So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. [But Jacob
had not sent Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers]’

In this example the qatal clause describes a fact that precedes the journey to
Egypt. In English this must be coded by the pluperfect construction, ‘Jacob had
not sent …’.27

The examples so far show digressions where the qatal clause is directly
related to a preceding storyline clause. When a qatal clause precedes the story-
line clause it is usually a signal of a break, as in Gen 39:1:

(23) Pattern: (VprefS); [Vsuff]+VprefS (a break; anterior aspect) (Gen 38:30 – 39:1)

וַיִּקָּרָה שֵׁם זֶרַח [וַיַּקְנוּ הוֹד מַצִּירָם [וַיַּקְנוּ פְּטָיפָר סֶרִיס פֵּרִעה
way-yiqrāʾ šēm-ō zārah. [wā-yōsēp hūrad misrāyām] way-yiqnē-hū pōṭīpar
sērīs par ʿō

‘He named his name Zerah.

[When Joseph had been taken down to Egypt,] Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s
officials, bought him’

In (23) it is easy to see that the naming of Zerah ends a paragraph of the story.
With the backgrounded qatal clause a new passage of the story is begun with an
event that clearly precedes in time the following event that Potiphar bought
Joseph. This example shows how a qatal clause qualifies a following storyline
clause. The qatal clause (wā-yōsēp hūrad misrāyām) expresses the anterior

27 The digression must be classified as ‘minor’ with Givón’s terminology, since the listener
remains on-stage.
aspect. The listener infers a temporal relation to the storyline: ‘when Joseph had been taken …’. The qatal clause, without any temporal conjunction, functions as a temporal non-main clause in relation to the following storyline.

Appendix: A structured analysis of Givón’s example

… See, what happened …

This’s at the time <I’m getting ‘Freaks’ ready for production>.
[I’ve got a script, {but it needs to work, get rid of some of the more expensive special effects}].

So I go see my writer and we discuss revisions.
[Murray’s good, he’s been with me, he wrote all my ‘Grotesque’ pictures, some of the others. He’s done I don’t know how many TV scripts, hundreds. He’s done sitcoms, westerns, sci-fi, did a few ‘Twilight Zone’s…

Only now he can’t get any TV work
[‘cause he’s around my age and the networks don’t like to hire any writer over forty].
Murray has kind of a drinking problem, too, that doesn’t help.
Likes the sauce, smokes four packs a day…]

We’re talking [– get back to what I want to tell you –]

he happens to mention a script <he wrote years ago when he was starting out and never sold>.
I ask him what it’s about.
He tells me.
It sounds pretty good, [so I take the script home and read it].”
[Harry paused.]
“I read it again, just to be sure.

My experience, my instinct, my gut, tells me I have a property here,
<that with the right actor in the starring role, I can take to any studio in town and practically write my own deal>.

This one, I know, is gonna take on heat fast.
The next day I call Murray, tell him I’m willing to option the script…”

28 The example shows that a finite non-main clause may precede the main clause and in such a case “usually indicates a break in the text, a new beginning” (Isaksson 2009: 122). Two more examples of digression with Vsuff that codes a circumstantial clause are Gen 38:4 and 41:12.
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