

THE PERFECT VERB

[Sometimes called the "Suffix Conjugation" or "Perfective Conjugation"]
see Waltke, § 30.1 - 30.5.4

NOTE: The following syntactical options for the "perfect verb" also apply to the *imperfect with waw-consecutive*. Stative verbs will be treated separately (see Category F).¹

- A. **AORISTIC ACTION** Completed action which is viewed as a single whole.² The action is depicted as an event which has happened.

1. **Definite Past** - denotes an action completed at a definite moment in the historical past.

Gen 18:15 "Sarah denied it . . . for she was afraid. And He said, 'No, but you did laugh.'"

וַתִּכְחַשׁ שָׂרָה . . . וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא כִי צָחַקְתְּ
you-did-laugh indeed no but-he-said Sarah so-she-lied

Variations: Categories 2-5 represent variations of the *Definite Past*. Waltke (p 482) adds an additional category called "telic" in which the culmination of the event is stressed (e.g., Dan 10:12 - "And I came in response to your words").

2. **Constative** - denotes an action which extended over a considerable period of time.

Gen 14:4 "For twelve years they served (or *were serving*) Chedorlaomer."

שְׁתֵּים עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה עָבְדוּ אֶת־כְּדֻרְלֹאֶמֶר
Kedorlaomer *** they-served year ten two

Note: The action can sometimes be "iterative"—occurring frequently or repeatedly in past time.

3. **Ingressive** - denotes a *complete situation* (not necessarily completed action), but with reference to the beginning of the situation.

Dan 10:12 "... from the first day that you set (or *began to set*) your mind on gaining understanding . . ."

מִן־הַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּ אֶת־לְבָבְךָ לְהַבִּין
to-gain-understanding mind-of-you *** you-set that the-first the-day since

In some cases, verbs that are normally not stative can become *functionally stative* when taking an ingressive force.

2 Kgs 8:25 "In the twelfth year of Joram . . . Ahaziah became king"

בִּשְׁנַת שְׁתֵּים עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה לַיּוֹרָם . . . מָלַךְ אַחֲזִיָּהוּ
Ahaziah he-became-king . . . of-Joram year ten two in-year-of

¹Verbs in which the subject is in a state of activity are called *fientive verbs*, in contrast to stative verbs which reflect a state of being or mental activity.

²Waltke (p 480) points out that it is technically more correct to speak of a "complete situation" than "completed action" (note 2 Kgs 8:25).

4. **Very Recent Past** - Action recently completed (use "has" or "have" in translating).

Gen 4:10 "And He said, 'What have you done?'"

וַיֹּאמֶר מָה עָשִׂיתָ
and-he-said what? you-did

5. **Indefinite Past** - denotes an undefined time in the past, i.e., past actions where no particular "past time" is in view (normally use "has/have").

Ps 37:35 "I have seen the wicked . . . thriving . . ."

רָאִיתִי רָשָׁע עָרִיץ וּמִתְעַרֵּה
I-saw wicked-man ruthless-man and-flourishing

Note: Sometimes a unique act in the indefinite past is emphasized (the translation may be supplemented by adverbial words like "ever" or "never").

Isa 66:8 "Who has ever heard such a thing?"

מִי שָׁמַע כְּזֹאת
who? he-heard such-as-this

B. PERFECT ACTION [Waltke, § 30.3 and 30.5.2]

Conceives the subject as in a given state resulting from a preceding action. [The action is viewed in one time and the speaker in a different time.]

1. **Present Perfect** - denotes a single past act with abiding results, or persisting action that continues into the present (normally supply "has" or "have").

Gen 3:22 "See, the man has become as one of us . . ."

הֵן הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאֶחָד מֵמִנוּ
see! the-man he-became like-one-of from-us

Isa 1:4 "They have forsaken Yahweh . . ."

עָזְבוּ אֶת־יְהוָה
they-forsook *** Yahweh

For an example of persistent action:

Jud 11:27 "Yet I have not wronged you [from the past right up to now] . . ."

וְאֲנִי לֹא־חָטָאתִי לָךְ
now-I not I-wronged against-you

2. **Past Perfect** - denotes an act which is anterior to (precedes) a past moment. These are usually found in dependent clauses (e.g., relative or causal) or in disjunctive clauses which are parenthetical. [Use "had" with the verb]

Gen 31:32 "Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them."

וְלֹא־יָדַע יַעֲקֹב כִּי רָחֵל גָּנְבָתָם:
 he-knew now-not Jacob that Rachel she-stole-them

1 Sam 28:3 "Now Samuel was dead, . . . and Saul had removed from the land those who were mediums and spiritists."

וְשָׁמוּאֵל מָתָּה . . . וְשָׁאוּל הִסִּיר הָאֲבוֹת וְאֶת־הַיִּדְּעָנִים
 he-was-dead now-Samuel and the-mediums he-expelled and-Saul the-spiritists

3. **Future Perfect** - denotes the subject in the future time, with the action of the verb in an anterior time (context gives "future" sense).

Deut 8:10 "When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you." [or "will have given you" -- the giving of the land was still in the future]

עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לְךָ:
 the-land the-good that he-gave to-you

C. PRESENT TIME REFERENCE [Waltke, § 30.5.1c]

The action (even if begun in the past) has not been completed at the present moment in relation to the speaker.

1. **Gnomic Perfect** (or "Proverbial Perfect") - denotes a constant or universal truth (trans. as "present tense," since this is not limited to past time). Note: *stative verbs* can also be gnomic.

Isa 40:7 "the grass withers (and) the flower falls"

יָבֵשׁ תֶּחֱצִיר נָבֵל צִיָּן
 he-withers grass he-falls flower

2. **Characteristic Perfect** - denotes an action begun in the past and continuing up to the present moment (similar to gnomic perfect, but not a universal truth and no reference to the future). Usually involves active verbs.

Ps 2:1 "Why do the heathen rage . . . ?"

לָמָּה רָגְשׁוּ גּוֹיִם
 why? they-rage nations

3. **Instantaneous Perfect** - denotes an instantaneous act which, being accomplished at the same instant as the speaking, is considered as a completed event (common with verbs of speaking or swearing, or gestures associated with speaking -- translate as present).³

Gen 14:22 "But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I lift my hand to Yahweh . . .'"

הָרִימְתִּי יָדִי אֶל-יְהוָה
I-raised hand-of-me to Yahweh

This can involve the speaking verb itself (Deut 26:3 - "I declare today")

4. **Epistolary Perfect** - denotes the sending of a letter, gift or service (this represents a special case of the Instantaneous Perfect; somewhat rare). [translate as present progressive]

1 Kg 15:18,19 "And King Asa sent them to BenHadad . . . , saying: ' . . . See, I am sending you a present of silver and gold.'"

הִנֵּה שְׁלַחְתִּי לְךָ שֶׁחָד כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב
see! I-send to-you gift-of silver and-gold

D. FUTURE TIME REFERENCE [Waltke, pp 489-90]

1. **Perfect of Resolve** - denotes the determination of the subject to accomplish an act in the future (supplemented by phrases as "I have decided to," "I am going to," or simply "I will").

1 Sam 2:16 "No, but you shall give it (meat) to me now; and if not, I will take it by force."

וְאִם-לֹא לִקְחָתִי בְּחֹזֶקָה
and-if not I-will-take by-force

2. **Prophetic Perfect**⁴ (or "Perfective of Confidence") - denotes a future event as an accomplished fact (when the event is certain to occur; translate with future tense).

Isa 9:5 "A child shall be born (Lit., has been born) to us; a son shall be given (Lit., has been given) to us."

כִּי-יֵלֵד יֶלֶד-לָנוּ בֶן נָתַן-לָנוּ
for he-is-born child to-us son he-is-given to-us

3. **Persistent (future) Perfect** - Represents a single situation extending from the present into the future.

Exod 10:3 "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?"

עַד-מָתִי מֵאַנְתָּ לַעֲנֹת מִפְּנֵי
how long will-you-refuse to-humble-yourself before-me

³Waltke (p 489) lists a related category which he calls "performative perfect," in which the speaking and acting are not only simultaneous but they are identical (e.g., Ruth 4:9 - "I acquire [here and now]").

⁴Waltke (p 490) makes a distinction between the prophetic perfect and what he calls the "accidental perfective" (the latter is a future event but not necessarily a prophetic utterance [e.g., Gen 30:13 - "women will call me happy"]).

E. IRREAL MOOD [Waltke, § 30.5.4]

1. **Hypothetical Perfect** - denotes (1) a condition contrary to fact; (2) a hypothetical situation (e.g., Gen 26:10); or (3) a wish not expected to be realized (e.g., Num 14:2). [rare; normally used with "if"].

Jud 13:23 *"If the LORD had wanted to kill us, he would not have taken . . ."*

לֹא חָפֵץ יְהוָה לְהַמִּיתָנוּ . . .
 to-kill-us Yahweh he-meant if

2. **"Perfective of Prayer"** (or "Precative Perfect") - situations the speaker prays for and expects to be realized (about 20x in the Psalms).

Ps 22:22 *"Rescue me from the mouth of the lions, and from the horns of the wild oxen answer me"*

הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי מִפִּי אֲרִיָּה וּמִקְרָנֵי רִמִּים עֲנִיתָנִי
 you-heard-me wild-oxen and-from-horns-of lion from-mouth-of rescue-me!

F. STATIVE VERBS [Waltke, § 30.5.3]

In contrast to verbs which express action, stative verbs denote the state, mental perception, or attitude of the subject. Sometimes this semantic difference is identifiable by form (e.g., *šēre* in the Qal Perf → כָּבֵד), but at other times there will be no distinguishing form. Stative verbs in the Perfect should *normally* be classified by one of the following categories, but there may be times when one of the general categories for the Perfect is suitable. Cf. Waltke, § 22.4, for further analysis.

1. **Adjectival Perfect** - denotes the present state of the subject without taking an object (intransitive); translated as a predicate adjective.

- a. Signifying the Present State

Gen 27:2 *" . . . I am old, and do not know the day of my death."*

הִנֵּה-נָא זָקֵנְתִּי
 I-am-old now! see!

- b. Ingressive (in past time) - focus is on the beginning of a state or situation. [When translating, you may supply a form of "become" or "get"]

Gen 24:1 *"Abraham had become old and was advanced in years"*

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן כָּאֵל זָקֵן
 in-the-days he-was-advanced he-was-old now-Abraham

Note: There are some cases where verbs that are normally not stative will become *functionally stative*, especially with an ingressive nuance (see pg 1).

- c. Telic - involves a process leading to a well-defined *terminal point*.

1 Kgs 6:38 “the temple was finished in all its details”

כָּלָה הַבַּיִת לְכָל-דֵּבָרָיו
he-finished the-temple in-all-of details-of-him

- d. Denoting Quality - takes a *complementary object*, but translated as though without an object.

Isa 1:15 “your hands are full of blood”

יְדֵיכֶם דָּמִים מְלֵאוּ
hands-of-you bloods they-are-full

2. **Mental or Psychological State** - denotes a mental perception or psychological state of the subject (an attitude). In contrast to the *adjectival perfect*, these will be transitive, i.e., they normally take an object.

- a. Constative - extended internal situation of the past (this can apply to both verbs of mental perception [e.g., Isa 40:28] and verbs of emotional response)

Gen 37:3 “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons”

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת-יוֹסֵף מִכָּל-בָּנָיו
now-Israel he-loved *** Joseph more-than-all-of sons-of-him

- b. Durative - indicates an ongoing mental state or emotional response

- (1) Mental (e.g., *see, know, perceive, hear*)

Gen 27:2 “... I do not know the day of my death.”

לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי:
not I-know day-of death-of-me

- (2) Emotional (e.g., *love, hate*)

Ps 40:8 “I delight to do Thy will, O my God.”

לַעֲשׂוֹת-רְצוֹנְךָ אֱלֹהֵי חֲפָצִתִּי
to-do will-of-you God-of-me I-desire

- c. Gnomic - stative verbs denoting a constant or universal truth

Isa 1:3 “An ox knows its owner”

יָדַע שׁוֹר קִנְיָהּ
he-knows ox one-being-master-of-him