Agreement

The term “agreement” is commonly used to describe the relationships between nouns and adjectives or subject and verb in the Biblical Hebrew sentence.

In phrases with a noun-adjective combination, agreement is observed in gender, number, and definiteness. If the noun is masculine, so is the adjective that modifies it. If the noun is plural, so is the adjective, and if the noun is definite, so is the adjective.

Observe the adjectives גָדֹל "large, great" and קטן "small" in the following verse:

וַיַעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדוֹלִים אֶת-הַמָאוֹר הַגָּדוֹל לְמֶמְשֶלֶת הַיוֹם וְׁאֶת-הַמָאוֹר הַקָּטֹן לְמֶמְשֶלֶת הַלַיְׁלָה וְׁאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים. (Genesis 1:16)

So God made the two great lights: The greater light for governing the day, the lesser light for governing the night, and the stars.

The noun מָאוֹר luminary, light appears three times: twice in the singular, and once in the plural. In all three cases, both the noun and the following adjective are definite, and since the noun is masculine, the adjectives too take a masculine form. When the noun appears in the singular, the adjective is in the singular, and when the noun is plural, so is the adjective.

For comparison, observe the feminine nouns with the adjective גָדֹל large, great in the verses below.

יְהוָֽה הַיָּהָה לְפָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּכְצְמֹן בְּגִבְּעוֹן; וַיְרַדְפוּ דֶרֶךְ מַעֲלֵה בֵּית-חוֹרֹן וַיִּכְצְמוּ עַד-עֲזֵ ָה וְׁעַד-מַקְדָה וַיְהִי בְׁנָסָם מִפְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵם בְּמוֹרַד בֵּית-חֹרֹן וַיְהוָה הִשְׁלִיךְ עֲלֵיהֶם אֲבָנִים גְדֹלוֹת מִן-הַשָּמַיִם עַד-עֲזֵ ָה וַיָּמְתוּ רַבִּים אֲשֶׁר-מָתְוּ בְּאַבְנֵי הָרָד מֵאֲשֶׁר הָרְצְו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בֶחָרֶב. (Joshua 10:10-11)

The Lord utterly confused them before Israel, and they inflicted upon them a great defeat at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and smote them all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. Now as they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon, the Lord hurled large stones down on them from the sky, all the way to Azekah, and there were more who died from the hailstones than those that the Israelites killed by the sword.
You should watch it [the cart]. If it goes up through its [Israel’s] own territory toward Beth Shemesh, then He has brought this great disaster upon us. But if it does not, we will know that it was not His hand that struck us, and that it happened to us by chance.

The agreement in definiteness is observed in phrases only (as in the examples above: the great disaster, the lesser light, etc., where both noun and adjective have the definite article). In clauses were an adjective serves as predicate, we do not see such agreement. See further in Adjectives.

As for subject and verb agreement, we commonly say that the verb agrees with the subject in person and number. That is, if the subject is a third person masculine singular (he, David, the boy, and the like), the verb will take the third person masculine singular form. If the verb is a third feminine plural (Ruth and Naomi, the women, and the like), the verb will take the third feminine plural form.

Very often, if the sentence has more than one subject, the verb will agree with the first subject on the list, creating a situation in which the verb is in the singular while the subject is a plural entity.

Then David said to the youth who brought him the news: "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan have [singular] died?"

The verb there was/ it was/it happened, technically a third person masculine singular form, appears with nouns of any gender or number. It is routinely used in introducing a set of events within a narrative, and can be regarded as a formulaic, frozen form.

Now the whole earth [feminine] was [masculine] of one language and uniform words.
He had two wives: The name of one was Hannah, and the other was called Peninah. There were [singular] children to Peninah, but to Hannah there were no children.

Agreement: Exercise