The Conjunction “and”

The conjunction “and”, which takes the form of a prefixed vav ו, figures prominently in Biblical Hebrew. In addition to connecting parallel elements within a sentence and parallel sentences within a larger unit of discourse, the conjunction plays a major role in defining the organization of the narrative sequence. It appears, therefore, in abundance in the Biblical text, and its meaning is much broader than “and”. This explains why, when the Biblical text is translated from the original Hebrew, ו is rendered in different ways (e.g., and, but, however, that, now) or, occasionally, is not translated at all.

Like other prefixes, the conjunction is affected by the word to which it is prefixed, and, in turn, may affect that same word. In the following verses, the conjunction is highlighted.

בראשית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ. וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְּתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶךְ עַל עְּנֵי תְּהוֹם; וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְּרַחֶפֶת עַל עְּנֵי הַמָּיִם. (Genesis 1:1-2)

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,[] the earth was nothingness and chaos and darkness over the face of the deep; and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב; וַיַּבְּדֵל אֱלֹהִים בֵין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶךְ. (Genesis 1:4)

[]God saw the light, that it was good; and God separated between the light and the darkness.

וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַרָּקִיעַ וַיַּבְּדֵל בֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַחַת לְרָקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לְרָקִיעַ; וַיְּהִי כֵּן. (Genesis 1:7)

Now, God made the vault, and separated between the waters which were below the vault and the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so.

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The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seeds in them after their kind; and God saw that it was good.

Now the whole earth was of one language and uniform words.

Then came Hanani, one of my brothers, he with other people from Judea; and I asked them about the Jewish remnant that remained after the captivity, and about Jerusalem.

But I am the Lord your God, from the land of Egypt. [A God other than me you should not know, for there is no Savior except me.

And you have said: “What a nuisance!” and you have snorted at it”, says the Lord of hosts. “And you have brought the injured, the lame, or the diseased animal, so you would bring the offering--should I accept it from your hands?” says the Lord.

Now, Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, to come to the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel.

As the examples above illustrate, the conjunction has many variants, but while they sound different, the variant forms do not have any particular meaning. For the time being it would suffice to note that when the conjunction is used purely as a connecting element, primarily with nouns, it may appear in any position within the sentence, and its most common forms are ו and ב.
1. When the conjunction serves the purpose of organizing the narrative sequence, it is prefixed to a verb at the beginning of the sentence, with ו as its primary rendition.

The Conjunction “and”: Exercises 1 and 2

Want to Know More?

1. **Variants of the conjunction:** The conjunction has many variants, depending on its function and on the word to which it is prefixed.

2. **Perfective and Imperfective:** The conjunction plays a major role in structuring the Biblical narrative.