Chapter 8

Hebrew Pronouns

8.1 *Introduction.* A pronoun is a word that replaces a noun. The noun that a pronoun refers back to is called the *antecedent.* Stated differently, the antecedent of a pronoun is the word or words for which the pronoun stands. In the example, “Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died,” the word “he” is a pronoun that refers back to “Moses,” the antecedent. In Hebrew, there are personal, demonstrative, relative, and interrogative pronouns. Hebrew pronouns function much like their English counterparts.

8.2 *Independent Personal Pronouns.* In Hebrew, the independent personal pronoun is labeled “independent” because it stands alone and is not prefixed or suffixed to another word. Personal pronouns can be first, second, or third person and either singular or plural. First person pronouns refer to the person speaking (I, we). Second person pronouns refer to the person being spoken to (you). Third person pronouns refer to the person or thing spoken of (he, she, it, they). The second and third person pronouns have both masculine and feminine forms. First person pronouns, however, are *common,* meaning that they may refer to either masculine or feminine nouns (they are not inflected for gender). In Hebrew, independent personal pronouns are *subjective,* meaning they are used as the subject of a verb, never as the object of the verb. Personal pronouns may also appear as the subject of a verbless clause. For this reason, they are sometimes called *subject pronouns.* The Hebrew independent personal pronouns are listed below. Note that some pronouns have more than one form or spelling.
8.3 Independent Personal Pronoun Paradigm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Common</td>
<td>1םָּהְמ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Masculine</td>
<td>2הַּא</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Feminine</td>
<td>2הַּא</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Masculine</td>
<td>3הַּא</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Feminine</td>
<td>3הַּא</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.4 The Use of the Independent Personal Pronoun. The independent personal pronouns and their translations should be memorized as vocabulary. Hebrew personal pronouns often occur in conjunction with verbs. They may also be used, however, in a predicative relationship with nouns or adjectives in verbless clauses. The following examples illustrate how the independent personal pronouns are used with nouns, adjectives, or a prepositional phrase in a predicative relationship.

אִמּוֹ | I am the Lord.
הִואֵל | He is a righteous prophet.
אַאָמִּי | You (2ms) are a good king.
אַוּרְם | We are brothers.
אַאָמִּי | She is a wise woman.
אַמּוֹ | You (2mp) are in the great city.

In terms of normal word order in a verbless clause, the independent personal pronoun may precede or follow the noun or adjective. As with the predicative use of the adjective (7.4.2), a form of the verb “to be” in the present tense must be supplied.

8.5 Demonstrative Pronouns and Adjectives. The English demonstratives are “this,” “these,” “that” and “those.” They may be used either as adjectives (this man, those women) or as pronouns (this is the man, those are the women). Demonstratives increase the level of a word’s specificity beyond that of the definite article. The level of specific reference increases from “a man,” to “the man,” to “this man.” Hebrew demonstratives function like English demonstratives.

1 The alternate forms נָּאָמִי and נָּאָמִי occur only seven total times.
2 The alternate form נָּאָמִי occurs only one time.
8.6 Demonstrative Paradigm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>נָּהַ</td>
<td>this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>נָּהַ</td>
<td>these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>נָּהַ</td>
<td>that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>נָּהַ</td>
<td>those</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The masculine and feminine singular forms נָּהַ and נָּהַ are identical to the third person masculine and feminine independent personal pronouns. In most instances where ambiguity exists, the larger context of the sentence will enable you to make the correct choice. Note the ambiguity in the following examples.

נָּהַ נַחֲלָ עֲאֵרָה | He is the man. (personal pronoun)  
נָּהַ נַחֲלָ עֲאֵרָה | That is the man. (demonstrative pronoun)  
נָּהַ נַחֲלָ עֲאֵרָה | She is the woman. (personal pronoun)  
נָּהַ נַחֲלָ עֲאֵרָה | That is the woman. (demonstrative pronoun)

2. The demonstrative נָּהַ (these) is both masculine and feminine plural. Remember that the designation for this phenomenon is "common," meaning not inflected for gender. In other words, this common form can modify either masculine or feminine nouns.

3. There are a few variant or alternative forms for some of the demonstratives. These forms should not be memorized because of their infrequency.

נָּהַ ↑ נָּהַ and נָּהַ  
נָּהַ ↑ נָּהַ and נָּהַ  
נָּהַ ↑ נָּהַ

8.7 The Use of the Hebrew Demonstratives. Hebrew demonstratives may be used either as adjectives (this man, those women) or as pronouns (this is the man, those are the women).

1. Demonstrative Adjectives. When a Hebrew demonstrative is functioning as an adjective, it will follow the noun it modifies and agree in gender, number, and definiteness. This is just like

---

3 The alternate 3s form נָּהַ is found only in the first five books of the Old Testament.
the attributive use of adjectives as explained in 7.4.1. The following examples illustrate the use of demonstrative adjectives.

- נָאוֹר הָאָדָם - this man
- נָאוֹר הָאִשָּׁה - this woman
- נָאוֹר הָהוֹמָה - that man
- נָאוֹר הָהוֹמָה - that woman
- נָאוֹרֵי הָאָדָם - these men
- נָאוֹרֵי הָהוֹמָה - these women
- נָאוֹרֵי הָאִשָּׁה - those men
- נָאוֹרֵי הָהוֹמָה - those women

In each of these examples, be certain that you understand the agreement between the noun and demonstrative adjective in the categories of gender, number, and definiteness. Note that the demonstrative follows the noun in every instance. You should also note that when an attributive adjective is introduced, it is placed between the noun and demonstrative adjective. It must also agree in gender, number, and definiteness.

- נָאוֹרֵי הָאָדָם - this good man
- נָאוֹרֵי הָהוֹמָה - that good man
- נָאוֹרֵי הָאִשָּׁה - this good woman
- נָאוֹרֵי הָהוֹמָה - that good woman
- נָאוֹרֵי הָאָדָם - these good men
- נָאוֹרֵי הָהוֹמָה - these good women
- נָאוֹרֵי הָאִשָּׁה - those good men
- נָאוֹרֵי הָהוֹמָה - those good women

2. Demonstrative Pronouns. When a Hebrew demonstrative is functioning as a pronoun, it will precede the noun and agree in gender and number but not definiteness. This is just like the predicative use of adjectives (7.4.2). The following examples illustrate the use of demonstrative pronouns.

- דֶּרֶךְ הַתּוֹאֲשֶׁר - This is the man.
- דֶּרֶךְ הַתּוֹאֲשֶׁר - This is the woman.
- דֶּרֶךְ הַתּוֹאֲשֶׁר - That is the man.
That is the woman.
These are the men.
These are the women.
Those are the men.
Those are the women.

When an attributive adjective is introduced, it is placed after the noun it modifies. It will agree in gender, number, and definiteness with the noun it is modifying.

This is the good man.
These are the good men.
That is the good woman.
Those are the good women.

8.8 Relative Pronoun. The major relative pronouns in English are “who,” “whom,” “whose,” “that,” and “which.” A relative pronoun introduces a relative clause that modifies a noun. A relative clause is composed of the relative pronoun and the clause that it introduces. In the sentence “happy is the person who studies Hebrew,” the clause “who studies Hebrew” is a relative clause modifying the noun “person.” In Hebrew, the word אלי functions as the relative pronoun. The form of this word never changes. In other words, it does not inflect to indicate the gender and number of its antecedent (the noun it is modifying). The relative pronoun אלי may appear either with or without the Maqqef. In the following examples, you will notice that when אלי functions as a relative pronoun introducing a relative clause, it immediately follows the noun it is modifying.

the tree that (is) in the middle of the garden
the mountains that (are) under the heavens
the king whom you chose

---

4 In addition to אלי, the particle אלי also functions as a relative pronoun, occurring 139 times in the Hebrew Bible (mostly in poetry). Like the definite article, it is prefixed to a word with a Daghest Forte in the first consonant (where possible), as in אלי (who is good).
8.9 Interrogative Pronouns. Interrogative pronouns are used to ask a question. In Hebrew, the main interrogative pronouns are מְמַשֶּׁהוּ (who? whom?) and מַם (what?). These pronouns do not inflect and can appear with or without the Maqqef. The vocalization of מַמ does not change. The vocalization of מְמ, however, may change slightly. In addition to מְמ, this interrogative is also spelled מָה and מָה. When spelled as מֱמ, a Daghesh Forte will usually appear in the first consonant of the following word (unless that consonant is a guttural). It is not essential to know what causes these vocalization changes. It is easier simply to be aware of the three spelling options. The following examples illustrate how these interrogative pronouns are used.

מְמַשֶּׁהוּ  What (is) his name?
מַמְמַשֶּׁהוּ  What have you done?
מַמְמַשֶּׁהוּ  What (is) this dream?
מְמִירְמַשֶּׁהוּ  Who (are) you?
מְמִירְמַשֶּׁהוּ  Who (is) this man?
מְמִירְמַשֶּׁהוּ  Who (are) these men?

8.10 The Interrogative Particle נ. In addition to the interrogative pronouns above, Hebrew also has an interrogative particle. In Hebrew, questions are not created with punctuation as in English (?). Rather, interrogative clauses (those that ask a question) are created with the use of certain interrogative pronouns or with a form of the particle נ prefixed to the first word of the sentence. Consider the following examples.

שָׁלִּיקוּ  The king sent the prophet.
שָׁלַל  Did the king send the prophet?

The first example is a statement; the second is a question. In the second example, the sentence begins with a verb to which the interrogative particle נ has been prefixed. The question has been created by the prefixing of the interrogative particle. The spelling of the particle will change, depending on the spelling of the form to which it is prefixed. The rules are quite simple.

---

5 The interrogative particle נ occurs 664 times in the Hebrew Bible.
1. Prefixed to most consonants, it is נ as in the example above.
2. Prefixed to a guttural consonant or any consonant with Shewa, it is normally נ.
3. Prefixed to a guttural consonant followed by Qamets, the spelling of the particle is נ.

There is the possibility of confusing the interrogative particle with the definite article. To avoid confusion, it will be helpful to remember the following clues.

1. The interrogative particle does not normally have an associated Daghesh Forte as does the definite article.  
2. With some frequency, the interrogative particle will be prefixed to a verbal form or another particle. Verbs and particles, of course, will not take the definite article.
3. The Hateph Pathach (נ) of the interrogative particle (as it appears with most consonants) is not one of the spellings of the definite article.

8.11 Summary.

1. A pronoun is a word that replaces a noun. The noun that the pronoun refers back to is called the antecedent.
2. A personal pronoun is a pronoun that replaces a noun referring to a person or thing. It can be first, second, or third person and either singular or plural. First person pronouns are labeled “common,” meaning that they may refer to either masculine or feminine nouns (they are not inflected for gender). Second and third person pronouns have both masculine and feminine forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Common</td>
<td>אֶנִּי, אֶנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּנֶּні</td>
<td>וְהָנָּה, we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Masculine</td>
<td>אָנַּה, אָנַּה</td>
<td>אָנַּה, you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Feminine</td>
<td>אָנַּה</td>
<td>אָנַּה, you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Masculine</td>
<td>אָנַּה</td>
<td>אָנַּה, he/it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Feminine</td>
<td>אָנַּה</td>
<td>אָנַּה, she/it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 Infrequently, the prefixing of the interrogative particle may occasion the doubling of the following consonant but this is anomalous.
3. The Hebrew demonstratives may be used either as adjectives (this man, those women) or as pronouns (this is the man, those are the women).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>בָּשָׂר</td>
<td>בְּשָׂרָ הּ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>בָּשָׂר</td>
<td>בְּשָׂרָ הּ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>בָּשָׂר</td>
<td>בְּשָׂרָ הּ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>בָּשָׂר</td>
<td>בְּשָׂרָ הּ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. When a Hebrew demonstrative is functioning as an adjective, it will follow the noun it modifies and agree in gender, number, and definiteness (בָּשָׂרָה, this man).

b. When a Hebrew demonstrative is functioning as a pronoun, it will precede the noun it modifies and agree in gender and number but not definiteness (בָּשָׂרָה, this is the man).

4. The word בָּשָׂר (who, whom, whose, which, that) functions as the Hebrew relative pronoun. The form of this word never changes.

5. In Hebrew, the most common interrogative pronouns are בָּשָׂר (who? whom?) and בָּשָׂר (what?). These words do not inflect and can appear with or without Maqqef.

6. Another way Hebrew asks a question is with the interrogative particle בָּשָׂר. This particle is prefixed to the first word of the interrogative clause (those that ask a question). Usually, it is spelled בָּשָׂר. However, it also occurs as בָּשָׂר (before most guttural consonants and consonants with Shewa) and בָּשָׂר (before guttural consonants with Qamets).

8.12 Vocabulary.

- בָּשָׂר tent (348)
- בָּשָׂר other, another, foreign (166)
- בָּשָׂר how? (61); also as בָּשָׂר (17)
- בָּשָׂר thousand (496)
- בָּשָׂר who, whom, that, which; בָּשָׂר as, when (5,503)
- בָּשָׂר animal(s), beast(s), cattle (190)
8.13 **I Myself Have Given.** In English, the subject of the verb and the verb itself are two separate words, e.g., “I (subject) wrote (verb)” or “he (subject) spoke (verb).” In Hebrew, however, the subject and the verb are one word as in יְפַלַּחְתָּ (I wrote) or פַּלָּחֲתָה (he said). Thus Hebrew uses one word where English uses two words. But when a biblical writer wanted to emphasize the subject, he would place an independent personal pronoun just before the verb, as in יְפַלַּחְתָּ (I myself wrote). The first word, יְפַלַּחְתָּ, is not necessary but serves to emphasize the subject’s involvement in the action of the verb.

An example of the emphatic use of the independent personal pronoun is found in Lev 17:11, one of the clearest verses in the Old Testament on the theology of sacrifice. Here the Lord says, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I myself have given it [יְפַלַּחְתָּ] to you upon the altar to make atonement for your lives, for it is the blood, by means of the life, that makes atonement.” On the one hand, God says that sacrificial blood is for the purpose of making atonement. On the other hand, however, he emphasizes that he himself is the one who provides the means for atonement in the first place. This is an important reversal of how we normally think about sacrifice, namely, as something we give to God. This verse turns that idea completely on its head. It is God who has given to us! As in the New Testament, then, God shows his grace not only by granting forgiveness, but by providing sinners with the means of forgiveness to begin with. This is the same idea
expressed in Rom 5:8, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this way: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jay A. Sklar
Assistant Professor of Old Testament
Covenant Theological Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri

8.14 Advanced Information: More Interrogative Pronouns. In addition to הָלְא (what?), מַמֶּה (who? whom?), and the interrogative particle הָל, Hebrew possesses a number of other interrogative words as well. Some of the more common interrogatives are listed below for your reference.

1. אוֹלָהּ לְמִלְתָּה (why?)

אִלְיָא אִלְיָא לְמִלְתָּה עַבְקַתני
My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
(Ps 22:2 [English 22:1])

לְמִלְתָּה תָּעֶשֶה בַּלֻּבְדוּתָה
Why are you doing thus to your servants?
(Ex 5:15)

2. וַאֲלָא or אֲלִיךָ (how?)

וַאֲלָא אֲלָא שָׁעַעְתֶּה מְזִילָה מְזִילָה הָאָא מַתָּאָה לָא לָא בָּוָה
How could I do this great evil
and sin against God?
(Gen 39:9)

אֲלִיךָ בֵּדְעַ אָרְחָיָה
How may we know the word?
(Deut 18:21)

3. אֲלָא or הָלַא (where?)

וַאֲלָא הָלוֹא אֲלִיָּהוּ אָלַיָּ יִבְלוּ אָלַי
do not say to me, “Where is Abel your brother?”
(Gen 4:9)

אֲלִיָּה שֶׁרַה אֵשָּׁפֵה
Where is Sarah your wife?
(Gen 18:9)