

Narrative Sequence

There is a common pattern for relating the main events of a narrative.

This pattern is to start with a verb in perfect tense (Perf.) followed by a string of vav-conversive verbs in the imperfect tense. (VCImpf.)

(The normal pattern for a negative statement in this chain is vav + negative + verb in Perfect tense)

וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ
he knew And Adam
(Perf.)

וַתֵּהָרֵי

And she conceived
(VCImpf)

וַתֵּלֵד אֶת-קַיִן
Cain And she bore
(VCImpf)

וַתֹּאמֶר

And she said...
(VC Impf)

This pattern may be broken for a number of reasons

- For emphasis
- To show parenthesis or background material
- For change of scene or speaker
- For contrast
- To show subordinate statements

The break can be made by a number of devices

- Change of word order (as above)
- Change of verb tense
- Unusual construction
- Unusual conjunction
- The word הִנֵּה “look, behold” which usually marks a change of perspective

The original thread of narrative may be picked up by resuming with a VCImpf verb.

This pattern is common, but not always consistent.

In some cases, it is possible to pick out the emphases of a narrative by observing this pattern and the strategic breaks.

An Example of Exegesis from Narrative Sequence

From: Robert B. Chisholm Jr., From Exegesis to Exposition, Baker, 1998. pp. 136-7.

Judges 3:18-26

VCIpf forms are flush left. Subordinate clauses are indented. Nonstandard constructions are in bold print. Quotations are italicized. The function of each phrase follows in parentheses.

(18) And it so happened (introductory)
when he had finished presenting the tribute payment (temporal)
he dismissed the people who had carried it (sequential)

(19) **But he went back once he reached the carved images** (contrastive)
which are in Gilgal (relative)

And he said: (sequential)

I have a secret message for you, O King.

And he replied: (sequential)

Shh!

And all his attendants left (sequential)

(20) **When Ehud approached him,** (circumstantial)
he was sitting in his ventilated upper room (synchronic)
where he was all alone (relative)

And Ehud said: (sequential)

I have a divine message for you

And he got up from his throne (sequential)

(21) And Ehud reached with his left hand (sequential)
and pulled the sword from his right thigh (sequential)
and drove it into his belly (sequential)

(22) And the handle went in after the blade (sequential)
and the fat closed around the blade (sequential)
for he did not pull the sword out of his belly (causal)

And it went out (sequential)

(23) And Ehud went out into the vestibule (sequential)
and he closed the doors of the upper room behind him (sequential)
and he locked them (complementary)

(24) **When he had left** (circumstantial)
his (Eglon's) servants entered (synchronic)
and they looked (sequential)

And look, the doors of the upper room were locked (dramatic)

And they said: (sequential)

He must be relieving himself in the upper room

(25) And they waited so long they became embarrassed (sequential)
And look, he did not open the doors of the upper room (dramatic)
And they took the key (sequential)

and opened them (sequential)

And look, their master was lying on the floor dead. (dramatic)

(26) **Now Ehud escaped while they delayed** (dramatic)
When he passed by the carved images (circumstantial)
he escaped to Seirah (sequential)