Word Order in the Book of Proverbs

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I. Introduction

There are innumerable studies of Biblical Hebrew (BH) proverbs—as a genre, as a book, as individual units—and almost as many studies of BH word order. Oddly, few works have broached the subject of the word order of BH proverbs. Perhaps it is due to the poetic, nonnarrative nature of proverbs; it is possible, if not likely, that the lack of lengthy stretches of discourse combined with the perceived syntactic "chaos" of BH poetry has motivated grammarians to look for greener, more easily accessible pastures elsewhere.

My biblical wisdom teacher, however, declined to graze elsewhere, and both his tenacity and refusal to be intimidated by the obscurities and complexities of BH wisdom texts have produced a scholar, who, to modify a biblical line, הוא מבין משל ומליצה דברי חכמים וחידתם. It is in his honor, and in the spirit of stubbornly working a knot until it is undone, that this study is offered.

Word order in the book of Proverbs is indeed a knotty grammatical issue. In this initial foray into this complex issue, I will proceed by examining the discourse features of BH proverbs, the typological study of word order, and the syntactic and pragmatic features that determine the word order of BH proverbs, focusing on the relative placement of subjects and verbs.

II. The Discourse Feature of Biblical Hebrew Proverbs

There is a tendency within the study of BH word order, particularly among those working within a typological-functional approach, to distinguish among various discourse types and/or genres.[1] Thus, the natural unmarked constituent order in BH narrative prose is believed to differ from that of the poetry in Psalms or the poetic prose within the prophets or, for example, Genesis 1, as

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1. See, for example, P. J. MacDonald, "Discourse Analysis and Biblical Interpretation," in *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (ed. W. R. Bodine; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992) 153–76; N. A. Bailey and S. H. Levinsohn, "The Function of Preverbal Elements in Independent Clauses in the Hebrew Narrative of Genesis," *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 5/3 (1992) 179–207; R. E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse* (New York: Plenum, 1996).

well as—to cut along a different axis—from reported speech/dialogue.[2] BH proverbs, which clearly fit into the category of poetry, present us with a rich and largely unstudied body of linguistic data. The results of a word order study of BH proverbs have the potential not only to enhance our abilities to interpret the book of Proverbs but also to contribute to our understanding of BH grammar in general.[3]

Perhaps there is still a lingering objection to my use of Proverbs: How could a poetic corpus be an appropriate corpus for investigating the basic word order of BH? It is because the crucial issue for word order study is not the prose-versus-poetry distinction—both prose and poetry exhibit a variety of stylistic and pragmatic features; that is, they both have conventions that any adequate word order study must analyze. Choosing one over the other, as long as the nature of the text is recognized and the salient features are analyzed, provides no advantage either way. Rather, the linguistic distinction that is important is between narrative (often monologic in nature) and nonnarrative (often dialogic in nature).

Typologists engaged in identifying basic word order for any given language have for quite some time debated about whether monologue or dialogue is more likely to provide basic word order examples. For many years narrative/monologue material was preferred: according to Robert Longacre, "If storyline clauses in narrative discourse in a given language are VSO, then that language should be classified as a VSO language."[4] Longacre bases this claim on several assumptions, the first of which is that "monologue discourse is a better

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2. See, for example, J. MacDonald, "Some Distinctive Characteristics of Israelite Spoken Hebrew," *BO* 23 (1975) 162–75.

3. A significant question that is often overlooked in BH word order studies concerns the use of genre distinctions for the study of BH grammar. I suggest that pressing distinctions among a number of genres too far renders the study of anything called "BH syntax" impotent. Indeed, a valid objection to maintaining any sort of strict discourse boundaries is that, for the purposes of BH syntax, discourse distinctions between, for example, prose and poetry are facile: either there is a "syntax" of BH or not. If there is, then the syntactic patterns of BH proverbs belong to that grammar, and while they may exhibit greater variety than nonproverbial material or nonpoetic material in general, their basic syntactic features should be in accordance with those of any other discourse type. Therefore, in some sense this essay does not aim to sketch simply "the grammar of BH proverbs" or even "the grammar of the book of Proverbs" (as if either would somehow constitute a distinct "grammar") but aims to contribute to the larger determination of the basic patterns of constituent order in BH grammar as a whole.

4. R. E. Longacre, "Left Shifts in Strongly VSO Languages," in *Word Order in Discourse* (ed. P. Downing and M. Noonan; Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1995) 331–54.

guide to language typology than dialogue . . . in that the exigencies of repartee presumably make for departures from standard word order at many places."[5]

However, an increasing number of typologists and discourse analysts are arguing that the opposite of Longacre's position is preferred, that reported-speech/dialogue texts are less idiosyncratic and thus should be used to determine basic word order.[6] In fact, it has been suggested that features associated with temporal succession in narrative result in narrative/monologic texts, rather than reported-speech/dialogic texts, exhibiting greater departures from standard word order.[7]

With proverbs, we have perhaps the best genre in the Hebrew Bible for isolating basic word order; it is, at least, of equal value to the long narratives most often studied (e.g., Genesis). How so? BH proverbs present us with nonnarrative discourse, thus this discourse type avoids the problems associated with temporal succession in narrative (e.g., foreground vs. background narrative and any correlation that this distinction has with word order). BH proverbs also straddle the fence in terms of the dialogue-versus-monologue distinction: they are cast as a dialogue between father and son, but the son is silent; thus, the intentionally unidirectional nature of the speech suggests that features of monologue exist. Certainly, it is apparent that Longacre's concerns about the "exigencies of repartee" do not apply to BH proverbs.

Additionally, most of the line pairs in the book of Proverbs are not "bound" within the discourse; that is, individual proverbs, or occasionally small groups of proverbs, constitute a self-contained world of discourse and are thus not influenced by discourse factors beyond the syntactic boundaries of the proverb or proverb group.[8] Thus, with the data in the book of Proverbs we have few of the long, pragmatically complex stretches of discourse found in narrative.

Finally, studying BH proverbs allows us to deal with a corpus that is relatively free from the skewing presence of the narrative-past verb *wayyiqtol*. This verb form greatly complicates the study of word order whenever it is present. Indeed, its dominance in BH narrative has misled most word order studies

5. Ibid., 333. Longacre also comments that, although BH narrative is primarily VS, "in expository discourse . . . SVO [i.e., subject–verb–object] predominates and is on the mainline" (*The Grammar of Discourse*, 23).

6. P. Downing, "Word Order in Discourse: By Way of Introduction," in *Word Order in Discourse* (ed. P. Downing and M. Noonan; Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1995) 1–27.

7. D. L. Payne, "Verb Initial Languages and Information Order," in ibid., 449–85 (quotation from p. 454).

8. For a similar observation, see M. Salisbury, "Hebrew Proverbs and How to Translate Them," in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (ed. R. D. Bergen; Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994) 434–61.

with regard to the essential syntax of the BH clause. It is self-evident that a verb form that requires a clause-initial position (i.e., one cannot have a pre-verbal constituent with the *wayyiqtol*) in a language that otherwise exhibits nearly free word order should be analyzed separately and that other clause types should be used to study basic word order.

Now that I have provided a brief justification for using BH proverbs to study BH word order, I will alert the reader to my methodological stance before proceeding to the data. Perhaps the approach taken in this essay could best be labeled "generative-typological." In other words, there is a strong typological element to the following analysis of the BH data, but it is predicated on generative principles.[9] To some, these two linguistic approaches may seem to be strange bedfellows, but in fact they are not theoretically irreconcilable.[10]

III. The (Generative-)Typological Study of Word Order

What is the typological study of word order? It is most often traced back to Joseph Greenberg's seminal 1963 article, "Some Universals of Grammar with Particular Reference to the Order of Meaningful Elements."[11] This essay set in motion a rich comparative linguistic method with the goal of discerning morphological and syntactic "universals"[12] within the incredible diversity of human languages. The first section in Greenberg's essay, focusing on "certain

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9. See N. Chomsky, *The Minimalist Program* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Instiute of Technology Press, 1995); idem, "Minimalist Inquiries: The Framework," in *Is the Best Good Enough? Optimality and Competition in Syntax* (MIT Working Papers in Linguistics 15; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); idem, "Derivation by Phase," in *Papers from the Workshop on Structure and Constituency in Native American Languages* (MIT Occasional Papers in Linguistics; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999). For somewhat more readable expositions of the recent generative model, see A. Radford, *Syntactic Theory and the Structure of English: A Minimalist Approach* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); J. Ouhalla, *Introducing Transformational Grammar: From Principles and Parameters to Minimalism* (2nd ed.; London: Arnold, 1999).

10. For a lengthy discussion of typology and generative linguistics, see F. J. Newmeyer, *Language Form and Language Function* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998) 297–369. See also the essays in the volume edited by Artemis Alexaidou (*Theoretical Approaches to Universals* [Linguistik Aktuell 49; Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2002]).

11. In *Universals of Language* (ed. J. H. Greenberg; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1963) 73–113.

12. The quotation marks around the word "universal" simply serve to distinguish the typological notion of language universals (which are rarely in fact "universal"—that is, without exception) and the Chomskyan generative concept of universals (which are, as "principles of Universal Grammar," taken to be without exception and part of the language faculty that is a genetic feature unique to humans).

basic factors of word order," is perhaps the most significant for our discussion. In order to identify the basic word order of any given language, Greenberg proposed using three criteria:[13]

(1) the use of prepositions versus postpositions;
(2) the relative order of subject, verb, and object in declarative sentences with nominal subject and object;
(3) the position of qualifying adjectives, either preceding or following the modified noun.

Although these three criteria have been modified as the typological program has matured, they still reflect the fundamental questions involved in determining how a language patterns: do heads (i.e., the constituent being modified) precede or follow their modifiers?

Typologists have refined the procedure considerably, and many have reduced the basic classification of languages to the VO-versus-OV and SV-versus-VS distinctions.[14] Generativists (and many other formalists) typically recast syntactic description such as this by using the the terms "complement" and "adjunct."[15] Complements are constituents that complete the head and are thus obligatory for forming a larger grammatical item. For instance, transitive verbs require complements, often in the form of direct objects but sometimes also in the form of prepositional phrases, and so forth. Adjuncts, in contrast, are nonobligatory modifiers, such as adjective, adverbs, and noncomplement prepositional phrases. Finally, the category of "specifier" includes subjects, articles, demonstratives, possessives, and subordinators. Using these three syntactic categories, the basic oppositions for a typological study are "head-complement versus complement-head," "head-adjunct versus adjunct-head," and "head-specifier versus specifier-head."

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13. Ibid., 76. It should be noted, with regard to the nature of Greenberg's "universals," that Greenberg himself lists exceptions in his footnotes. In defense of this "loose" approach to language universals (which some now call "tendencies" rather than "universals"), Thomas Payne suggests that "[l]anguages which deviate from Greenberg's ideal types do not 'violate' Greenberg's universals. They are simply inconsistent with the ideal type. Since the majority of languages of the world are inconsistent, it may be more appropriate to dub perfectly consistent language as a violation of expectations!" (T. E. Payne, *Describing Morphosyntax: A Guide for Field Linguists* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997] 90–91).

14. See M. Dryer, "On the Six-Way Word Order Typology," *Studies in Language* 21/1 (1997) 69–103.

15. See A. Alexaidou, "Introduction," in *Theoretical Approaches to Universals*, 3.

Our typological goal is thus to determine whether and how a language exhibits strong tendencies one way or the other for each grammatical category, such as nouns and verbs, and each syntactic relationship, such as complementation and adjunction. The table in example (4) illustrates the way we might sketch a simple typological analysis for English, asking the "head-initial" or "head-final" question for each syntactic category.

(4)

Heads	Complements (≈ obligatory modifiers)	Adjuncts (≈ optional modifiers)	Specifiers
Nouns	***destruction*** *of the city*	*big* **cities** **cities** *in Africa*	*the/that/our* **city**
Verbs	***destroy*** *the city*	**run** *quickly* *quickly* **run**	*They* **destroyed** *cities*
Adpositions	**in** *the city*	*N/A*	*Straight* **down** *the street*
etc.			

The English examples in the table illustrate the facts that English is strictly head-initial for the order of head and complement, strictly head-final for the order of head and specifier, and both head-initial and head-final for the order of head and adjunct, with greater weight given to the head-final examples because they occur in less-restricted environments (see below, examples [14] and [15] and the discussion there). So English exhibits no one order for all "grammatical" categories but is fairly consistent within each "syntactic" category; in this way, English is a fairly typical SVO language.

When we investigate BH complements and adjuncts, we find that it is a strongly head-initial language, illustrated by the examples in (5–9).

(5)   Preposition + Nominal Complement (= Preposition + Object): "head-initial"
       לדם   for blood (1:11)

(6)   Noun + Nominal Complement (= Construct Phrase): "head-initial"
       יראת יהוה   the fear of Yʜwʜ (1:7)

(7)   Verb + Complement (= Verb + Object): "head-intial"
       נמלא בתינו   we will fill our houses (1:13)

(8)   Noun + Adjunct (= Noun + Adjective): "head-initial"
       בן חכם   wise son (10:1)

(9)   Verb + Adjunct (= Verb + Adverb):
       a. "head-initial"
       let's hide for the innocent
       (man) <u>without cause</u> (1:11)   נצענה לנקי <u>חנם</u>

b. "head-final"

therefore his distress will
come <u>suddenly</u> (6:15)

על כן <u>פתאם</u> יבוא אידו

When we turn to the issue of specifiers, we arrive at the knotty issue. First, the evidence of nouns and specifiers is ambiguous, as the examples in (10) illustrate.

(10) Noun + Specifier (= Noun + determiner): (a) "head-final" and (b) "head-initial"

a. **היום** the day (4:18)

b. **בני** my son (1:8)

While articles precede nouns (that is, they exhibit head-final order), demonstrative and possessive pronouns follow nouns (that is, they exhibit head–initial order). Unfortunately, the evidence of verbal specifiers (subjects) further complicates the determination of basic order for this syntactic category. To put a point to the question for the book of Proverbs: Does the SV/head-final example in (11) or the VS/head–initial example in (12) represent the basic order? (Remember, the verb is the head.)[16]

(11) Subject-Verb
<u>hatred arouses</u> strife (10:12)

<u>שנאה תעורר</u> מדנים

(12) Verb-Subject
<u>the lazy person says</u>: A lion is outside! (22:13)

<u>אמר עצל</u> ארי בחוץ

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16. The overwhelming majority opinion is that VS is basic in BH; most of the analyses have focused on narrative. For representative recent studies, see T. Goldfajn, *Word Order and Time in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); J.-M. Heimerdinger, *Topic, Focus and Foreground in Ancient Hebrew Narratives* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); C. H. J. Van der Merwe, "Towards a Better Understanding of Biblical Hebrew Word Order (review of Walter Gross's *Die Satzteilfolge im Verbalsatz alttestamentlicher Prosa*)," *JNSL* 25/1 (1999) 277–300; A. Moshavi, *The Pragmatics of Word Order in Biblical Hebrew: A Statistical Analysis* (Ph.D. diss., Yeshiva University, 2000); K. Shimasaki, *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of Word Order and Information Structure* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2002). Representative of the majority opinion applied to the syntax of BH proverbs, Murray Salisbury assumes VS basic order ("Hebrew Proverbs and How to Translate Them," 446). For rare dissenting voices to the VS analysis, see P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'Hebreu biblique* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1923); V. DeCaen, *On the Placement and Interpretation of the Verb in Standard Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1995); R. D. Holmstedt, *The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew: A Linguistic Analysis* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2002).

Not surprisingly, when this issue is analyzed from a generative perspective, the options—as well as the starting point—change considerably. To simplify for the sake of space, current generative analysis has determined that initial derivations (perhaps we could call these "clauses-in-the-making") start with the subject preceding the verb. Since within the generative approach many constituents in the clause (it depends on the language) "move" from this starting position to higher positions in the clause (that is, toward the front of the clause), it is possible for this derivation to result in a clause with VS or SV order (hence, the older distinction between "deep" structure and "surface" structure[17]).

Furthermore, the structural position of subject constituents is quite unlike that of complements and adjuncts. Whereas complements and adjuncts (again, depending on the language) may occupy positions on either side of the verb (that is, VO vs. OV and V–Adv vs. Adv–V, etc.), subjects are thought to occupy a unique position called the "specifier" (abbreviated as "Spec") that is only to one side—to the left side, or "higher"—of its phrasal head. In informal terms, the specifier position is occupied by constituents that "specify" salient features of the main constituent; so, for example, subjects specify the agent/theme/patient of verb phrases, articles specify the definiteness of noun phrases, and complementizers (e.g., English "that") specify the finiteness and illocutionary force of the complementizer phrase (i.e., clause).[18]

Recast in this paradigm, the issue for BH becomes whether the verb "raises" over the subject, producing VS order, or whether the verb remains lower than the subject, producing SV order. And, as we shall see, there are further complicating factors: additional movement of constituents (e.g., the verb moving even higher than normal) can be "triggered"[19] by the presence of other constituents, such as clause-initial grammatical items like relative words.[20]

Thus, the typological study of basic word order, when performed within the paradigm of generative linguistics, becomes at once more complex and

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17. On the conceptual changes brought about by the Minimalist Program, with particular reference to "deep structure" and "surface structure" as components of the model, see A. Marantz, "The Minimalist Program," in *Government and Binding Theory and the Minimalist Program: Principles and Parameters in Syntactic Theory* (ed. G. Webelhuth; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 349–82.

18. On the general nature of complementizer and complementizer phrases (CPs), see Radford, *Syntactic Theory*, 54–58, 95–96.

19. See U. Shlonsky, *Clause Structure and Word Order in Hebrew and Arabic: An Essay in Comparative Semitic Syntax* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); also U. Shlonsky and E. Doron, "Verb Second in Hebrew," in *The Proceedings of the Tenth West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics* (ed. D. Bates; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) 431–45.

20. Holmstedt, *The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew*, 145–50.

more powerful. A typologically minded generativist recognizes the value of cross-linguistic analysis, the nuanced discussion of which clause type best approximates the basic clause type, the identification of a variety of discourse types, and the typological obsession with compiling vast sets of data. However, the generative approach qualifies what it views as the naïve acceptance of the final or "surface" product as the sole object of syntactic study;[21] in other words, the basic distinction between "deep" structure and "surface" structure allows a generativist to identify relevant features in a way that a nongenerativist cannot.[22]

At this point, I have introduced the basics of the typological study of word order, described many of the features of BH harmonics, excluding the subject and verb issue, and set this typological study within the broader generative theoretical program. I have yet to identify whether BH proverbs suggest that BH is VS or SV. This is not an easy task, and we must use a few established criteria in order to analyze the data. The four most commonly used criteria for this task are listed in (13).[23]

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21. Although Chomsky's earliest comments on the value of "statistical studies" are somewhat dismissive in tone (and he took a slightly more positive approach toward typology within the Principle and Parameters approach in the mid-1980s), the basic critique of Greenberg's initial study has not changed: "Insofar as attention is restricted to surface structures, the most that can be expected is the discovery of statistical tendencies, such as those presented in Greenberg 1963" (N. Chomsky, *Aspects of a Theory of Syntax* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965] 118). Frederick Newmeyer has recently proposed a method by which generativists can make use of typology (see above, n. 8), he made the following skeptical observation in an earlier work:

> [T]here is no evidence that "the collection of valuable facts" has ever led or could lead to the discovery of any generalizations other than the most superficial sort. For example, the seven-year-long Stanford University Language Universals Project (whose results are now published as Greenber, Ferguson and Moravcsik 1978) carried out Li's program to perfection yet has not led, as far as I know, to any substantial theoretical revisions. The problem is that the fairly shallow generalizations and statistical correlations described in the project's reports were far too sketchily presented to be of much use in ascertaining even the grammatical structure of the individual languages treated, much less shed any light on universal grammar. (F. Newmeyer, *Grammatical Theory: Its Limits and Its Possibilities* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983] 71)

22. See J. A. Naudé for a similar critique of surface-level approaches ("A Syntactic Analysis of Dislocations in Biblical Hebrew," *JNSL* 16 [1990] 115–30).

23. See M. Dryer, "Word Order," to appear in *Language Typology and Syntactic Description* (2nd ed.; ed. T. Shopen; forthcoming) 13–14 [May 2003 draft].

(13)   Criteria for identifying basic word order
    a.   clause type
    b.   frequency
    c.   distribution
    d.   pragmatics

IIIa. Clause Type

The criterion of clause type builds upon Greenberg's initial approach; however, typologists have since refined the definition of the appropriate basic clause considerably. An example is Anna Siewierska's, in which she defines the basic clause as: "stylistically neutral, independent, indicative clauses with full noun phrase (NP) participants, where the subject is definite, agentive and human, the object is a definite semantic patient, and the verb represents an action, not a state or an event."[24]

Admittedly, clauses of this sort may not occur in abundance in a typical text or discourse due to the nature of human communication.[25] For example, in languages that allow subject pronouns to be omitted (that is, "pro-drop" languages, such as Spanish, Italian, and Hebrew), clauses with "full noun phrase" subjects will be difficult to isolate. The fact that "basic clauses" may not be frequent does not invalidate the search for basic word order, however; rather, this simply illustrates the complexities of typical human discourse.[26]

IIIb. Frequency

Those who assign primacy, or at least significance, to statistics use the frequency criterion. Whereas a "basic clause type" may be in the statistical minority—here of course is the potential rub—the frequency approach demands that the basic order designation be assigned to a statistically dominant pattern.[27] It is interesting to note that the frequency criterion is used by Takamitsu Muraoka in his study of emphatic structures in BH: "[W]e are not interested in discussing the theory that [VS] order is normal because action is the most important piece of information to be conveyed by this sentence type called verbal clause. In other words, by saying that V-S is the normal word-order we do not mean that it is logically or intrinsically so, but simply statistically."[28]

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24. A. Siewierska, *Word Order Rules* (London: Croom Helm, 1988) 8.

25. Ibid., 8–14.

26. For a concise summary of the basic issues involved in the typological quest for determining "basic word order" in any given language, see Newmeyer, *Language Form and Language Function*, 330–37.

27. See, for example, J. A. Hawkins, *Word Order Universals* (New York: Academic, 1983).

28. T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985) 30.

However, there have been a number of challenges to using simple statistical dominance to determine basic word order. For example, given a 2:1 ratio of VS to SV order in a given text, are we justified in classifying that language as VS? Linguists are not in agreement on this issue. The problem is exacerbated when the statistics are even closer, as Matthew Dryer notes: "In the Auk dialect of Tlingit, for example, a text count (Dryer 1985) for the order of subject and verb revealed VS outnumbering SV by 177 to 156. In a case like this, the difference in frequency is sufficiently small that it does not seem reasonable to say that VS is more frequent than SV or that VS is basic."[29]

IIIc. Distribution

The third approach is based on the test of "distribution." Given two or more alternatives for a syntactic construction, the one that occurs in the greater number of environments, that is, it is less restricted, is the basic order. Note that this is not the same as statistical dominance, because the issue at hand is not "occurrence" but "environment." For instance, in English, manner adverbs may both precede and follow the verb, as in (14–15):

(14) a.   Ethan slowly walked into the room.
                       Adv   V
        b.   Ethan walked into the room slowly.
                       V   Adv
(15) a.   ?*Ethan is slowly walking.
                       Adv   V
        b.   Ethan is walking slowly.
                       V   Adv

Although both options exist in English, based on the distributional patterns, it can be argued that "verb–adverb" order is basic because there are environments in which the order "adverb-verb" is not used (e.g., ?*Ethan is slowly walking), or is less felicitous.[30]

IIId. Pragmatics

Finally, we come to the last criterion by which basic word order is often examined: pragmatics. This criterion is particularly significant for "free-order" languages, that is, languages exhibiting a great deal of word order variation. At the core of this approach is the recognition that the majority of language data contains pragmatically "marked" or "non-neutral" clauses due to the nature of

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29. Dryer, "Word Order," 19.
30. Ibid., 9.

human communication. Even for languages that have a more rigid word order, such as English, pragmatics can produce extreme but grammatically acceptable examples, as in (16a) and (17a):[31]

(16)   a.   Mary, I saw.
        b.   I saw Mary.
(17)   a.   Into the room came the Prime Minister.
        b.   The Prime Minister came into the room.

The recognition of the importance of pragmatics in the order of constituents in some languages has provided a necessary corrective to the investigation of basic word order. Marianne Mithun even questions whether some languages can be assigned to a typologically word order category.[32] In particular, for languages with an apparently "free word order," Mithun argues that we should not be looking for a basic word order in terms of the position of subject, verb, and modifiers. Rather, she suggests that in these languages it might be the case that the syntactic role of an item (subject, object, etc.) is less important than its discourse role (e.g., topic-hood, identifiability, "newsworthiness"). Thus, the order of the constituents, subject noun phrase, verb, complements, and so on, will change in a "basic clause," depending on the information status of the constituents. At the very least, this type of argument has made it clear that an awareness of how a language allows information to be structured is a fundamentally important part of word order study.[33]

IV. The Word Order of Proverbs

With the four basic criteria in hand, we are adequately prepared to begin considering the data from BH proverbs. The first task is to isolate the proper database of examples from the book of Proverbs. Since the primary issue for this study is the position of the subject in relation to the verb (not complements or adjuncts), we are limited to clauses with full noun phrase subjects. In addition, we are limited to examples with finite verbs, because clauses with non-finite verbs often exhibit their own distinctive syntactic features. After

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31. Ibid., 14.
32. M. Mithun, "Is Basic Word Order Universal?" in *Pragmatics of Word Order Flexibility* (ed. D. L. Payne; Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1992) 15–61.
33. I do not think, however, that Mithun's observations obviate a basic word order discussion for those languages. I would still suggest that in clauses in which the constituents all share the same pragmatic marking (e.g., all the constituents are "new," such as in presentative clauses), the observable order could be identified as basic.

sifting through the clauses in Proverbs for these features, I arrived at an initial database of 504 clauses (18), with the statistic breakdown noted:

(18)　Clauses to include: full NP (external) arguments (i.e., subject); finite verbs
　　　a.　SV (335) = 66%
　　　b.　VS (169) = 34%

However, this database includes all types of clauses and verbs. The basic clause type criterion, however, reflects the recognition that there are a number of factors that affect word order for purely syntactic reasons.[34] Thus, it has been established cross-linguistically that subordinate clauses, modal clauses, negative clauses, and interrogative clauses are complicating factors.[35] Therefore, I will eliminate those clauses specified in (19) and illustrated by the examples in (20–23):

(19)　Clauses to exclude:
　　　a.　dependent clauses
　　　b.　modal clauses
　　　c.　negative clauses[36]
　　　d.　interrogative clauses

(20)　Dependent clauses in Proverbs
　　　because better . . . than (one) humili-
　　　ating you before a noble <u>whom your
　　　eyes have seen</u> (25:7)

כי טוב . . . מהשפילך
לפני נדיב אשר ראו עיניך

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34. Not all word-order variation is motivated by discourse-pragmatic concerns; see N. A. Bailey for a functional-typologist who recognizes this principle as well ("'What's Wrong with My Word Order?' Topic, Focus, Information Flow, and Other Pragmatic Aspects of Some Biblical Genealogies" [*Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 10 (1997)] 10 n. 4).

35. See Payne, *Describing Morphosyntax*, 77.

36. Negation is often closely linked to modality (see J. Lyons, *Semantics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977] 768–77; F. R. Palmer, *Mood and Modality* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986] 218–21; L. Hoye, *Adverbs and Modality in English* [London: Longman, 1997]). Furthermore, in some languages negative function words clearly affect the word order of the subject, verb, and object constituents (see T. Givón, *On Understanding Grammar* [New York: Academic, 1979] 124–25). Thus, the negative examples should be subsumed under the presentation of modal clauses, unless the negative in question is an item adverb; see Ps 103:10 (cf. GKC 478–79; B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990] 659–60; JM 603).

(21) Modal clauses in Proverbs
May your father be glad, and your mother //
<u>and may she who bore you rejoice</u> (23:25)

ישמח אביך ואמך
<u>ותגל יולדתך</u>

(22) Negative clauses in Proverbs
<u>Treasures of wickedness do not profit</u> //
but righteousness delivers from death (10:2)

לא יועילו אוצרות רשע
וצדקה תציל ממות

(23) Interrogative clauses in Proverbs
<u>Can a man snatch fire into his lap</u> //
and his garments not be burned? (6:27) [37]

<u>היחתה איש אש בחיקו</u>
ובגדיו לא תשרפנה

Once the dependent, modal, negative, and interrogative clauses are sorted out, the remaining database includes 319 clauses from the book of Proverbs:

(24) Clauses to include: full subject NP, finite verbs, "basic clause type"
    a. SV (297)=93%
    b. VS (22)=7%

And yet another sorting needs to be performed. Both syntactic (that is, parallel constituents) and semantic (that is, parallel lexemes) parallelism make it clear that many line pairs present contrasts (for example, righteous vs. wicked, rich vs. poor, wise vs. foolish).[38] Because the presence of a contrast suggests

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37. The S-Neg-V order of the b-line presents an interesting case of focus-fronting (see below for a brief explanation of this phenomenon). First, the semantics of the syntactic coordination between the a-line and the b-line should probably be interpreted as result. Second, the placement of the subject noun phrase above the negative and verb (which, due to the negative, would normally be located in the highest position in the clause) suggests that the subject is being focused. The intended nuance of the line pair, then, is probably similar to a *Qal weḥomer* statement: if the garments are burned, how much more will the man's lap, or worse! be burned. Thus, the subject בגדיו is contrastive with one explicit (the man's lap) and other implicit alternatives, which are presumably more sensitive items that could be burned.

38. See B. Hrushrovshki, "Prosody, Hebrew," in *EncJud* 13:1195–1203; M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (rev. ed.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997 [1981]); E. L. Greenstein, "How Does Parallelism Mean?" in *A Sense of Text* (Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement; Philadelphia: Center for Judaic Studies, 1982) 41–70; A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985); W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986); J. C. L. Gibson, "The Anatomy of Hebrew

the great likelihood that one or both of the clauses are no longer "unmarked" or "normal" and that the word order may have been affected, we must exclude such examples as specified in (25) from the basic word order database. The example in (26) illustrates the variety of contrastive constituents in the book of Proverbs, from prepositional phrases to entire clauses.

(25)   Clauses to exclude, in addition to a–d in (19):
     e.   clearly contrastive constituents (for example, clefts, answers to questions, etc.)

(26)   Contrastive examples in Proverbs
     Noun Phrase[39]

<table>
<tr><td>(the) wise of heart receives commands //</td><td dir="rtl">חכם לב יקח מצות</td></tr>
<tr><td>but the foolish of lips is thrust aside (10:8)</td><td dir="rtl">ואויל שפתים ילבט</td></tr>
</table>

It is equally evident, however, that many line pairs do not contain contrastive relationships between the parallel items. Indeed, this feature no doubt contributed to the identification of Lowth's categories of "synonymous" and "synthetic" parallelism. Prov 22:8 is a good case in point: it is difficult to imagine what kind of contrast exists between the two lines of (27).

(27)

<table>
<tr><td>the one who sows injustice will reap trouble //</td><td dir="rtl">זרע עולה יקצור[40] און</td></tr>
<tr><td>and the rod of his anger will come to an end (22:8)</td><td dir="rtl">ושבט עברתו יכלה</td></tr>
</table>

Both lines in (27) exhibit SV order, thereby presenting a degree of syntactic parallelism. There is also a very general semantic parallelism that binds the two lines together, because presumably the rod of anger in the b-line belongs to

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Narrative Poetry," in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honor of George Wishart Anderson* (ed. A. G. Auld; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 141–48; W. L. Holladay, "Hebrew Verse Structure Revisited (I): Which Words 'Count'?" *JBL* 118 (1999) 19–32.

    39. The two noun phrases are clearly contrastive; however, although the verbs differ, it cannot be argued that they are contrastive as well, because "receiving commands" and "being thrust aside" are simply different actions/events, not opposing members of the same semantic continuum. Proverbs like this are elliptical in nature, with the opposites of the predicates intended for application to the opposites of the subjects (i.e., 10:8a should be read as both "the wise of heart receives commands" and "the not-wise of heart does not receive commands"; so too, 10:8b).

    40. *Kethiv*; *Qere* יקצר.

the 'one who sows injustice' from the a-line (i.e., the third masculine-singular possessive suffix in עברתו refers back to the implicit subject of זורע).

The numerous examples like (27) seriously challenge a VS analysis of BH, whether in proverbs or elsewhere. If there is no apparent contrast (and, since there is no larger discourse, the issue cannot be a change in topic—that is, what functionalists call "topicalization"), then what motivates the SV order? However, if BH were an SV language, these examples would simply be pragmatically unmarked and representative of basic word order.

The exclusion of overtly contrastive clauses results in a database of 103 clauses from which we can potentially identify basic word order in Proverbs, illustrated in (28–29). That is, these clauses do not appear to be dependent, negative, modal, or interrogative, and they present no clear contrast.

(28)   VS (22×)[41]
        <u>a scoffer seeks</u> wisdom but (finds) none (14:6a)   <u>בקש לץ</u> חכמה ואין

(29)   SV (81×)[42]
        <u>the one who sows injustice will reap</u> trouble (22:8a)   <u>זורע עולה יקצור</u>[43] און

These statistics greatly favor an SV analysis of word order in BH proverbs (by a ratio of 4:1). Two additional linguistic features support this SV analysis. First, it is significant that many, if not all, of the VS clauses included in the 22 examples described above in (28) can be analyzed as a type of modal clause. Consider the example in (30):

(30)   VS = modal
        <u>the lazy person says</u>: A lion is outside! //   <u>אמר עצל</u> ארי בחוץ
        In the streets I'll be killed! (22:13)   בתוך רחבות ארצח

In VS examples such as Prov 22:13, the event represented by the perfective verb אמר appears to be "habitual"; in the case of (30), this is what the lazy person repeatedly says in order to get out of work.

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41. See also 3:24; 11:2; 14:18, 19; 17:10; 19:24, 29; 21:29; 22:13; 24:24, 31 (2×); 26:13, 15, 26; 27:25 (3×); 30:17; 31:11, 28.

42. See also 1:14; 2:11 (2×); 3:20; 5:22; 8:15, 17, 22, 36; 9:1, 17 (2×); 10:10 (2×), 27; 11:7, 25, 29; 12:2, 14; 14:17 (2×); 15:10, 20, 30 (2×); 16:20, 21, 23, 26, 28, 29; 17:2, 5, 11, 20; 18:6, 15 (2×), 16, 21, 22; 19:3, 4, 9, 15 (2×), 16, 28 (2×); 20:5, 6, 28, 30; 21:7, 10, 14, 21, 25; 22:2, 12, 15; 23:24, 33 (2×); 24:31; 25:15, 23; 26:28 (2×); 27:9, 16, 17, 18 (2×); 29:9, 13, 15, 22.

43. *Kethiv*; *Qere* יקצר.

The connection between VS order and the habitual nature of the action lies in the issue of modality. Importantly, linguists have come to recognize that many languages use modal forms to express habitual action;[44] additionally, the BH perfective has recently been associated with modal uses.[45] Thus, we have the habitual action associated with the BH perfective in (30) reflecting the modal use of the verb. More to the point, it has been observed by both E. J. Revell (for the narrative material in Judges)[46] and me (for Genesis)[47] that modal clauses in BH prose exhibit VS basic order, whereas indicative clauses exhibit SV basic order. To summarize, perfective verbs expressing habitual action in the book of Proverbs are being used modally and as such exhibit a basic VS word order; as "modal" clauses, they should be excluded from consideration as basic word order. This leaves us with no VS examples, and 81 SV examples from which to identify basic word order in BH proverbs.

If SV is the basic word order, why then are there so many clauses with VS order? The answer lies with an inherently generative syntactic notion that I briefly mentioned above in section III: "triggered inversion." Thus, for all of the clauses that I have excluded so far in this study, the simplest explanation for the dominant VS order is that subordinating functors like אשר or כי, negatives like אל or לא, interrogatives like למה or ה, and modality all serve as syntactic triggers, causing the verb to rise higher than the subject and producing VS order.

The second feature that buttresses the SV analysis of BH proverbs—or at least removes a possible set of counter examples—concerns the status of the first line in a contrastive line pair. It is far from obvious that that SV order of the a-line in line pairs that do present a contrast is pragmatically marked (i.e., exhibit the fronting of the subject for contrast). Up to this point, I have excluded such examples from my database. Yet, it is arguable whether the initial subjects in this type of example, such as the first line in (31),[48] need to be read as contrastive, because the first-time reader/listener really has no idea if the proverb contains an opposing or non-opposing second line.

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44. See S. Chung and A. Timberlake, "Tense, Aspect, and Mood," in *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, vol. 3: *Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon* (ed. T. Shopen; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 202–58; Palmer, *Mood and Modality*, 216.

45. See J. A. Cook, *The Biblical Hebrew Verbal System: A Grammaticalization Approach* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2002) 230–31.

46. E. J. Revell, "The System of the Verb in Standard Biblical Prose" *HUCA* 60 (1989) 1–37.

47. Holmstedt, *The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew*, 126–59.

48. See also 10:1a, 7a, 8a, 9a, 12a, 14a, 21a, 31a, 32a; 11:3a, 5a, 6a, 16a, 27a; 12:11a, 17a, 19a, 21a, 24a, 25a; 13:6a, 9a, 15a, 17a, 19a, 20a [*Qere*], 22a; 14:1a, 9a, 11a, 15a, 31a; 15:1a, 2a, 5a, 7a, 13a, 14a, 18a, 28a; 16:9a; 17:22a; 18:14a; 21:28a; 22:3a; 26:14; 27:7a, 12a; 28:4a, 18a, 19a, 25a; 29:3a, 8a, 10a, 23a, 25a; 31:29.

(31) a wise son gladdens his father //
      but a foolish son is his mother's misery (10:1bc)

בן חכם ישמח אב
ובן כסיל תוגת אמו

In other words, at the outset of the proverb, one has no idea whether the b-line will reinforce or heighten the positive statement about the wise son in the a-line, or make an observation about the opposing constituent, the foolish son, as (31) does. Because examples of this sort are open to different readings (some may prefer to read the initial subject constituent as contrastive in the a-line, but whether this was intended is far from clear), they do not provide support for either argument—that BH is VS or SV.

In summary, what the data from BH proverbs suggest is that an SV analysis for BH word order provides the greatest descriptive adequacy. If we start with an SV arrangement, we can account for all other arrangements by means of two very common linguistic phenomena: "triggered inversion" (which I have just described) and "focus fronting." Note that both are predicated upon a theory of constituent movement; that is, both imply that a constituent has been "raised" further than normal in the clause due to some motivation.

I have already argued that examples (20–23) illustrate syntactically motivated triggered inversion; in the remaining space I will briefly illustrate focus-fronting in BH proverbs. First, it is important to recognize that triggered inversion is not limited to clauses with initial function words; any item that is positioned above the subject and verb constituents serves as a trigger, producing VS order. Not surprisingly, then, we find VS order in clauses in which a constituent has been fronted for focus.[49] How is focus fronting manifested in the syntax of BH proverbs? The b-line in (32) provides us with a good example.

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49. I find it useful to distinguish two general approaches to focus. On the one hand, focus may refer to the information in a clause that the addressee does not share with the speaker and thus is "asserted," "new," or "added" (see Lyons, *Semantics*, 509; K. Lambrecht, *Information Structure and Sentence Form: Topic, Focus, and the Mental Representations of Discourse Referents* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994] 206–18). It should be noted that "new," "added," and "asserted" are not necessarily equivalent concepts, and often linguists take great pains to distinguish among them. On the other hand, focus may refer to the relatively most important or salient piece of information in a clause (see S. C. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar, Part 1: The Structure of the Clause* [2nd rev. ed.; ed. K. Hengeveld; Berlin: Mouton, de Gruyter, 1997]; E. Vallduví and M. Vilkuna, "On Rheme and Kontrast," in *The Limits of Syntax* [ed. P. Culicover and L. McNally; San Diego: Academic, 1998] 79–108). The first approach to focus means that every clause must have a focused item (excluding an absolute redundancy) because some information is always being added or asserted. The second approach to focus often consists of a linguistically nuanced way of discussing the non-linguist's "emphasis" or "contrast." In this work, I am using a definition of focus that falls into the latter category. For further discussion, see my "Adjusting Our Focus (review of Katsuomi Shimasaki, *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of Word Order and Information Structure*)," *Hebrew Studies* 44 (2003) 203–15.

(32) PPVS

the righteousness of the blameless will straighten
his path //
but in his wickedness <u>the wicked will fall</u> (11:5)

צדקת תמים תישר דרכו
<u>וברשעתו</u> יפל רשע

In the a-line of example (32), we have a banal statement attributing the blame-
less person's success to his righteousness. The b-line presents an initial PP
(prepositional phrase), ברשעתו, that does not parallel any item in the a-line in
a strict syntactic sense but apparently contrasts semantically with the syntactic
subject of the a-line, צדקת. The formal semantic features of both items (both
are feminine-singular nouns) suggest that the contrast is indeed between the
two initial constituents in the line pair. (I belabor this point in order to dem-
onstrate that, while one could identify a chiasm in this verse [SVO//PPVS],
such an analysis would lack any explanatory power.)

In terms of the pragmatic structure of the two lines, the first line presents an
ambiguous case: it is possible to read first lines of this sort (whether in Hebrew
or English) as having either a contrastive or noncontrastive initial subject. It
is the order of the b-line that is unambiguously illustrative. The initial PP
ברשעתו is clearly focus-fronted to set the reason[50] of the wicked person's fail-
ure in contrast: it is his "wicked behavior" that will bring about his end. The
function of the focus instructs the listener/reader to establish a membership
set[51] that includes all the possible reasons that a wicked person might fail—for
example, his thoughts, his associates, his behavior, and so on—and set the one
reason chosen in the PP, "his wickedness," over against the others, presumably
to stress with absolute clarity the reason that the wicked must lack success
in life.

The pragmatically motivated movement of the PP to the clause-initial po-
sition sets in motion a chain of events that results in the raising of the verb over
the subject (that is, triggered inversion occurs). Thus, the VS order in the
b-line can be explained in simple syntactic terms (thereby further undermining

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50. Or the initial PP may specify the type of result if the preposition specifies manner
rather than means; see M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 10–31* (New York: Doubleday, forthcoming).

51. "A set is any collection of objects, which are described as its members. We can specify
a set by reference to a property which all members share: for example, we can speak of a set
of British towns with a population over 1 million, or a set of English sentences. Alternatively,
a set can be specified by listing its members: for example, there is a three-membered set
whose members are Margaret Thatcher, the number 7, and the city of San Francisco. As this
example indicates, the members of a set need not 'belong together' in any natural fashion"
(K. Malmkjær, *The Linguistics Encyclopedia* [London: Routledge, 1991] 401; see also J. van
der Does, "Set Theory," in *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* [ed. R. E. Asher; Ox-
ford: Pergamon, 1994] 3861–64).

any sort of chiastic, or similar "stylistic," analysis). There are many of these focus-fronted PPs[52] or even focus-fronted objects[53] in Proverbs.

As a last example, the a–line in Prov 22:23 presents a focus-fronted subject. One environment in which these unambiguously appear is within dependent clauses, clauses that should exhibit triggered inversion to VS order but do not.

(33)   CSV[54]

because Yʜᴡʜ pleads their case,	כי יהוה יריב ריבם
and (he) robs their robbers (of) life (22:23)	וקבע את־קבעיהם נפש

Example (33) presents one of those less–common situations in which a two–line proverb is dependent on the previous context, in this case, the preceding verse (22:22). The preceding verse is an exhortation to avoid oppressing the lowly and poor and suggests a legal context. In the a–line of Prov 22:23, then, the legal language is continued, and a rather forceful motivation is given for abiding by this advice: because "it is Yʜᴡʜ" that will take up their case against you if you oppress them. To make this point unambiguously, the subject noun phrase "Yʜᴡʜ" is focus-fronted within the subordinate clause. That is, the focus-fronting results in SV order even though the syntactic environment is a dependent clause and normally exhibits VS due to triggered inversion. Such examples, of which there are many, indicate that the triggered inversion to VS order can be superficially negated by the movement of a focus-fronted constituent to a position even higher than the raised verb. SV examples like the one in (33) also demonstrate that even SV order need not present an unmarked, basic word order clause.

V. Conclusion

I have focused on data in the book of Proverbs to further our understanding of BH word order. Using both typological and generative principles, I have asserted that BH proverbs exhibit a basic SV word order. However, at the outset I also suggested that BH proverbs provide a better source of data for a basic word order analysis than BH narrative. If so, then word order studies should reevaluate the rest of the data in the Hebrew Bible in light of my conclusions here. In other words, I suggest that the syntax of BH narrative should be studied in light of BH proverbs and not the other way around.

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52. See also 4:12; 7:11, 23; 9:11; 10:12, 13, 19; 11:5, 7, 10, 11, 14; 12:8; 14:10, 13, 14, 20, 23, 26, 32, 33; 16:6, 10, 12, 33; 17:14; 18:1, 3, 10, 12, 20; 19:3; 21:11; 24:3, 25; 25:15; 26:20, 24; 28:12, 21, 28 (2×); 29:1, 2, 16, 18, 19; 30:21.

53. See also 5:3, 12; 8:7; 13:5, 21 (2×); 15:25; 16:4; 18:18, 23; 20:14; 21:22; 23:21; 24:2, 26; 29:11.

54. See also 1:16, 32(2×); 2:6, 10, 21 (2×), 22 (2×); 3:26; 8:35; 11:31; 23:21; 28:22; 30:33.