

Grammatical Analysis of Exodus 14:31

Exodus 14:31
וַיִּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּירָאוּ הָעָם אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ בִּיהוָה וּבְמֹשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ: פ
NRSV Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.
NAS And when Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.
KJV And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.
NIV And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

Observation:

This verse comes at the conclusion of God's mighty hand being exercised against Egypt. The people of Israel are finally able to catch their collective breath, and look around to witness the true power of what the Lord had done on their behalf. In turn, they fear YHWH and believe in his miraculous power to save, as well as the appointed leadership role of Moses. It is interesting that they had not stopped to marvel beforehand, as the miracle of the Red Sea was occurring. Only in the aftermath do they truly appreciate it.

וַיִּרְא

ו

Particle: Conjunction

וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ

Verb: Qal/Waw-consec/3rd Imperfect, Singular

This verb simply means “to see” and is being used to refer to Israel seeing the work of YHWH against the Egyptians. It is interesting that it is in the imperfect tense, carrying a connotation of incompleteness. Therefore, the seeing of God’s work was ongoing. The particle conjunction at the beginning of the verse ties it closely with 14:30, a continuation of what was witnessed – the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל – **Noun:** Proper, Absolute

This is the proper name of Israel. Taken with the previous verb, it is translated in the English (with the exception of the NRSV) as “And [when] Israel saw...” It is interesting that the conjunction is paired with the verb in the Hebrew, but is changed to make more syntactic sense in the English, with the proper noun Israel between the two.

אֶת־הַיָּד	אֵת	Particle: Direct object marker
	הַ	Particle: Article
	יָד	Noun: Common, Singular, Absolute

The particles: direct object marker/article – tie the seeing of Israel to that which they collectively saw. The noun in the Hebrew simply means “hand” but is translated as “(great) work/power” in the English versions. The “hand” reference ties back into God’s promise to deliver Israel. It is odd to me that such an obvious reference was left out...

I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. – Exodus 3:19 (NRSV)

הַגְּדֹלָה	הַ	Particle: Article
	גְּדוֹלָה	Adjective: Singular, Absolute

The particle article connects the previous noun, “hand” with the adjective which is translated as *great* (in magnitude and extent) in the English. Again, I would have expected this to be more directly translated “mighty hand” as in previous verses.

אֲשֶׁר – **Particle:** Relative

This particle is simply being used as a sign of relation between “mighty hand” or “great work/power” and the verb which follows it – describing the action that was caused.

עָשָׂה – **Verb:** Qal/Perfect/3rd Singular

This verb, literally “to do/make” is connected via the preceding relative particle to the powerful act/hand which God has just demonstrated. Singular 3rd person usage lends itself well to a more literal translation of “mighty hand” rather than “great work.”

יְהוָה – **Noun:** Proper, Absolute

This is the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, God’s proper and personal name revealed for the first time to Moses. Before that time, God was simply known as a proper, conceptual title of “God Almighty.” The use of the personal name here indicates that through their suffering, deliverance, and now victory against their captor, Israel as God’s children have come to know and fully appreciate the magnificence of their heavenly Father.

בְּמִצְרַיִם	ב	Particle: Preposition
	מִצְרַיִם	Noun: Proper, Absolute

The particle preposition is tying the noun immediately following, Egyptian(s), to the noun which precedes it, YHWH. His action against the Egyptians has caused a re-action. The events which have been witnessed, between God and Egypt evokes emotion.

וַיִּירָאוּ	ו	Particle: Conjunction
	יָרָא	Verb: Qal/Waw-consec/3 rd Imperfect, Plural

The particle conjunction links the beginning of this sentence with the preceding one. The NRSV translates it as “So” whereas the KJV translates it as “and.” The NIV and NAS simply omit the particle conjunction altogether, showing causation by adding the word “when” at the beginning of 14:31.

Either way, as a direct results of what God did to Egypt, fear has come over the Israelite people. It is Imperfect, Waw-consecutive – showing succession/temporal sequence.

הָעָם	ה	Particle: Article
	עָם	Noun: Common, Singular, Absolute

The particle article links the verb *fear* to the *people* who are presently (in the imperfect) experiencing it. It should be noted that the word *people* can be taken to mean Israel, since they are logically the only ones left, after the Egyptian army has been drowned. The

vagueness however, leaves room for broader interpretation of *all* people whom may have heard of these events, in which case regional fear of YHWH was at an all-time high.

אֶת־יְהוָה אֶת **Particle:** Direct object marker
יְהוָה **Noun:** Proper, Absolute

The particle used here is as a direct object marker, connected to the name of God – YHWH. It is a continuation of the verb *fear* and the noun *people*. Here, YHWH is the object of their fear, and also the cause of it because of the Egyptian outcome.

וַיֵּאֱמְנוּ ו **Particle:** Conjunction
אֱמַן **Verb:** Hiphil/Waw-consec/3rd Imperfect, Plural

Here, the particle conjunction can simply be thought of as “and” which is translated consistently throughout the English versions. It simply connects the first half of the sentence to that which follows. In this case, the verb means “confirm/support” which is translated in the English as “believed” or “put their trust in [YHWH].”

The Hiphil, imperfect, waw-consecutive combination shows causation along with succession and temporal sequence. So, the belief of the people is directly caused by their fear, which is a result of God’s action against Egypt.

בַּיהוָה ב **Particle:** Preposition
יְהוָה **Noun:** Proper, Absolute

Here the particle preposition links the belief/support/trust of the people to the proper, absolute noun YHWH. God has awestruck the people by what he has done to Egypt.

וּבְמֹשֶׁה ו **Particle:** Conjunction
ב **Particle:** Preposition
מֹשֶׁה **Noun:** Proper, Absolute

Here, the particle conjunction links the belief/support/trust of the people to the proper, absolute noun that follows. So, not only are the people fearing YHWH, but they also give this support *to* Moses as well – all as a result of what YHWH, not Moses has done.

עֶבְדוֹ: עֶבֶד **Noun:** Common, Singular, Construct
פ **Suffix:** 3rd Masculine, Singular

Here, the noun *servant* refers to Moses, and the masculine singular suffix is reflected by the word *his* in all the English translations. YHWH and Moses are closely linked in the Hebrew, and Moses is given the title of “servant” following his name. Due to the nuance of the language differences, “his servant” precedes Moses in each English rendition.