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Concessive Clause: Biblical Hebrew

A concessive clause leads one to be surprised by the matrix clause, because the situations that the two clauses denote are typically thought to be incongruent. In other words, the matrix clause is true in spite of the fact that the concessive clause is also true. For example, consider the sentence "*Even though the weather report that morning had predicted sun all day long*, a heavy thunderstorm began at noon and lasted the rest of the day" (concessive clauses are italicized throughout this entry). The first clause ("even though the weather report…all day long") is a concessive clause, because it indicates a situation (a recent professional prediction of sunshine all day long) that leads one to expect that a situation such as that expressed in the matrix clause ("a heavy thunderstorm began at noon and lasted the rest of the day") should not occur.

English concessive clauses often begin with 'in spite of the fact that', 'even though', or 'although'. In Biblical Hebrew, a concessive clause can begin (1) with a bare subject.

(1) אֲנַחְנוּ טְמֵאִים לְנֶפֶשׁ אָדָם לָמָּה נִגָּרַע לְבִלְתִּי הַקְרִב אֶת־קָרְבַּן יְהוָה
'ănaḥnū ṭəmē'īm lə-nɛp̄ɛš 'ăḏām lāmmā niggāraʻ lə-ḇiltī haqriḇ 'ɛt-qårban YHWH
we unclean due.to-body.of person why we.are.debarred NEG to.offer ACC-offering.of YHWH
'*Although we are unclean due to a corpse*, why must we be debarred from offering YHWH's offering?' (Num. 9.7).

Alternately, a concessive clause in Biblical Hebrew can begin with *waw* followed by (2) the subject or (3) the predicate; אִם *'im* followed

by (4) the subject or (5) the predicate; גַּם *gam* followed by (6) the subject or (7) the predicate; (8) גַּם כִּי *gam kī* followed by a *yiqtol* verb; (9) כִּי גַם *kī gam* followed by the predicate; כִּי *kī* followed by (10) the subject or (11) the predicate (but see Aejmelaeus 1986:198–199); or (12) עַל *ʿal* followed by the predicate.

(2) וְאַתֶּם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים חֲשָׁבָהּ לְטֹבָה
wə-ʾattɛm ḥăšaḇtɛm ʿalay rāʿā ʾĕlōhīm ḥăšāḇắh lə-ṭōḇắ
and.you you.planned against.me evil God planned.it for-good
'Although you planned evil against me, God planned it for good' (Gen. 50.20).

(3) וְלַמֵּד אֹתָם הַשְׁכֵּם וְלַמֵּד וְאֵינָם שֹׁמְעִים
wə-lammēḏ ʾōṯām haškēm wə-lammēḏ wə-ʾēnắm šōmʿīm
and-teaching them repeatedly and.teaching and-NEG.them listening
'Although I taught them persistently', they would not listen' (Jer. 32.33).

(4) אִם־עֲוֺנֵינוּ עָנוּ בָנוּ יְהֹוָה עֲשֵׂה
ʾim-ʿăwōnēnū ʿānū ḇắnū YHWH ʿăśē
if our.sins they.testify against.us YHWH act!
'Although our sins testify against us', act, O YHWH!' (Jer. 14.7).

(5) אִם־יִתֶּן־לִי בָלָק מְלֹא בֵיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲבֹר
ʾim-yittɛn-lī ḇắlắq məlō ḇēṯō kɛsɛp̄ wə-zắhắḇ lō ʾūḵal la-ʿăḇōr
if-he.gives-to.me Balak fullness.of his.house silver and-gold NEG I.am.able to-transgress
'Even if Balak were to give to me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to transgress' (Num. 22.18).

(6) גַּם־אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחְנָה וְאָנֹכִי לֹא אֶשְׁכָּחֵךְ
Gam-ʾēllɛ ṯiškaḥnắ wə-ʾắnōḵī lō ʾɛškắḥēḵ
even-these they.will.forget and-I NEG I.will.forget
'Although these may forget', I will not forget' (Isa. 49.15).

(7) בְּחָנוּנִי גַּם־רָאוּ פָעֳלִי
bəḥắnūnī gam-rắʾū p̄ắʿŏlī
they.tested.me even-they.saw my.deed
'They tested me, *although they had seen my deeds*' (Ps. 95.9).

(8) גַּם כִּי־תַרְבּוּ תְפִלָּה אֵינֶנִּי שֹׁמֵעַ
gam kī-ṯarbū ṯəp̄illắ ʾēnɛnnī šōmēaʿ
even although-you.multiply prayer NEG.there.is.me listening
'Although you pray repeatedly', I will not listen' (Isa. 1.15).

(9) יָצָא לִמְלֹךְ כִּי גַם בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ נוֹלַד רָשׁ
yāṣắ limlōk kī gam bə-malḵūṯō nōlaḏ rắš
he.goes.out to-reign although even in-his.kingdom born poor
'He may emerge to reign, *although he was born poor in his kingdom*' (Qoh. 4.14).

(10) כִּי־תְאֵנָה לֹא־תִפְרָח...וַאֲנִי בַּיהוָה אֶעְלוֹזָה
kī-ṯəʾēnā lō-ṯip̄rắḥ...wa-ʾănī ba-YHWH ʾɛʿlōzắ
if-fig NEG-it.blossoms...and-I in-YHWH I.shall.exult
'*Even though the fig does not blossom*,... I shall exult in YHWH' (Hab. 3.17–18).

(11) כִּי־יִפֹּל לֹא־יוּטָל
kī-yippōl lō-yūṭāl
if-he.falls NEG-he.is.thrown
'*Even though he fall*, he will not be thrown' (Ps. 37.24).

(12) וּלְחַטָּאתִי תִדְרוֹשׁ עַל־דַּעְתְּךָ כִּי־לֹא אֶרְשָׁע
u-l-ḥaṭṭắṯī tiḏrōš ʿal-daʿtəḵắ kī-lō ʾɛršắʿ
and.for.my.sin you.seek in.addition-your.knowledge that-NEG I.am.guilty
'And you seek out my sin *although you know that I am not guilty*' (Job 10.6–7).

Instead of a concessive clause, one can also have a concessive phrase that begins with (13) -בְּ *bə-* or (14) עַל *ʿal*.

(13) בְּכָל־זֹאת חָטְאוּ־עוֹד
bə-ḵắl-zōṯ ḥắṭʾū-ʿōḏ
in-all-this they.sinned-still
'*In spite of all this*, they still sinned' (Ps. 78.32).

(14) יֵשׁ־מִקְוֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־זֹאת
yēš-miqwɛ lə-yiśrắʾēl ʿal-zōṯ
exists-hope for-Israel in.addition-this
'There is hope for Israel *in spite of this*' (Ezra 10.2).

Typically, the concessive clause precedes the matrix clause, but there are numerous exceptions. In particular, a concessive clause that begins with *waw* may either precede (2, 3) or follow (15, 16) the matrix clause. In addition, there are several examples where a כִּי *kī* clause that follows its matrix clause is typically translated as concessive (17, 18). Aejmelaeus (1986:205–207), however, has argued that all putative examples of a concessive clause beginning with כִּי *kī* following the matrix clause should be understood as causal (17) or object (18) clauses rather than as concessive clauses.

(15) וְקִנֵּא אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְהִיא לֹא נִטְמָאָה

wə-qinnē ʾet-ʾištō wə-hī lō niṭmaʾå̄

and-he.is.jealous ACC-his.wife and-she NEG she.defiled.herself

'He is jealous of his wife, *although she has not defiled herself*' (Num. 5.14).

(16) אֲאַזֶּרְךָ וְלֹא יְדַעְתָּנִי

ʾă-ʾazzerkå̄ wə-lō yədaʿtå̄nī

I.gird.you and-NEG you.know.me

'I gird you *although you do not know me*' (Isa. 45.5).

(17) וְלֹא־נָחָם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא

we-lō-nåḥå̄m ʾĕlōhīm dɛrɛk ʾɛrɛṣ pəlištīm kī qårōb hū

and-NEG-he.led God way.of land.of Philistines for near it

'God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines (*for/although*) *it was near*' (Exod. 13.17).

(18) וְלֹא־יֹאבֶה כִּי תַרְבֶּה־שֹׁחַד

we-lō yōbɛ kī ṭarbɛ-šōḥad

and-not-he.will.accept (*that/although*) you.multiply-gift

'He will not be willing *although you multiply gifts*'

or 'He will not accept your multiplication of gifts' (Prov. 6.35).

A single matrix clause can have multiple concessive clauses. In such cases, the introductory particle can be repeated before each concessive clause (19). Alternatively, the introductory particle can begin the first concessive clause, and the other concessive clauses can begin with either a *waw* or be unmarked (20).

(19) כִּי־תַעֲלֶה בָבֶל הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכִי תְבַצֵּר מְרוֹם עֻזָּהּ מֵאִתִּי יָבֹאוּ שֹׁדְדִים לָהּ

kī-taʿăle bå̄bɛl haš-šå̄mayim wə-kī təbaṣṣēr mərōm ʿuzzåh mē-ʾittī yå̄bōʾū šōdədīm låh

if-she.ascends Babylon the-heavens and-if she.fortifies height.of her.strength from-me they.will.come destroyers to.her

'*Even though Babylon ascends to the heavens and even though she fortifies her elevated stronghold*, from me destroyers will come against her' (Jer. 51.53).

(20) כִּי־תְאֵנָה לֹא־תִפְרָח וְאֵין יְבוּל בַּגְּפָנִים כִּחֵשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה־זַיִת וּשְׁדֵמוֹת לֹא־עָשָׂה אֹכֶל גָּזַר מִמִּכְלָה צֹאן וְאֵין בָּקָר בָּרְפָתִים וַאֲנִי בַּיהוָה אֶעְלוֹזָה

kī-təʾēnå̄ lō-tip̄raḥ wə-ʾēn yəḇūl bag-gəp̄å̄nīm kīḥēš maʿăśē-zayit u-šḏēmōṯ lō-ʿå̄śå̄ ʾōḵɛl gå̄zar mim-miḵlå̄ ṣōn wə-ʾēn bå̄qår bå̄-rp̄å̄ṯīm wa-ʾănī ba-YHWH ʾɛʿlōzå̄

if-fig NEG-it.blossoms and-NEG.exists produce in.the-vines fails.to.appear produce.of-olive and-fields NEG-it.produces food it.is.cut.off from.pen flock and-NEG.exists cattle in.the.stalls and-I in-YHWH I.shall.exult

'*Even though the fig does not blossom, and (even though) there is no produce on vines, (and even though) olive produce fails, and (even though) fields do not produce food, (and even though) flocks are cut off from the fold, and (even though) there are no cattle in the stalls*, I shall exult in YHWH' (Hab. 3.17–18).

Some authorities (e.g., Arnold and Choi 2003:184; Joüon and Muraoka 2006:601–602) distinguish two types of concessive clauses. Concessive clauses that communicate the violation of expected causality are to be translated 'although' and begin with כִּי *kī*, עַל *ʿal*, גַּם כִּי *gam kī*, or *waw*, whereas concessive clauses that communicate the violation of expected conditionality are to be translated 'even though' and begin with אִם *ʾim* or כִּי *kī*. This distinction of meaning can be subtle, and the situation is further complicated by the fact that both types can begin with כִּי *kī*. Perhaps for this reason, translations often use the noncommittal 'though' rather than 'although' or 'even though', and the same concession may be translated differently by different translators. For example, in Genesis 50.20 (example 1 above), the NJPS translation introduces the concessive clause with 'although' whereas the NRSV translation uses 'even though'.

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Concessive Clauses: Rabbinic Hebrew

A concessive clause is a subordinate clause which implies a relation of unexpectedness between the situation it describes and the one described in the main clause. Most concessive clauses in Rabbinic Hebrew are introduced by conjunctions containing the particle אף *ʾap̄* 'also, even', e.g., אפילו *ʾap̄illu* 'even, even if', אף כש־ *ʾap̄ ke-še-* 'although, even if', (־ש) אף על פי *ʾap̄ ʿal pi (še-)* 'although', אף על פי כן *ʾap̄ ʿal pi ken* 'nonetheless'.

An אפילו *ʾap̄illu* clause may either precede or follow the main clause, e.g., ואפילו המלך שואל בשלומו, לא ישיבנו *we-ʾap̄illu ham-melek šo'el bi-šlomo, lo yešibennu* 'Even if the king greets him, he may not answer him' (Mishna Berakhot 5.1); מצות חליצה בשלושה דיינים, אפילו שלשתן הדיוטות *miṣwat ḥaliṣa bi-šloša dayyanim, ʾap̄illu šloštan hedyoṭot* 'The rite of ḥaliṣa is [to be performed] before three [judges], even if the three are laymen' (Mishna Yevamot 12.1). Instead of אפילו *ʾap̄illu*, which regularly introduces the concessive clause, one may find (very rarely) אפילו ש־ *ʾap̄illu še-* 'even that' and אפילו אם *ʾap̄illu ʾim* 'even if'. אפילו *ʾap̄illu* is also regularly used before any part of the sentence to imply that what follows is unexpected and surprising, e.g., מוכר לו פירות אפילו בשעת הזרע *moker lo perot ʾap̄illu bi-š'at haz-zera'* 'One may sell him produce even in time of sowing' (Mishna Shevi'it 5.8); אפילו חלמון שלה אסור *ʾap̄illu ḥelmon šel-lah ʾasur* 'Even its yolk is forbidden' (Mishna Terumot 10.12).

The conjunction אף כש־ *ʾap̄ ke-še-* is uncommon and is used only before a perfect or imperfect verb, e.g., אף כשאמרו בית שמי *ʾap̄ ke-še-ʾamru bet šammay* 'Although when the School of Shammai said [this]' (Mishna Nazir 2.1); קדושתן אף כשיהו שוממים *qedušatan ʾap̄ ke-šey-yehu šomemim* 'Their sanctity [remains] although they are desolate' (Mishna Megilla 3.3).

Unlike אפילו *ʾap̄illu* clauses, (־ש) אף על פי *ʾap̄ ʿal pi (še-)* clauses do not appear in sentence initial position, e.g., כל הנולדים מן הסוס, אף על פי שאביהן חמור, מותרין זה עם זה *kol han-noladim min has-sus, ʾap̄ ʿal pi še-ʾabihen ḥamor, mutarin ze ʿim ze* 'All offspring of a horse, even if sired by an ass, are permitted [to be yoked] together' (Mishna Kilayim 8:4). ש־ *še-* 'that' may be omitted before a participle, e.g., אנטיכי, אף על פי גרופה, אין שותין ממנה *ʾanṭiki, ʾap̄ ʿal pi grup̄a, ʾen šotin mim-menna* 'Antikhi, even though it was cleared of its ashes, one may not drink from it' (Mishna Shabbat 3.4). אף על פי כן *ʾap̄ ʿal pi ken* is a clause in its own right, e.g., המחזיר חוב בשביעית יאמר לו: משמט אני. אמר לו: אף על פי כן, יקבל ממנו *ham-maḥzir ḥob baš-šebi'it yomar lo: mešammeṭ ʾani. ʾamar lo: ʾap̄ ʿal pi ken, yeqabbel mim-mennu* 'One who would repay a debt in the Seventh Year, he [the creditor] must say to him: I cancel it. If he replied: Nonetheless, he may receive [it] from him' (Mishna Shevi'it 8.10). אף על פי כן *ʾap̄ ʿal pi ken* may also follow a concessive clause in order to emphasize the unexpected relation between the concessive and the main clause, e.g., ועל כולם אף על פי שאמרה: בליבי היה להתקדש לו, אף על פי כן, אינה מקודשת *we-ʿal kullam ʾap̄ ʿal pi še-ʾamra: be-libbi haya lehitqaddeš lo, ʾap̄ ʿal pi ken ʾenah mequddešet* 'In all such cases, even though she said: It was in my heart to become engaged to him, in spite of that, she has not become engaged' (Mishna Qiddushin 2.3).

Due to the close affinity between concessive and conditional clauses a formally conditional clause can sometimes be understood as concessive, e.g., אם יהיו כל חכמי ישראל בכף מאזנים ואליעזר בן הורקנוס בכף שנייה, מכריע הוא את כולם *ʾim yihyu kol ḥakme yisra'el be-kap̄ moznayim we-ʾeli'ezer ben horqenus be-kap̄ šeniyya, makria' hu ʾet kullam* '[Even] if all the sages of Israel were on one scale of the balance and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus on the other, he would outweigh them all' (Mishna ʾAvot 2.8). A concessive clause may also be introduced by the simple conjunction ו־ *we-* 'and': נשביתי, וטהורה אני *nišbeti, u-ṭehora ʾani* 'I was taken captive, nevertheless I am pure'.

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