

HEBREW BASICS FOR READING

VERBS

- The typical meanings of the verbal conjugations:

Qal – active basic (*to kill*)

Niphal – passive (*to be killed*)

Piel – active intensive (*to slaughter*), or repetitive, or factitive (of stative verbs)

Pual – passive of the Piel (*to be slaughtered*)

Hiphil – active causative (*to cause ___ to kill*)

Hophal – passive of the Hiphil (*to be caused to kill*)

Hithpael – reflexive or reciprocal action (*to kill oneself/one another*)

- Paradigms for Perfect, Imperfect, and Participle of Regular Qal Verbs

Qal Perfect

3ms	קָטַל	קָטְלוּ	3cp
3fs	קָטְלָהּ	-----	
2ms	קָטַלְתָּ	קָטַלְתֶּם	2mp
2fs	קָטַלְתְּ	קָטַלְתֶּן	2fp
1cs	קָטַלְתִּי	קָטַלְתֶּם	1cp

Qal Imperfect

3ms	יִקְטֹל	יִקְטְלוּ	3mp
3fs	תִּקְטֹל	תִּקְטְלֶנָּה	3fp
2ms	תִּקְטֹל	תִּקְטְלוּ	2mp
2fs	תִּקְטְלִי	תִּקְטְלֶנָּה	2fp
1cs	אֶקְטֹל	נִקְטֹל	1cp

Qal Participle

ms	קָטֹל	קָטְלִים	mp
fs	קָטְלָת	קָטְלוֹת	fp

- Perfect* verbs express action which is completed. The basic/default English translation of the Perfect is simple past (killed), perfect (has killed), or pluperfect (had killed). Other uses/translations are possible, as outlined in Hebrew grammars.
- Imperfect* verbs express action which is incomplete. The basic/default English translation of the Imperfect is future (will kill). It can also indicate ongoing action in the past, present, or future (e.g. was killing). Or it can indicate a modal sense (would/could/should/may/might kill). Other uses/translations are possible, as outlined in Hebrew grammars.
- A *vav-with-A-vowel* (ו or וַ) at the beginning of a word almost always marks a *Vav-Consecutive Imperfect*. The translation will be simple past (and ___ killed). The consonant ׀, ׀, ׀, or ׀ following the initial *vav* will be the Imperfect preformative letter (not a part of the verbal root) and will help to indicate the subject (e.g. וַאֲקַטֵּל and I killed).
- A *vav-shewa* on a Perfect form (וַקָּטַל) usually indicates a *Vav-Consecutive Perfect*. The basic/default English translation is future, or it may continue the sense of the previous verb (e.g., after an imperative, it may count as another imperative).

7. The clue for recognizing Qal Participles is an initial *holem* with no preformative letter before the root (אמר). Participles in the Piel, Pual, Hiphil, and Hophal have a מ-preformative, and the Hithpael Participle has a תמ-preformative.
8. Hebrew *participles* (unlike Greek participles) are primarily *adjectives*, not finite verb forms with tense distinctions. Participles and adjectives have the same three basic uses:

Attributive participle: המְלִיךְ הָאָמֵר – “the king who is/was saying” or “who says”

Attributive adjective: הַמְּלִיךְ הַגָּדוֹל – “the great king”

Predicate participle: אָמֵר הַמְּלִיךְ – “The king is/was/will be saying.”

Predicate adjective: גָּדוֹל הַמְּלִיךְ – “The king is great.”

Substantive participle: אָמֵר – “one who says,” “a say-er”

Substantive adjective: גָּדוֹל – “a great one”

9. Participles have number and gender but not person. Therefore, predicate participles require an explicit subject noun or pronoun. Participles are not negated by לא, but rather by אֵין, often with a pronominal suffix on אֵין indicating the subject of the negated participle. Examples:

הַמְּלִיךְ אָמֵר – The king was saying.

אֲנִי אָמֵר – I was saying.

הַמְּלִיךְ אֵינּוֹ אָמֵר – The king [he]-was-not saying. [Note אֵין + 3ms suffix.]

אֵינָם אָמְרִים – They-were-not saying. [Note אֵין + 3mp suffix.]

10. *Volitives* are verb forms which express the speaker’s will for another subject. They are sometimes followed by הֵנָּה, the *particle of entreaty*, which may express politeness or urgency but is usually not translated.

Jussives express the speaker’s will for a third person subject. The ms Jussive בִּנֵה (from בנה) means “let him build” or “may he build.”

Imperatives express the speaker’s will for a second person subject. The mp Imperative שְׁמַעוּ means “listen!”

Cohortatives express the speaker’s will for the speaker’s own self (or selves), or the speaker’s willing self-commitment. The 1cp cohortative נִרְדֹּף means “let us pursue” or “may we pursue,” or even “we *shall* pursue.”

11. Imperative verb forms are never negated. In order to express a negative command, Hebrew uses the negative particle אַל or לֹא plus a 2nd person Imperfect form.

אַל תִּירָא “Do not fear!”

לֹא תִירָא “You shall not fear” (Imperative sense)

or “You will not fear” (Imperfect indicative sense).

12. Different verbal forms are negated by different particles:

לֹא negates Perfects and Imperfects.

לֹא־ negates Volitives (Jussives, Imperatives*, and Cohortatives).

לֹא־נִי negates Participles.

לֹא־יִנְיָ negates Infinitive Constructs.

* However, note #11 above!

NOUNS

13. The word אֵת or אֶת־ is most commonly the Definite Direct Object marker, indicating that the following word is the direct object of the verb. (This is frequently omitted in poetry.) The word אֵת or אֶת־ can also be a preposition meaning “with.”

14. Distinctive construct endings:

ָ – feminine *singular* construct (_____ of...)

ִּ – masculine *plural* construct (_____s of...)

15. Construct chains, definiteness: Two or more nouns in a row usually comprise a *construct chain*. Construct chains are entirely definite or entirely indefinite, depending on the definiteness of the final noun. The final noun is considered definite if it (a) has the definite article, (b) is a name/proper noun, or (c) has a pronominal suffix.

16. Construct chains, meaning: A Hebrew construct chain creates a genitive relationship which is often translated as “_____ of _____,” but this genitive relationship can have a number of senses, as outlined in Hebrew grammars. As just three examples:

genitive of possession (בֵּית דָּוִד, the house of David – *David's house*)

attributive genitive (אִישׁ קִדְּוָה, a man of holiness = a *holy man*)

genitive of material (אֲרוֹן זָהָב, an ark of gold = an ark *made of/consisting of gold*)

17. Students should become familiar with the irregular construct forms of some of the most common nouns:

בֵּית הָאִישׁ – the *house of* the man

תּוֹךְ הָאִישׁ – the *midst of* the man (usually: בְּתוֹךְ, in the midst of...)

מוֹת הָאִישׁ – the *death of* the man

בַּת הָאִישׁ – the *daughter of* the man

בְּנֵי הָאִישׁ – the *sons of* the man

יָמֵי הָאִישׁ – the *days of* the man

מַלְכֵי הָאִישׁ – the *kings of* the man

עֲבָדֵי הָאִישׁ – the *servants of the man*
 אֱלֹהֵי הָאִישׁ – the *God of the man* / the *gods of the man*
 עֵינֵי הָאִישׁ – the *eyes of the man*
 מֵי הָאִישׁ – the *waters of the man*
 דְּבָרֵי הָאִישׁ – the *words of the man*
 אַנְשֵׁי הָאִישׁ – the *men of the man*
 עָרֵי הָאִישׁ – the *cities of the man*

18. Hebrew nouns are usually formed from three-letter verbal roots, often by adding a מ or ת to the front of the root, and sometimes adding a הָ or ת־ feminine ending.

יָלַד – to bear a child	→	יָלֵד – child
עָבַד – to labor, serve	→	עֲבוּדָה – service, servitude
שָׁפַט – to judge	→	מִשְׁפָּט – justice
לָחַם – to wage war	→	מִלְחָמָה – warfare, battle
הִלֵּל – to praise	→	תְּהִלָּה – praise, song of praise [doubled ל from הלל]

PRONOUNS

19. Independent pronouns are always nominative, acting as the subject of the verb or the subject of a verbless clause. They are unnecessary with Perfect and Imperfect verbs; therefore, when appearing with these verbs they are usually emphatic.

3ms	הוא	הֵם	3cp
3fs	היא	הֵנָּה	3fp
2ms	אתָ	אתֶם	2mp
2fs	אתְּ	אתֵּן	2fp
1cs	אֲנִי or אֲנֹכִי	אֲנֹכֶנּוּ	1cp

אֲנִי יְהוָה – I am Yahweh
 אֲנֹכֶנּוּ נְבִיאִים – We are prophets.
 אֲנֹכִי עָמַדְתִּי – I *myself* stood
 הוּא עָשָׂה – he *himself* has done [it]

20. Recognize pronominal (that is, pronoun) suffixes on nouns, prepositions, and also on the definite direct object marker אֵת. Note that with a pronominal suffix, the DDO marker אֵת usually appears with an initial *holem* vowel (e.g. אֵתִי, *me*).

3ms	לוֹ – to <i>him</i>	דְּבָרוֹ – <i>his</i> word	אֵתוֹ – (DO) <i>him</i>
3fs	לָהּ – to <i>her</i>	דְּבָרָהּ – <i>her</i> word	אֵתָהּ – (DO) <i>her</i>
2ms	לְךָ – to <i>you (ms)</i>	דְּבָרְךָ – <i>your (ms)</i> word	אֵתְּךָ – (DO) <i>you (ms)</i>

2fs	לְּךָ – to you (fs)	דְּבַרְךָ – your (fs) word	אֶתְּךָ – (DO) you (fs)
1cs	לִּי – to me	דְּבָרִי – my word	אֶתִּי – (DO) me
3mp	לָהֶם – to them (m)	דְּבָרָם – their (m) word	אֹתָם or אֶתְהֶם – (DO) them (m)
3fp	לָהֶן – to them (f)	דְּבָרָן – their (f) word	אֹתָן or אֶתְהֶן – (DO) them (f)
2mp	לָכֶם – to you (mp)	דְּבַרְכֶם – your (mp) word	אֹתְכֶם – (DO) you (mp)
2fp	לָכֶן – to you (fp)	דְּבַרְכֶן – your (fp) word	אֹתְכֶן – (DO) you (fp)
1cp	לָנוּ – to us	דְּבַרְנוּ – our word	אֹתָנוּ – (DO) us

21. Plural nouns take Type II suffixes which can be recognized by the *yod* (י) between the noun and the suffix. With the 1cs forms, the suffix itself is a *yod*, and so the *vowel preceding the yod* is the basis for distinguishing between singular and plural nouns: one dot (*hireq*) precedes the *yod* suffix with singular nouns (יִ).

דְּבָרוֹ – his word	דְּבָרָיו – his words	(the <i>yod</i> indicates a plural noun)
דְּבָרָם – their word	דְּבָרֵיהֶם – their words	(the <i>yod</i> indicates a plural noun)
דְּבָרִי – my word	דְּבָרַי – my words	(1cs forms both have <i>yod</i> ; note diff. vowel)

22. While there is some variation in pronominal endings, the varied forms for each PNG are closely associated and should be learned and recognized. They can be summarized as follows, a listing which includes Type II suffixes (used with plural nouns) and object suffixes (placed at end of some verb forms to indicate the direct object).

3ms	<i>him, his</i>	וּ	יוּ	הוּ
3fs	<i>her</i>	וּ	יְהִי	הָ
2ms	<i>you, your</i>	ךָ	יְךָ	
2fs	<i>you, your</i>	ךָ	יְךָ	
1cs	<i>me, my</i>	יִ	יִ	נִי
3mp	<i>them, their</i>	ם	יְהֶם	הֶם
3fp	<i>them, their</i>	ן	יְהֶן	הֶן
2mp	<i>you, your</i>	כֶם	יְכֶם	
2fp	<i>you, your</i>	כֶן	יְכֶן	
1cp	<i>us, our</i>	נוּ	יְנוּ	

PREPOSITIONS AND CONJUNCTIONS

23. The three *prefixed prepositions* בְּ-כִּי-לֵךְ are joined to their object noun, which can present a challenge for recognizing both the preposition and the word. Ordinarily, an *a-vowel* under these prefixed prepositions indicates that its noun is definite:

כְּמֶלֶךְ “like the king” vs. כְּמֶלֶךְ “like a king”

24. The preposition מִן is *sometimes prefixed* directly to its noun. When prefixed, מִן loses its *nun* and simply appears as מ or מ joined to the front of a word.

מִכָּל “from all

מֵאֵלִים “from Elim”

מִן־הַהָר or מֵהָר “from the mountain”

25. The *preposition meanings* listed in an elementary Hebrew grammar represent only two or three of the most common meanings/functions. Frequently, however, these most common meanings will not apply to a particular usage, and *the reader should consult the lexicon or an intermediate grammar for a more complete listing* of possible meanings and translational options. As examples, both מִן and כִּי can be *causal* (“because of”), and both כִּי and עַל can have an *adversative* sense (“against”).

26. *Lamed of possession*: Hebrew does not employ a verb meaning “to have.” In order to indicate *possession*, Hebrew uses the particles יֵשׁ “there is” or אֵין “there is not” — or a form of the verb היה in past or future contexts (“there was” or “there will be”) — along with the preposition ל:

יֵשׁ בַּיִת לְאִישׁ – There is a house *belonging to* the man. = The man has a house.

וְלֹחֲמָהּ אֵין יְלָדִים – But *belonging to* Hannah there are not children

= But Hannah has no children.

הָיָה לְאַבְרָם צֹאן – There were *belonging to* Abram sheep. = Abram had sheep.

לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ בָנִים – There will not be *belonging to* you sons. = You won’t have sons.

לִי אַתָּה – *Belonging to* me (are) you. = You are mine.

27. Uses of כִּי and אֲשֶׁר: The conjunction כִּי occurs with high frequency and in a number of idiomatic constructions (see lexicon or intermediate grammar). However, three basic uses are most common and should be memorized. The word אֲשֶׁר, which usually functions as the relative pronoun (“who, which”), can also function as a conjunction with these same three meanings.

- a. “for, because”

Enoch walked with God and was not, *because God took him* (כִּי לָקַח אֱלֹהִים)

Two are better...*because there is a good reward for them* (אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ לָהֶם שָׂכָר טוֹב).

- b. “that” (after verbs of perceiving or speaking)

And the Egyptians will know *that I am Yahweh* (כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה)

Mordecai commanded her *that she should not tell* (אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַגִּיד).

- c. “if, when” (introducing conditional or temporal clause)

And if/when a man opens a pit... (וְכִי־יִפְתַּח אִישׁ בּוֹר).
When your children ask... (אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאַלוּ בְּנֵיכֶם).

SYNTAX

28. Standard word order: In a Hebrew clause is Verb then Subject, often followed by Direct Object or Prepositional Phrase. The reader should anticipate a subject noun immediately following the verb, especially with a third person verb, unless the acting subject has already been indicated by the prior clause. When a clause departs from this verb-then-subject order, it is often for the sake of emphasis (on the fronted element) or other rhetorical effect (e.g., a chiasmic structure between parallel clauses, binding them closely together).
29. *Vav-consecutive* verb forms always begin a new clause. As a reading strategy, it is very helpful to remember that when a word begins with *vav-with-A-vowel* (ו or וּ), this likely indicates two things. First, the next letter will be an imperfect preformative (וּ ה א or וּ), and the form itself is a *Vav-Consecutive Imperfect* (simple past). Second, this marks the beginning of a new clause, and the subject noun, object, and/or any other modifying information will come *after* this verb.
30. Disjunctive *Vav*: Because Hebrew clauses often begin with the Verb, and often with *vav* + Verb, a clause introduced by *vav* + non-Verb is noticeable to the Hebrew ear. In this situation, the initial *vav* is *disjunctive*, usually conveying one of three nuances:
- (a) A contrast from previous statement (“...*but* the people refused to listen.)
 - (b) An emphatic change in subject (“And *as for* Moses, he...”)
 - (c) A stepping away from the main storyline to give background/parenthetical information (“*Now* the famine was severe in the land...”).
31. Accents: Nearly every word in the Hebrew text is marked with an *accent*. The bookmark in BHS lists these accents as conjunctive (the word is to be read together with the following word) or disjunctive (there is a slight pause or break before the next word). In addition to the end of verse mark *soph pasuch* (:), four other *disjunctive* Masoretic accents should be actively learned and immediately recognized.
- ◌ֻ *athnach* – occurs in almost every verse; marks most significant break within the verse
 - ◌ֹ *segolta* ◌ֶ *zaqeph* ◌ִ *reviya*’ – other breaks especially helpful to note
32. Hebrew *Infinitive Absolutes* and *Infinitive Constructs* perform a variety of functions with the syntax.

Infinitive Absolute

can be used with a verb of the same root to provide *emphasis/certainty*.

שׁוּב אֶשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ – I will *surely* return to you.

can function as a “wild card” verb as determined by context, standing in for a Perfect, Imperfect, or, most often, an Imperative.

זָכוֹר אֶת־יְוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת – *Remember* the Sabbath day.

Infinitive Construct

is commonly used in a *temporal clause*, esp. when prefixed with preposition בְּ or בְּ.

וַיְהִי בְהֵיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה – And it happened *when they were* in the field...
(The middle word is ב + I.C. of היה + 3mp suffix = “at the time of *their being*.”)

בְּבֹאוֹ אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ – *When he goes* into the Holy Place...
(First word is ב + I.C. of בוא + 3ms suffix = “at the time of *his going*”.)

is commonly used to express *purpose*, esp. when prefixed with preposition לְ.

וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה לְרִאֵת אֶת־הָעִיר – And Yahweh came down *in order to see* the city.

is commonly used to complete the sense of another verb (a “complementary infinitive”).

לֹא אוּכַל לְקוּם – I am not able to stand up.
וַיִּתְחַל יוֹנָה לְבוֹא בְּעִיר – And Jonah began to enter the city.

33. Two strong rhetorical words: הִנֵּה and עַתָּה:

The term הִנֵּה (“behold”) is a focusing term which is often used in speeches to call attention to important points, and is often used in a similar way in narrative passages, sometimes introducing observations which are offered by the narrator from a particular character’s point of view.

The term עַתָּה often comes within a speech after the rehearsal of certain facts or events, and it indicates that the speaker has come to a central, or the central, point which he wants his hearers to take away. Having heard this, having seen this, now note or do this....

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