

LESSON 3: Prefixes; Grammatical Gender; Past Tense Verbs (he, she); Definite Direct Objects.

VOCABULARY

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|-----------|---|
| אַבְרָהָם | Abraham |
| אַבְרָם | Abram |
| כֹּהֵן | priest |
| נָבִיא | prophet |
| עֶבֶד | servant, slave |
| עַיִן | eye, spring, well |
| דָּבָר | word, matter, thing (item), something occurring |
| אֶרֶץ | land (in a geographical sense), earth |
| מִן | from |
| תַּחַת | under, instead of |
| אֶל | to, toward (sometimes overlaps with על) |
| לְפָנַי | before (in terms of time or space); in the presence of |
| לְאמֹר | Introduces a direct quotation, and is best translated by the punctuation sequence <i>comma quote</i> (, “). Traditionally לְאמֹר is translated <i>saying</i> , “ This does <i>not</i> mean “to say” |
| אֵת, אֶת | [definite direct object marker] (explained below in the lesson) |

More common prefixes which work like words

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|----|-------------|
| כּ | like, as |
| ל | to, for, of |
| מ | from (=מִן) |

Verbs

| | |
|--------|---|
| נָתַן | give, set, place, appoint, allow (he gave) |
| אָמַר | say (he said) |
| הִלְךְ | go, walk (he went, he walked) |
| בָּא | come, enter (he came, he entered) (בּוֹא in lexicons) |
| שָׁלַח | send (he sent) |

Possible confusion:

תָּךְ or תְּךְ (definite direct object marker) with הָיָךְ (you [feminine singular]).
Unpointed these look identical.

GRAMMAR REVIEW, TERMS

- verb** = something someone does (run, jump, think, loved)
- lexicon** = the common term for a language dictionary in Biblical studies.
- subject** = the one doing the action of a verb (*Jane* ran to the store, *we* sent, *the king* went, *the dog* chased the car)
- object** = what is on the receiving end of the verb (the dog chased *the car*, Jane ran to *the store*)²¹
- direct object** = that which is being “verbed” (the dog chased *the car*, the boy hit *the ball*)
- indirect object** = *to* or *for* whom/what something is being “verbed” (i.e., a preposition shows up before the noun when there is also a direct object, e.g., the boy threw the ball *at the wall*).

GRAMMAR DISCUSSION: DIRECT AND INDIRECT OBJECTS

Indirect objects in English occur when there is a direct object and an object which is somewhat removed. In the above example, “the boy threw the ball”, the ball is the direct object. The indirect object is somewhat removed from the direct object (“at the wall”), and may or may not have a preposition. Indirect objects in Hebrew have prepositions associated with them.

Direct and indirect objects in English can be distinguished by word order if a preposition is not present. Thus we can say, “The boy gave the girl the flower.” *The boy* is the subject (the one doing the action of the verb). *The flower* is what was

²¹The subject and object explanations work with active verbs, not passives. This partial explanation is to get students started understanding the concepts.

given and is thus the *direct object*. *The girl* is the recipient of the direct object and is therefore the *indirect object*.

However, when a preposition is present in English (in this instance *to*), the preposition will indicate the indirect object. Thus with “The boy gave the flower to the girl,” the girl is shown to be the indirect object because of the preposition.

You will see that Hebrew indicates indirect objects with prepositions, rather than with word order.²²

PREFIXES

When $\text{כ} + \text{ה}$ and $\text{ל} + \text{ה}$ appear as prefixes, the ה disappears, just like it does with $\text{ב} + \text{ה}$. Thus למלך = to the king; כמלך = like the king.

As with the ב prefix, most of the time the ל prefix means "to the" (definite), not “to a” (indefinite).

The prefix כ may or may not be definite. (“Like a” is slightly more likely to be the case than “like the”.)²³ When it is “like a” it often is doing a comparison to a general class of items:

כבית = like a house

The Masoretes provided clues with their vowels as to whether the prefixes ב , כ , and ל were definite (“the”) or not. However, *every* time they used vowels as indicators it reflects their opinion (which might not be correct). The best clue is context: If there does not appear to be a particular item in mind, then it might make sense to say “in a”, “like a”, or “to a”. If there is something particular in mind assume “the”. If any of these prefixes are attached to proper names of people or places, just translate “in Jerusalem, like David, to Abraham”.

²² Later on you will encounter instances where *direct objects* are indicated with prepositions (e.g., בחר and פקד).

²³ About 55% of the time כ is “like a”.

HEBREW IS A GENDER BASED LANGUAGE

Hebrew is a language which is inflected for grammatical gender. In other words, most words are either masculine or feminine. This is similar to French, Spanish, German, Greek, Latin, and many other languages. Many types of words have gender associated with them.²⁴ In this lesson we will see that masculine words take masculine verbs, and feminine words take feminine verbs. When you see [m] or [f] with words, it means *masculine* or *feminine*.

TRILITERAL (THREE-LETTER) ROOTS

There is a long-standing tradition which holds that all (or most) Hebrew words--especially verbs--come from three letter (triliteral) roots. It is true that words tend to come from triliteral roots, but many clearly come from two letter roots (and some from four letter roots!). In spite of this, many lexicons routinely list all verbs under three letter roots.

In our vocabulary lists we will list words which appear to have two letter roots in a two letter form, and we will also note how one will find the word in a lexicon.²⁵

VERBS: PAST TENSE

The lexicon (dictionary) form of Hebrew verbs is a *he did* verb (he said, he went). All other verb forms are built on this past tense masculine verb form.

The past tense masculine form is what you will see in vocabulary lists. When you see

²⁴ Be careful not to attribute too much significance to this phenomenon. For example, “wickedness” is a feminine word in Zechariah 5:8 and is thus personified as a woman. However, “wisdom” is also a feminine word, and in Proverbs 8:12 “wisdom” is personified as a woman.

²⁵ This basically follows Lambdin’s practice. Lexicons and grammars which add a middle ך or ך base their form on the infinitive construct (discussed later), not the *he did* form.

הֵלֵךְ go, walk (he went, he walked)

הֵלֵךְ is the *he did* form in Hebrew, “go, walk” is the basic idea behind the verb, and what occurs in parentheses (he went, he walked) is an example of a way (or ways) you would translate that actual form.²⁶

We will wait to give a full introduction of verbs until later. For the moment we will look at past tense versions of *he* and *she*.²⁷ As said above, *he did* is represented by the form of the verb in the vocabulary lists. Consonantly, *she did* is represented by adding a ה to the masculine form. Note that a ה on the end of these words is pronounced *-ah*, not *-ha*.²⁸

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| אמר he said | הלך he went | בא he came |
| אמרה she said | הלכה she went | באה she came |

Notice that the final kaph of הֵלֵךְ turns into the medial²⁹ כ when the ה is added to the end. (All final forms of the letters פ נ מ ט צ turn into their medial forms when any letters are added to the end of a word.)

Hebrew verbs are different from English in a couple of ways. First, the subject is built right into the verb unless a specific subject is listed. The second way in which Hebrew verbs are much different from English has to do with word order. In general, Hebrew verbs occur before independently listed subjects. (If you have an independent subject for a verb you do not use *he* or *she* in translation.)

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|-----------|---|
| הלך אברהם | Abraham walked (not “he walked Abraham”) |
| אמרה האשה | The woman said (not “she said the woman”) |

²⁶These verbs (which are often called the *perfect* tense) can be translated in other ways, but but past tense will suffice for now.

²⁷Also known as *the third person*.

²⁸We will address consonantal changes for *I*, *we*, *they*, and *you* in later lessons.

²⁹Reminder: *medial* = the form of a Hebrew letter which is not at the end of a word.

The order in sentences with objects is often verb-subject-object:

בא אברהם עיר Abraham entered a city (not “he entered Abraham a city”)

THE DEFINITE DIRECT OBJECT MARKER (את)

Biblical Hebrew has an extremely common word, את, which is not translated into English with a word, but with word order. If a verb has a definite direct object (i.e., if something on the receiving end of a verb has “the”), then the definite direct object is usually preceded by the Hebrew word את (pointed one of two different ways: את, את). Remember that nouns with a ה prefix and proper names are both definite.

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|------------------------------------|--|
| נתן אברהם ספר על השלחן | Abraham put a book on the table. |
| נתנה את הספר לנביא | She gave the book to the prophet. |
| שלח המלך את האיש אל העיר | The king sent the man to the city. |
| שלח אברהם את האיש ואת האשה אל הבית | Abraham sent the man and the woman to the house. |

את is extremely common in Hebrew narrative, but often absent in poetic texts.

VOWEL CHANGES

At this point we need to discuss vowel changes. In a pointed Hebrew text, vowels are different for feminine verbs than for masculine ones. Rather than following typical grammars which state a myriad of confusing rules (most which have exceptions), our approach will be to emphasize one vowel rule: ***vowels frequently change, so accept that it is not worth the frustration or time to learn how and why all these vowels change.*** This is especially true whenever prefixes or suffixes are added to words, as well as for different verb forms. Focus on the consonantal text and you will do well.