

## Making Sense of Heb. Words (for Word Studies)

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Hebrew is an inflected language. Hebrew does more via inflection than Greek and English. It not only inflects for the types of functions similar to Greek. Hebrew also attaches conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions and other things directly to the root word. Using an analytical lexicon can enable you to find the dictionary form for word studies. However, the inflections change the meaning, sometimes in ways not spelled out by the analytical lexicon. It is important to account for these changes as much as possible.

Some common prefixes:

- ו conjunction “and, but, yet”<sup>1</sup>
- ה definite article “the”<sup>2</sup>
- ב preposition “in, with, by”
- ל preposition “to, for”
- כ preposition “like, as”
- מ preposition “from”
- ש particle “which” (shortened form of אשר which is more common)



If your word starts with any of these letters and they are not accounted for in the root (dictionary form) then they may be a prefix as described above.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: the conjunction ו is not accounted for in Davidson’s analytical lexicon. In other words וקטל will be listed under ק and not under ו.

<sup>2</sup> Most other prefixes are accounted for in Davidson, but are not accounted for in Logos computer program.

## The pronominal Suffixes

Person, Gender, Number	Basic Form of Suffix	Suffix with Preposit. ל	Suffix with noun סוּס	Suffix with verb קָטַל
1 <sup>st</sup> comm sing	נִי	לִי	סוּסִי	קָטַלְנִי
2 <sup>nd</sup> masc sing	ךָ	לְךָ	סוּסְךָ	קָטַלְךָ
2 <sup>nd</sup> fem sing	ךְ	לְךָ	סוּסְךָ	קָטַלְךָ
3 <sup>rd</sup> masc sing	הוּ הֵ	לוֹ	סוּסוֹ	קָטַלוֹ
3 <sup>rd</sup> fem sing	הִּהּ הֵ	לָהּ	סוּסֶיהָ	קָטַלָּהּ
1 <sup>st</sup> comm pl	נוּ	לָנוּ	סוּסֵנוּ	קָטַלְנוּ
2 <sup>nd</sup> masc pl	כֶּם	לְכֶם	סוּסֵכֶם	קָטַלְכֶם
2 <sup>nd</sup> fem pl	כֶּן	לְכֶן	סוּסֵכֶן	קָטַלְכֶן
3 <sup>rd</sup> mas pl	ם	לָהֶם	סוּסֵם	קָטַלָּם
3 <sup>rd</sup> fem pl	ן	לָהֶן	סוּסֵן	קָטַלָּן

## Verbs:

Verbs inflect for person, gender and number of the subject. In Hebrew, the inflections are represented by either prefixes or suffixes or both. The suffixes are too complicated to be covered here, and can be easily confused with pronominal suffixes. However, an analytical lexicon will tell you the inflection of the verb and the presence of pronominal suffixes. There are only four letters that are ever prefixed as part of a basic verb inflection.<sup>3</sup> These are י ת נ and נ . If you see one of these letters prefixed to a verb and you cannot account for them, assume they are part of the inflection.

### Hebrew Verb Stems

In Hebrew, like in Greek, inflection of verbs can drastically alter the meaning.

For example:

קָטַל	“he killed”
נִקְטַל	“he was killed”
קָטַל	“he slaughtered”
הִקְטִיל	“he caused to kill”

Hebrew makes these types of changes by changing internal vowels and some prefixes. These spelling patterns are regular and are grouped into what are called ‘stems’.

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<sup>3</sup> The letter נ is sometimes prefixed as a marker of a participle in the derived stems (see below).

The basic form is called Qal (Hebrew for ‘light’ (opp. of ‘heavy’)).  
 The other forms get their name from the common verb פִּעַל .

Stem name <sup>4</sup>	Vowel pattern
Qal	פִּעַל
Niphal	נִפְעַל
Piel	פִּעִיל <sup>5</sup>
Pual	פִּעֵל
Hiphil	הִפְעִיל
Hophal	הִפְעֵל
Hithpael	הִתְפַּעֵל

<sup>4</sup> There are seven basic stems, listed here. There are also a number of less common stems with irregular verbs. The analytical lexicon will give you enough information to find these words in the BDB lexicon

<sup>5</sup> The second letter (radical) of the Piel, Pual and Hithpael stems is usually doubled with a dagesh. However, the second letter in this word is a guttural, which does not double with a dagesh.

Each stem has a distinctive translation value. The exact value is debated by scholars, but some general trends are discernable.

Qal is basic active meaning

שָׁבַר                      he broke

Niphal is often passive

נִשְׁבַּר                    he was broken

Piel may be intensive

שָׁבַר                    he shattered, smashed

Pual is the passive of piel

שֻׁבַר                    he was shattered, smashed

Hiphil has a causative idea

הִשְׁבִּיר                he caused to break out

Hophal is the passive of hiphil

הִשְׁבַּר                he was caused to break out

Hithpael is often reflexive

הִתְשַׁבַּר            he broke himself

\*\*\*However, these basic translation values are not always accurate. The best approach is to treat each stem as a different word. That is why the Lexicons list each stem separately. The definition for one stem is not a valid definition for the same word in a different stem.\*\*\*

One final concept:

Intransitive verbs do not have a direct object. “I ran.”

Transitive verbs have a direct object. “I ran the race.”

The same verb may be both transitive and intransitive at different times (like ‘ran’). But in Hebrew, often the transitive meaning is different from the intransitive.

Be careful to note whether a verb is transitive or intransitive, *especially* if the Lexicon has a different definition for each occasion.