

Learning Hebrew: Construct Chain

CONSTRUCT CHAIN

Hebrew expresses the possessive (“of”) relationship between two nouns by a construct chain. The relationship is created by placing two or more nouns side by side.

קול האיש

BASIC GRAMMAR OF THE CONSTRUCT CHAIN

The first of the two nouns is called the construct noun and is in a construct state. There may be multiple construct nouns in a construct chain.

The second of the two nouns is called the absolute noun and is in an absolute state. There may only be one absolute noun in a construct chain.



The construct noun will not take the definite article. If the absolute noun is definite, so are all the construct nouns linked to it. (קול האיש) If the absolute noun is indefinite, so are all the construct nouns linked to it. (קול איש)

When multiple construct nouns appear, each construct noun is translated with the possessive “of” and they all depend upon the absolute noun to determine if they are definite or indefinite.

דברי מלך הארץ

The nouns of a construct chain are sometimes joined by a Maqqef.

בן - דוד

CONSTRUCT CHAINS WITH ADJECTIVES

When an adjective modifies either the construct or absolute noun, it must follow the entire construct chain. The adjective must agree in gender, number, and definiteness with the modified noun. (מלך הארץ הטוב)

When an adjective is used as a noun, it appears in the construct state just like a noun.

קדוש ישראל

CONSTRUCT NOUNS WITH INSEPARABLE PREPOSITIONS

Construct chains may appear with one of the inseparable prepositions (בְּ, לְ, עִם) as in בְּבֵית דָּוִד.

Sources:

The First Hebrew Primer, Third Edition by Simon, Resnikoff, and Motzkin

Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar by Pratico and Van Pelt

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