

Learning Hebrew: Qal Imperfect Verbs

QAL IMPERFECT – STRONG VERBS

The Qal (קל) is the basic verbal stem which indicates active voice (though some passive forms do exist) and the unnuanced type of action. For example: שָׁמַע (he heard)

The imperfect conjugation is used to express incomplete action and is usually translated as present tense (I walk) or future tense (I will walk). The imperfect also denotes habitual or customary action – past, present, or future tense. The imperfect may also be rendered as one of several modal values (would, should, can, etc.) which are suggested by context and syntax.

The Hebrew imperfect does not have tense apart from context and syntax – just like the Hebrew perfect. The Hebrew imperfect denotes incomplete action, whether in the past, present, or future.

THE PREFIX CONJUGATION

The prefix conjugation has prefixes called preformatives that are added to all imperfect verbal forms and distinguish these conjugations from all other conjugations. Some of the imperfect verbal forms also take imperfect sufformatives.

	Sufformative	Imperfect	Preformative	Translation
Third Person, Masculine Singular		יִזְכֹּר	י	He will remember
Third Person, Feminine Singular		תִּזְכֹּר	ת	She will remember
Second Person, Masculine Singular		תִּכְתֹּב	ת	You will write
Second Person, Feminine Singular	י	תִּכְתְּבִי	ת	You will write
First Person, Common Singular		אֶכְתֹּב	א	I will write
Third Person, Masculine Plural	ו	יִשְׁמְרוּ	י	They will keep
Third Person, Feminine Plural	נָה	תִּשְׁמְרֶנָּה	ת	They will keep
Second Person, Masculine Plural	ו	תִּקְבְּצוּ	ת	You will gather
Second Person, Feminine Plural	נָה	תִּקְבְּצֶנָּה	ת	You will gather
First Person, Common Plural		נִקְבֹּץ	נ	We will gather

THE NEGATIVE PARTICLE

Perfect and imperfect verbs are negated with the particle **לֹא** (also spelled **לֹא־**) which is generally translated as “not”. This negative particle is placed immediately before the verb. When placed before the imperfect verb, it means an absolute or permanent prohibition

Example: **לֹא תִרְצַח** (You shall not murder)

The negative particle **אַל** is also used with an imperfect verb to express an immediate, specific, and non-permanent prohibition. This prefix is often prefixed to the verb with the maqqef.

Example: **אַל תִּירָא** (Do not fear)

QAL IMPERFECT – WEAK VERBS

Weak verbs are those verbs which have one or more weak roots consonants. Regardless of the verb’s weakness, the preformatives and sufformatives of the imperfect conjugation do not change.

There are four categories of qal imperfect weak verbs.

Category I Patach-Guttural weak verbs have a patach stem vowel and a guttural for the first root consonant.

For example: **יָזַק** (be strong)

Category I Cholem-Guttural weak verbs have a cholem stem vowel and a guttural for the first root consonant.

For example: **עָמַד** (to page)

Category II-Guttural weak verbs have a guttural for the second root consonant.

For example: **בָּחַר** (to choose)

Category III- **ה/ע** weak verbs have either **ה** or **ע** for the third root consonant.

For example: **שָׁלַח** (to send)

GEMINATE VERBS

Geminate verbs are verbs that have identical second and third root consonants (for example: סָבַב - to go around).

DOUBLY WEAK VERBS

Doubly weak verbs have more than one weak consonant as part of the verbal root. Generally, this class is made up of category III-ה and either category I or category II guttural weak verbs.

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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