

Learning Hebrew: Qal Infinitive Construct

QAL INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT

Infinitives are verbal nouns which mean they have features in common with both verbs and nouns. The Infinitive Construct is similar to the English Infinitive and is commonly translated with the preposition “to” plus a verb – such as, to drive.

Since the Infinitive Construct is not inflected for person, gender, or number, there is only one basic form. The vowel pattern for the Qal Infinitive Construct is consistent for all strong verbs and most weak verbs.

QAL INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT FORM

The Infinitive Construct form of Category III-ה verbs end in ת.

בָּנָה [Verbal Root] בְּנוֹת [Infinitive Construct] (to build, building)

The Infinitive Construct form of Category I-נ verbs preserve the nun in the first root position. However, there are many verbs that have an alternate Infinitive Construct form where the initial נ is lost and a ת is added to the end.

נָסַע [Verbal Root] נָסֵעַ [Infinitive Construct with נ] סָעַת [Alternate Form with ת] (to depart)

A few of the Infinitive Construct form of Category I-י verbs preserve the standard vowel pattern as in יָשַׁן (to sleep). Most of these verbs however drop the initial י and add a final ת.

יָשַׁב [Verbal Root] שָׁבַת [Infinitive Construct] (to dwell)

QAL INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT WITH PRONOMINAL SUFFIXES

The Infinitive Construct often appears with a pronominal suffix that can act as either the subject or object of the verbal idea.

קָטַלְי (my killing – suffix as subject) (killing me – suffix as object)

QAL INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT WITH INSEPARABLE PREPOSITIONS

The inseparable prepositions בְּ, כִּי, and לְ may be prefixed to the Infinitive Construct. The Infinitive Construct with the לְ inseparable preposition is generally used to express purpose of result.

לְזָכֵר (in order to remember)

When the inseparable prepositions **כִּ** and **כַּ** are prefixed to the Infinitive Construct, they may be translated as “when” or “while”.

כְּשֶׁמֶר or **כִּשְׁמֶר** (when observing or while observing)

NEGATION OF THE INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT

The negative particles **לֹא** and **אַל** are not used to negate the Infinitive Construct. Instead, the Hebrew Infinitive is negated with **בְּלֹא** (also spelled **לְבִלְתִּי**) meaning “not” or “in order not”.

Sources: *The First Hebrew Primer, Third Edition* by Simon, Resnikoff, and Motzkin *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* by Pratico and Van Pelt

© Rachel-Esther bat-Avraham, 2009
For Personal Use Only. All Other Uses Must be Pre-Approved
rachel-esther@becomingjewish.org