

Learning Hebrew: Qal Perfect Verbs

QAL PERFECT – 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)

Transitive verbs may take a direct object. For example: The rabbi taught a class. In this case, the word “class” is the direct object of the verb “taught”.

Intransitive verbs cannot take a direct object. For example: Saul perished in a battle. In this case, the verb “perished” cannot take a direct object.

Stative verbs describe a state of being. For example: The book is torn. In this case, “is torn” describes the state of the book.

THE PERFECT CONJUGATION

The perfect conjugation is used to express a completed action or state of being in the past, present, or future. Since Hebrew does not have tense like English (“she had worked”), the “tense” of the perfect conjugation will be based upon the context and syntax.

The perfect conjugation is sometimes called the suffix conjugation because different endings (sufformatives) are added to the Qal stem to indicate person, gender, and number.

	Sufformative		Translation
Third Person, Masculine Singular		יָשַׁב	He dwelled
Third Person, Feminine Singular	הָ	יָשְׁבָה	She dwelled
Second Person, Masculine Singular	ָךְ	זָכַרְתָּ	You remembered
Second Person, Feminine Singular	ְךְ	זָכַרְתְּ	You remembered
First Person, Common Singular	ִי	כָּתַבְתִּי	I wrote
Third Person, Common Plural	וּ	כָּתְבוּ	They wrote
Second Person, Masculine Plural	ָם	שָׁמַרְתֶּם	You kept
Second Person, Feminine Plural	ָן	שָׁמַרְתֶּן	You kept
First Person, Common Plural	וּ	קָבְצָנוּ	We gathered

VERBAL ROOTS ENDING IN TAV AND NUN

When a verbal root ending in ת or נ receives a sufformative beginning with ת or נ, the two identical consonants become one consonant with a Dagesh Forte.

ת ת becomes ת

נ נ becomes נ

THE NEGATIVE PARTICLE

Perfect and imperfect verbs are negated with the particle לא (also spelled לוא) which is generally translated as “not”. This negative particle is placed immediately before the verb.

Example: לא זכַרְתָּ (You did not remember)

THE PARTICLE הִנֵּה

The word הִנֵּה (also spelled הִן or הִן) is commonly translated as “behold” and can either stand alone or take a pronominal suffix.

Example: הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי (Behold, I have listened)

Example: וְהִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי (And behold, I am)

QAL PERFECT – WEAK VERBS

Weak verbs are those verbs which have one or more weak roots consonants. These consonants may cause vocalization or spelling changes of the verbs.

There are three categories of qal perfect weak verbs.

Category I-Guttural weak verbs have a guttural for the first root consonant.

For example: עָמַד (to stand)

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

For example: בָּחַר (to choose)

Category II- ח/ע weak verbs have either ח or ע for the third root consonant.

For example: לָקַח (to take) שָׁמַע (to hear)

VOCAL SHEVA

As we have already learned, a guttural cannot take a vocal sheva. The vocal sheva of a strong verb will be changed to a chataf patach in a weak verb. Despite these changes, the sufformatives do not change.

Example (Category I): עֲמַדְתֶּם (you stand [second person masculine plural])

Example (Category II): בָּחַרוּ (they choose [third person common plural])

CATEGORY THREE WEAK VERBS

The category three א weak verbs have an א for the third root consonant. The patach of a strong verb will be changed to a kamets in a weak verb (with the exception of third person feminine singular and third person common plural).

Example: מָצָא (he found [third person masculine singular])

The category three ה weak verbs have a ה for the third root consonant. The final ה root consonant is dropped in every form of the qal perfect weak verbs.

Example: בָּנִית (you build [second person feminine singular])

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.

The perfect form of these verbs will combine the spelling variations of the two weak consonants.

Category III-ה with category I guttural example: עָלִיתִי (I go up [first person common singular])

Category III-ה with category II guttural example: רָאִינוּ (we see [first person common plural])

GEMINATE VERBS

Geminate verbs are verbs that have identical second and third root consonants (for example: סָבַב - to go around). In most forms of these verbs the first geminate consonant assimilates into the second and is represented as a dagesh forte. There is also a connecting cholem vav between the verbal root and the sufformative.

Example: סָבַבְתָּ (you go around [second person masculine singular])

HOLLOW VERBS

Hollow verbs (also known as Category II-^{י/ו}) are verbal roots composed of two consonants. All weak hollow verbs have a kamets under the first root consonant.

Example: **בָּאֵתָן** (you entered [second person feminine plural])

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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