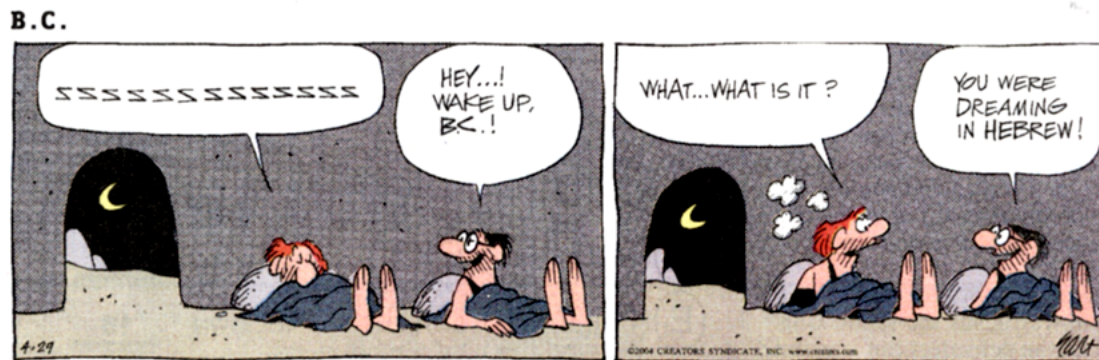# Section B

Grammar
Second Edition

"As a hawk flieth not high with one wing,
even so a man reacheth not to excellence with one tongue."

— Roger Ascham

Contents

Abbreviations

BH   Biblical Hebrew.

BHS   *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

MNK   *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* by van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze.

PHK   *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar*, by Page H. Kelley.

JAH   *A Basic Introduction To Biblical Hebrew* by Jo Ann Hackett.

JW   *A Practical Grammar For Classical Hebrew* by J. Weingreen.

PDSBH   *Pocket Dictionary For The Study Of Biblical Hebrew* by Todd J. Murphy.

VP   *Biblical Hebrew: A Compact Guide* by Miles V. Van Pelt.

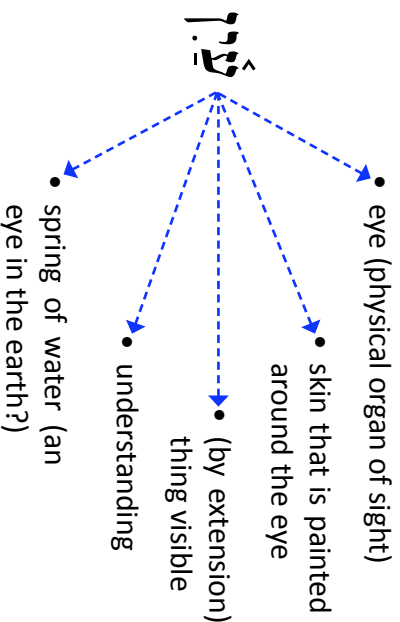YO   *The Essentials Of Biblical Hebrew* by Kyle M. Yates, edited by John Joseph Owens.

Characteristics Of Linguistic Expression In Hebrew

Whether or not the Hebrew language predated and survived the confusion of tongues at Babel, it nevertheless preserves some of the earliest words and modes of verbal expression. Studying the Hebraic approach to verbal communication is fascinating in itself, but for us has the added value of helping us understand the biblical revelation, both Old Testament and New! Here are some distinctive characteristics of Hebraic expression we observe in the Scriptures:

1. **Emphasis On Action** The first verb of the Bible, בָּרָא, may have set the tone for the action-orientation of Hebrew. After all, that verb (*created*) differentiated the God of the Hebrews from all other gods. Whether or not the ancient verb בָּרָא had that much influence on the orientation of the Hebrew language, we find that Hebrew, when describing something, emphasizes what that thing *does.* The Hebrew language is a verb-based. Words for *intangible* actions are derived from words for *perceptible* actions; the intangible *bless*, בָּרַךְ, is spelled the same as the perceptible *kneel*. Hebrew nouns are generally derived from verbs. Both the noun *knee*, בֶּרֶךְ, and the noun *blessing*, בְּרָכָה, derive from the verb *to kneel*, בָּרַךְ. Note that Hebrew nouns retain an underlying connotation of action. This is even true for proper nouns, and is emphasized in the compound names of God, as in אֵל רֳאִי, *the God who sees*, from רָאָה, *to see.*

2. **Concrete Metaphors For Abstract Or Intangible Things** The inclination to describe things in active terms shows up in the way Israelites described emotions. In contrast to our western culture, which tends to think of something like "anger" *abstractly*, an Israelite of biblical times described anger *concretely and actively* as "a burning nose" (Gen 30.2)!

3. **Interest In A Person's Character** The holiness of God engendered an ethical bent to the Hebrew mind, and a consequent inclination to describe a person by his or her character, more than by his or her outward appearance. This emphasis in language overlapped with both the *action* and *concrete* orientations of Hebrew: a person's character is often described by their actions, or with concrete metaphors. God exemplified this kind of expression when He warned Cain, "sin is crouching at your door...." (Gen 4.7). This statement undoubtedly intimates something about sin itself. More importantly, though, it describes Cain's character as *susceptible to temptation*. But it is *so much more vivid* than simply saying, "Cain, you're susceptible to temptation."

4. **Attention To Function** We Westerners struggle with some of the Bible's *concrete* character metaphors, because we have trouble looking past the thing pictured (e.g., *wing*) to its function (*protection*; Psa 57.1). We are apt to stumble over the metaphor of the Shulammite's tower-like nose (Song 7.4), or the description of the Shulammite's sister as a "wall" or a "door" in Song 8.9. Similarly, when we read Psalm 52.8, "I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God," we probably visualize the Psalmist standing *still* in the temple, experiencing a static, column-like existence. To properly understand these passages, however, we *must* think of the function of a tower, the function of a door, the function of a wall, and the function of an olive tree. The function of this last item, for example, is bearing fruit and producing oil.

5. **Freedom To Speak Phenomenologically** This attribute of verbal communication is not unique to Hebrew, but is often overlooked by those who wish to take the Bible as literally as possible. We must remember that when the Bible says things like, "the LORD changed his mind," (Exo 32.14), the writer speaks *phenomenologically* (describing the event as humanly perceived), rather than *ontologically* (describing the event in terms of its essential reality).

Semantic Fields & Semantic Domains

Semantics is the study of word *meaning*. A **semantic field** is the set of all the possible meanings that a particular word can express if it were used in all its possible contexts. For example, consider the possible meanings of the word עַיִן.

עַיִן

- eye (physical organ of sight)
- skin that is painted around the eye
- (by extension) thing visible
- understanding
- spring of water (an eye in the earth?)

The biblical **semantic field** for עַיִן.

The word עַיִן also has several **semantic domains**. A **semantic domain** is the category of meaning that a particular word shares with other words. The first **semantic domain** for עַיִן is "Parts Of The Human Head":

Parts Of The Human Head

אֹזֶן = ear	עַיִן = eye
אַף = nose	פֶּה = mouth
גֻּלְגֹּלֶת = skull, head	פָּנִים = face
לְחִי = jaw, cheek	רֹאשׁ = head
לָשׁוֹן = tongue	שֵׁן = tooth
מֵצַח = brow, forehead	שֵׂעָר = hair

The word עַיִן also has several **semantic domains**. A **semantic domain** is the category of meaning that a particular word shares with other words. The first **semantic domain** for עַיִן is "Parts Of The Human Head." It also belongs to a **semantic subdomain**, "Parts Of The Human Body."

Awareness of **semantic domains** is important, because a **semantic domain** reveals the alternate words that *could have been used* in a given passage. Knowing the words an author elected to *not* use, gives greater meaning to the words he did use. In the famous dictum, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot," (Exodus 21.24), why didn't the Lord say, "ear for ear, nose for nose"?

Regarding the **semantic domain** of "Speech" (Lesson 13A), why did the Lord use "told" (הִגִּיד from נָגַד) instead of "said" (אָמַר) in Genesis 3.11: "Who told you that you were naked?" (Cf. the LXX ἀνήγγειλέν.)

The Definite Article

In Hebrew, all proper nouns are considered definite. Other nouns can be made definite by addition of the definite article, consisting of הַ attached to the beginning of the word with a doubling of the first letter of the noun itself. Thus, horse, סוּס, becomes *the horse:* הַסּוּס (note the dagesh that doubles the first ס).

The Definite Article & Initial Gutturals

The following note and diagram is from Christo Van der Merwe, Jackie Naudé, Jan Kroeze et al, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar,* electronic ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), §24.4.2:

The form of the article

The basic form of the article is הַ. The article is directly attached to the front of the relevant noun resulting in the doubling of the first consonant of that word.

הַ + מֶלֶךְ   the + word

הַמֶּלֶךְ   the word

The following exceptions occur:

The gutturals (א, ה, ח, ע) and ר (as a rule) cannot be doubled.

When a definite noun begins with one of these consonants, the / ַ / of the *article changes or lengthens to compensate* for the doubling that can no longer occur. These changes may be presented systematically as follows:

	The first vowel is not a qāmeṣ.				The first vowel is a qāmeṣ.		
	אִישׁ	א			אָדָם	א	הֶ
הָ	רֹאשׁ	ר			רָשָׁע	ר	
	עִיר	ע			עָפָר	ע	
הֶ	הֵיכָל	ה		הֶ	הָרִים	ה	
	חֶרֶב	ח			חָכָם	ח	

The Vav-Conjunctive

The Hebrew conjunction is called *vav-conjunctive*. It can mean *and, then, also, now* or *but*. **It is always prefixed to its following word**. It is spelled, וְ, but it changes its form for phonological reasons before a labial consonant:

> Think of a doo-wop song for which the background singers sing, *BuMP sheva, ooh!* That will remind you that for words beginning with the labials ב, מ, or פ, and for words whose first vowel is *sheva,* the attached conjunction becomes וּ.

However, if a word begins with a *yod* and *sheva* (יְ), the combination with the conjunction becomes וִי. For words whose first vowel is a *hateph* vowel, the vowel of the conjunction will mirror the *hateph* vowel. Thus, the conjunction joined to the noun *fool* (אֱוִיל) becomes וֶאֱוִיל (Pro 10.10).

Furthermore, before a monsyllabic word or before an accented syllable, vav-conjunctive is written וָ , as in וָבֹּהוּ (Genesis 1.2).

The Vav-Consecutive

The *vav-consecutive*[1] is a special form of the conjunction. It is prefixed to an **imperfect verb** that is governed by a preceding **perfect verb**. It is called the *vav-consecutive* because it ties the imperfect verb into a logical sequence expressing action occuring in the past. A passage narrating consecutive events in past time will often begin with a perfect verb, and then continue with a series of imperfects that have the prefixed *vav-consecutive*. The *vav-consecutive* can be interpreted as either sequential ("and then") or consequential ("and so").

> The *vav-consecutive* is written as a *vav + patah + dagesh forte* in the following consonant (וַ·). However, when an imperfect verb begins with א, the *dagesh forte* of the *vav-consecutive* is rejected, and the *patah* under the *vav* is lengthened to a *qamatz*.

---

1   Sometimes called a *vav-relative* (because it **relates** the action of a new clause to that of the preceding one), or *vav-conversive* or *vav-inversive*; also called *sequential-vav* or *vav of succession*.

In certain conditions (as in prophecy of future events), a וְ + a perfect verb constitutes a consecutive construction that functions similarly to the vav + imperfect relative construction. These verb sequences are possible:

perfect + vav consecutive + imperfect = consecutive events in the past

imperfect + vav + perfect = consecutive events in the future

In prophetic texts, though we must also watch for the "prophetic past" in which perfect verbs are used to express future events in their factuality, i.e., certainty of fulfilment.

The Definite Direct Object Marker

In BH the untranslatable word אֵת is written directly before a definite direct object (e.g., בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם). There are exceptions to this rule; the marker is often not used when the direct object is a body part.

אֵת is not to be confused with the preposition אֵת (with, along with) which is written identically.

Rather than written as a separate word, the definite direct object marker is usually connected to its following definite direct object with a *maqqeph*: אֶת־הָאוֹר (*the light,* Gen 1.4). Notice that the *maqqeph* causes the long *tsere* of the direct object marker to reduce to a *segol*.

The Direct Object Marker With Personal Pronoun

אֹתִי	me	אֹתָנוּ	us
אֹתְךָ	you (ms)	אֶתְכֶם	you (mp)
אֹתָךְ	you (fs)	אֶתְכֶן	you (fp)
אֹתוֹ	him, it	אֹתָם	them (m)
אֹתָהּ	her, it	אֹתָן	them (f)

Hebrew Syllables

Every syllable in Hebrew begins with a consonant; closed syllables also end with a consonant (sometimes accompanied by a silent sheva, i.e., a syllable divider).
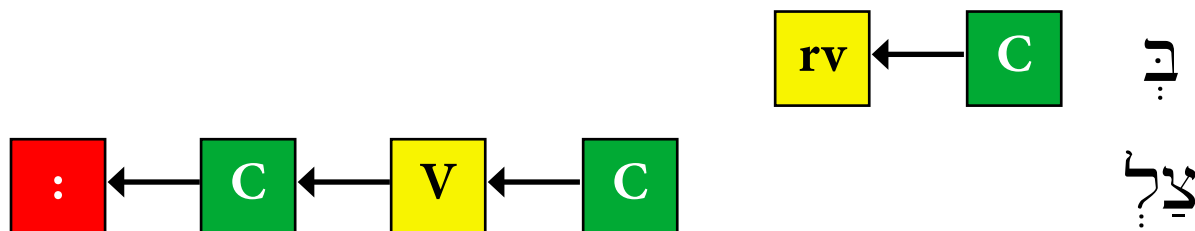
Authorities differ as to whether the reduced vowels (with preceding consonant) can constitute a syllable, or whether a full vowel must be present to constitute a syllable.

PHK, YO and PDSBH agree that **the Hebrew syllable never has less than one full vowel (e.g., NOT** אֵל **[PDSBH pp. 152-153]), nor more than one full and one reduced vowel (NOT** אֱלֹה **[YO, pp. 17-18]). In other words, the Hebrew syllable can have two distinct vowel sounds, though one will be very lightly pronounced.** According to this system of syllabification, a complex Hebrew syllable could look like this (Using the beginning of בְּצַלְמֵנוּ in Gen 1.26):

| : | ← | C | ← | V | ← | C | ← | rv | ← | C | בְּצַל |
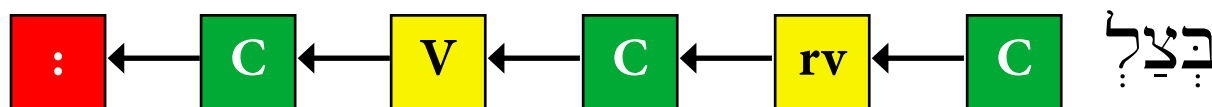
That is, it could consist of a Consonant + Reduced Vowel + Consonant + Full Vowel + Consonant + Silent Sheva.

JAH, MNK and VP, on the other hand, see the reduced vowels (or at least the simple sheva) as sufficient to constitute an open syllable (i.e., a syllable lacking a closing consonant), and thus would break the above example into two syllables:

| rv | ← | C | בְּ |

| : | ← | C | ← | V | ← | C | צַל |

This system of syllabication is consistent with the English approach in which a syllable consists of only one uninterrupted segment of pronunciation.

The two differing systems of Hebrew syllabification do not seem to affect the rules for vocalizing the *sheva* nor for identifying the *qamatz qatan (qamets hatuf)*.

**Hebrew syllables are of two kinds: open and closed.**

An **open syllable** ends in a vowel or diphthong:

rv ←	**C**	בְּ
V ←	**C**	קָ
diph ←	**C**	סָה
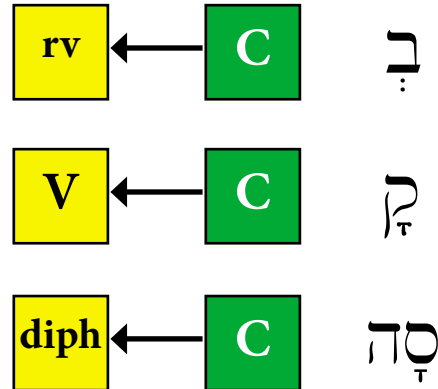
Aside from reduced vowels, an **open syllable takes a long vowel**, but if accented may take either a long or a short vowel (as in חֶסֶד in which the first syllable is open but accented, and so can take a short vowel). Rarely, *an unaccented open syllable* will *take a short vowel* [(YO, p. 18)] as in the middle syllable of בַּקִּין.

In a **closed syllable**, the full vowel is **enclosed** between two consonants, or "included" within a diphthong following a consonant [JAH, p. 20]. Alternatively, a *diphthong* is enclosed between two consonants, including the case of syllables with a furtive patch where the preceding vowel with the patch creates a diphthong before the final consonant [MNK, p. 33]. A closed syllable may conclude with a silent *sheva*.

C ←	**V** ←	**C**	טַל

A **closed syllable takes a short vowel**, but if accented may take either a short or a long vowel (as in מֵאְדָם where the final syllable is closed but accented and so can take a long vowel).

diph ←	**C**		לְפָנֵי
C ←	**diph** ←	**C**	אֱלֹהִים
C ←	**diph** ←	**C**	רוּחַ
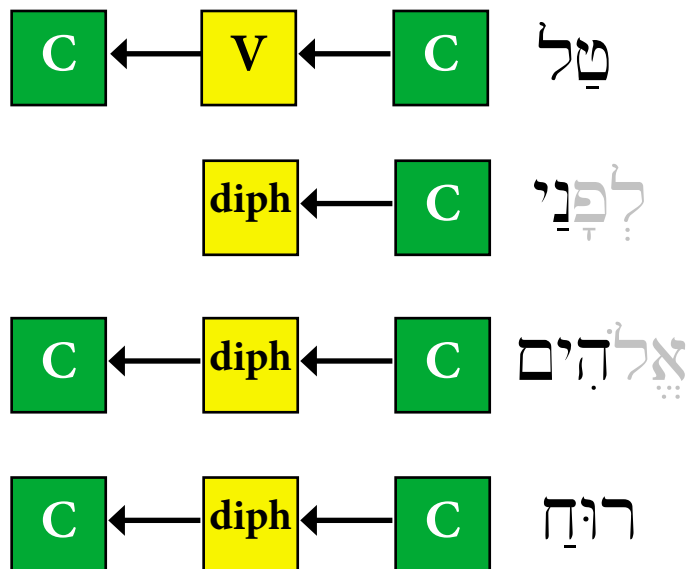
Hebrew Prepositions

Their are three kinds of Hebrew prepositions: (1) those which stand alone (separable), like אֵצֶל, meaning "near, next to," (2) those joined to a following word with a *maqqeph* (also considered separable), like עַל in עַל־סוּס, and (3) the more common inseparable prepositions that must be prefixed to a substantive, an infinitive construct, or a pronominal suffix, forming a single word.
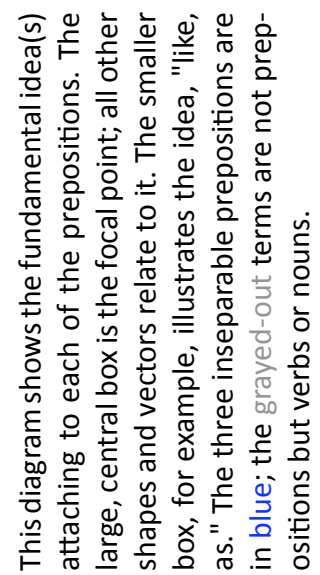
The inseparable prepositions are:

בְּ	in, on, at
לְ	to, for
כְּ	like, as

The inseprable prepositions are pointed with a vocal sheva, except when they fuse with the definite article. When joined to a noun with the definite article, the ה of the article drops out, and the preposition takes the vowel that normally would have accompanied the missing ה. Thus, *for* the *horse* is לַסוּס, and *for* the *woman* is לָאִשָּׁה.

The preposition מִן, meaning *from,* also prefixes to its object, but behaves differently from the other inseprable prepositions because when נ occurs immediately before another consonant it tends to assimilate to that consonant: the נ disappears, and the next consonant is doubled. Thus, for a phrase like "from the king," which one would expect to be written מִנְמֶלֶךְ, the נ drops out because the silent sheva would force the נ to be pronounced immediately before the מ. Therefore, the phrase is correctly written: מִמֶּלֶךְ.
     Because doubling occurs with the prefixing of מִן, when the object beings with a guttural or *resh,* none of which can be doubled, the *chiriq* of מִן is lengthened instead to a *tsere,* as in מֵאִשָּׁה. The definite article, since it begins with a guttural will cause compensatory lengthening or cause the whole preposition to be attached with a *maqqeph* as in מִן־הַסּוּס.

Hebrew Prepositions Chart
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In proximity to, beside.

Between

With

suffix

Away from, behind.

This diagram shows the fundamental idea(s) attaching to each of the prepositions. The large, central box is the focal point; all other shapes and vectors relate to it. The smaller box, for example, illustrates the idea, "like, as." The three inseparable prepositions are in blue; the grayed-out terms are not prepositions but verbs or nouns.

Hebrew Nouns: Singulars, Duals, Plurals & More!

The *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* tells us, "Nouns in BH [= Biblical Hebrew] have singular, plural and dual forms. The dual forms in BH are mainly reserved for objects that occur in pairs (such as parts of the body) and for certain indications of time." This book goes on to explain:

a.   Some words have all three forms of number:

<div dir="rtl">

יָדוֹת   יָדַיִם   יָד

</div>

hands   [two] hands   hand

b.   Others have only a singular and dual form—the dual form is then used for the plural:

<div dir="rtl">

אָזְנַיִם   אֹזֶן

</div>

ears   ear

c.   Some words have only a dual form:

<div dir="rtl">

מָתְנַיִם

</div>

hips[1]

- Singular nouns take singular verbs. **The exception**: When used as a subject, a collective noun like, עוֹף , *bird(s)*, though singular in form, can take a singular *or* plural verb (1Kings 14.11 or Ecclesiastes 10.20).

    Note 1: nouns that occur often in plural form, can be used in the singular form to convey a collective meaning; this explains the singular עֵץ, meaning *trees* collectively, in Genesis 1.11. **Note 2**: A collective singular noun will often take a plural adjective. **Note 3**: Nouns in singular form that occur after a cardinal number, after כֹּל (*all*), and after other words indicating quantity, refer to a class or a group.

- Since there is no dual form of the Hebrew verb, dual nouns take a plural verb.

- Generally, plural nouns take plural verbs. **The exception**: nouns with a plural form *but a singular meaning* take a singular verb (and a singular adjective).

- Gesenius describes **plurals of local extension**. These plural form nouns describe the *single* surface of something as "composed of innumerable separate parts or points."[2] Thus, in Genesis 1.10, we have the plural form, יַמִּים, for the singular idea of "sea."The Hebrew noun *face*, פָּנֶה, is another of these kinds of plurals.

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1   Christo Van der Merwe et al., *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, electronic ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 181-182.

2   Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, edited by E. Kautzsch and Sir Arthur Ernest Cowley, 2d English ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910).

It always occurs in the plural form, פָּנִים, *whether singular or plural in meaning* (Genesis 1.1; Ezekiel 1.10), and always takes a plural verb (as in Exo 33.14). There are also plurals of *chronological* extension like עוֹלָמִים, *eternity*, from עוֹלָם, *a long duration, age*.

- Poetic **plurals of intensification** (or *amplification*) intensify the idea of a noun that is singular in meaning (and sometimes make it abstract), as יְדִידֹת , (*intense*) *love*, from יָדִיד , *beloved one* (Psalm 45.1).

- **Abstract plurals** refer to the whole of something that is comprised of components, like חַיִּים , *life*, considered as the totality of the qualities of a living being.

A Divine Plural?

The Hebrew word אֱלֹהִים, is one of four biblical words referring to God that have a plural form but a singular meaning:

- אֱלֹהִים , God (Genesis 1.1)

- עֶלְיוֹנִין , Most High One (Daniel 7.18)

- עֹשָׂי, My Maker (Job 35.10)

- קְדוֹשִׁים , Most Holy One (Hosea 11.12/12.1)

Two other nouns sometimes use a plural form with singular meaning when referring to God or someone with "god-like" authority:

- אֲדֹנָי, Lord; אֲדֹנִים, Lord (Gen 42.30)

- בְּעָלִים , Lord, Owner (Isaiah 1.3)

Finally, there is the odd case of תְּרָפִים, *Household Idol*, always plural in form, but sometimes with a singular meaning (1 Samuel 19.13).

There is no "royal plural" in biblical Hebrew; a single king is never referred to by himself or others in the plural. According to Gesenius (and seemingly contra van der Merwe, et al), "The use of the plural as a form of respectful address is quite foreign to Hebrew." Accordingly, Ringgren wrote (in TDOT), "Why the plural form for 'God' is used [in the OT] has not yet been explained satisfactorily." It may have to do with using the plural form to express **abstract** and **intensified** meaning (see Lesson 4B). However, it may just as possibly reflect a primordial sense of some kind of plurality within the one true God.

Hebrew Nouns: Gender

Hebrew uses only two genders, masculine and feminine. Hebrew substantives have no neuter gender as Greek substantives do. In Hebrew, the masculine nouns are hardest to identify since they don't follow a set form. The surest path to certainty regarding the gender of a Hebrew noun is to check the parsing information on your computer or look up the noun in a Hebrew lexicon.

However, Kelley gives the following guidelines for **Identifying Feminine Nouns**:

a. Nouns referring to female persons or animals will be feminine.

אִשָּׁה   נְקֵבָה   אָחוֹת   בַּת

woman   female   sister   daughter

b. Nouns referring to paired body parts are feminine.

יָד   אֹזֶן   עַיִן   שָׂפָה

hand   ear   eye   lip

c. Nouns ending with הָ are usually feminine. Example words used in Genesis:

אֲדָמָה   מְלָאכָה   אָכְלָה   דָּגָה   מֶמְשָׁלָה   שָׁנָה   יַבָּשָׁה

dry land   year   dominion   fish   food   work   ground

d. Nouns ending with ת are usually feminine. Example words used in Genesis:

בְּרִית   חַטָּאת   כֻּתֹּנֶת   דַּעַת   תּוֹלֵדוֹת   דְּמוּת   רֵאשִׁית

beginning   likeness   histories   knowledge   tunic   sin   covenant

• Most feminine *plural* nouns end with וֹת. **There are exceptions!**

בַּת   בָּנוֹת   שִׁפְחָה   שְׁפָחוֹת   שָׁנָה   שָׁנִים

daughter --> daughters   maidservant--> maidservants   *BUT* year--> years

• Masculine *plural* nouns end with יִם , but a few end with וֹת.

דָּבָר   דְּבָרִים   אָב   אָבוֹת

word --> words   *BUT*   father --> fathers

Noun Cases In Hebrew

Nominative.
Hebrew has no specific ending for nominative nouns, but generally indicates the nominative noun by its position in a sentence. Generally the subject follows the finite verb.

Accusative
The direct object is indicated by word position in the sentence. Generally the direct object follows the subject of the verb. A direct object which is definite is generally introduced with the direct object marker (see preceding page), except in poetry. There is an old accusative ending, הָ, which is still used to express direction or motion toward a place, as in הָהָרָה *toward the mountain,* or אַרְצָה *to the ground*.

Ablative.
The case expressing separation, or movement or direction *from* is formed using the preposition מִן־.

Dative.
The case expressing intention *toward* or movement *to* is formed using the preposition לְ.

Locative.
The case expressing position is shown by the use of the prepositions בְּ *in,* עַל *upon,* תַּחַת *below,* בֵּין *between,* אֵצֶל *beside,* לִפְנֵי *before,* and others.

Instrumental.
The instrumental case is indicated with the prepositions בְּ and עִם. The locative and instrumental cases are distinguished by context.

Genitive.
The case expressing possession and a wide variety of other relationships is expressed with a special combination of words which is called a construct chain (see the following page).

The Construct State

The genitive case is expressed in Hebrew by combining words in what is called the construct relation. The construct relation is formed by annexion, i.e. by joining with a preceding substantive in the construct state. Thus while Greek would express the idea "king's son" by saying "son **of-the-king**," i.e., by putting the noun *king* in the genitive case (υἱὸς τοῦ βασιλέως), Hebrew would express the same thing by saying "**son-of** the-king," i.e., by writing the word *son* in its construct form, and putting it in the construct state by annexing it to the phrase *the king* (בֶּן־הַמֶּלֶךְ).

Notice that the word *son* is בֵּן in the absolute state (dictionary form), but בֶּן in the construct state. This is because when the construct relation is formed, the substantive in the construct state loses its accent, and the long vowels of the open syllables (unless characteristic) are reduced to hateph vowels (volatilized), and the long vowels of the closed syllables are shortened. In the case of בֵּן, the long *tsere* of the closed syllable is shortened to *segol*.

The construct forms of various kinds of nouns are formed differently (see Hackett pp. 50-51). Generally, the construct is recognized by its position in a chain of nouns, and by the reduction (volatilization) of vowels as compared to the absolute form of the noun. The construct state can also be signalled simply by a noun's pronominal suffix, by the joining action of a *maqqef*, or a by conjunctive accent (see MNK p. 193; a disjunctive accent alternatively signals the absolute state of a noun).

In Hebrew, the genitive has a very wide application, expressing almost any relation between two nouns, "corresponding often to the semi-adjectival use of nouns in our own language, as tree-fruit, fruit-tree, seed-corn, water-pot, except that the order of words is reversed, fruit of tree, tree of fruit."[1]

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1   A. B. Davidson, *Introductory Hebrew Grammar Hebrew Syntax*. 3d ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), p. 31.

The Hebrew Infinitives

In our English language, "the **infinitive** expresses *an action* generally, i.e., without reference to a particular person or thing."[1] "**Infinitives** are 'infinite' in the sense that they express the basic idea of the verb root without the limitations of person, gender, and number."[2] In English we usually preface the **infinitive** with the preposition *to*: "I want *to tango*." **Infinitives** are verbal nouns; therefore, they will have characteristics of verbs, but can also function as the subject or object of another verb.

In Hebrew, there are two **infinitives**, the infinitive construct and the infinitive absolute.

The infinitive construct is most like our English infinitive, but has fascinating variations. As with nouns in the construct state, the word *construct* refers to the phenomenon of two or more words being "constructed," or built together, to function as a unit in conveying a single compound idea.[3] Thus, the **infinitive construct** most often appears with a preceding or prefixed preposition:

1. When prefixed with a בְּ , the **infinitive construct** signals a **temporal clause** (indicating *when* an action took place, as in Gen 9.14, "**when I bring a cloud**"; Gen 12.4, "**when he departed**"), or a causal clause (telling *why* an action or result occurred). Of course, sometimes the בְּ is attached to the temporal noun rather than to the infinitive as in, בְּיוֹם אֲכָלְכֶם , "**in**-[the]-day-of your-eating," Gen 3.5; cf. Gen 5.1.

2. When prefixed with a כְּ , the **infinitive construct** signals a **temporal clause** expressing the idea of *when*, *as*, *just as*, or *as soon as* (e.g., Gen 39.18, "As I raised my voice …"). It can also express a causal idea: "Because (or since) you have allied yourself…." (2 Chronicles 20.37).

3. When prefixed with a לְ , the most frequent prefix of the **infinitive construct**, the form can signal a **temporal clause** (as in Gen 6.1: "It happened **when** man began **to multiply**…"), but often like our English infinitive, it signals a purpose clause (as in Gen 1.15 and 17, "***to give light*** on the earth"), or a result clause (as in Gen 3.22: "the man has become like one of Us, [**with the result of**] **knowing good and evil**").

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1 Wenham.
2 Kelley.
3 Cf. Weingreen, p. 44.

4. A מִן , "from," prefixed to an **infinitive construct** sometimes logically follows verbs of withholding or restraining. It can also occasionally express comparison, as in Gen 4.13: "[Too] great my punishment **from** [what can be] **borne**," or direction, as in Gen 10.19 (where the preposition is attached to preceding directional noun), "**to go from**-Sidon [in the direction] of Gerar…."

The **infinitive construct** is often used with a pronominal suffix which functions as either the subject or the object of the infinitive. In Gen 3.19, for example, the suffix ךָ- , *you* (2 person, masc., sing.) is the subject of the infinitive *to return*: "Till **you**-return unto the-ground."

In a seeming disregard of the idea of a **construct state**, the **infinitive construct** also appears (like the infinitive absolute) without any preposition or pronomial suffix. In these cases, the **infinitive construct** often seems to mimic the uses of infinitive absolute (see item 1 below).

The infinitive absolute, in contrast, never occurs with prepositional prefixes or pronominal suffixes. The **infinitive absolute** is commonly used:

1. As a noun, like our English gerund (a verb ending with *-ing*, and functioning as a noun). The infinitive construct is sometimes used this way as well, as in Gen 2.18, "The man's **being alone** [is] not good"; notice that the infinitive construct in this case is used as the subject.[4]

2. To intensify the verbal idea of its immediately following cognate verb. Thus, in Gen 2.16, אָכֹל תֹּאכֵל, "eating you will [freely] eat," and Gen 2.17, מוֹת תָּמוּת, "dying you will die!" Likewise, in Gen 3.16, הַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה , "multiplying I will multiply your pain…."

3. To emphasize the duration or continuation of the verbal idea of its *immediately preceding* cognate verb, as in Isaiah 6.9: שִׁמְעוּ שָׁמוֹעַ וְאַל־תָּבִינוּ , "hear hearing (i.e, hear and keep on hearing), but you will not discern…."

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4 Putnam, p. 40.

The Hebrew Verbal Stems

In Hebrew, a stem is the **fundamental** word to which other letters are affixed in order to modify meaning. To a Hebrew verb stem, we can affix number and gender endings, as well as pronominal suffixes. Thus for the Qal stem, שָׁמַר , *he kept*, we can add the first person singular ending, תִּי , and make שָׁמַ֥רְתִּי , *I kept*. Then we can add the second person masculine pronominal suffix to build the word שְׁמַרְתִּיךָ, *I kept you*.

For Hebrew verbs there are seven stems. The different stems express different voices, i.e., **active** and **passive**, along with **reflexive**. A stem in the active voice express that the subject is doing the action. A stem in the passive voice expresses that the action is being done to the subject. A stem in the reflexive voice expresses that the subject is doing the action to himself, herself or itself.

There is more to Hebrew stems than voice, however. Hebrew verb stems can also express the intensification of an action, or the causation of an action.

Here is a summary of the seven verb stems and how they work:

Qal
The word קַל means *light* (not heavy). This is the name given to the basic Hebrew verb stem that simply states action in the active voice.

Niphal
The Niphal stem expresses the passive voice, and (in the perfect conjugation) is marked by a prefixed nun-hirik (נִ). Thus, the Qal שָׁמַר , *he kept*, in the Niphal stem becomes נִשְׁמַר , *he was kept*.

Piel (Polel)
The Piel stem (also called *Polel* in connection with a certain class of verbs), expresses an active voice like the Qal stem, but adds and element of intensification to the action. Thus, the piel participle of שָׁמַר in Jonah 2.9, מְשַׁמְּרִים , expresses the idea not just of keeping or guarding, but of doing so vigilantly, and so describes those who keep a religious (idolatrous) vigil.

Pual (Polal)
The Pual stem (also called *Polal* in connection with a certain class of verbs), is the passive voice counterpart to the Piel stem, adding an intensification to the action. Thus while the word חָלַק simply means *to divide,* or *share*, its pual forms, *be divided* only occur in the OT in connection with people's property *being divided as spoil* (Isaiah 33.23; Amos 7.17; Zechariah 14.1). "The passive (Pual) is distinguished by the obscure vowel ŭ, or very rarely ŏ, in the first syllable, and ŏ (in pause ā) always in the second."

Hithpael
The Hithpael stem also expresses intensive action, but adds a reflexive meaning. However, besides expressing an action that someone does to himself, it can express action done *for oneself* or *for one's own interests*. Thus, while the verb הָלַךְ means *to go* or *walk*, the Hithpael in Zechariah 1.10, הִתְהַלֵּךְ, means *to patrol*, i.e., *walk around for one's particular purposes*.

Hiphil
The Hiphil stem expresses causative action. So, while the Qal קָדַשׁ means *he was holy,* the Hiphil הִקְדִּישׁ means *he caused to be holy,* i.e., *he sanctified.*

Hophal
The Hophal stem is the passive counterpart to the Hiphil. Thus, we have the Hophal of the verb נָכָה, *he struck*, in Zechariah 13.6, הֻכֵּיתִי, *I was caused to be struck,* i.e., *I was beaten*.

Consecutive Verbs

One of the most counter-intuitive structuring device in biblical Hebrew, from the perspective of an English reader, is what Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka call **Inverted Tenses** and William Griffin refers to as "tense flipping."[1] This structuring device includes, first of all, the use of the imperfect verb (which is most commonly used to describe action in future time,[2] and is also used to express action in the present) to describe an action in the past. Here are two texts in which the imperfect form יֹאמַר (of אָמַר, *to say*) is used with a future meaning in the first instance, and a past meaning in the second:

וְיֹאמַר הִנֵּנִי … and He **will say**, "Here I am." (Isa 58.9)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר And God **said**, "Let there be light." (Gen 1.3)

You will notice that there are different vowel points and accentuation in the two instances of יאמר, but what should draw your eye are the different spellings of the vav conjunctions. In the first instance, the vav has its normal conjunctive spelling (וְ); in the second instance it has the distinctive spelling of the **Vav-Consecutive** (וַ , see p. B-8). This **Vav-Consecutive** indicates that the imperfect verb to which it is prefixed is governed by a preceding perfect verb. In the case of Gen 1.3, the imperfect verb, *and said*, is governed by the preceding perfect verb *was* in Gen 1.2: "The earth **was** formless and void …" It is in the historical context of the time when the earth was formless and void that God **said**, "Let there be light." Since the historical context concerns the remotest past, it is appropriate for our English versions to translate with "God **said**," instead of with "God **will say**," or "God **says**."

וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ And the earth **was** formless and void (Gen 1.2)
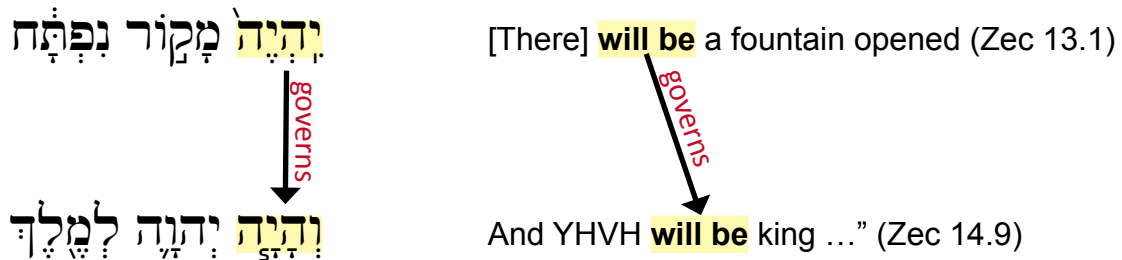
governs *governs*

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר And God **said**, "Let there be light." (Gen 1.3)

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1. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), §117, and William Paul Griffin, *Hebrew for Reading Comprehension* (William Paul Griffin, 2014), p. 73. It is misleading to speak of inverted tenses in biblical Hebrew, however, first of all because on the conjugational level Hebrew has verbal aspects (kind of action) rather than tenses (time of action), and second because the verbal aspects are not inverted. As Kyle M. Yates insisted, "There is no particle [such as a vav-consecutive] which has the power of changing a verbal state to another state." See Kyle M. Yates, *The Essentials Of Biblical Hebrew*, (New York: Harber & Row, 1938), pp. 103-105.
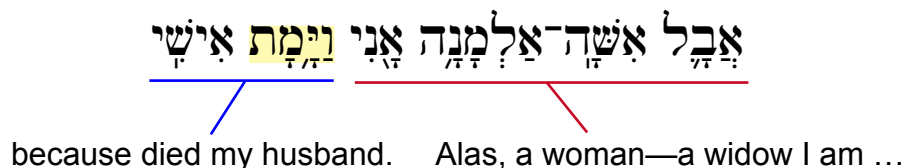2. PHK, p. 129.

The so-called phenomenon of **Inverted Tenses** also includes the use of the per-fect verb (which is normally translated with a past tense) to express action that will occur in the future. Whereas use of the imperfect with a Vav-Consecutive is the mainstay of historical narrative, use of perfect verbs governed by an antecedent imperfect verb is an important syntactical device in predictive prophecy. Thus, though context helps place the action of the many perfect verbs of Zec 14 in the future Day of the LORD, those perfect verbs are governed by an imperfect verb way back in Zechariah 13.1:

יִהְיֶה מָקוֹר נִפְתָּח

[There] **will be** a fountain opened (Zec 13.1)

governs

וְהָיָה יְהוָה לְמֶלֶךְ

And YHVH **will be** king …" (Zec 14.9)

As you see, in the case of perfect verbs governed by an imperfect, the **Vav-Consecutive** in *not* employed; instead, the consecutive verbs are connected to the governing clause by the regular **Vav-Conjunctive**.

Of course the question arises: Why use "inverted tenses" at all; why not consis-tently use perfect verbs for action in past time, and imperfect verbs for action in pres-ent and future time? **The answer is twofold: First, the Hebrew structuring device of consecutive verbs allows an author to indicate successive and subordinate action relative to a preceding verbal statement;[3] second, it allows an author to speak of uncompleted action in the past, and of completed action in the future!**

With regard to the first feature, consecutive verbs joined to a preceding statement by **Vav-Consecutives** will express succession, either temporal (actions occurring after the preceding) or logical (actions occurring because of the preceding). Sometimes, how-ever, an imperfect verb with **Vav-Consecutive** will be used not for temporal or logical succession, but instead epexegetically, i.e., to explain the prior state or event. Here's an example of **epexegesis**:

אֲבָל אִשָּׁה־אַלְמָנָה אָנִי **וַיָּמָת אִישִׁי**

because died my husband.   Alas, a woman—a widow I am …

Here we see that the imperfect verb with **Vav-Consecutive**, וַיָּמָת , literally, "and he

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3   See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), § 33.2.
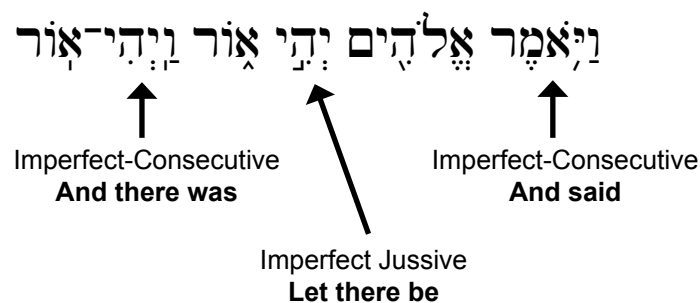
died," is used to explain the antecedently stated situation, "I am a widow."[4]

The second use of consecutive verbs is not entirely unlike our habit of telling stories about past events with present tense verbs:

> I **went** to see Star Trek VI, and they **get into** a predicament where Scotty **says**, "If we do that … then we're dead," and Spock **answers**, "I've been dead before."

Notice that the initial verb in the above example is in the past tense. The verb *went* "governs" all the present tense verbs that follow. Even though the speaker describes Scotty speaking and Spock answering in the present tense, the hearer understands that the movie characters are not speaking and answering now, but in the past viewing of the film. We do this to add vividness and drama to our storytelling.

Adding vividness and drama are also part of the Hebrew use of coordinated consecutive verbs, along with the more technical need at times to express perfect (completed) or imperfect (uncompleted) verbal aspect regardless of the chronological context. This being the case, let us reexamine Genesis 1.3:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר

Imperfect-Consecutive	Imperfect Jussive	Imperfect-Consecutive
And there was	**Let there be**	**And said**

In the sentence, "And said Elohim, 'Let there be light,'" and there was light," the main verbs **said** and **there was** are imperfect verbs implying some aspect of uncompleted action. However, because they are consecutive verbs governed by a preceding perfect verb, and joined to the narrative by **Vav-Consecutive**, we translate them into English in the past tense. Still, if we were to "over translate" the verse, it might read like this:

> "And Elohim proceeded to speak, 'Let there begin to be light,' and light began to beam forth."[5]

Do you see how an understanding of *imperfect action* in *past time* adds a poetic dimension to the text?

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4 The consecutive imperfect used here, besides being epexegetical, may imply that the husband was dying over time, instead of suddenly.
5 Cf. Yates' rendition of this verse in his grammar, p. 104.

Now look again at Zechariah 14.9a:

וְהָיָה יְהוָה לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ

↑

Perfect-Consecutive
And will be

In the sentence, "And will be YHVH king over all the land," the verb *will be* is perfect, but governed by the imperfect verb back in Zec 13.1. Therefore, we translate it into English in the future tense (particularly since Zec 14.9b gives the chronological context as in the future Day of the LORD). However, we could translate the first half of this verse:

And the LORD **will have become** king over the whole land; …

In other words, perfective aspect of the verb *to be* in this verse communicates **the accomplished and settled state** of the LORD's kingship in that future time, not just the simple fact that He will be king. Remember that when David first became king, it was only over a portion of the nation (the tribe of Judah); "there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David" (2Sa 3.1), before David finally became king over the whole land. However, when the greater David comes in His Day, his kingship over the whole land (Israel and beyond) will be a *fait accompli* from the moment of His return.

The better we understand the nuances of perfective and imperfective verbal aspect, the more we will appreciate the poetry and the force of the Hebrew text. Therefore, we want to learn to recognize consecutive verb chains by their conjunctions and accentuation,[6] as well as by their contexts. Thankfully, our various tools that identify Hebrew morphology will help us recognize consecutive verbs. For those of us using **Bible-Works**, consecutive verbs are identified in the Analysis window as "verb [stem] **consec** …." In **Logos**, these verbs are identified as "imperfect waw **consecutive**" or "perfect **consecutive**."

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6   Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), §118 and §119.

Independent Personal Pronouns

These pronouns are called "independent" because the are not affixed to another word. They are sometimes called Subject Pronouns because they are always the subject of a verb (or of a verbless clause), never the object.

Person	Singular		Plural	
1 c.	אֲנִי / אָנֹכִי	I	אָנוּ / אֲנַ֫חְנוּ	we
2 m.	אַתָּה	you	אַתֶּם	you
2 f.	אַתְּ	you	אַתֵּ֫נָה	you
3 m.	הוּא	he	הֵ֫מָּה / הֵם	they
3 f.	הוּא / הִיא	she	הֵ֫נָּה / הֵן	they

When an **Independent Personal Pronoun** is used as a subject in a verbless clause, the verb "to be" is understood:

כִּי־עָפָר אַתָּה   For dust [are] **you** ... (Genesis 3.19).

וּמוֹצִא דִבָּה הוּא כְסִיל   And a man spreading rumor, **he** [is] a fool. (Pro 10.18b)

Pʀᴏɴᴏᴍɪɴᴀʟ Sᴜꜰꜰɪxᴇs Wɪᴛʜ Nᴏᴜɴs

Here is the word *horse* with possessive pronominal suffixes. The suffixes are added to the construct form of the noun (= *horse of*). Thus, to say "my horse" (1st person, common, singular), Hebrew says, "horse of me"; to say, "those ladies' horses," (3rd person, feminine, plural), Hebrew says, "horses of them," etc. I've marked the pronominal suffixes in **blue**. Many of them preserve a fragment of the corresponding <u>Independent Personal Pronouns</u>; I've marked the person of those in **Red**.

Person	Singular Noun	Plural Noun
	סוּס	סוּסִים
	סוּס const.	סוּסֵי const.
1 c.s.	סוּסִי	סוּסַי
2 m.s.	סוּסְךָ	סוּסֶיךָ
2 f.s.	סוּסֵךְ	סוּסַיִךְ
3 m.s.	סוּסוֹ	סוּסָיו
3 f.s.	סוּסָהּ	סוּסֶיהָ
1 c.p.	סוּסֵנוּ	סוּסֵינוּ
2 m.p.	סוּסְכֶם	סוּסֵיכֶם
2 f.p.	סוּסְכֶן	סוּסֵיכֶן
3 m.p.	סוּסָם	סוּסֵיהֶם
3 f.p.	סוּסָן	סוּסֵיהֶן