

Rules for Analyzing Hebrew Verbs

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Note 1: Please call any errors or unclarities to my attention
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Note 2: When a root is called “*pê wāw*” in this document, the dictionary form is, of course, written with an initial *yôd*.

1. Learn thoroughly the Qal Perfect and Imperfect paradigms so that you can write and recite them and so that you can recognize instantaneously that a suffix like **תָּ** indicates 2mp Perfect. The PGN (person, gender, number) of any Perfect or Imperfect verb form in any Pattern can be identified by knowledge of the Qal Paradigm. In every Pattern there are two stems: The Perfect Stem and the Imperfect Stem (usually the Imperative, Infinitive Construct and Infinitive Absolute, and Participle are based on the Imperfect Stem). In the Qal the Infinitive Absolute and Participle are not based on this stem and must be memorized). On the Niphal participle, see below.

2. Begin analysis of any verb form by marking off the prefixes and suffixes.

קטלָתָּ תִּקְטַלְנָה בָּחַמוּ

The first example is Perfect 2fs (תָּ), the second 3fp or 2fp Imperfect (תִּקְטַלְנָה), and all we can say about the third (בָּ) is that it is 3 common plural perfect or masculine plural imperative.

Rules for Verb Analysis (2)

3. For the Perfects of the Derived Patterns (everything but Qal), let the name of the Pattern be your guide (that is, the 3ms will sound like the name of the Pattern). Niphal begins with *nûn*, Piel and Pual have a *dāgēš forte* in their middle character and can be distinguished by their vowel sequence (i-e for Piel, or u-a for Pual); Hiphil, Hophal, and Hithpael begin with Hi-, Ho- (*qāmeš ḥātûp*) and Hith- respectively.

If the form is perfect, as identified by the suffix, and there are no prefixes and no *dāgēšes*, the form is Qal. e.g. קָמַתְּ from קוּם

4. If an Imperfect has a *yôd* prefix, it is a 3m form (singular or plural);
if it has a *tāw* prefix, it is a 3f or 2m-2f form (singular or plural);
if it has an *ḏāleph* or *nûn* prefix it is a 1st person form (singular
and plural respectively).

5. Identify the Pattern of Imperfects and other forms based on the Imperfect Stem (usually the Imperative, Infinitive Construct and Infinitive Absolute, and Participle are based on the Imperfect Stem) by the recognition points.

Qal: *ḥîreq-šěwăḏ* קָ? or קַ?, etc.

Niphal: Niphal triangle יִקְטֹל (formed by *ḥîreq--dāgēš forte--qāmeš*)

With a Guttural יִקְטֹל (Compensative lengthening instead of *dāgēš forte*)

Pê Wāw יִשָּׁב (Note the Niphal triangle)

(With a Hollow Verb יִכּוֹן The *dāgēš* results from the assimilation

Rules for Verb Analysis (3)

of the *Nûn* of the Niphal)

Piel and **Pual**: A *dāgēš forte* will be in the middle letter and a vocal *šěwăḏ* under the prefix consonant; one can distinguish Piel from Pual by the sound of the vowels (a Pual will have a *qibbûṣ* under the first root consonant).

יִקְטֹל יִקְטֹל

The *dāgēš* in the middle letter sometimes disappears when there is a *šěwăḏ* under the letter (Seow, p. 59).

Note: By definition, a Hollow verb cannot double its middle letter. Instead we have patterns called **Polel** (יִקְוֹמֵם) and **Polal** (יִקְוֹמֵם). That is, the final letter of the Hollow root is doubled. The forms above are Imperfects; these patterns also have all the other tenses.

Hiphil: Note the pataḥ under the prefix יִקְטִיל

[Sometimes a *pataḥ* will show up in the Qal prefix before verbs beginning with a guttural יִצְמַד].

Hophal: Note the *qāmeṣ ḥatûp* under the prefix followed by a silent *šěwăḏ* יִקְטֹל.

A *qāmeṣ ḥatûp* is a short vowel and appears only in a closed, unaccented syllable. Before *dāgēš forte*, the *qāmeṣ ḥatûp* is replaced by a *qibbûṣ*. הִגִּישׁ = Hophal Perfect from גִּישׁ.

Hithpael: yith-, tith-, ʔeth-, or nith- prefix יִתְ, תִּתְ, אִתְ, נִתְ. There will also be a *dāgēš forte* in the middle letter of the root.

Note: By definition a Hollow verb cannot double its middle letter. Instead we have **Hithpolel** (יִתְקוֹמֵם). That is, the final letter of the root is doubled.

Rules for Verb Analysis (4)

6. In Piel through Hithpael the Participles begin with a *mêm* and are based on the imperfect stem.

מִקְטָל, מִקְטָל, מִקְטִיל, מִקְטֵל, or מִתְקַטֵּל

In the Qal and Niphal the participles are not based on the imperfect stem and must be memorized:

Qal Active Qal Passive Niphal

קָטַל

קָטוּל

נִקְטָל

קָם (Qal active participle from a Hollow verb)

7. The Jussive is distinguished from the Imperfect in the Strong Verb only in the Hiphil where the vowel is shortened in the second syllable. In all other Patterns the forms can be either Imperfect or Jussive.

Hiphil Imperfect יִקְטִיל Hiphil Jussive יִקְטַל

(In the weak verbs, the Jussive is distinguished from the imperfect by a shortening of the stem vowel)

8. The imperative is formed in the Qal and Piel by removing the prefix from the 2nd person imperfect forms and making necessary vowel changes for other genders and numbers (see Rule of *šěwăṭ*, Seow, p. 56). In the Niphal, Hiphil, and Hithpael imperative, a *hê* replaces the *tāw* of the imperfect prefix, and in the Hiphil 2ms a *šērê* also replaces the *hîreq* as the stem vowel.

Qal קָטַל Niphal הִקְטָל Piel קָטַל Hiphil הִקְטַל Hithpael הִתְקַטֵּל

Rules for Verb Analysis (5)

9. The infinitive construct is formed the same way as the imperative 2ms in Qal, Niphal, Piel, and Hithpael. In the Hiphil, the infinitive construct is **הַקְטִיל** .

A final *tāw* (ת) indicates a Qal Infinitive construct in

Pê Yôd: **שָׁבַת** from **יָשַׁב** . (Note the loss of the initial *yôd*)

With suffix: **שָׁבַתִּי** . Cf. **לָקַח** from **לָקַח** .

Pê Nûn: **נָשַׁת** from **נָשַׁת** . (Note the loss of the initial *nûn*)

With suffix **נָשַׁתִּי** . Cf. **לָקַח** from **לָקַח** . With suffix **לָקַחִי** .

A final **וְ** is the sign of an Infinitive Construct in all Patterns for *Lāmed Hê* verbs.

Qal **בָּנוֹחַ** from **בָּנָה** Piel **גָּלוֹחַ** from **גָּלָה** .

10. The infinitive absolute, from Piel to Hithpael, has similar recognition points to those of the Imperfect.

Piel **קָטַל** or **קָטַל** (*dāgēš forte* in the middle letter of the root), Pual **קָטַל** (*dāgēš forte* in the middle letter of the root), Hiphil **הִקְטִיל** (*pathaḥ* in the prefix), Hophal **הִקְטִיל** (*qāmeš ḥāṭûp* in the prefix), and Hithpael **הִתְקַטַּל** (*hith-* prefix and *dāgēš forte* in the middle letter of the root)

In the Qal and Niphal the infinitive absolutes are not based on the imperfect stem. The Qal should be memorized.

Qal **קָטוּל** Niphal **נִקְטוּל** or **הִקְטוּל** Both Niphal forms are rare.

11. If only two root consonants appear in a verb form, the following rules will help discover the third consonant.

Rules for Verb Analysis (6)

a. *If there are only two root consonants, and the first is pointed with dāgēš forte, the word is Pê Nûn.*

יגַשׁ from נגשׁ . Cf. לקח from לקח

Pe Nûn verbs tend to have the first letter of the root assimilated (dāgēš forte appears in the following consonant). They act like the Strong Verbs in Piel and Pual.

Niphal Perfect נגַשׁ from *נגַשׁ

Hiphil Perfect הַגִּישׁ from *הַגִּישׁ

Hophal Perfect (*qibbûṯ*) replaces *qāmeṣ hāṭûp* before a dāgēš forte) הַגִּישׁ from *הַגִּישׁ

Hophal Imperfect 1cs נַגֵּשׁ from the root נגשׁ .

b. *If there are only two root consonants, and the prefix and the first two root consonants (that is, up to the second consonant, but not beneath it) are pointed like the Strong Verb paradigm, the word is lāmed hê.*

תַּגְלוּ Qal Imperfect, 2mp, from גלה

עָנִיתָ Piel Perfect, 2ms, from ענה

The Jussives of *Lāmed Hê* Verbs are apocopated (shortened):

Qal Imperfect יַגְלֶה Qal Jussive יַגְלֶה

Qal *wāw* consecutive with imperfect יַגְלֶה

Piel Imperfect יַגְלֶה Piel Jussive יַגְלֶה

cf. *wāw* consecutive with the imperfect יַגְלֶה instead of יַגְלֶה

Hiphil Imperfect יַגְלֶה; Hiphil Jussive יַגְלֶה.

Note: The common form יַגְלֶה is both *pe nûn* and *lāmed hê* from נכה

Rules for Verb Analysis (7)

c. If there are only two root consonants, and they are separated by a long vowel, the word may be Hollow (‡Ayin Wāw or ‡Ayin Yôd). Note rules “c” and “d” belong together.

Qal Imperfect
יְשִׁים and יְקוּם

Qal Jussive
יִשֵּׁם and יִקֹּם

Niphal Perfect
נִכְוֹנָה 2ms

Niphal Imperfect from כּוּן
נִכְוֹן 1cp

Hiphil Perfect of קוּם: הִקִּימָהּ 2ms; הִקִּימוּ 3ms

d. If there are only two root consonants, and the prefix of the imperfect is pointed with a qāmeṣ in an open syllable, the verb is Hollow and the pattern is Qal or Hiphil.

Qal Imperfect יְשִׁים or יְקוּם from קוּם and שִׁים.

Qal Jussive יִשֵּׁם or יִקֹּם derived from קוּם or שִׁים.

Qal Imperfect with *Wāw* Consecutive וַיִּשֵּׁם or וַיִּקֹּם derived from קוּם or שִׁים. Note that the accent is on the *yā* syllable, making the final syllable closed and unaccented.

Hiphil Imperfect יִשֵּׁם or יִקֹּם derived from קוּם or שִׁים.

Hiphil Jussive יִשֵּׁם or יִקֹּם derived from קוּם or שִׁים.

Hiphil Imperfect with *Wāw* Consecutive וַיִּשֵּׁם or וַיִּקֹּם derived from קוּם or שִׁים.

Note: the Qal and Hiphil Imperfects of ‡Ayin Yôd verbs are identical.

Rules for Verb Analysis (8)

שׂים is Qal or Hiphil Imperfect 3ms from שׂים.

e. If there are only two root consonants, and the prefix is pointed with a Naturally Long vowel [a vowel usually written with a vowel letter], the word is Pê Wāw, Pê Yôd, or Hollow.

Pê Wāw (the examples cited are from יִשָּׁב, יִלֵּד and יִרְדָּ).
Niphil נִשְׁבַּ perfect. The imperfect is regular: יִנְשֹׁב
(Niphil Triangle)

Niphil infinitive construct הוֹלִיד .

Hiphil Perfect הוֹלִיד 3ms; הוֹלִידָה 2ms from יִלֵּד

Hiphil Imperfect יוֹלִיד from יִלֵּד

Hophal יוֹרֵד and הוֹרֵד Imperfect and Perfect from יִרְדָּ

Pê Yôd (true *pê yôd*)

Hiphil הִיטִיב from יִטַּב

Hollow

Hophal הוֹקַם and יוֹקַם Imperfect and Perfect from קוּם.

Note: *Pê Wāw* and Hollow roots have the same kind of Hophal forms. Theoretically, הוֹקַם could come from either יקום or קום.

The Hiphil perfect of Hollow verbs is הִקִּים (3ms) and הִקִּימוּ (2ms; note vowel reduction in the propretone). Though these forms do not have a naturally long vowel in the prefix and therefore do not fit this rule, the *hê* prefix is a tipoff that they are Hiphil. The Hiphil participle of Hollow verbs is מִקִּים.

f. If there are only two root consonants, and the prefix of the Qal Imperfect is pointed with a šērê, the word is Pê Wāw.

Rules for Verb Analysis (9)

יָשָׁבֹוּ Qal imperfect 3mp from יָשַׁב. cf. הִלְךְ from יָלַךְ.

g. If there are only two root consonants, and none of the above rules applies, the word may be ~~ʾ~~Ayin ~~ʾ~~Ayin.

יָשָׁבֹוּ, הִסִּיב, סִבּוּתִי are all from סבב (Qal Perfect 1cs, Hiphil Perfect 3ms, and Hiphil Imperfect with waw consecutive 3ms respectively).

12. Guttural verbs differ from Strong verbs in the following ways:

F = no *dāgēš forte*; **S** = Silent *šewăṯ* replaced by *hātēp* vowel; **V** = Vocal *šewăṯ* is replaced by *hātēp* vowel; **A** = Preference for “a-class” vowels. The letter *rêš* also does not take *dāgēš forte*.

Piel perfect מֵאָנַף with compensative lengthening
מָהַר with virtual doubling
נָהַם Niphāl or Piel Perfect with virtual doubling
בָּרַךְ Piel Perfect. No *dāgēš forte* in the *rêš*;
compensative lengthening

Qal imperfect יַעֲמֹד *hātēp* vowel for silent *šewăṯ* and preference for “a” vowel

Qal imperative עֲמֹד *hātēp* vowel for vocal *šewăṯ*

Rules for Verb Analysis (10)

Procedure for Analyzing Hebrew Verbs

13. Examine words to see whether they show any suffixes of the Perfect or any prefixes (and suffixes) of the Imperfect. These clues will give you the tense and the Person, Number, and Gender.

- A verb is an infinitive construct if it has a preposition in front of it (ל,ב,כ,ל), or if it has possessive suffixes like those used on a noun. Other recognition points of the Imperfect also apply.

לְהַצִּיל, לְשַׁבֵּתוֹ, לְהַקְטִיל, לְקַטֵּל, גִּשְׁתּוֹ, בְּגִלוֹת, לְקַטֵּל

(From left to right: Qal infinitive construct from a strong verb; Qal infinitive construct with a preposition from a *lāmed hê* verb; Qal infinitive construct with a 3ms suffix from נָשַׁב; Piel infinitive construct; Niphal infinitive construct; Qal infinitive construct from *Pê yôd* with a 3ms suffix; Hiphil infinitive construct from a *pê nûn* verb).

Infinitive constructs for *Lāmed Hê* verbs end in תּוּ
Infinitive constructs for *Pê Yôd* and *Pê Nûn* verbs end in תּוּ

- A verb is an infinitive absolute if it is used immediately before or immediately after a finite verb of the same root.

Qal = קָטוּל. In other patterns, standard recognition forms for the Imperfect apply in identifying the Infinitive Absolute.

- A verb is a participle if it is קָטוּל, קָטוּל in the Qal (active and passive respectively), נִקְטָל in the Niphal, or has a מ prefix in Piel--Hithpael (other Imperfect recognition points apply).

Rules for Verb Analysis (11)

- A verb is probably an imperative if an imperative is used in an English translation. Imperatives are formed by removing the ה prefix from the second person forms of the Imperfect in Qal or Piel, or by replacing it with a ה (in Niphal, Hiphil, and Hithpael; other Imperfect recognition points apply).

14. Determine the Pattern of the verb:

A. If the verb (according to #13 above) is Perfect, the recognition points are the following:

Qal--no prefixes, no *dāgēšes*

Niphal--*Nûn* prefix

Piel-Pual--*dāgēš forte* in middle letter. (Look for the “u” vowel in the Pual)

Hiphil--ה prefix (ה [strong verbs], וה [pê wāw].ה or ה [hollow], ה [gutturals])

Hophal--הה, (וה [pê wāw or hollow], ה [pê nûn])

Hithpael--הה

B. If the verb (according to #13 above) is Imperfect, the recognition points are the following:

Qal--ה? (ו, ה, ש, נ for *Pê Yôd*; ו etc. for Hollow)

Niphal--ה? (Niphal triangle). וה? with initial guttural

Piel-Pual--לה? (Note *šewăš* under the prefix and *dāgēš forte* in the middle letter)

Hiphil--ה? (ו? *Pê wāw*; ו? *Pê yôd*, ו? Hollow)

Hophal--ה? (ו? for Hollow or *Pê Yôd*; ו? for)

Hithpael--ה?, etc.

15. Identify the root letters in the form--usually two or three will be present. Choose the third letter. See #11 above for a list of rules on how to determine the third root consonant.

Rules for Verb Analysis (12)