

Verbs

They're What's
Happening

Verbs

A verb is a word used to describe an action, state, or occurrence, and forming the main part of the predicate of a sentence.

Hebrew is a very “verbal” language – verbs do a lot of the heavy lifting of the language. They also work rather differently from English. Thus, they deserve special attention.

Function of Verbs

In the simplest terms, verbs demonstrate either *action* or *being*.

Actions

He **ran**.

We **are jumping**.

States of being

She **is** smart.

The cheese **stunk**.

Tense of Verbs

Past

I jumped

You jumped

He jumped

She jumped

We jumped

Ya'll jumped

They jumped

Present

I jump

You jump

He jumps

She jumps

We jump

Ya'll jump

They jump

Future

I will jump

You will jump

He will jump

She will jump

We will jump

Ya'll will jump

They will jump

Transitive vs. Intransitive

Another quality of verbs to consider is whether they are transitive or intransitive. Transitive verbs take a direct object. Intransitive verbs do not.

He **Painted** the **wall**.

The tower **fell**.

Dogs **are chasing** the **cat**.

I will **rest**.

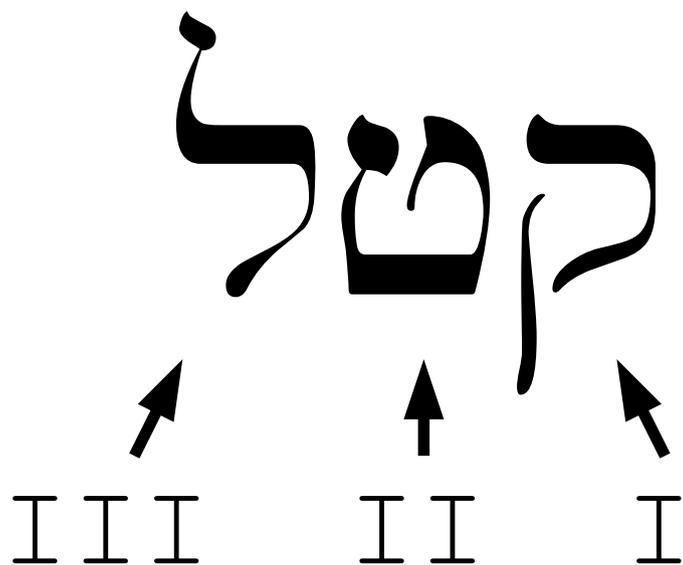
Verbal Roots

Hebrew words are generally built on tri-consonantal* roots. Thus we have:

- מֶלֶךְ king
- מַלְכָּה queen
- מַלְכוּת kingdom
- מָלַךְ he ruled

*sometimes bi-consonantal

Verbal Roots



Verbal Roots

Hebrew roots often demonstrate peculiar morphological changes because of the nature of the consonants.

Verbs that do not demonstrate oddities are called “strong” verbs.

Gutturals in the any of the three positions, or *yod* or *nun* in the first position.

Fortunately, Logos is always there to guide us.

Parsing Verbs

Like nouns, Hebrew verbs are also inflected for number and gender. However, they also carry an implicit subject in their conjugation.

קָטַל	He killed	קָטְלוּ	They killed
קָטְלָהּ	She killed		
קָטַלְתָּ	You killed	קָטַלְתֶּם	Y'all killed
קָטַלְתְּ	You killed	קָטַלְתֶּן	Y'all Killed
קָטַלְתִּי	I killed	קָטַלְנוּ	We killed

Singular

Plural

3 mas	קָטַל	He killed	קָטְלוּ	They killed
3 fem	קָטְלָהּ	She killed		
2 mas	קָטַלְתָּ	You killed	קָטְלוּהֶם	Y'all killed
2 fem	קָטַלְתְּ	You killed	קָטְלוּהֶנָּה	Y'all Killed
1 com	קָטַלְתִּי	I killed	קָטְלוּנוּ	We killed

When we parse a verb, we note its person, number, and gender.

Verbal Stems

Hebrew has a number of *stems*.^{*} The basic stem is the *Qal*, or light stem. It's all you need to know for now.

Other stems, which we will learn later (Niphal, Piel, Hiphil, etc), add markers to the verb to distinguish them from the simple meaning of the *Qal*.

^{*}The term *binyanim* is also used

English Verbal Tense

The 12 Verb Tenses

	Past	Present	Future
Simple	<p>I <i>ate</i> pizza yesterday.</p> <p>S + V₂ + O</p>	<p>I <i>eat</i> pizza everyday.</p> <p>S + V₁ + O</p>	<p>I <i>will eat</i> pizza tomorrow.</p> <p>S + 'will' + V + O</p>
Continuous	<p>I <i>was eating</i> pizza when you arrived.</p> <p>S + 'was/were' + (V+ing) + O</p>	<p>I <i>am eating</i> pizza right now.</p> <p>S + 'am/is/are' + (V+ing) + O</p>	<p>I <i>will be eating</i> pizza when you arrive.</p> <p>S + 'will be' + (V+ing) + O</p>
Perfect	<p>I <i>had eaten</i> all of the pizza when you arrived.</p> <p>S + 'had' + V₃ + O</p>	<p>I <i>have eaten</i> all of the pizza.</p> <p>S + 'have/has' + V₃ + O</p>	<p>I <i>will have eaten</i> all of the pizza by the time you arrive.</p> <p>S + 'will have' + V₃ + O</p>
Perfect Continuous	<p>I <i>had been eating</i> pizza for 2 hours when you arrived.</p> <p>S + 'had been' + (V+ing) + O</p>	<p>I <i>have been eating</i> pizza for 2 hours.</p> <p>S + 'have/has been' + (V+ing) + O</p>	<p>I <i>will have been eating</i> pizza for 2 hours when you arrive.</p> <p>S + 'will have been' + (V+ing) + O</p>

Legend: S = Subject O = Object V = Verb (V₁ = present / V₂ = past / V₃ = past participle)

English Verbal Tense

Two attributes are conveyed in English verbal tense: time and aspect.

Time indicates the temporal relationship between the sentence and the action.

Aspect indicates the nature of the actions – whether it is completed or continuous.

Hebrew Verbal Tense(?)

Hebrew verbs do not indicate tense. The two “full” conjugations are referred to as the *perfect* and *imperfect*.

קָטַלְתָּ

Perfect

suffix

qāṭal

יִקְטֹל

Imperfect

prefix

yiqṭōl

Perfect Conjugation

The perfect conjugation generally reflects a “perfected” action – that is, an action that has been completed.

This is most commonly translated into English as past tense (see previous paradigm).

Hence:

קָטַל He **killed**

Qal perfect 3ms qtl

Perfect Conjugation

We've already seen this, but this is the full paradigm for the Qal Perfect

קָטַל

He killed

קָטְלוּ

They killed

קָטְלָהּ

She killed

קָטַלְתָּ

You killed

קָטַלְתֶּם

Y'all killed

קָטַלְתְּ

You killed

קָטַלְתֶּן

Y'all Killed

קָטַלְתִּי

I killed

קָטַלְנוּ

We killed

Imperfect Conjugation

The imperfect conjugation, on the other hand, connotes an “imperfected” or incomplete action.

In many cases, this is best translated by an English future tense.

Hence:

יִקְטֹל. He **will kill**

Qal imperfect 3ms qtl

Imperfect Conjugation

יִּקְטֹל

He will kill

יִּקְטֹלוּ

They will kill

תִּקְטֹל

She will kill

תִּקְטֹלְנָה

They will kill

תִּקְטֹל

You will kill

תִּקְטֹלוּ

Y'all will kill

תִּקְטֹלְי

You will kill

תִּקְטֹלְנָה

Y'all will kill

אֶקְטֹל

I killed

נִקְטֹל

We will kill

Waw Consecutive Imperfect

A *waw* is often appended to an imperfect verb. Specifically, *waw* + *pathach* + *dagesh forte*.

וַיִּקְרָא

This is commonly called *waw* consecutive. It reverses the translation of the tense – the future tense of the imperfect become past tense. It is used extensively in narrative sequence.

Waw Consecutive Perfect

Likewise, the past tense of the perfect can be converted to future in the same way.

וְקָטַלְתָּ

Note, however, that the conjunction is spelled with a shewa and there is no dagesh.

Alternate Terminology

Perfect

qātal

Imperfect

yīqtōl

waw-Consec. Imperfect

w^eyīqtōl

waw-Consec. Perfect

w^eqātal

Back to Parsing

We now have 6 attributes we can identify with every verb:

- Stem
- Conjugation (Tense)
- Person
- Number
- Gender
- Root

Back to Parsing

קָטַל

Qal Perfect 3rd person masculine singular (3ms), from *qtl*

קָטַלְתִּי

Qal Perf 1cs

יִקְטְלוּ

Qal Imperf 3mp

Lexical Form

A verb is found in the lexicon according to its Qal 3ms Perfect form.

קָטַל: qal: impf. יִקְטֹל, תִּקְטֹל,

יִקְטֹלֵנִי: **kill** Ps 139:19; Jb 13:15;

24:14. †

From *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*,
William L. Holliday (CHALOT) .

Syntax

Standard syntax for Biblical Hebrew narrative is
Verb – Subject – Object.

Thus:

אֶת־הַהַר
the hill d.o.m.
(accusative)

יַעֲקֹב
Jacob
(genitive)

בָּנָי
sons
(nominative)

יָרְדוּ
They went down
(Qal Perf 3mpl)