Chapter Ten

Introduction to Verbs

Vocabulary

אָכַל	to eat	עָבַד	to serve
אָמַר	to say	עָלָה	to go up
הָלַךְ	to go, walk	עָשָׂה	to do, make
הָיָה	to be, become	פָּקַד	to visit
יָצָא	to go out, come out	קָרָא	to call
יָשַׁב	to sit, dwell	רָאָה	to see
מָלַךְ	to reign	שָׁכַב	to lay down
מָצָא	to find	שָׁלַח	to send
נָפַל	to fall	שָׁמַע	to hear, obey
נָתַן	to give	שָׁמַר	to keep, guard

Introduction to Verbs

Verbs are the most important part of speech since the action or state of being is defined by the verb. All Hebrew words have a root, either a three consonant or two consonant root that forms the foundation of the noun or verb. A stem is then built from the root and serves as the basic element of all words. Drs Pratico and Van Pelt provide the following words of encouragement, "The system of deriving different words or stems from a common root should be a point of encouragement for students since it can take some of the pain out of vocabulary memorization."[1] The following examples illustrate this concept using a couple of popular words.

Noun		Verb	
מֶלֶךְ	king	מָלַךְ	to reign
דָּבָר	word	דִּבֶּר	to speak

Hebrew verbs possess a stem, tense, person, gender, and number. The following table characterizes the various stems.

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[1] Gary Pratico & Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 2001), p. 122

Type	Stem	Description	Translation
Simple	Qal	Simple active	I said
	Niphʿal	Simple passive	I was being spoken to
		Simple reflexive	I said myself
Intensive	Piʿel	Intensive active	I intensely said
	Puʿal	Intensive passive	I was being intensely spoken to
	Hitphaʿel	Intensive reflexive	I intensely said myself
Causative	Hiphʿil	Causative active	I cause to speak
	Hophʿal	Causative passive	I was being made to speak

The second aspect of the Hebrew verb is tense or inflection. The time aspect of the verb is not inherent in the verb form as is the case with some languages. Instead, the time aspect is determined by the context. However, Hebrew verbs have two possible "inflections" that express the state of the action of the verb, referred to as kind of action. They are the perfect and imperfect. Perfect verbs express a completed state of the action, while imperfect expresses the incomplete state of the action.

The following table describes the various tense inflections[2].

Inflection	Kind of action	Translation	Example
Perfect	Completed action	Past tense	In the beginning God *created* (Gen. 1:1)
Imperfect	Incomplete action	Present/future tense	And I *will make* you a great nation (Gen. 12:2)

Inflection	Kind of action	Translation	Example
Imperative	Command	Command	*Believe* in the Lord your God! (2 Chron. 20:20)
Infinitive	Verbal noun	infinitive	*To know* good and evil (Gen. 3:22)
Participle	Verbal adjective	Verbally/adjectivally	*Knowing/those that know* good and evil (Gen. 3:5)

Finally, the Hebrew verb possesses person, number, and gender. The following table summarizes these aspects.

Person	Number

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[2] Most modern Hebrew grammarians do not use the word "tense" so as not to confuse the student concerning the time aspect. This grammar uses the word tense as a category simply because Gesenius uses the word to describe this characteristic – it simply is the best way to describe it.

	Singular		Plural	
	1st	I	1st	we
	2nd	you	2nd	you
	3rd	he/she/it	3rd	them

	Masculine	masculine subjects
Gender	Feminine	feminine subjects
	Common	both masculine and feminine

Parsing and Translation Guidelines

To parse a verb is to identify all the individual elements that define a Hebrew verb. That is, identifying the verb's stem, conjugation, person, number, and lexical form. To parse a verb first start by identifying the prefixes and suffixes that may be present. Once they are identified, find the verb root. The verb root will be the Qal Perfect 3rd masculine singular form for bisyllabic verbs and the Qal infinitive construct in the case of monosyllabic verbs. The next step is to find the root in the lexicon and the meaning. Then the stem is identified (Qal, Niphal, Piel, etc…) and its conjugation (perfect, imperfect, imperative, etc). Finally, the gender and number can be noted and the rough translation made.

To break the verb down into its elementary parts:
1.   Identify the additions
      a. Prefix
      b. Suffix
2.   Remove affixes
3.   Identify root letters (lexical form)
4.   Translate the word.

Suffixes	**Root**	**Prefixes**
XX	**XXX**	**XX**
Verbal endings	3 - letter root	Article
Pronominal suffixes		Conjunction
		Preposition
		Stem identifer
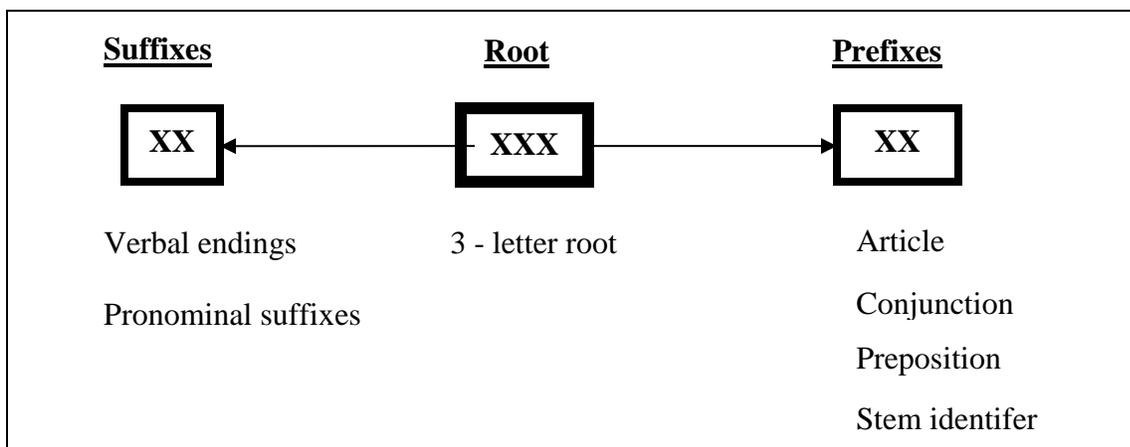
The Hebrew Verb Sentence

1. *Normal word order*. The normal word order for the Hebrew verbal sentence is first the verb, then the subject and any modifiers, and finally the object and any modifiers (*verb-subject-object*). This is illustrated as follows:

Object	Subject	Verb
אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ	אֱלֹהִים	בָּרָא
"God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1)		

(modifiers)	Object	(modifiers)	Subject	Verb
	אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ		אֱלֹהִים	בָּרָא
"God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1)				

2. *Word order used for emphasis*. Hebrew word order may vary in order to emphasize some aspect that is placed first. Notice the following examples.

יְהוָה נָתַן וַיהוָה לָקָח   The LORD (emphatic) gave, and the LORD (emphatic) has taken away. (Job 1:21)

אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִּירָא   Yahweh (emphatic) your God you shall fear (Deut. 10:20)

דֶּרֶךְ שָׁלוֹם לֹא יָדָעוּ   The way of peace (emphatic) they do not know. (Isa. 59:8)

Verb Classifications

Hebrew verbs are classified according to sound as either strong or weak. The result of this classification is that strong ("sounding") verbs are fairly standard while weak ("sounding") verbs are subdivided into ten groupings.

A. *Strong verbs*. A strong verb contains three strong consonants in the root form. The strong consonants are: ב, ג, ד, ז, ט, כ, ל, מ, נ (middle consonant), ס, פ, צ, ק, ר (final consonant), שׂ, שׁ, ת.

B. *Weak verbs*. A verb is weak if it contains one of the following:
   1. It contains one or more guttural consonant א, ה, ח, ע, and sometimes ר.
   2. It begins with י, ו, or נ.
   3. Its second and third consonants are identical (Geminate).
   4. It is a middle vowel verb or a two consonant root (biconsonantal) verb.

Dr. Kelley writes, "Early grammarians named the various classes of weak verbs on the basis of a paradigm verb chosen for this purpose [of classification]. They might have chosen any triliteral verb as a basis for the names, but the one they favored was פָּעַל, translated 'he did, made.' Weak verbs were organized into separate classes on the basis of how their weak consonants were positioned in relation to the three consonants of the paradigm verb. Thus a verb with an initial guttural was called a Pe guttural; one with a middle guttural, an 'Ayin guttural; one with a final guttural, a Lamed guttural, etc. Many modern grammarians prefer to designate these simply as I-guttural, II-guttural, etc."[3]

	III ל	II עַ	I פָּ	← Modern designation / ← Traditional	Modern	Description
1	ד	מ	עָ	Pe Guttural	I - Guttural	Guttural in 1st root position
2	ל	א	שָׁ	'Ayin Guttural	II - Guttural	Guttural in 2nd root position
3	ח	לְ	שָׁ	Lamed Guttural	III - Guttural	Guttural in 3rd root position
4	ל	כ	אָ	Pe 'Alef	I – 'Alef	'Alef in 1st root position
5	א	צָ	מָ	Lamed 'Alef	III- 'Alef	'Alef in 3rd root position
6	ה	נָ	בָּ	Lamed He	III - He	He in 3rd root position
7	ל	פַ	נָ	Pe Nun	I - Nun	Nun in 1st root position
8	ב	ו	שׁ	'Ayin Vav or Yod	II – Vav or Yod	II – Vav/Yod
9	ב	שַׁ	יְ	Pe Vav or Yod	I - Vav or Yod	I – Vav/Yod
10	ב	ב	סָ	Double 'Ayin	Geminate	

Practice
1. Memorize the vocabulary.
2. Classify the following as strong or weak:
   a. הָלַךְ
   b. גָּנַב
   c. אָהַב
   d. יָדַע

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[3] Page Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 81