

Chapter Sixteen

Niph'al Strong Verbs

Vocabulary

גָּאַל	to redeem	נַחַל	a valley, wadi (m)
גָּדַל	to be great	עָזַב	to abandon, leave, forsake
הִשָּׂא	grass (m)	עָזַר	to help
זָבַח	to sacrifice	פָּרְהָה	to be fruitful
הִלֵּל	to praise	קָרַב	to draw near, approach
חָטְאָת	sin (f)	רָבָה	to be many, multiply
יָצָא	to go out	רָדַף	to pursue, persecute
יָרָא	to fear	שָׂם	to put, place
לָמַד	to learn	שִׁבְט	rod, staff, scepter, tribe (m)
מוֹת	to die	שָׁכַן	to settle, dwell

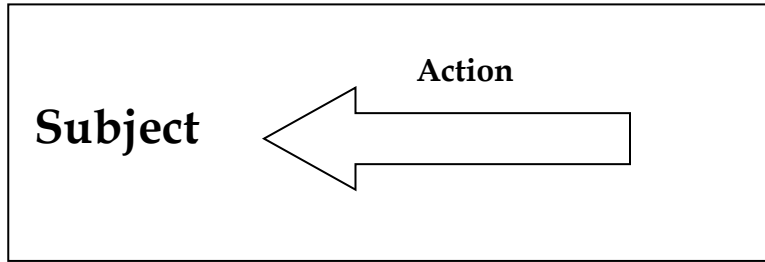
Niph'al

While the Qal verb stem expresses the Hebrew simple active voice, the Niph'al (נִפְעַל) verb stem is used to express the simple passive or reflexive voice. Drs. Waltke and O'Connor write, "The Qal example represents the subject as the agent, implicitly answering the question 'What is God doing?' The Niph'al by contrast answers the question 'What happened to the ground?' It does not represent the subject as the actor or agent. It rather represents the subject as having been acted upon by an unstated agent; the subject is merely participating in the action."¹

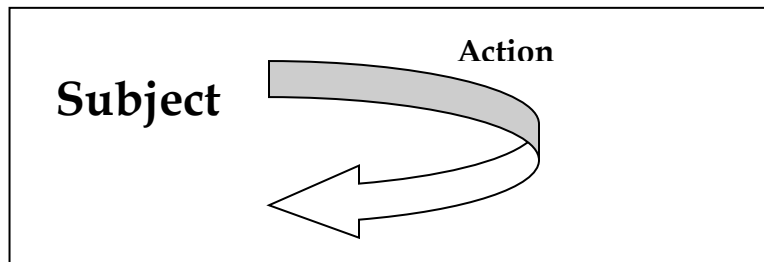
The passive and reflexive can be illustrated in the following pictorial forms:

Passive Voice

¹ Bruce Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winon lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 363



Middle Voice



Niph'al Perfect Form

To form the Niph'al perfect strong verb, attach the Niph'al prefix (נ) to the perfect form. The addition of נ will change the vowels according to the normal rules (e.g., shorting of the first vowel).

Niph'al Perfect				
Qal Perfect 3ms	Niph'al prefix		Niph'al Perfect	
שָׁמַר	נ	→	נִשְׁמַר	“he was kept” or “he kept himself”

Perfect				
	Qal	Niph'al	Passive	Reflective

	Simple active	Simple passive/reflexive		
3 ms	שָׁמַר	נִשְׁמַר	he was kept	he kept himself
3 fs	שָׁמְרָה	נִשְׁמְרָה	she was kept	she kept herself
2 ms	שָׁמַרְתָּ	נִשְׁמַרְתָּ	you were kept	you kept yourself
2 fs	שָׁמַרְתְּ	נִשְׁמַרְתְּ	you were kept	you kept yourself
1 cs	שָׁמַרְתִּי	נִשְׁמַרְתִּי	I was kept	I kept myself
3 cp	שָׁמְרוּ	נִשְׁמְרוּ	they were kept	they kept themselves
2 mp	שָׁמַרְתֶּם	נִשְׁמַרְתֶּם	you were kept	you kept yourselves
2 fp	שָׁמַרְתֶּן	נִשְׁמַרְתֶּן	you were kept	you kept yourselves
1 cp	שָׁמַרְנוּ	נִשְׁמַרְנוּ	we were kept	we kept ourselves

Niph'al Perfect Usage

1. *Simple passive action.* The Niph'al Perfect can be used to describe action in the simple passive voice. For example, "For God knew that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes **shall be opened**, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:5)
2. *Simple reflexive action.* The Niph'al Perfect can be used to express action in the simple reflexive action where the subject performs the action upon himself/herself. An example is, *עַל־כֵּן קָרָא לַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע כִּי שָׁם נִשְׁבָּעוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם*, "Wherefore he called that place Beersheba; because there **they swore** both of them." (Gen. 21:31)
3. *A few verbs do not exist in the Qal form.* The Niph'al Perfect is used in some cases for a Qal. Examples are the verbs *נָלַחַם* "he fought," and *נִשְׁבַּע* "he swore."

Niph'al Imperfect Form

To form the Niph'al imperfect strong verb, attach the Niph'al prefix (נִ) to the imperfect verb form. Whenever the nun (נ) closes a syllable within a Hebrew word and is followed by a syllable divider (silent sheva), it is assimilated into the following consonants by means of a dagesh forte.² In addition, the vowel under the first consonant is a qamets.

Niph'al Imperfect				
Qal Imperfect 3ms	Niph'al prefix		Niph'al Imperfect	
יִשְׁמַר	נִ	→	יִשְׁמַר	"he will be kept" or "he will keep himself"

² Kelley, p.139

Imperfect				
	Qal	Niph'al	Passive	Reflective
	Simple active	Simple passive/ reflexive		
3 ms	יִשְׁמֹר	יִשְׁמָר	he will be kept	he will keep himself
3 fs	תִּשְׁמֹר	תִּשְׁמָר	she will be kept	she will keep herself
2 ms	תִּשְׁמֹר	תִּשְׁמָר	you will be kept	you will keep yourself
2 fs	תִּשְׁמָרִי	תִּשְׁמָרִי	you will be kept	you will keep yourself
1 cs	אֲשַׁמֵּר	אֲשַׁמָּר	I will be kept	I will keep myself
3 mp	יִשְׁמְרוּ	יִשְׁמְרוּ	they will be kept	they will keep themselves
3 fp	תִּשְׁמְרֶנָּה	תִּשְׁמְרֶנָּה	they will be kept	they will keep themselves
2 mp	תִּשְׁמְרוּ	תִּשְׁמְרוּ	you will be kept	you will keep yourselves
2 fp	תִּשְׁמְרֶנָּה	תִּשְׁמְרֶנָּה	you will be kept	you will keep yourselves
1 cp	נִשְׁמֹר	נִשְׁמָר	we will be kept	we will keep ourselves

Niph'al Imperfect Usage

1. *Simple action in future time.* The Niph'al Imperfect can describe simple passive or reflective action in future time. An example is, בָּאֵשׁ יִשְׂרָף “with fire it shall be burned” (Lev. 7:19)
2. *Repeated, habitual, or customary action.* The Niph'al Imperfect can describe action or an act as repetitive, habitual, or customary. An example is, וְאַתֶּם כֹּהֲנֵי יְהוָה תִּקְרְאוּ “And you shall be called the priests of the LORD” (Isa. 61:6)
3. *Jussives and cohortatives.* The Niph'al Imperfect can be used to express actions contingent upon other elements in the context. An example is, אִילֵי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים אָנָשִׁים “Suppose there should be found there forty men” (Gen. 18:29)

Niph'al Imperative Form

To form the Niph'al imperative strong verb, change the ת prefix of the Qal imperfect verb to the ה prefix for the second person forms.

Niph'al Imperative					
	Qal Imperfect	Niph'al prefix		Niph'al Imperative	
2ms	תִּשְׁמֹר	ה	→	הִשְׁמָר	keep!
2fs	תִּשְׁמָרִי	ה	→	הִשְׁמָרִי	keep!
2mp	תִּשְׁמְרוּ	ה	→	הִשְׁמְרוּ	keep!

2fp	תשמרנה	ה	→	השמרנה	keep!
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Niph'al Imperative Usage

The Niph'al imperative describes action that is a command in the passive or reflexive voice. An example is **השמר לך פן-תשכח את-יהוה** “take heed to yourself lest you forget the LORD” (Deut. 6:12). The passive sense of the Niph'al imperative is often lost.

Niph'al Infinitive Form

1. *Niph'al infinitive construct.* The Niph'al infinitive construct has the same form as the masculine singular imperative. To form the Niph'al infinitive strong verb, change the ת prefix to the ה prefix in the Qal imperfect verb 2ms form.

Niph'al Infinitive Construct				
Qal Imperfect	Niph'al prefix		Niph'al Infinitive	
תשמר	ה	→	השמר	to be kept

2. *Niph'al infinitive absolute.* The Niph'al infinitive absolute is formed in two ways. The first form is similar to the construct state replacing the ת prefix to the ה prefix in the Qal imperfect verb 2ms form and dropping the final syllable vowel *se*. The second preserves the Niph'al prefix ה.

Niph'al Infinitive Absolute				
Qal Imperfect	Niph'al prefix		Niph'al Infinitive	
תשמר	ה	→	השמר	being kept
	ה	→	Alt. השמר	

Usage of the Niph'al Infinitive

The Niph'al infinitive is used in Genesis 2:4:

אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם ביום עשות יהוה אלהים ארץ ושמים

“This is the generations of the heavens and the earth **when they were created**, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,” (Gen 2:4)

Niph'al Participle Form

The Niph'al participle is formed by adding the Niph'al prefix נ to the Qal Participle form.

Niph'al Participle					
	Qal Participle	Niph'al prefix		Niph'al Participle	
ms	שָׁמֹר	נ	→	נֹשֵׂם	keeping
mp	שָׁמוֹרִים	נ	→	נֹשְׂמִים	keeping
fs	שָׁמוֹרָה	נ	→	נֹשְׂמָה	keeping
fp	שָׁמוֹרוֹת	נ	→	נֹשְׂמוֹת	keeping

Usage of the Niph'al Participle

The Niph'al participle is used in Psalm 102:18:

תִּכְתָּב זֹאת לְדוֹר אַחֲרוֹן וְעַם נְבִרָא יְהַלְלֶיהָ

“This will be written for the generation to come, that a people **yet to be created** may praise the LORD.” (Ps. 102:18)

Practice

I. Memorize the vocabulary.

II. Memorize the Niph'al perfect form.

III. Translate the following:

1. תִּשְׁלַח רוּחְךָ וְיִבְרָא אֱוִיָּה וְתִתְחַדֵּשׁ פָּנַי אֲדָמָה (Ps. 104:30)
2. וְאֶבְרַכְּךָ (And I will bless) וְאֶבְרַכְּךָ אֲדָמָה (that bless you) מִקְּלֶיךָ אֲדָמָה וְנִבְרַכְּךָ בְּךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחַת הָאֲדָמָה
3. וַיִּירָאוּ גוֹיִם אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה וְכָל־מַלְכֵי הָאָרֶץ אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ (Ps. 102:16; Heb. Ps. 102:17)
4. כִּי־כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה חֲנֹם נִמְכַרְתֶּם וְלֹא בְכֶסֶף תִּגְאָלוּ (Isa. 52:3)