Chapter Six

Prepositions

Vocabulary

חָכְמָה	wisdom		מִי	who?
טָהוֹר	clean, pure		מִצְוָה	command
יְהוּדָה	Judah		עַדִּיק	righteous, just
כַּאֲשֶׁר	as, when		עָנִי	poor, afflicted
כִּי	because, for		עַתָּה	now
כֹּל	all, every, whole		פֶּה	mouth
כֵּן	thus, so		רָשָׁע	wicked, guilty
לְמַעַן	for the sake of, on account of, in order that		שָׂדֶה	field
לָמָּה	why?		שֹׁפֵט	judge
מָה	what?		שִׁיר	song

Hebrew Prepositions

Hebrew prepositions like English prepositions are words that express spatial or temporal relations[1]. The word preposition comes from the Latin *praepōněre* meaning, "to put before, place before." Though prepositions are placed before a substantive indicating its relation to the verb, prepositions may also be placed at the head of a phrase (e.g., "in the book"). In English, prepositions may be placed at the end of a phrase (e.g., "what is it that you believe in?"). When the preposition is placed at the head of the phrase, it marks out a prepositional phrase.

Hebrew also has the three inseparable prepositional prefixes:

- בְּ   in, by, with
- כְּ   as, like, according to
- לְ   to, for, at

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[1] Prepositions may also communicate origin, instrument, agent, interest, cause, and goal.

The basic Hebrew prepositions are:

אַחֲרֵי אַחַר	behind, after		מִן	from, out of
אֶל	to, toward		נֶגֶד	before
אֵצֶל	beside, near		עַד	until, unto
אֵת	with		עַל	upon, above, about
בֵּין	between		עִם	with
בַּעַד	behind, around		תַחַת	under, instead of

Compound Prepositions

Preposition			Compound of:	
בְּתוֹךְ	in the midst, middle	בְּ	תֶוֶךְ	
לִפְנֵי	before, in front of	לְ	פָּנִים "face"	
מֵאֵת	from with	מִן	אֵת	
מִלִּפְנֵי	away from, from before, on account of	מִן	לִפְנֵי	
מֵעַל	from upon, above	מִן	עַל	
מִפְּנֵי	away from, out from, on account of, because of	מִן	פָּנִים	
מִתַּחַת	from under	מִן	תַחַת	
מִתּוֹךְ	from the midst of	מִן	תֶוֶךְ	
עַל-דְּבַר	on account of	עַל	דָּבָר	
עַל-פְּנֵי	in the face of, before, opposite to	עַל	פָּנִים	

Special Rules for מִן "from, out of"

The following changes apply:

a.   Before nouns with the definite article, מִן is joined using the *maqqef*.

   i.   מִן-הָאָרֶץ "from the earth"
   ii.   מִן-הַיּוֹם "from the day"

b.   Before indefinite nouns possessing non-guttural[2] initial consonant, מִן undergoes major changes dropping the final *nun* and a *hireq* plus a *dagesh forte* is added to the initial consonant.

מִן	+	בַּיִת	→	מִבַּיִת	from a house
מִן	+	מֶלֶךְ	→	מִמֶּלֶךְ	from a king

c.   When מִן is before a *yod* pointed with a simple *sheva* it contracts to מִי.

מִן	+	יְהוּדָה	→	מִיהוּדָה	from Judah
מִן	+	יְרוּשָׁלַם	→	מִירוּשָׁלַיִם	from Jerusalem

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[2] The gutturals are א, ע, ה, ח and sometimes ר.

d.   Before indefinite nouns whose initial consonant is a guttural, מִן changes to a *mem* plus a *tsere*.

מִן	+	אִישׁ	→	מֵאִישׁ	from a man
מִן	+	הַר	→	מֵהַר	from a mountain
מִן	+	עִיר	→	מֵעִיר	from a city
מִן	+	רֹאשׁ	→	מֵרֹאשׁ	from a head

Usage of מִן as a comparative
a.   The preposition מִן can be used as a comparative to express "better." Dr. Kelley offers the following examples[3]:

טוֹב הָאוֹר מִן־הַחֹשֶׁךְ   "*better* [is] the light *than* the darkness."

טוֹב הַבֹּקֶר מִן־הָעֶרֶב   "*better* [is] the morning *than* the evening"

b.   The preposition מִן can be used as a comparative to express "too…for." Drs. Pratico & Van Pelt give the following example[4]:

קָשָׁה הָעֲבוֹדָה מֵהָאֲנָשִׁים   "The work [is] *too* difficult *for* the men."

Usage of מִן as a superlative
The preposition מִן can be used as a superlative.
   1.   In the simple since:

מִגְּדוֹלָם וְעַד־קְטַנָּם   "from the *greatest* of them to the least"

   2.   The preposition מִן used with כֹּל functions as the superlative "best."

עָרוּם מִכֹּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה   "the *most* clever living thing of the field."

Usage of מִן as a partitive
The preposition מִן can be used to function as the partititive "some." For example:

מֵהָאֲנָשִׁים   "*some* of the men."

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[3] Page Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p.30
[4] Gary Pratico & Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Bible Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). P. 54

The Sign of the Direct Object

The sign of the Direct Object (SDO) is אֵת/אֶת־ and identifies the direct object that receives the action of the verb. The direct object may be either definite or indefinite. If the direct object is definite, it is usually preceded by the particle אֵת. In this case, the particle אֵת serves as a "sign" and is not translated. The SDO can stand alone or joined to the direct object using the *maqqef*. Do not confuse the SDO with the preposition אֵת "with;" though they are spelled the same, context must be used to distinguish between the two.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ	In the beginning God created **the heavens and the earth.** (Gen. 1:1)
וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב	And God saw **the light** that [it was] good. (Gen. 1:4)

Practice
    I. Memorize all the prepositions.
    II. Translate the following:
        1. אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים
        2. וּבֵין עֲשֶׂרֶת יָמִים
        3. כָּל־הֶהָרִים הַגְּבֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־תַּחַת כָּל־הַשָּׁמָיִם