

Participles

Overview

Participles in Hebrew are considered “verbal adjectives”, which is to say that they are verbs that are inflected like nouns to reflect gender and number. Participles are best rendered in an adjectival sense, but can also stand alone representing an unstated noun. For example, a participle based on the verb “say” can mean, “saying” alongside a noun, or it can stand alone as “(the one) saying”.

Like other adjectives, they also have to agree with the nouns they modify in gender, number, and definiteness, meaning that if their noun has a definite article, they must also have one.

Participles inflect with a fairly regular vowel pattern. Here is the pattern with the verb **אָמַר**, “say”.

אֹמֵר	“saying” – masculine singular
אֹמֶרֶת	“saying” – feminine singular
אֹמְרִים	“saying” – masculine plural
אֹמְרוֹת	“saying” – feminine plural

Notice how the plural endings are the same as the plurals for nouns (but without the dual)

These participles are for the regular pa’al form, the ordinary active verb. There are different forms for other forms, the intensive verb (piel) and the causative (hifil).

Here is the piel participle using a new verb, **דָּבַר**, “speak”:

מְדַבֵּר	“speaking” – masculine singular
מְדַבֶּרֶת	“speaking” – feminine singular
מְדַבְּרִים	“speaking” – masculine plural
מְדַבְּרוֹת	“speaking” – feminine plural

Notice the characteristic prefixes **מְ** and the dagesh (dot) in the center of the middle consonant. Otherwise, the vowels are the same as the regular pa’al form.

And now for the hifiel, using the same verb:

מְדַבֵּר	“cause to speak” – masculine singular
מְדַבֶּרֶת	“cause to speak” – feminine singular
מְדַבְּרִים	“cause to speak” – masculine plural
מְדַבְּרוֹת	“cause to speak” – feminine plural

The clues to look for here are the prefix מְ – but notice the “ah” vowel, and the ך before the last root consonant. Also, the feminine singular ends with a ת unlike the other forms. In fact, the final ת is a relatively common marker of a feminine noun, we just haven’t seen it yet.