

Perspectives on Pesky Prefixes Part 2: Prefixes to Verbs

Overview

If you managed to get through the supplement on noun prefixes, congratulations! Those are the harder ones.

Most of the verbs we've encountered in our reading are conjugated in the *imperfect*, which is a conjugation that roughly equates to a future tense. Hebrew imperfect forms all use a prefix as part of each conjugation.

The Imperfect

As you recall, the imperfect is a conjugation that refers to future or uncompleted actions. *It marks the verb root with prefixes*, depending on the person, number, and gender of the subject.

We've seen three conjugations thus far:

3rd person masculine singular

3rd person feminine singular

3rd person masculine (mixed) plural

Here are the forms, each with their conjugation, using the verb **בדל** ("to separate"):

יִבְדֹּל 3rd person masculine singular, "He will divide."

תִּבְדֹּל 3rd person feminine singular, "She will divide."

יִבְדְּלוּ 3rd person masculine (mixed) plural, "They will divide."

Here is a form we will see shortly:

נִבְדֹּל 1st person common plural, "We will divide."

Other vowels can vary inside the verb, so watch for the prefixes, and the **ו** in the plural form.

Examples:

יִקְרָא He will call

יִבְרָא He will create

יֵאמְרוּ They will say

תְּבַרֵךְ She will bless

יַעֲשֶׂה He will make

The vav-Consecutive

This is that strange form that takes an imperfect and turns it into a past tense. We haven't seen it yet, but it also flips the tense of a perfect from past to future.

When final ׀ verbs appear in the imperfect/vav-consecutive, the final ׀ drops off.

Using the verb ראה "see" as an example (3rd masculine singular),

The imperfect יִרְאֶה He will see

Imperfect/vav-consec. וַיִּרְאֶה And he saw

The Infinitive

This is a verb form that equates to our "to –", as in "to speak", or "to make". Because this form uses a ל as a prefix to the start of a verb, it's easy to confuse this with the ל preposition "to" or "for".

Here are two hints to tell them apart:

First, the preposition always attaches to a noun, and the infinitive is a verb form.

Second, watch for the pointing:

The infinitive is pointed with a chirik ("ee") vowel -- לְ

לְקַרֵּא "To call"

The preposition is pointed with a schwa -- לְ