

Chapter 3: Nouns (cont.), Definite Article (cont.), and the Verb (Active Participle)

The goal of this chapter is to build on the previous chapter and increase the student's ability to read and construct Hebrew narrative. This chapter also introduces the active participle verb form. It cannot be overemphasized that *Biblical Hebrew does not have forms that can be called "tenses"* in a strict sense. In most cases, the active participle denotes ongoing action, especially action that takes place in the present or immediate future. For the time being, the student should consider the active participle to be the "verb of choice" for the present tense, but the student should also remember that there will be instances introduced in subsequent chapters where the active participle can be used for the future or past tenses. The nuances of tense will be introduced later. **The main goal of this chapter is to facilitate the reading of Hebrew prose in the present tense, so we will assume for the next few chapters that all active participles represent the present tense** (other tenses will be learned later).

This chapter will also introduce the student to further details relating to the noun and the definite article. Once again, these new details will concentrate on the features that will most facilitate reading of actual Hebrew prose. The important features that are found less frequently in the Hebrew Bible will be introduced later in this textbook.

The following are the **essential features** that the student should learn in this chapter:

- 1. The formation of plural nouns where vowel reduction is required.**
- 2. The use of the definite article in nouns that begin with gutturals or *resh*.**
- 3. The basics of the orthography and usage of the active participles.**
- 4. Putting it all together—continuing to read and construct simple Hebrew sentences.**

One: The noun (part 2: vowel changes that occur with plural endings)

The previous chapter introduced the concept of the noun and the forms of the plurals. However, details such as vowel changes that occur with the formation of the plural were not explained. The previous chapter introduced vowel changes that are added to the end of the noun, but there are also very common vowel changes that occur in the noun itself. These changes are so common that they must be learned from the beginning. While the following list of representative vowel changes that occur with the formation of the plural can be daunting, just a few rules that are given immediately below allow the students to make sense of these changes (See CD):

Example 3.01

- בָּקָר “cattle” (sng.) → בָּקָרַיִם “cattle” (pl.) → וָ reduces to וַ
- הַמְּזוּזִים “tumult” → הַמְּזוּזִים “tumults” → הַ reduces to הַ
- לֵבָב “heart” → לְבָבוֹת “hearts” (pl.) → לְ reduces to לְ
- עֵנָב “a grape” → עֵנָבִים “grapes” → וֵ reduces to וֵ
- סֹפֵר “scribe” → סֹפְרִים “scribes” (pl.) → פֵ reduces to פֵ
- גֹּאֲלֵי “redeemer” → גֹּאֲלִים “redeemers” → אֵ reduces to אֵ
- זֵית “olive” → זֵיתִים “olives” → זֵ reduces to זֵ
- אֵיל “ram” → אֵילִים “rams” → אֵ reduces to אֵ
- מוֹת “death” → מוֹתִים “deaths” → מוֹ reduces to מוֹ
- מַעֲשֵׂה “deed” → מַעֲשֵׂים “deeds” → הַ reduces to הַ
- רֵעָה “friend” → רֵעִים “friend” → הַ reduces to הַ

Fortunately the student can learn just **five rules** that make sense of all the above vowel changes.

These rules are not only important for nouns, but they help explain vowel reduction that occurs with the addition of pronominal suffixes and with various verbal conjugations. While these

specifics will not be covered until later in this textbook, the student is urged to learn these rules well at this stage because the same rules will prove very useful later in the book. The following is a list of the rules:

1. **Propretonic $qāmēṣ$ (ָ) and $ṣērê$ (ֵ) reduce to $šwā$ (ַ).** The “tonic” syllable is defined as the syllable that carries the accent or the stress. The propretonic syllable is thus two syllables away from the accented (tonic) syllable, while the pretonic syllable is one syllable away from the accented (tonic) syllable. For example, in the word **בְּקָרִים** “cattle,” **רִים** is the tonic syllable, **קָרִ** is the pretonic syllable, and **בְּ** is the propretonic syllable.

Example 3.02

- **בְּקָר** “cattle” (sng.) → **בְּקָרִים** “cattle” (pl.) → propretonic **בְּ** reduces to **בַּ**
- **לֵב** “heart” → **לְבָבוֹת** “hearts” (pl.) → propretonic **לְ** reduces to **לַ**

2. **Pretonic $ṣērê$ (ֵ) reduces to $šwā$ (ַ) if there is no propretonic vowel reduction.**

The pretonic syllable is one syllable away from the accent or stress. If the addition of the plural ending causes a $ṣērê$ (ֵ) to be in the pretonic syllable, and there was no reduction in the propretonic syllable, then the $ṣērê$ (ֵ) will reduce to $šwā$ (ַ).

Example 3.03

- **סֹפֵר** “scribe” → **סֹפְרִים** “scribes” → **פְּ** reduces to **פַּ**
- **אֹיֵב** “enemy” → **אֹיְבִים** “enemies” → **יְ** reduces to **יַ**

3. **Gutturals (א, ה, ח, and ע) do not accept a simple $\check{s}ewā^p$ (ְ) as a vowel → they take a composite $\check{s}ewā^p$ (ֶ) instead.** For example, there is a composite $\check{s}ewā^p$ in **עֲנַבִּים** and *not* **עַנְבִּים**. Thus, if the above two rules would have caused a $\check{s}ewā^p$ (ְ) as the vowel for a guttural, the resulting vowel will be a composite $\check{s}ewā^p$ (ֶ).

Example 3.04

- **הַמְזוּזִים** “tumult” → **הַמְזוּזִים** “tumults” → propretonic הֶ reduces to הֶ
- **עֲנַב** “a grape” → **עֲנַבִּים** “grapes” → propretonic עֶ reduces to עֶ
- **גֹּאֵל** “redeemer” → **גֹּאֲלִים** “redeemers” → pretonic אֶ reduces to אֶ

4. **The diphthongs $\acute{a}yi$ (יֵ) and $\bar{a}we$ (אֵ) contract to form a long vowel with a *mater*.**

Example 3.05

- **זֵית** “olive” → **זֵיתִים** “olives” → יֵ reduces to יֵ
- **אֵיל** “ram” → **אֵילִים** “rams” → יֵ reduces to יֵ
- **מָוֵת** “death” → **מָוֵתִים** “deaths” → אֵ reduces to אֵ

5. **Nouns with final הֶ drop the הֶ to form the plural.**

Example 3.06

- **מַעֲשֵׂה** “deed” → **מַעֲשֵׂים** “deeds” → הֶ reduces to יֵ
- **רֵעֵה** “friend” → **רֵעִים** “friend” → הֶ reduces to יֵ

Two: Definite article (cont.)—nouns that begin with gutturals (א, ה, ח, and ע) and rêš (ר).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the definite article is normally marked by the addition of the consonant *hē* with a *pátah* (ֶ) to a noun and then by doubling (adding a *dāgēš*)

the first consonant of the noun. For example, “a king” is written מֶלֶךְ and “the king” is written הַמֶּלֶךְ (the doubling is signified by the *dāgēš* in the *mēm* of the noun מֶלֶךְ). The common method of marking the definite article does not work with nouns that begin with gutturals (א, ח, ע, and רֶשֶׁשׁ (ר)) for two reasons:

- Gutturals (א, ח, ע, and ר) and רֶשֶׁשׁ (ר) cannot be doubled (take a *dāgēš*).
- If the first consonant of a noun is a guttural and has a long /a/ class vowel, then the addition of the definite article (ה) would cause an awkward clustering of /a/ sounds. This situation results in a natural tendency for vowels to dissimilate, and so in cases where these clusters would occur the definite article takes an /e/ class vowel instead of an /a/ class vowel.

In light of the above two reasons, the following rules must be learned:

1. **In nouns that begin with א or ר, the definite article is הֶ and not הָ.** Since the letters א and ר and cannot take be doubled (take a *dāgēš*), the /a/ class vowel of the definite article is lengthened to a *qāmēš* (ֶ).

Example 3.07

- אִישׁ־הֶ “the man”
- אִשָּׁה־הֶ “the woman”
- אֲדֹנָי־הֶ “the lord, master”

2. **In nouns that begin with ע, the definite article is normally (but not always) הֶ and not הָ** (except for the exceptions noted below).

Example 3.08

- הָעִיר “the city”
- הָעוֹלָם “the forever = eternity”
- הָעֹלָה “the burnt offering”

3. **In nouns that begin with ה or ח, the definite article is normally ה** even though the first consonant is not doubled (does not take a *dāgēš*). The exceptions to this rule are noted below.

Example 3.09

- הַהַיְכָל “the palace”
- הַהַבְּזָל “the vanity”
- הַחֹדֶשׁ “the new moon, month”
- הַחַיִּים “life”

4. **Exception One: in nouns that begin with ה, ח, and ע in an unaccented syllable, the definite article is ה and not ה.**

Example 3.10

- הַהֲמוֹן “the tumult”
- הַחָכָם “the wise person”
- הַחֲמוּס “the violence”
- הַעֲוֹן “the transgression”
- הַעֲפָר “the dust”

5. **Exception Two: in nouns that begin with הָ, the definite article is הַ and not הָ**
regardless of whether the first syllable of the noun is unaccented or accented.

Example 3.10

- לַחֲדָשׁ “the feast”

6. **Exception three: Some nouns are irregular** in the way that they accept a definite article and do not fit the above rules. The irregular forms need not be memorized at this stage, but the student should learn to recognize them. The following is a list of the most common irregular ones:

Example 3.11

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| • אֶרֶץ “an ark” | הָאֶרֶץ “the ark” |
| • אֶרֶץ “a land” | הָאֶרֶץ “the ark” |
| • גַּן “a garden” | הַגַּן “the garden” |
| • הַר “a mountain” | הַהַר “the mountain” |
| • פָּר “a bull” | הַפָּר “the bull” |
| • עַם “a people” | הָעַם “the people” |

Three: active participles

The active participle conveys action that is durative or continuing. In many instances the tense of this action is the *present* tense, but Hebrew verbs do not consistently fit into categories of tense. In most cases tense must be determined by context. **For the time being it will be assumed that active participles convey durative action in the present**—the nuances of other usages of the participle will be introduced later in the textbook.

The orthography of the active participle—how to recognize and produce the participle

The participle has a regular vowel pattern of \bar{o} – \bar{e} in verbal roots with three consonants. A long / \bar{o} / vowel (a *ḥōlem*) follows the first consonant, and a long / \bar{e} / vowel (a *ṣērê*) follows the second consonant. The following are examples of masculine, singular, active participles (see **CD; Example 3.12**):

- כֹּתֵב “he writes” or “he is writing”
- יֹשֵׁב “he sits” or “he is sitting”
- שֹׁמֵר “he guards” or “he is guarding”
- הֹלֵךְ “he walks” or “he is walking”
- אֹכֵל “he eats” or “he is eating”
- אֹמֵר “he says” or “he is saying”
- קֹרֵא “he calls” or “he is calling”
- נֹתֵן “he gives” or “he is giving”
- מֹלֵךְ “he reigns” or “he is reigning”
- שֹׂאֵל “he asks” or “he is asking”
- אֹהֵב “he loves” or “he is loving”

The active participle is inflected like a noun, and it has different endings for the masculine singular (ms), feminine singular (fs), masculine plural (mp), and feminine plural (fp).

The ending for the fs form is תֵּי, the ending for the mp is ים, and the ending for the fp is ית.

Most of the vowel changes that take place in the different conjugations are identical to vowel

changes found in the plural. In active participles, pretonic *šerê* (ְ) reduces to *šwā* (ָ). In other words, the mp form of שָׁמַר (“he guards”) is שְׁמָרִים and not *שְׁמָרִים.

The following is the paradigm of the active participle. It is one of the most important paradigms that the student will memorize in this course. It should thus be memorized and reviewed frequently (the student will notice that this paradigm is one of the *key paradigms* found on the CD that comes with the textbook; a recording is found on the website and in the CD).

Table 3.12

Plural	Singular	
שְׁמָרִים	שָׁמַר	Masculine
שְׁמָרוֹת	שָׁמְרָה	Feminine

Just as was the case with nouns, there are some minor exceptions in the above paradigm with roots that have a guttural as the middle consonant in the root. Just as was seen above, gutturals (א, ה, ח, and ע) do accept a simple *šwā* (ָ) as a vowel → they take a composite *šwā* (ְ) instead. Therefore, in the mp active participle of שָׁאַל “he asks,” there is a composite *šwā* in שְׁאַלִּים and *not* שְׁאַלִּים. The following paradigm summarizes this pattern:

Table 3.13

Plural	Singular	
שְׁאַלִּים	שָׁאַל	Masculine
שְׁאַלוֹת	שָׁאַלָה	Feminine

The uses of the active participle

The active participle is quite dynamic and can be used in a variety of ways. The following list is not exhaustive, but it presents the most common uses of the participle:

1. A *transitive verb* in the present tense (**Example 3.14**):

הָאִישׁ שׁוֹמֵר הַמֶּלֶךְ “the man guards the king”

2. A predicate adjective that functions as an *intransitive verb* and conveys a *continuous occurrence*. (**Example 3.15**)

הַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב עַל־הַכִּסֵּא “the king is sitting on the throne”

Note: a participle that functions as a predicate adjective agrees in number and gender, but it does not take the definite article.

3. An *attributive adjective*: The placement of a definite article on an active participle changes the meaning of both a transitive verb or an intransitive verb to an attributive adjective. (**Example 3.16**)

הַמֶּלֶךְ הַשׁוֹמֵר הָאִישׁ “the man *who is* guarding the king”

הַמֶּלֶךְ הַיּוֹשֵׁב עַל־הַכִּסֵּא “the king *who is* sitting on the throne”

Note: a participle that functions as an attributive adjective agrees in gender, number, and definiteness with the noun that it modifies. Also note that the English relative pronoun “who” is used to translate the definite article that is attached to an active participle.

4. A *substantive noun*: the active participle can also function as a substantive noun.

For example, שׁוֹמֵר means “one who guards” so it may be used as a noun for a

“guard.” Likewise, שֹׁמֵר means “one who writes” so it may be used as a noun for a “scribe.” Like any other nouns, an active participle that functions as a substantive noun can be definite or indefinite. (Example 3.17)

שֹׁמֵר = “a guard”

הַשֹּׁמֵר = “the guard”

סֹפֵר = “a scribe”

הַסֹּפֵר = “the scribe”

יֹשֵׁב = “a dweller, inhabitant”

הַיֹּשֵׁב = “the dweller, inhabitant”

Vocabulary:

Verbs:

“he eats, is eating” = אָכַל

“he says, is saying” = אָמַר

“he walks, is walking” = הִלְךְ

“he goes down, is going down” = יָרַד

“he sits, is sitting; he dwells, is dwelling” = יָשַׁב

“he writes, is writing” = כָּתַב

“he reigns, is reigning” = מָלַךְ

“he gives, is giving” = נָתַן

“he calls, is calling; he reads, is reading” = קָרָא

“he asks, is asking” = שָׁאַל

“he guards, is guarding; he keeps, is keeping” = שָׁמַר

Nouns:

Egypt = מִצְרַיִם

Life, breath = נֶפֶשׁ

a famine; hunger = רָעַב

Exercises adopted from Hebrew Bible:

1. נֶעַר פֶּתַח כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים עַל־הַסֶּפֶר
Adapted from Isa 10:19 and Jer 36:18—

2.