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 particle 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

- "cattle" (sng.) → "cattle" (pl.) → reduces to 
- "tumult" → "tumults" → reduces to 
- "heart" → "hearts" (pl.) → reduces to 
- "a grape" → "grapes" → reduces to 
- "scribe" → "scribes" (pl.) → reduces to 
- "redeemer" → "redeemers" → reduces to 
- "olive" → "olives" → reduces 
- "ram" → "rams" → reduces 
- "death" → "deaths" → reduces to 
- "deed" → "deeds" → reduces to 
- "friend" → "friend" → reduces to 

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 (\(q\)) and šērē (\(s\)) reduce to šēwā\(^3\) (\(\text{š}\)).** 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 מִיָּרָו וּב “cattle,” מִיָּרָו is the tonic syllable, ו is the pretonic syllable, and ב is the propretonic syllable.

**Example 3.02**
- מִיָּרָו “cattle” (sg.) \(\rightarrow\) מַיְמִיָּרָו “cattle” (pl.) \(\rightarrow\) propretonic ב reduces to ב
- מַיְמִיָּרָו “heart” \(\rightarrow\) מַיְמִיָּרָו “hearts” (pl.) \(\rightarrow\) propretonic ב reduces to ב

2. **Pretonic šērē (\(s\)) reduces to šēwā\(^3\) (\(\text{š}\)) 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 šērē (\(s\)) to be in the pretonic syllable, and there was no reduction in the propretonic syllable, then the šērē (\(s\)) will reduce to šēwā\(^3\) (\(\text{š}\)).

**Example 3.03**
- רְםָל “scribe” \(\rightarrow\) רְמָל “scribes” \(\rightarrow\) ב reduces to ב
- בְּרָנָן “enemy” \(\rightarrow\) בְּרָנָן “enemies” \(\rightarrow\) י reduces to י
3. Gutturals (ח, נ, ק, and ת) do not accept a simple šēwā (א) as a vowel → they take a composite šēwā (א) instead. For example, there is a composite šēwā in בַּיִת and not בַּיִית. Thus, if the above two rules would have caused a šēwā (א) as the vowel for a guttural, the resulting vowel will be a composite šēwā (א).

Example 3.04

• נָבָה “tumult” → נָבַּה “tumults” → preproteronic נ reduces to נ
• נָבָה “grapes” → נָבַּה “grapes” → preproteronic נ reduces to נ
• נָבָה “redeemer” → נָבַּה “redeemers” → pretonic נ reduces to נ

4. The diphthongs āyi (א) and āwe (אא) contract to form a long vowel with a mater.

Example 3.05

• נַוָה “olive” → נַוָּה “olives” → נא takes writes א
• נַוָה “ram” → נַוָּה “rams” → נא takes writes א
• נַוָה “death” → נַוָּה “deaths” → נא takes writes א

5. Nouns with final ה drop the ה to form the plural.

Example 3.06

• הַלּוָה “deed” → הַלּוּ “deeds” → לֹא reduces to ל
• הַלָּוָה “friend” → הַלָּוּ “friends” → לֹא reduces to ל

Two: Definite article (cont.)—nouns that begin with gutturals (ח, נ, ק, and ת) and rēš (ר).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the definite article is normally marked by the addition of the consonant hē with a pāṭah (י) to a noun and then by doubling (adding a dāgēš)
the first consonant of the noun. For example, “a king” is written נל and “the king” is written 
( the doubling is signified by the dāgēš in the mēm of the noun נל). The common
method of marking the definite article does not work with nouns that begin with gutturals (א, י, 
, and ב) and rēš (ך) for two reasons:

• Gutturals (א, י, ו, and ב) and rēš (ך) 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 (ן) would cause an awkward clustering of /a/ sounds.
This situation results in a natural tendency to 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 י, the definite article is י and not י.** Since the
letters א and י and cannot take be doubled (take a dāgēš), the /a/ class vowel of the
definite article is lengthened to a qāmēṣ (א).

**Example 3.07**

• יא “the man”
• יא “the woman”
• יא “the lord, master”

2. **In nouns that begin with ב, the definite article is normally (but not always) י

and not י (except for the exceptions noted below).
Example 3.08

- יִשְׂרָאֵל “the city”
- יַעֲדוּ “the forever = eternity”
- יִנְאָב “the burnt offering”

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

Example 3.09

- יִשְׂרָאֵל “the palace”
- יִרְבּוּ “the vanity”
- יִנְאָב “the new moon, month”
- יֵשָׁב “life”

4. **Exception One: in nouns that begin with 𐤊, 𐤂, and 𐤔 in an unaccented syllable, the definite article is 𐤊 and not 𐤊.**

Example 3.10

- יָגוֹל “the tumult”
- יֵדַך “the wise person”
- יָמַכ “the violence”
- יָגוֹל “the transgression”
- יָגוֹל “the dust”
5. Exception Two: in nouns that begin with י, the definite article is י and not יח regardless of whether the first syllable of the noun is unaccented or accented.

Example 3.10

• ייח “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

• ייח “an ark” ייח “the ark”
• ייח “a land” ייח “the ark”
• ייח “a garden” ייח “the garden”
• ייח “a mountain” ייח “the mountain”
• ייח “a bull” ייח “the bull”
• ייח “a people” ייח “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 ō–ē in verbal roots with three consonants. A long /ō/ vowel (a hōlem) follows the first consonant, and a long /ē/ vowel (a šērē) follows the second consonant. The following are examples of masculine, singular, active participles (see CD; Example 3.12):

- בֵּיתוֹ “he writes” or “he is writing”
- בֵּיתוֹ “he sits” or “he is sitting”
- בֵּיתוֹ “he guards” or “he is guarding”
- בֵּיתוֹ “he walks” or “he is walking”
- בֵּיתוֹ “he eats” or “he is eating”
- בֵּיתוֹ “he says” or “he is saying”
- בֵּיתוֹ “he calls” or “he is calling”
- בֵּיתוֹ “he gives” or “he is giving”
- בֵּיתוֹ “he reigns” or “he is reigning”
- בֵּיתוֹ “he asks” or “he is asking”
- בֵּיתוֹ “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 תר, the ending for the mp is מֶל, and the ending for the fp is תר. Most of the vowel changes that take place in the different conjugations are identical to vowel
changes found in the plural. In active particles, pretonic šērē (י) reduces to šēwā (י). In other words, the mp form of “he guards” is šēwā (“he guards”) and not *šēwā.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>šēwā</td>
<td>šēmōr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>šēwā</td>
<td>šēmār</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just as was the case with nouns, there are some minor exceptions in the above paradigm with roots that have a guttural as a the middle consonant in the root. Just as was seen above, gutturals (ק, צ, כ, and כ) do accept a simple šēwā (י) as a vowel ➔ they take a composite šēwā (י) instead. Therefore, in the mp active participle of šēwā “he asks,” there is a composite šēwā in šēwā and not šēwā in šēwā. The following paradigm summarizes this pattern:

Table 3.13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>šēwā</td>
<td>šēlōe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>šēwā</td>
<td>šēlōe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 particple:

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

   "the man guards the king"

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

   "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)

   "the man who is guarding the king"

   "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, means “one who guards” so it may be used as a noun for a
“guard.” Likewise, מָשֵׁר 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic Word</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>מָשֵׁר</td>
<td>“a guard”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בָּשֵׁר</td>
<td>“a scribe”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מָשֵׁר</td>
<td>“a dweller, inhabitant”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מָשֵׁר</td>
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<tr>
<td>מָשֵׁר</td>
<td>“the dweller, inhabitant”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vocabulary:

Verbs:

“he eats, is eating” = אָכֵל
“he says, is saying” = לֹאַה
“he walks, is walking” = לֹאַל
“he goes down, is going down” = לֹהַר
“he sits, is sitting; he dwells, is dwelling” = בָּשֵׁר
“he writes, is writing” = בָּשֵׁר
“he reigns, is reigning” = לֹאַל
“he gives, is giving” = נֹרַב
“he calls, is calling; he reads, is reading” = נֹרַב
“he asks, is asking” = נֹרַב
“he guards, is guarding; he keeps, is keeping” = מָשֵׁר

Nouns:

Egypt = מֵעֲרָב
Life, breath = שִׁמָּה
a famine; hunger = כִּנְעָן

Exercises adopted from Hebrew Bible:

1. נֶגֶר פְּתַח אֶת-הָעִקְרָה עַל-הָעֵקְר
Adapted from Isa 10:19 and Jer 36:18—

.2