

Classes of Hebrew Verbs

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There are three classes of Hebrew verbs: Strong, Weak, and Irregular

I. Strong Verbs

Strong verbs retain all three root letters in all forms. They are a minority of Hebrew verbs.

קָטַל
שָׁמַר

II. Weak Verbs ¹

Certain types of weak root letters cause changes in pronunciation (vowels) in weak verbs. They should not be considered irregular because the changes are predictable and follow certain patterns. There are three basic types of weak verbs:

1. Guttural and Quiescent

initial guttural	עXX	עָמַד
medial guttural	XעX	בָּרַךְ
final guttural	עXX	שָׁלַח
<small>includes words ending in ה in which ה is a full consonant</small>	הXX	גָּבַהּ
initial <i>aleph</i> ²	XXא	אָמַר
final <i>aleph</i>	אXX	מָעָא
final <i>he</i>	הXX	גָּלַהּ
originally initial <i>yod</i> ³	XXי	יָטַב

¹There are a significant number of doubly weak verbs that are affected by two (or more) of the weaknesses described here, e.g., גָּבַהּ. They are best dealt with as they are encountered in reading.

²There are only five initial *aleph* verbs in which the aleph regularly quiesces:

אָמַר, אָבַד, אָבַה, אָכַל, and אָפַה. There are some that occur with both quiescent and strong forms, e.g., אָחַז, אָטַף, and אָלַף.

³There are only seven initial *yod* verbs in which the *yod* is original to the root and never elides:

יָטַב, יָבַק, יָקַץ, יָצַר, יָלַל, יָשַׁר, and יָבֵשׁ. In these, the initial *yod* normally quiesces.

2. Elided or Assimilated Letters

initial <i>nun</i>	XXנ	נָגַשׁ
originally initial <i>vav</i> ¹	XXי/XXו	יָשַׁב

¹In some forms, such as the Qal perfect, the initial *vav* occurs as a *yod* and the conjugation appears regular (יָשַׁבְתִּי). In other forms the *yod* elides, as in the Qal imperfect (יִשַׁב from יִישַׁב); assimilates, as in some words with a medial sibilant (יִצַח from יִיצַח); or the original *vav* reappears, such as the Niphal imperfect (יִוֹשַׁב).

3. Hollow Verbsmedial *yod*X^יX שׂיםmedial *vav* (ו or ם)X^וX בוא**III. Irregular Verbs**

Because of the history of the language, some verbs inflect in ways that are not always predictable.

4. Geminate Verbs

medial and final the same

X^{לל}X סָכַב**5. Irregular Stems**

forms Poel, Pilpel, etc.

various X^{הה}X סָהַר**6. Individual Irregular Verbs**initial *he* elides (unique)X^הX הִלֵּךְinitial *lamed* elides (unique)X^לX לָקַחfinal *nun* elides (unique)X^נX גָּתַן

four root letters (unique)

X^{שה}X שָׁתַּהַר

a small number of additional irregular verbs must simply be learned as they are encountered.