

Lesson 7: Imperfect, Participles, Prepositions

Part 1:

The imperfect form of the verb indicates actions not yet complete, and so can often be translated with the English present or future. It also expresses modal nuances, which are communicated in English through complementary verbs “should”, “would”, “could”, etc.

Its form is characterized by a combination of prefixes and suffixes (in contrast to the perfect’s exclusive use of suffixes). Again, predicting the correct forms of the verb in the various stems is easy if you know the root, the theme vowel, and the series of prefixes/suffixes for each person/number/gender.

The theme vowel is the vowel that appears in the last syllable of the 3ms imperfect form. For the D- and H-stems, every root has the same theme vowel /e/ (ܐ), unless it has a guttural (ܐ, ܗ, ܟ, ܥ) as a third-consonant (or a *resh*), in which case the /e/ (ܐ) shifts to /a/ (ܐ) in accordance with the phonological rules of Aramaic (see the above note to **ܐܡܪ** [Les. 5, part 1]).

In the G-stem, the theme vowel is less predictable. The most common is the short /u/ vowel. This is found with roots like **ܟܬܒ** (“to write”). Other roots have a short /a/, like the root connected to speaking (**ܐܡܪ**), or the root that indicates dressing (**ܠܒܫ**), or the root indicating wielding power (**ܫܠܬ**). Usually, roots with a perfect like **ܫܠܬ** with /e/ (ܐ) as the second vowel, have imperfects with an /a/ theme vowel.

Considering the following paradigms, wherever **ܟܬܒ** has a /u/, these verbs take /a/. They are otherwise completely analogous to **ܟܬܒ**. A very few roots have a theme vowel of /e/ (ܐ), roots like **ܢܦܠ** (“to fall”) and **ܢܬܢ** (“to give”), which will be discussed later.

The following paradigm isolates the distinctive suffixes and prefixes of each form of the imperfect.

3ms	יִכְתֹּב	יִכְתֹּב
3fs	תִּכְתֹּב	תִּכְתֹּב
2ms	תִּכְתֹּב	תִּכְתֹּב
2fs	תִּכְתְּבִין	תִּכְתְּבִין
1cs	אֶכְתֹּב	אֶכְתֹּב
3mp	יִכְתְּבוּן	יִכְתְּבוּן
3fp	יִכְתְּבִין	יִכְתְּבִין
2mp	תִּכְתְּבוּן	תִּכְתְּבוּן
2fp	תִּכְתְּבִין	תִּכְתְּבִין
1cp	נִכְתֹּב	נִכְתֹּב

Exercise 7a.

Understanding the prefixes and suffixes attached to the G-stem imperfect and understanding the basic principles of vowel reduction, allows you to predict what the verbal forms will look like in the D- and H-stems.

Fill out the following chart for the verb כָּתַב, consulting the Answers Appendix as needed.

	G-imperfect	D-imperfect	H-imperfect	Alternative form of the H-stem with no ה
3ms 3fs	יִכְתֹּב תִּכְתֹּב	יִכְתֹּב	יִדְכֹּתֵב	יִכְתֹּב
2ms 2fs	תִּכְתֹּב תִּכְתֹּבִין	תִּכְתֹּבִין		
1cs	אִכְתֹּב	אִכְתֹּב	אִדְכֹּתֵב	
3mp 3fp	יִכְתֹּבוּן יִכְתֹּבִין	יִכְתֹּבוּן	יִדְכֹּתֵבוּן	יִכְתֹּבוּן
2mp 2fp	תִּכְתֹּבוּן תִּכְתֹּבִין			
1cp	נִכְתֹּב			

Note the alternative forms of the H-stem (Haphel), called the A-stem (or, Aphel), since it lacks the distinctive *heh* prefix. The A-stem occurs sporadically in Biblical Aramaic and eventually supplants the older H-stem in later dialects of Aramaic.

Exercise 7b.

Parse the following forms, describing stem, person, gender, number, and root:

תִּנְתֵּן This has two possible parsings.

תִּנְתֵּנִין

תְּמַלְלֵן
 יְדַחֲלֵן
 בְּהַלְבֵּשׁ
 אֲשַׁבַּח

Part 2:

The forms of the D- and H-participles are easy to learn, based on your familiarity with the patterns of the perfect and imperfect verb forms. They are distinct from the G-participle, because they both have a *mem* prefix.

As with the G-participles, the D and H-participles can be used as nouns or as predicates.

Their most common forms are given below:

	D-stem	H-stem (Haphel) and A-stem (Aphel)	
m.s.	מְכַתֵּב	מְהַכְתֵּב	מְכַתֵּב
f.s.	מְכַתֵּבָה	מְהַכְתֵּבָה	מְכַתֵּבָה
m.p.	מְכַתְּבֵין	מְהַכְתְּבֵין	מְכַתְּבֵין
f.p.	מְכַתְּבֵין	מְהַכְתְּבֵין	מְכַתְּבֵין

Part 3:

Like nouns, prepositions can take suffixed pronouns. Their paradigm is entirely predictable:

Exercise 7c.

In the following chart, the prepositions בְּ and בִּי are like לְ in their form. The prepositions מִן and מִי are similar to each other in that they both actually have a doubled second radical (i.e., minn and ‘imm), something that is only indicated in the orthography by a dot when a suffix follows them. The prepositions עַל and עֲלֵי both take suffixes as if they were masculine plural nouns.

Fill out the blanks in the following chart.

	ל	ב	ב	מן	עם	על	קדם
1cs	לי			מני			קדמי
2ms	לך				עמך		
2fs	לכי					עליכי	
3ms	לה						קדמוהי
3fs	לה			מנה			
1cp	לנא			מננא			
2mp	לכם					עליכם	
2fp	לכן						
3mp	להם				עמהם		
3fp	להן						

Part 4.

A final few nominal patterns can be studied, as they are occasionally found in Aramaic texts.

There are many nouns that have a prefixed *mem* or *taw* at their beginning. Nouns like מַעֲבָד “work” are formed from the basic root עֲבַד “to do” or “make.”

Similarly, מְשַׁבֵּב “bed” from שָׁבַב G = “to lie” and מַדְבַּח (“altar”) from דָּבַח G = “to sacrifice”. The same pattern fits with the *taw*-prefixed words like תְּשַׁבַּח “praise, glory” from שָׁבַח D = “to praise.”

Other, more confusing patterns also exist:

singular

	Nouns that end in etymological <i>y</i>		gentilics (ending in <i>āy</i>) (These are usually names of ethnic, political, or religious groups. Here, יְהוּדַי can be translated either as Judean or Jew.)
abs.:	כְּרִסָּא (throne) (כְּ = /o/)	אַרְיָה (lion)	יְהוּדַי
const.:	כְּרִסָּא (?)	אַרְיָה	יְהוּדַי
emph./det.:	כְּרִסָּיא	אַרְיָיא (?)	יְהוּדַיא

plural

abs.:	כְּרִסְוֵן	אַרְיֵון	יְהוּדַאֵין / יְהוּדַאֵין
const.:	כְּרִסְוֹת	אַרְיֹות	יְהוּדַאֵי / יְהוּדַאֵי
emph./det.:	כְּרִסְוֹתָא	אַרְיֹותָא	יְהוּדַאֵיא

Note in relation to the gentilic nouns that one occasionally finds forms in which the original *yodh* has been replaced by an *'aleph*: יְהוּדַאֵין for יְהוּדַיֵין and יְהוּדַאֵי for יְהוּדַיֵי.

Exercise 7d.

Fill out the chart below, according to the pattern of יְהוּדָי.

sing. abs.	sing. cstr.	sing. emph./det.	pl. abs.	pl. cstr.	pl. emph./det.
בְּבַלְי ("Babylonian")					
כְּשַׁדְי ("Chaldaean")					

There are, of course, many more peculiar nouns, but these must be learned individually.

Especially important are the forms of father and brother, both of which are attested only with suffixes, making their other forms a matter of conjecture.

Consider the suffixed forms.

singular

אֲבִי ?

אֲבוּךְ ?

אֲבוּכִי ?

אֲבוּהִי ?

אֲבוּהָ ?

אֲבוּנִי ?

אֲבוּכֶם ?

אֲבוּכֵן ?

אֲבוּהֶם ?

אֲבוּהֵן ?

plural

אֲבָתַי אֲתֵי (?)

אֲבָתְךָ אֲתֵיךְ (This is the only form attested in BA.)

etc.

For the word "father" note that the plural has a feminine ending. For "brother", note that the ך in the plural form is virtually doubled.

Exercise 7e.

Translate the following passage from Ezra 4:14-15, vocalizing the six forms without vowels. For words you do not know, use the vocabulary list that follows the passage.

בְּעֵין כָּל־קַבֵּל דֵּי־ מַלְח הַיְכָלָא מִלְחָנָא

וְעֵרוֹת מִלְכָּא לָא אֲרִיךְ לְנָא לְמַחְזָא

עַל־דְּנָה שְׁלַחְנָא וְהוֹדְעָנָא לְמִלְכָּא

דֵּי יִבְקַר בְּסִפְר־דְּכָרְנִיא דֵּי אֲבַהֲתָךְ

וְתַהֲשִׁיב בְּסִפְר־דְּכָרְנִיא וְתִנְדַּע

דֵּי קְרִיָּתָא דְּךָ קְרִיָּה מְרָדָה וּמַהֲנֻזְקַת מְלָכִין

Notice that in line 4, the initial verb is 3ms in form and refers to the Persian king, while the following verbs are 2ms forms, also referring to the Persian king. The initial use of the 3ms is perhaps out of deference to the king's superior status.

Vocabulary:

Nouns:

דְּכָרְנִין = “record” (dokrān) (pl. emph./det.: אֲ דְכָרְנִיא) m.

הַיְכָלָא = “palace” (sing. emph./det.: אֲ הַיְכָלָא) m.

מַלְחָא = “salt” (sing. emph./det.: אֲ מַלְחָא) m.

עֵרוֹתָא = “dishonor” (sing. cstr.: עֵרוֹתָא) f.

קְרִיָּה = “city” f.

Adjectives:

אֲרִיךְ = “proper”

מְרָדָה = “rebellious”

Verbs:

בִּקֹּר = D-stem “to seek”

חִזָּה = G-stem “to see” (G-inf.: חִחִיזָה)

יָדַע = G-stem “to know”, “to understand” (G-impf. יִדְעַע),

H-stem “to make known” (H-perf. הוֹדַע)

מָלַח = G-stem “to salt” i.e., to donate salt, or to eat salt.

נָזַק = G-stem: “to suffer”

H-stem: “to injure”

שָׁבַח = H-stem “to find”

Particles/Adverbs:

בְּ = “in” --- Note that when a shewa that represents a murmured vowel is prefixed to a word that begins with a murmured vowel, the first murmured vowel becomes short /i/, and the second becomes silent: סִפֵּר + בְּ → *בִּסְפֵּר → בִּסְפֵּר (bispar).

כָּל-קִבְּלָא = “corresponding to”

כָּל-קִבְּלָא דִּי = “because”

כְּעֵן = “now”

Note the three sets of “near” demonstrative pronouns, all identical in meaning (“this”/“these”):

	Sing. (“this”)	Plural (“these”)
First Set		
masc.	דְּנָה	אַלְיַן (and אֱלָה and אַל)
fem.	דְּנָא	אַלְיַן
Second Set		
masc.	דְּדָ	אַלְדָּ
fem.	דְּדָא	אַלְדָּא
Third Set		
masc.	דְּכֵן	XXXXX
fem.	דְּכֵנָא	XXXXX

There is only one set of “far” demonstratives (“that” / “those”), though only the masculine forms are attested:

	Sing. (“that”)	Plural (“those”)
masc.	ܘܢܐ	ܘܢܐܝܘܢ
fem.	ܘܢܐ	ܘܢܐܝܘܢ*