

Lesson 10: Weak Verbs I: First-*nun*, First-'*aleph*, First-*yodh*

There are three basic varieties of weak verbs, those having a weak first, second, or third consonant. There are mainly two weak consonants, *waw* and *yodh*. When '*aleph* appears at the beginning or end of a root it is considered weak and can create unpredictable forms. Only when *nun* appears at the beginning of a root can it be considered weak, especially in the conjugated forms of the verbs.

Part 1.

First-*nun* verbs

The simplest of these weak verbs is the last, first-*nun* verbs. In fact, not all first-*nun* verbs behave strangely at all, some have patterns identical to the strong verbs. These include verbs like נזק H = “to injure”, נתן G = “to give”.

Those that do show “weak” characteristics include: נחל G = “to descend”, נפל G = “to fall”, נפק G = “to come forth”, נצל H = “to rescue”, נשא G = “to carry”.

We have already learned some of these in an earlier lesson, but because we only learned them in their participial forms, they did not exhibit their “weak” characteristics. In fact, the weak characteristics are not even apparent in the perfect of any stem. But, in the G- and H-imperfect the weak first-*nun* verbs behave somewhat unpredictably (but are normal in the D-imperfect). In essence, whenever a prefix is applied to the root and this results in *nun* as the final consonant of a syllable, the *nun* blends in with the following consonant; it assimilates. Thus, in the perfect, without a prefix, we have נפל, the expected form, analogous to the form of verbs with strong roots. But in the imperfect, with the addition of the prefix *yi-* the *nun* becomes a syllable-final consonant **yin-pel*, and it subsequently blends or assimilates with the following *peh*, resulting in *yippel*. (Notice that the theme vowel of this root, as indicated earlier, is /e/ [..]. The theme vowels of first-*nun* verbs differ.)

Assimilation is a common linguistic phenomenon. What is described here is similar to the kind of assimilation that has taken place in Latin in the very word *assimilate*, from *ad + similis* → *assimilāre* = “to assimilate”.

(Note that due to difficulties with my word-processing program, the dot that should appear in the *sadeh* in the following forms does not appear.)

	G-Imperfect	G-Imperative	H-Perfect	H-Imperfect	H-Imperative
3ms 3fs	יִפֵּל <i>yippel</i> תִּפֵּל		הִצֵּל <i>hassel</i> הִצֵּלְתָּ	יִהְצֵל <i>yahasel</i> תִּהְצֵל	
2ms 2fs	תִּפֵּל תִּפְּלֵינָא	פֵּל פְּלֵי	הִצֵּלְתָּ הִצֵּלְתִּי	תִּהְצֵל תִּהְצֵלֵינָא	הִצֵּל הִצֵּלֵי
1cs	אִפֵּל		הִצֵּלְתָּ	אִהְצֵל	
3mp 3fp	יִפְּלוּ יִפְּלֵינָא		הִצֵּלוּ הִצֵּלְהוּ	יִהְצֵלוּ יִהְצֵלְוּ	
2mp 2fp	תִּפְּלוּ תִּפְּלֵינָא	פְּלוּ פְּלֵה	הִצֵּלְתֶּם הִצֵּלְתֵּם	תִּהְצֵלוּ תִּהְצֵלְוּ	הִצֵּלוּ הִצֵּלְהוּ
1cp	נִפֵּל		הִצֵּלְתָּ	נִהְצֵל	

Note that the imperatives also attest unexpected forms, based on the fact that they are influenced by the form of the imperfect.

The H-stem participle and G- and H-stem infinitives are quite predictable, given the pattern above.

H-Participle: מְהִצֵּל or מִצֵּל, מְהִצֵּלְהּ or מִצֵּלְהּ, etc.

G-Infinitive: מִפֵּל

H-Infinitive: הִצֵּלְהּ

As observed above, in each of these forms the *nun* has assimilated into the following consonant, resulting in a doubled consonant. Thus, **yinpel* → *yippel*. This is a relatively simple transformation, and deriving the root from these forms is relatively straightforward. Identifying these forms becomes problematic when one considers the other weak verbs that have forms similar to these.

Part 2.

First- 'aleph verbs.

Roots with an **𐤀** as their first consonant have verbal forms that are only slightly distinct from those of the strong verb.

As with first-*nun* roots, the differences appear primarily when prefixes are added to the root. For the G-stem, the result is that the regular short /i/ of the prefix transforms into /ē/ (..).

So the 3ms form of **𐤀𐤌𐤓** in the perfect is **𐤀𐤌𐤓**, but in the imperfect it is **יֵ𐤀𐤌𐤓**. The 2mp form in the perfect is **𐤀𐤌𐤓 𐤐𐤓**, but in the imperfect it is **יֵ𐤀𐤌𐤓 𐤐𐤓**. Notice that the 'aleph in the prefixed forms does not have a shewa or any vowel beneath it.

Exercise 10a.

Based on the two examples above, you should be able to predict the following forms. Fill in the blanks of the chart (**𐤀𐤌𐤓** for the G-Imperfect and **יֵ𐤀𐤌𐤓**):

	G-Imperfect	G-Imperative
3ms	יֵ𐤀𐤌𐤓	XXXXXXXXXX
3fs		XXXXXXXXXX
2ms		𐤀𐤌𐤓
2fs		יֵ𐤀𐤌𐤓
1cs	𐤀𐤌𐤓	XXXXXXXXXX
3mp		XXXXXXXXXX
3fp		XXXXXXXXXX
2mp		יֵ𐤀𐤌𐤓 𐤐𐤓
2fp		יֵ𐤀𐤌𐤓 𐤐𐤓
1cp		XXXXXXXXXX

Notice that the 1cs form would have been *אמר , but because of the redundancy of two 'alephs, this shortens to the form אמר.

The D-stem shows no major inconsistencies with the basic paradigm (e.g., *אמר and *אמר --- the /a/ theme vowel is due to the influence of the *resh*), but the H-stem does show significant deviation from the basic paradigm. The forms of first-'aleph roots in the H-stem must be learned individually for each root.

Part 3.

First-yodh verbs.

Roots with a ' as the first root-consonant are like the other verbal patterns studied in this lesson, in that peculiarities in their forms emerge only with the application of prefixes to their root. The G- and D-stem perfect to these verbs are, therefore, analogous to strong verbs.

For the G-imperfect, there are two basic patterns, depending on the specific verb/root; for the H-imperfect, there is a single pattern. These are illustrated in the chart below. (D-stem imperfects are too rare to warrant discussion.)

	G-Imperf. ידע	G-Imperf. יתב	G-Imvs.	H-Perf.	H-Impef.
3ms	ינדע	יתב		הודע	יהודע
3fs	תנדע	תתב		הודעת	תהודע
2ms	תנדע	תתב	תב / דע	הודעת	תהודע
2fs	תנדעין	תתבין	תבי / דעי	הודעתי	תהודעין
1cs	אנדע	אתב		הודעת	אהודע
3mp	ינדעון	יתבון		הודעו	יהודעון
3fp	ינדען	יתבן		הודעה	יהודען
2mp	תנדעון	תתבון	תבו / דעו	הודעתון	תהודעון
2fp	תנדען	תתבן	תבה / דעה	הודעתן	תהודען
1cp	ננדע	נתב		הודענא	נהודע

The G-stem imperfect of ידע mimics the pattern of a root whose first root consonant is a *nun*, one that does not assimilate. The G-stem imperfect of יתב mimics the pattern of a root whose first root consonant is a *nun* that does assimilate.

The H-stem of ידע shows an /a/ vowel where we expect /e/ (..); this is due to the influence of the guttural 'ayin. Thus we have הודע instead of הודע. One root

deviates from this and makes the H-stem with a prefixed ה־, the root יבל, which appears in the H-3ms perfect as הִיבַל.

One of the side effects of these similarities between roots is that it is sometimes difficult, when reading Biblical Aramaic, to recognize the root from which a given verb form derives. This, in turn, makes it difficult to look up the meaning of the verb.

Exercise 10b.

List the possible roots from which these verbal forms might derive and look up the correct root in the Answers Appendix.

1. שׂא
2. הַב
3. פָּקַו
4. דַּע
5. תְּהוּבַד

Exercise 10c.

Translate this slightly simplified version of Daniel 7:11-14

11.

חַזָּה הַגּוֹיִת בְּאַדְוִין מִן־קָל מְלִיָּא רַבְרַבְתָּא דִּי קַרְנָא מְמַלְלָה
חַזָּה הַגּוֹיִת עַד דִּי קְטִילַת חִיּוֹתָא
וְהוּבַד גְּשָׁמָה וַיְהִיבַת לִיקְדַת אֲשָׁה

12.

וְשָׂאָר חִיּוֹתָא הַעֲדִיו שְׁלִטְנָהוֹן
וְאַרְכָּה בְּחִיּוֹן יְהִיבַת לְהוּם עַד־זְמַן וְעַד־

13.

חַזָּה הַגּוֹיִת בְּחִזּוּי לִיָּא
וְאָרוּ עַם־עַנְנֵי שְׁמַיָּא כְּבַר אֲנֹשׁ אַתָּה הוּא
וְעַד־עַתִּיק יוֹמִיָּא מְטָה וְקַדְמוּהִי הַקְרַבּוּהִי

14.

וְלָהּ יְהִיב שְׁלִטָּן וַיְקַר וּמְלָכוּ
וְכָל עַמְמִיָּא אֲמִיָּא וְלִשְׁנַיָּא לָהּ יַפְלָחוּן

שְׁלִיטְנָה שְׁלִטְנָה שְׁלִטְנָה שְׁלִטְנָה
וּמְלִכּוּתָהּ דִּי־לֹא תִתְחַבֵּל

Consider the following:

In the third line of verse 11, note the forms of אֲבַד = G-stem “to perish”, in the H-stem “to destroy”, in the Hp-stem “to be destroyed” (Hp-perf. הוּבַד)

In the first line of verse 12, the verb הֶעֱדִי is an H-3mp perfect of עָדָה: “to take away.” The /e/ vowel under the *heh* (instead of an /a/ vowel) is the result of the following guttural consonant. Instead of translating, “the rest of the beasts took away their dominion,” it is likely that this verb is intended to have an impersonal subject, and should therefore be translated into the English passive. The first noun phrase is marking the topic of the sentence, best translated “As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away.”

In the second line of verse 12, note the curious phrases to mark time at the end.

In the second line of verse 13, note the phrase “like a son of man,” meaning like a human being. We might expect a ׀ to precede this phrase, to make “one like a human being”.

In the third line of verse 13, note the object suffix (3ms) on the H-3mp perfect of קָרַב. The addition of the suffix results in the reduction of the short /i/ beneath the *resh* in the regular form of the H-3mp perfect: הֶקְרַבּוּ. Notice that here there is no clear subject, and so one must assume an impersonal subject, and translate with an English passive: “He was brought near” (instead of “they brought him near”).

In the third line of verse 14, the verb יֶעְדָּה is a G-3ms imperfect of עָדָה “to pass away.” Compare the H-stem of this verb, as it appears in verse 12.