

Handout #10 - Infinitives

There are two types of infinitives in biblical Hebrew: **ABSOLUTE** and **CONSTRUCT**.

INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT:

- has both nominal and verbal elements, a “verbal noun.”
 - it can function as a nominal element in a sentence or a verbal predicate.
- It is usually nominal if:
 - it is in the construct state; with a pronominal suffix without an additional object or prepositional phrase; used absolutely.
 - absolute use: שָׁמַע מִזֶּבַח טוֹב *obeying is better than sacrifice*
 - construct state: הָאֶסְרָף הַמְקִנָּה *the gathering of the cattle*
 - pronominal suffix: שְׁמָעִי *my hearing*
- It is usually verbal if:
 - it governs an object or prepositional phrase.
 - with pronominal suffix: שְׁמָעִי אֹתוֹ *my hearing him*
 - without suffix: כָּתַב לְךָ *to write to you*
 - **With an infinitive construct, the pronominal suffix can be either subjective or objective. Context will determine which it is.**

INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT + PREPOSITIONS ל, ב, כ

- with ב and כ
 - the equivalent of an adverbial clause in English, usually with a temporal meaning: “when”
 - כְּשָׁמְעוֹ אֶת־הַדְּבָר *when he heard the word*
 - this form of the infinitive construct shows up frequently with the temporal construction in Lambdin §110:
 - וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעֵם מִקֶּדֶם *when they traveled from the east*
- with ל
 - There is more variety in the meaning, but it is typically a complementary or explanatory use.
 - Usually has to do with purpose, goal, or result.
 - לְשָׁמַע ... בָּאוּ *they came ... (in order) to hear*
 - הִנֵּה הָעָם חֹטְאִים לַיהוָה לֶאֱכֹל עַל־הַדָּם *they are sinning against Yahweh by eating with blood*
 - לְאָמַר is a qal infinitive construct of אָמַר and literally means “by saying”
 - Idioms with ל + infinitive:
 - הָיָה + ל + infinitive: *to be about to or to be compelled to*
 - עַל + noun/pronoun + ל + infinitive: *obligation or responsibility*
 - אֵין + ל + infinitive: *“it is not possible/permitted to”*

The infinitive construct is negated with לֹבֵלְתִי