

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 הַמְקֻנָּה *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”
    - כְּשָׁמְעוּ אֶת־הַדְּבָר *when he heard the word*
  - this form of the infinitive construct shows up frequently with the temporal construction in Lambdin §110:
    - וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעָם 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*