

## Hebrew Weak Verb Cheat Sheet

Lots of theological students find Hebrew a bit baffling. Especially weak verbs. Way back in the day, I was one of them. James Robson, our lecturer at that time, was (and is) an utterly outstanding teacher, and produced dozens of full-colour sheets designed to help us chart a course through the minefield of weak verb paradigms. Some of my fellow-students even managed to learn them. Yikes - there were some smart folks in that class. But not everyone has the neck muscles to support the planet-sized brain necessary to memorize all that stuff.

Fortunately, it turns out that there's an easier way. If you think about it, you don't actually need to learn all of the rules for forming Hebrew verbs if your only aim is to translate from Hebrew to English. The range of possible meanings for any given verb is constrained both by the root letters that remain and by the context. This means that if you have a good grasp of Hebrew vocabulary, and if you're sufficiently experienced at actually reading the Hebrew Bible to have a reasonable idea of the context, then a few simple rules will enable you to identify the root letters of almost every weak verb in the Hebrew Bible. You won't impress your purist friends, but you should at least pass the exam, and you might even find yourself able to read the Hebrew Bible. Now there's a neat idea.

### 1. Top and tail

Look out for these letters at the beginning and the end of the word. They may be preformatives, affirmatives or pronominal suffixes, rather than root letters. Also note that participles take standard noun endings in the feminine and plural forms.

	Perfect	Imperfect
Preformatives	ה	נ ת י א
Affirmatives	ה ו תָּן תָּם נו תִּי ת ה	ו נה ו
Pronominal suffixes	נו הו ו ני ך ן כן ם הם כם	

### 2. Unrecognisable root letters

If you can't spot the verb root after step 1 (either because you don't recognise the root letters or because there aren't enough of them), try inserting, changing or deleting the following letters in the positions shown. This will give you several options to try, one of which will almost certainly be right.

3RL		2RL		1RL	
Geminate	Repeat 2RL	Hollow verbs	ו י	Pe-yod / waw	ו → י
Lamed-he	ה ת י → ה	Hifil hollow verbs	ו → י	הֶלֶךְ (like a pe-waw)	ה
Hollow, geminates: delete ו י between root and cons suffix				Pe-nun (if dagesh forte in 2RL)	נ
				לָקַח (like a pe-nun)	ל

### 3. Other things

This section describes how to tell the difference between different forms that might otherwise be confused. It doesn't distinguish between every form, just those that are more common where a difference in meaning would result from the difference. And it doesn't describe all the differences between the forms noted, just enough to distinguish them. The number in brackets gives the number of times each rule will be needed in reading the OT. Bear in mind that a feature will occur approximately 100 times if it appears 1 – 2 times in the shorter books and 2 – 3 times in the longer books.

(2500) Lamed-he pointing: per הָּ ; imp הֶּ ; impv הִּ ; inf abs הֵּ ; inf con תֵּ

(2500) Pe-guttural imp: nifal 1RL pointing is always ך ; qal is never ך

(1700) Lamed-he per (3RL הָּ → ך ): active stems ך ; passive stems ך

(1300) Ayin guttural per: Piel 1 RL pointing is always ך ; qal is never ך

(680) Hollow verbs: qal active participle = 3ms perfect קָנָה

(250) Ayin-guttural imp and impv: nifal always has DF in 1RL; no other stems do.

(100s) Ayin guttural per and imp: pual 1RL pointing is always ך ; piel never is.

(41) Pe-aleph qal imperfect 1cs: No אַ preformative: אֲנִי