

LESSON 1

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה

Genesis 3:13

1.1a Read

Referring to the alphabet and vowel listings, pronounce the two words of the lesson sentence, reading from right to left: consonant, vowel, consonant, etc. Most Hebrew words have the stress on the final syllable. When a word in the lesson sentence has the accent elsewhere, as in וַיֹּאמֶר an accent mark will be used.

1.1b The vowels of the second word יְהוָה have been omitted intentionally. In the Bible it is written with two different sets of vowels: יְהוָה and יְהוֹה. The first, some people think, approximates the original sound of the divine name, and thus they pronounce it “Yahweh.” Those who do not like to say “Yahweh” use “Adonai,” or Lord in English. Outside of liturgical settings, some Jews substitute הַשֵּׁם “The Name,” for “Adonai.”¹ (You will hear this substitution in some of the songs on שִׁבְחֵי הַשֵּׁם) The second set of vowel markings are those of another divine name, אֱלֹהִים. When these vowels are used, the word is to be pronounced “Eloheem.”

1.2 Count the Consonants וַיֹּאמֶר

In most aspects Hebrew is a very simple language. Almost every word contains a root of three consonants. The first step in finding the root is to count the consonants in a word. So, ו = 1 consonant. Notice the dot in the yod ם. A dot in a consonant is called a **dagesh**.

If there is a full vowel immediately preceding the letter containing the dagesh, the dagesh is a **dagesh forte** (or strong dagesh). It has the effect of doubling the letter in which it appears and is, almost always, grammatically significant.

Here the ם is preceded by a full vowel (pataḥ ׀ under the ו is the preceding vowel), so the dagesh is a dagesh forte ם = ם׃ Thus, ו = 1 consonant, ם = 2 consonants, ם = 1 consonant, ם = 1 consonant, and ם = 1 consonant, for a total of 6 consonants.

1. For a more detailed explanation, see Fox, pp. xxix–xxx.

1.3 Find the **Root**

You must separate three consonants from the word in order to identify the root. Since the root consonants will generally appear together, you can expect to find the non-root consonants at either the beginning (right) or the end (left) of the word.

1.3a A וַ at the beginning of a word means *and* regardless of the vowel that appears with it. It cannot stand by itself as a word in Hebrew.

1.3b When such a וַ is followed by a pataḥ ׀ and a dagesh appears in the next letter ׀ וַ the construction is called **vav conversive**.

1.3c A vav conversive indicates:

1. The word is a **verb**.
2. The subject of the verb, a pronoun, is indicated by the consonant following the vav, which here is ׀. When such a subject pronoun precedes the root, this pronoun is called a prefix, and we say that the verb has **prefix form**.
3. The verb should be translated in the **past tense**.

1.3d Having accounted for ׀ וַ you are left with three letters אָמַר which you can assume are the root.

1.4 Verb Analysis

You now have ׀ וַ = vav conversive

׀ = prefix pronoun (subject)

אָמַר = root (meaning *say*)

As an aid to translation, we make a chart for verbs:

| Root | Stem | Form | Person/Gender/Number | Special Features |
|-------|------|--------|----------------------|------------------|
| אָמַר | Qal | prefix | 3 m. sg. | vav conversive |

1.4a **Stem** indicates whether there has been some change in the basic meaning of the root. Variations from the basic meaning are indicated by additions to the root. When there are no additional letters or other indicators, as is the case here, the stem is the **Qal**, the most basic and common stem. One writes “Qal” or “Q” in the Stem column.

1.4b **Form** In this column we write “prefix,” indicating prefix form.

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1.4c Person, Gender, Number We said that ׀ is the prefix, the pronoun subject.

׀ as a prefix indicates the third person masculine subject of the verb. In this case, the number of the subject is singular, “he” (for the plural, a special ending is added to the word). So “3 m. sg.” (third masculine singular) is written in this column. “Vav conversive ” is written in the Special Features column.

1.5 Translation

Reading the analysis chart from right to left, you can translate:

vav conversive = *and* (followed by past tense translation)

3 m. sg. prefix = *he*

Qal = basic meaning of root

אמר = *say*

Translation: *and-he-said*

1.6 יְהוָה This is the sacred four-letter name for God. (1.1b) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה is literally *and-he-said-Lord*. In Biblical Hebrew, the normal word order is verb-subject. So the “he” contained in the verb refers to the subject, יְהוָה and you can properly translate *and the Lord said*. (You now know about 4% of the Hebrew Bible’s vocabulary.)

You might wonder whether וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה could also be translated *and he said, “Lord.”* The answer is yes.

Assignments

- A. It will be assumed that you are responsible for learning the contents of each lesson as part of every assignment.
- B. Vocabulary: the particles plus words 1–10.

Note: What you need to memorize for each entry is set in **boldface**.

Vocabulary words are recorded—from English to Hebrew—in blocks of ten on אֱלֹהִים וְיָדְבָרִים and there are vocabulary exercises—also in blocks of ten—at the back of the Supplement.

- C. Review alphabet and vowels, using אָבָב tracks 2–3, as necessary.
- D. Practice reading using the Proper Names and Places Reading Exercise (Reading and Writing G), and in the Supplement, do **S1.1a**.
- E. שִׁבְחֵי track 2: following along in your Bible, listen to the song שִׁבְחֵי Psalm 147:12. Note that הַשֵּׁם the substitute term for יְהוָה (1.1b) is used in this recording.