

“Drop Letter” Imperfects

What are Drop Letter Imperfects?

Drop letter imperfects are verbs that lose the initial letter of their root in the Qal imperfect. We will be learning several of these together, but there are actually different reasons why this happens, depending on the initial letter of the stem.

Stems beginning with נ

When a נ stands at the end of closed syllable that is not final, the נ will be assimilated to the next consonant. That next consonant will be doubled with a dagesh. We have not learned any verbs beginning with נ yet, but here is an example:

נָפַל to fall When the prefixes are added to form the imperfect, the נ assimilates into the פ, yielding, for example יִפֹּל as the third person singular masculine (rather than יִנְפֹּל, which we would expect)

Exception: if the second letter of the stem is a guttural, it cannot be doubled and the נ will not be dropped

Stems beginning with א

When the letter א stands at the end of a syllable, it loses its value as a consonant and functions merely as a vowel lengthener (this is called the quiescent aleph). For the formation of the imperfect, this means that the vowel associated with the prefix will become a holem, and that the second consonant, if it is a beged kefat letter, will not take a dagesh because it is considered to be preceded by a vowel. Also, in the first person singular, the א of the prefix will combine with the א of the stem. This means that verbs beginning with א will drop a letter only in the first person singular.

Stems beginning with ש

Stems beginning with ש may or may not lose their initial letter in the imperfect. Whether or not this happens depends on a complex set of factors. There are only a limited set of verbs beginning in ש which regularly lose their initial letter in the imperfect:

go out	יֵצֵא	know	יָדַע
be dislocated	יִקַּע	be united	יִחַד
descend	יִרַד	beget	יִלְד
sit, dwell	יֵשֵׁב	add, increase	יִסַּף

historical aside: Verbs that begin with ש are divided into two classes. Some of these verbs, at a

pre-historic stage of the language, began with **ל** rather than **ל**. Over time, this **ל** became a **ל**, but sometimes the **ל** reappears in stems other than Qal (we will learn more about this later). Verbs that always began with **ל** never drop it. Of the verbs that originally began with **ל**, some drop their initial **ל** and some do not.

לְהַלֵּךְ and לְקַח

לְהַלֵּךְ and **לְקַח** are both irregular. **לְקַח** behaves like a verb with initial **ל**. **לְהַלֵּךְ** behaves like a verb with an initial **ל**.