Syntax of the Hebrew Verb Forms

The Perfect Tense:

Basically, the perfect tense has the idea of completed action. There is no concept of time except as indicated by the immediate context. The perfect tense should actually be divided into two kinds of action, perfective and aoristic.

Aoristic Action:

Simple or Definite Past:

Like the simple perfect in English, it looks at an action as a past action. Ruth 1:14 "but Ruth remained with her."

When the action is a recent event in the past, the English auxiliary word "has" or "have" is used. Ruth 1:15 "Your sister-in-law has returned." Gen. 4:10 "And he said, 'What have you done."

The Indefinite Past:

This points to some undefined time in the past. Also uses the English "has" and "have." I Sam. 12:3 "Whose ox have I taken?" Ruth 1:13.

Often there is a unique quality to this undefined action. The English will add the words "ever" or "never." Isaiah 66:8 "Who has ever heard such a thing."

Gnomic Perfect: To express facts which have formerly taken place, and are still of constant recurrence and, therefore, are events of common experience. (Cf. the Greek Gnomic Aorist.) The English present tense best expresses this usage. Psalms 9:11 "For you, Lord, do not forsake them that seek you."

Present Perfect or Characteristic Perfect: This represents actions, events or states, though completed in the past, that extend their influence into the present, in English, sometimes "have" or "has," and sometimes the use of the present tense. Psalms 143:6 "I have spread forth my hands (and still keep them spread forth) or I spread forth my hands," Psalms 2:1 "Why do the heathen rage?"

Instantaneous Perfect: To indicate an action in the process of completion but viewed as accomplished at the instant of speaking or doing. Deut. 18:19 "I testify," Job 9:22 "I declare."

Perfective Action:

Present Perfect: The subject is in a present state based on a past action. Isaiah 1:4 "They have forsaken Jehovah." Uses the English "have" or "has."

Adjectival Perfect: This describes the condition of the subject. Ruth 1:12 "I am too old to get married." This is used with stative intransitive verbs.

Stative, Transitive Perfect: Used to indicate affections or states of mind. Num. 11:5 "We remember" I Sam. 2:1 "I rejoice"

Past Perfect: To indicate an event previous to a past moment. I Sam. 28:3 "And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits...." Ruth 1:6 "Because she had heard; also that Jehovah had visited his people.''

Future Perfect: To express the subject in the future and the action of the verb previous to that. Isaiah 4:4, "When he shall have washed away." Gen. 28:15, "In the good land which he will have given you."

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Perfect of Resolve: This is used to indicate that which the subject has decided or resolved to do in the future. Ruth 4:3. Naomi has decided to sell the field.

Prophetic Perfect: To express facts which are undoubtedly imminent and, therefore, in the mind of the one speaking already fulfilled. Isaiah 5:13, "Therefore my people are gone (shall go) into captivity."

The Imperfect Tense:

The Imperfect tense indicates progressive or incomplete action. The uses of the imperfect have been divided into five categories.

<u>Future Action:</u>

Simple or Specific Future: This is the manner in which most imperfects function. Gen. 2:17, "Dying you shall die."

Historical Future: This views a future event from the standpoint of a past moment. 2 Kings 13:14, "Now Elisha was sick from the sickness from which he would die."

Anterior Future: This is just like the future perfect. Job 40:14, "Your own right hand shall have given you the victory."

<u>Repeated action either in present or past time:</u>

Habitual Imperfect: To express facts known by experience which at any time may occur again. Something that is a universal truth. To express actions which may be repeated at any time, or are customarily repeated on a given occasion. Judges 11:40, "The daughters of Israel go yearly to commemorate." Deut. 1:44, "They pursued you as bees do (are accustomed to do)."

Progressive Imperfect: To indicate actions which are in progress, or are incomplete. Gen. 37:15, "What are you seeking? (What do you seek?)"

Customary Imperfect: To indicate actions repeated in the past, either at fixed intervals or occasionally. Job 1:5, "Thus did Job continually." Exodus 33:7, "And Moses used to take (every time) the tabernacle and pitch it without the camp."

<u>Aspects of Mood:</u>

Potential Imperfect: To indicate actions which are viewed as possibly taking place or as not taking place. Gen. 6:21, "Take all the food which is able to be eaten (which may be eaten or is edible)."

Permissive Imperfect: Where the action has the concept of giving permission. Gen. 2:16, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat." Ruth 2:2, "You may go, my daughter."

Deliberative Imperfect: To indicate deliberation. Gen. 39:9, "How then can I...." Gen. 43:7, "Could we in any way know...." Ruth 1:21, "For what reason then, should you call me Naomi?"

Imperfect of Obligation: To express an obligation or necessity according to the judgment of another person. Ruth 3:4, "And he will tell you what you should do (what you ought to do)."

Desiderative Imperfect: To indicate an expression of will either definite intention and arrangement or a simple desire. Ruth 1:10, "We desire to return with you to your people." Ruth 1:16, "Where you shall go, I desire to go, and at what place you shall spend the night, I desire to spend the night." Ruth 1:16, "Where you shall die, I desire to die and there I desire to be buried."

Imperfect of Possibility: To indicate the concept of possibility. Joshua 7:5 "Whoever may lap with his

tongue from the water...."

Imperfect of Purpose: To indicate purpose. Exodus 4:5, "In order that they might believe."

To indicate the moods of volition:

Imperfect of Command: Urgent request or entreaty. Gen. 43:12; Psalms 17:8.

Imperfect of Instruction: To indicate legislation or instruction. Exodus 12:11; Exodus 21:8; Lev. 19:32.

Imperfect of Prohibition: To express negative legislation or instruction. This is commonly used with the negative, "lo." Exodus 12:10; Exodus 20:13.

To indicate past action with various adverbs:

Exodus 15:1; 1 Kings 3:16; Joshua 3:1; Exodus 12:34; Gen. 2:5; Gen. 19:4; Gen. 24:45; Gen. 27:33; Gen. 37:18.

The Cohortative:

Resolve: The expression of the will or the desire of the one speaking. Gen. 45:28, "I will go down." Exodus 3:3, "I will turn aside."

Request: Used of one person requesting permission from someone else. Ruth 2:2, "Permit to go to the field." Ruth 2:7, "Permit me to glean."

Horatory: This is one person encouraging another to join him in a particular course of action. Gen. 37:17; Deut. 13:3,7,14.

Purpose: To express an intention or intended consequence. Gen. 27:4; Isaiah 5:19.

The Jussive:

This can be viewed from two standpoints: (1) From one of high rank to one of lower rank. (2) From one of low rank to one of higher rank.

From one of high rank to one of lower rank:

Commandment: Gen. 1:3.

Counsel: Deut. 20:5.

From one of low rank to one of higher rank:

Demand of permission: 2 Sam. 19:38.

Advice: Gen. 41:33.

Desire: Gen. 30-34; Gen. 33:14.

Invitation: 2 Sam. 13:24.

Prayer: Exodus 34:9.

Blessing: Num. 6:24.

The Jussive is also found frequently with the negative, "al."

Negative desire: Ruth 1:16; 1 Kings 2:20.

Negative prayer: Deut. 9:26; 1 Kings 2:20; Psalms 27:9; Psalms 69:18.

Prohibition: 1 Kings 13:22; Exodus 34:3.

The Imperative:

To express permission: Isaiah 21:12; Isaiah 45:11; Gen. 50:6.

To express real commands: Gen. 12:1.

To express a distinct assurance: Isaiah 65:18; 2 Kings 19:29; Psalms 110:2.

To express interjection: Ruth 1:8; Exodus 32:1; Gen. 11:3,7 This occurs when it immediately precedes a second imperative, and most often with the words, halak, qum and yahabh.

To express condition: Gen. 42:18; Gen. 17:1; 1 Kings 22:12; Isaiah 36:16. Do this and live...if you do this, you will live. Walk before me and be perfect...walk before me and then you will be perfect.

To express purpose: Ruth 1:9; 4:11; Gen. 12:2; Exodus 18:22; 2 Sam. 21:3; 2 Sam. 21:3, "Wherewith shall I make atonement in order that you may bless."

The Waw Consecutive:

With the imperfect tense it may function in any of the capacities of the perfect tense. See above under the perfect tense.

With the perfect tense it may function in any of the capacities of the imperfect tense. See above under the imperfect tense.

For the other many and varied uses of the waw connective, consult Hebrew lexicons and advanced grammars.

The Participle:

The participle may function either verbally or adjectivally.

Verbal usage:

When used verbally, it expresses the concept of durative, linear action and does not indicate time. Time must be determined by the context. It may function in the area of past, present or future times.

Past time: The concept is durative, action in the past. Compare with the Greek imperfect tense. 2 Sam 15:30, "And David was ascending by the ascent of the Mount of Olives weeping as he was ascending." Gen. 41:1; I Kings 14:17; Gen. 39:3.

Present time: Gen. 4:10, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me."

Future instantaneous: To express action which is about to occur but is dependent upon some other event occurring first. Gen. 6:17, "Behold, I am bringing the flood (I am about to bring the flood" Deut. 1:20, "The land which Jehovah is giving you (is about to give you)."

Future time: Stresses the continuous progress of the action in the future. Gen. 7:4, "For in seven days I will be sending rain on the earth."

Adjectival usage:

The adjectival participle does not express durative action but expresses the basic quality of the verbal root that it is from. There is no indication of time or aspect except through the context.

Used as an attributive adjective: Deut. 4:24; Gen. 35:3; Ex. 11:5. 3.

Used as a predicate adjective: Deut. 3:21.

Used as a substantive: Amos 5:13; Gen. 26:11; 9:6.

Some participles have actually their primary function as a noun that indicates rank, office or occupation. Judge - Shophat; Priest - Kohan; Watchman - Shomar; Shepherd - Roeh.

The Infinitive Absolute:

It is a verbal noun which expresses simply the basic abstract verbal action of the root. It speaks of an action without any regard to the agent or to the circumstances of time and mood under which it takes place.

It may function as a noun or a verb.

As a noun it may function as a subject, object or predicate nominative, but these uses are very infrequent. Examples: Prov. 8:21; Isaiah 32:17; Isaiah 1:17.

It may also be used to add emphasis to the sentence and when doing so it usually precedes the verb. There are various shades of this emphasis so for a detailed analysis consult the advanced grammars.

It is also used as an adverbial accusative which describes the action of a previous verb. In this usage the infinitive absolute will follow the verb.

Job 37:2, "Hear attentively."

Num. 24:10, "You have blessed them thoroughly."

Sometimes there are two infinitive absolutes coordinated with each other.

To express an accompanying or antithetical action or the aim to which the principle action is directed. 1 Sam. 6:12, "Lowing as they went." Isaiah 19:22, "Smiting and (but also) healing again."

To express the long continuance of an action. Isaiah 6:9, "Hear you continually." Jer. 6:29; Jer. 23:17; Gen. 19:9; Num. 11:32; Gen. 12:9, "And Abraham advanced continually toward the south."

Sometimes the infinitive absolute will function as a finite verb.

When it is sufficient to simply mention the basic verbal idea.

Or, when the writer uses a hurried or for some other reason, excited style.

The finite verb which precedes, will determine how the infinitive is to be rendered.

References: Dan. 9:5; Exodus 36:7; 1 Sam. 2:28; Jer. 14:5; Hag. 1:6; Zech. 12:10.

The Infinitive Construct:

This form, like the infinitive absolute, may represent a verbal noun, but it is much more flexible in character than the infinitive absolute. It is able to function in any of the cases.

As the subject of a verb: 1 Sam. 18:23; Jer. 2:17; Gen. 30:15; Isaiah 7:13; Gen. 2:18, "Not good is the being of man in his separation."

As the direct object of the verb: 1 Kings 3:7, "I know not the going out or the coming in (I know not to go out and to come in)." (With or without a preposition.)

As a genitive: Exodus 3:4, "A time of mourning and a time of dancing." Gen. 2:17; Gen. 29:7; Neh. 12:46. (With or without a preposition.)

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The infinitive construct will have various uses with prepositions, but the meaning will be based on the function of the preposition. For detail one needs to consult the lexicon and the advanced grammar.

The prepositions "be" and "ke" are used basically to express time determinations.

The preposition "al" indicates a causal clause.

The preposition "le" is used to indicate many different concepts: direction towards, purpose, aim, to introduce the object, to state motives or attendant circumstances, consequence, result, obligation and degree.