

# Biblical Hebrew Grammar for Beginners

## Gender: Masculine and Feminine Nouns

“Grammatical gender” is a category assigned to nouns, which is separate from biological gender. Biblical Hebrew nouns, animate and inanimate, are traditionally categorized as either “masculine” or “feminine”. The gender designation for inanimate nouns was historically explained by a perception in Afro-Asiatic languages, according to which nouns that were considered “socially inactive”, among them diminutives, pejoratives, collectives, and feminine nouns, were grouped together, separately from “socially active” --primarily masculine-- nouns. Modern scholars view the grammatical gender designation as a system of marking or not marking a noun, irrespective of both its biological gender and its function or quality. The terms “feminine” and “masculine”, then, as they apply to the grammatical gender of Biblical Hebrew nouns, are best described as generalizations about words and their role in a sentence.

The “feminine” gender is the one that is marked in Hebrew. Nouns that are marked as feminine, and categories that *agree* with them (e.g., adjectives), commonly exhibit the endings **תִּ**, **תְּ**, or **תַּ**. The masculine, which is unmarked, is the generic gender, also assigned to mixed groups or impersonal statements.

Some examples of nouns designated as masculine or feminine are:

Masculine

*man* **אִישׁ**

*light* **אוֹר**

*darkness* **חֹשֶׁךְ**

*vault* **רָקִיעַ**

Feminine

*woman* **אִשָּׂה**

*dry land* **יְבָשָׂה**

*animal* **חַיִּה**

*daughter* **בָּתִּ**

place **מקום**

bow, rainbow **קֶשֶׁת**

Other feminine noun endings are **ית**, **ות**, and **ית**. Not all feminine nouns are marked—e.g., **ארץ** *land* and **עצם** *bone* are also of the feminine grammatical gender. Also, in some instances, the ending **ה** is associated with the masculine. The discussion of “marked” vs. “unmarked” is continued in the unit on [number](#).

[Gender: Exercise](#)