

# **Biblical Hebrew Grammar for Beginners**

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## **Number: Singular and Plural**

Like [gender](#), number is a grammatical category that does not always correspond to a “one” or “more than one” observation. While not all forms are attested in the Hebrew Bible, one can assume that Hebrew nouns generally exhibit both a singular and a plural form. Some nouns indicate a collective (e.g., *בָּקָר* *cattle*, *אֶכְלָה* *food*) and thus appear only in that form, as a singular. Nouns that exist naturally in pairs (e.g., *יָד* *hand*), often have a dual form in addition to the plural form.

Plurality is marked by the ending of the noun. For the most part, nouns of the masculine gender end in *ים* and nouns of the feminine gender end in *ות* in the plural. However, nouns of the feminine gender at times take the ending *ים* in the plural, and a plural noun of the masculine gender may end in *ות*. Dual forms have the ending *ים*—that ending may sometimes indicate a simple plural or appear in nouns that do not count as pairs.

Since the added ending changes the syllable structure and accentuation scheme of the singular noun, vowel differences may be observed between singular, plural, and dual forms of the same noun.

Some examples of masculine nouns in the singular and plural are:

<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<i>vault</i> רְקִיעַ	רְקִיעִים
<i>morning</i> בֹּקֶר	בֹּקְרִים
<i>tree</i> עֵץ	עֵצִים

Some examples of feminine nouns in the singular and plural are:

Singular	Plural
<i>animal</i> חַיָּה	חַיּוֹת
<i>language</i> שָׂפָה	שָׁפוֹת
<i>bow</i> קֶשֶׁת	קֶשֶׁתוֹת

The noun יָד, *hand/handle*, has the plural form יָדוֹת *handles* and the dual form יָדַיִם *hands*. The latter can refer to two hands or any number of hands, and is thus both a plural and a dual.

Some observations about nouns being marked or not marked in the context of number and gender:

The nouns אִמָּה *mother* and אָב *father*, both unmarked, are feminine and masculine singular nouns, respectively. The plural forms are אִמּוֹת and אָבוֹת respectively.

The noun דֶּרֶךְ *road*, which is unmarked, is designated as either masculine or feminine. For plural form is דֶּרֶכִּים.

The noun שָׁנָה *year*, marked as “feminine”, has the plural שָׁנִים and a derivative form that points to the parallel existence of the plural שָׁנוֹת. The noun מְקוֹם *place*, unmarked and designated as “masculine”, has the plural מְקוֹמוֹת.

The noun לַיְלָה *night*, marked as feminine, has the plural form לַיְלוֹת. It is, however, a masculine noun.

## **Confusing?!?**

Yes, it is. Try to conceptualize the generalizations, while noting special traits of individual words as they present themselves in the text. That's the best you can do at this point!

[Number: Exercise](#)