

B. Prepositions: Freedom and not anarchy

In our earlier days of Hebrew-study, we learn very fixed meanings for prepositions which we later discover were too narrow. This is a necessary process for if we were to attempt to give all the meanings that may be assigned to particular prepositions in the earlier days of the study, the overall process would be mind-boggling and self-defeating. Most students would profit greatly from the reading of the fuller prepositional articles in BDB but failing of this, if one will bear in mind that they have wider areas of meaning, it is possible to gain a reasonable understanding just from our few notes.

1. Types of Prepositions

For our purposes, the Hebrew prepositions may be grouped in three classes that are not exactly logical but work, just the same:

a. Inseparable

These are the prepositions that have no independent usage. They are joined immediately to the word governed and are usually pointed with shewa. The three most common are:

בְּ, לְ, עַל

All have wide areas of meaning.

b. Independent

Such prepositions as these "stand alone". The great majority are in this class and some of them look like verb-forms, some like nouns, et c. If you come on any of these and it is used more than a smattering of times in the OT, you should put it in your vocabulary.

c. Variants

Uncertain about their identity, these may be joined or may stand independent. They may also depend on the maqqeph for word affixation. The best known of the former is כִּי while the better known of the latter is וְ.

2. Usage of Prepositions

Simplifying the heavier grammatical suggestions, we mention four sorts of usage:

a. Positional...a preposition that shows the place, state of an entity...where it is, that is.

Examples: שָׁמַיְמָּה beside, over, at, above, etc.

לְפָנָיו before, in front of, etc.