

VI. SUMMARY NOTES ON INFINITIVES AND PARTICIPLESContent

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A. INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Infinitives and participles constitute two ways whereby the verb is used to depict something other than direct action. This is true in Hebrew as in most languages.

The general rule is this:

The PARTICIPLE describes or tells something about the subject.

The INFINITIVE defines a quality of action.

To put this more directly, the participles are used as modifiers while the infinitive serves as a determinator. The former shows a distinct feature while the latter shows a type of action. Since language is not designed by scientists or grammarians, these very simple designations are not always accurate. But they serve as working principles in a full set of rule of thumb orders. You can see the generalization working in the thrust of Deuteronomy 1:14

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ אֲחֵרֵי הַכְּתוּבִים יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן נֹון הַיְיָ מִלְּרִי אֶשְׁרָר יוֹשֵׁב בְּחֶשְׁבוֹן
 וַיֵּשְׁבֵהוּ = "was dwelling"

This epitomizes the participle construction and modifies the Amorite king telling us something about what he was doing, namely dwelling in Heshbon. It does not tell how or why or give an indication of any particular type of action but it does tell something about the king and in that way modifies the image we might form of him.

וְאַחֲרַי הַכְּתוּבִים = "after his smiting" וְאַחֲרַי... אִתּוֹ, const.

This is an infinitive action and may be translated almost as if a regular verb. It tells of an action...and of course it tells us something about the subject, but only in connexion with the action. The infinitive gives a "living" thrust to the material by determining what happened.