

BBH Workbook p. 16 #17

עבדים

עבדים : Number

עבדים consists of

- the masculine noun עָבֵד, “servant, slave”
- the plural suffix מִן

MORPHOLOGY

Note that not only nouns (such as עָבֵד), but also adjectives and participles, are made plural by means of the suffix מִן.

MORPHOLOGY

Why do the vowels of עָבֵד change when the suffix מִן is added?

עבד is a Segholate noun. A Segholate noun is defined by two characteristics:

- (1) It has two syllables (e.g., עָבֵד), and
- (2) Its accent lies on the first of these two syllables עָבֵד.

The plural of a Segholate noun is formed in the following manner, regardless of what vowels the singular form contains:

- (1) The ending **ים** or **ות** is added, and
- (2) The vowels under the consonants of the original singular Segholate become **ָם**.

Here are a few Segholate nouns in their singular and plural forms:

<i>Sing.</i>		<i>Pl.</i>	
מלך	→	מלךים	king(s)
נפש	→	נפשות	person(s)
ספר	→	ספרים	book(s)
נער	→	נערים	lad(s)
שער	→	שערים	gate(s)
פעל	→	פעלים	deed(s)

As we remarked earlier, no matter what the vowels of a Segholate noun are in its singular form (and they may be of any vowel class: a, e, i, o, or u), the plural is either of the pattern **ים|ות** or **ם|ות**.

The first of these patterns is close to what we see in **עבדים**, but what shall we make of the **ָם** under the Ayin?

Gutturals, remember, cannot usually take a Vocal Shewa; in lieu of a Vocal Shewa, they usually take a compound Shewa, or Hateph vowel ($\bar{\text{u}}$, $\bar{\text{e}}$, or $\bar{\text{a}}$).

Moreover, gutturals often prefer a-class vowels (we shall come across this phenomenon frequently later on). In עֲבָדִים, the Ayin (a guttural) cannot take the Vocal Shewa characteristic of plural Segholate nouns (ָ) and so it takes the a-class compound Shewa, Hateph Pathach (ֹ).

עֲבָדִים : Gender

If we haven't memorized the gender of **עבד**, the **ים** on the plural tells us that it is *probably* masculine. We can verify that this is indeed the case by looking up **עבד** in a lexicon.

MORPHOLOGY

Remember that the plurals of some feminine nouns are also formed by the addition of the suffix **תִּיְלָה**; e.g.,

<i>Sing.</i>		<i>Pl.</i>	
אֲשֶׁר	→	נָשִׁים	woman/women
עִיר	→	עִירִים	city/cities

Summary

עבדים is masculine in gender and plural in number