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בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ

בֵּינִי

בֵּינִי consists of the preposition בֵּין, “between,” and ׀, one of Hebrew’s several first-person common singular pronominal suffixes (of these we shall learn more in chapter 9).

GRAMMAR

When a pronominal suffix is attached to a preposition, it acts as the direct object of the preposition.

בֵּינִי means “between me.”

וּבֵין

This form begins with a vowel. Normally, a syllable in Hebrew cannot begin with a vowel, but this rule admits of one exception: when the conjunction Waw is prefixed to

- (a) a word that begins with ב, מ, or פ (the “bilabial” consonants, so called because their sounds are produced with both lips), or

(b) a word beginning with a consonant (besides ך) followed by a Vocal Shewa,

the conjunction is spelled as Shureq (וּ).

For example,

וּ + מִלְךְ	→	וּמִלְךְ	(Judg 19:1)	(situation a)
וּ + נְעָרִים	→	וּנְעָרִים	(2 Kgs 2:23)	(situation b)

Because Bet is one of the bilabials, וּ + בֵּין becomes וּבֵּין.

We may provisionally translate וּבֵּין as “and between.” We will return to this word shortly, however, in order to discuss its translation in the phrase בֵּינֵי וּבֵּין הָאָרֶץ.

הָאָרֶץ

הָאָרֶץ consists of the noun אָרֶץ (best translated “world” in the present case) and the definite article.

MORPHOLOGY

We have learned that the article in Hebrew typically consists of Heh followed by Pathach and a Daghesch Forte in the next consonant (ה־). We have also learned that certain

phenomena may cause some of the constituent parts of this base form of the definite article to change.

אֶרֶץ begins with the guttural א. Gutturals, as well as ר and sometimes some other consonants (e.g., ק), cannot double (that is, they cannot take a Daghesth Forte). The א of אֶרֶץ rejects the Daghesth Forte of the preceding definite article, and the Pathach of the article compensates for the loss of this Daghesth by lengthening to its corresponding long vowel, Qamets. This lengthening of Pathach to Qamets is an instance of the phenomenon known as “compensatory lengthening.”

We might now expect to see *הָאֶרֶץ. Why instead do we find הָאָרֶץ?

We remarked in the previous example that אֶרֶץ is one of several nouns which undergo a vowel change in their first syllable when the definite article is prefixed to them (some others are בֵּן, הָר, and עַם). These changes are not predictable and must therefore be memorized.

Excursus: Translation

In English, a phrase beginning with the preposition “between” contains only one instance of “between,” regardless of how many objects follow. For example,

between us

between me and you

between me and you and every living creature

In Hebrew, on the other hand, בֵּין is repeated before each of its objects. Here are Hebrew equivalents of the English phrases above:

בֵּינֵינוּ (Job 9:33)

בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ (1 Kgs 15:19)

בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם (Gen 9:12)
וּבֵין כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

Final Translation

between me and the earth