

## BBH Workbook p. 92 #5

(Gen 17:9-10)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וְאַתָּה אֶת־בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמֹר  
אֶתָּה וְזָרְעֶךָ אֶחְרִיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ  
בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זָרְעֶךָ אֶחְרִיךָ הַמּוֹלֵד לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר

### וַיֹּאמֶר

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A footnote indicates that the verb form **וַיֹּאמֶר** may be translated “and (he) said.”

#### MORPHOLOGY

Although we have not yet learned how to parse **וַיֹּאמֶר**, we may observe that its root is **אָמַר**.

### אֱלֹהִים

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**אֱלֹהִים** “God,” is the subject of **וַיֹּאמֶר**.

### אֶל־אַבְרָהָם

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אֶל-אַבְרָהָם, "to Abraham," consists of

- the preposition אֶל, "to"
- the proper noun אַבְרָהָם, "Abraham"

## Summary: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְרָהָם

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*And God said to Abraham.*

### SYNTAX

The word order of the clause

אֶל-אַבְרָהָם	אֱלֹהִים	וַיֹּאמֶר
(INDIRECT) OBJECT	SUBJECT	VERB

is typical of Hebrew narrative.

## וְאַתָּה

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וְאַתָּה, "and you, as for you," consists of

- the conjunction Waw
- the 2ms independent personal pronoun אַתָּה, "you"

### TRANSLATION

וְאַתָּה is emphatic in the present sentence, inasmuch as the pronoun אַתָּה is grammatically unnecessary before the verb תִּשְׁמֹר (which comes a few words later). Translating וְאַתָּה “as for you” brings out its emphatic quality.

## את

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Context makes it clear that this אֶת־ is the definite direct object marker.

### MORPHOLOGY

The form אֶת־ (pointed אֶת when not attached to another word by means of a Maqqef) may be either

- (a) the definite direct object marker, or
- (b) the preposition “with.”

For example,

#### (A) DEFINITE DIRECT OBJECT MARKER

אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ (God created) the heavens  
and the earth (Gen 1:1)

אֶת־נִינְוָה (he built) Nineveh  
(Gen 10:11)

#### (B) PREPOSITION “WITH”

אֶת־הָאֶבֶן וְאֶת־הָעֵץ with stone and with wood

(Jer 3:9)

את יַעֲקֹב      with Jacob      (Exod 1:1)

Context indicates when אַתָּה/את is the definite direct object marker and when it is the preposition “with.”

When the definite direct object marker and the preposition “with” appear with pronominal suffixes, their forms are distinct. For example,

(A) DEFINITE DIRECT OBJECT MARKER

אֹתוֹ      (you shall serve) him      (Deut 10:20)

(B) PREPOSITION “WITH”

אִתּוֹ      (the guests who were) with him  
(1 Kgs 1:41)

## בְּרִיתִי

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בְּרִיתִי, “my covenant,” consists of

- the noun בְּרִית, “covenant”
- the 1cs pronominal suffix יָ, “my”

A pronominal suffix attached to a noun functions possessively; e.g.,

אֶהְלוֹ	his tent	(Ps 27:5)
שִׁפְחָתִי	my maid	(Gen 30:18)
מֶלְכְּךָ	your king	(Zech 9:9)

A pronominal suffix attached to a preposition, on the other hand, functions as the object of the preposition; e.g.,

אֵלַיְךָ	to you	(Deut 5:27)
עֲלֵיהֶם	on them	(1 Kgs 6:32)
לִפְנֵי	before me	(Ps 5:9)

## תִּשְׁמֹר

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תִּשְׁמֹר, “you will guard,” is the Qal Imperfect 2ms of שָׁמַר.

### MORPHOLOGY

For verbs both strong and weak in all stems, the Imperfect 2ms and 3fs are formally identical (e.g., תִּשְׁמֹר); context indicates which is meant.

### TRANSLATION

Like Hebrew תִּשְׁמֹר, the English expression “you will guard” can have both a predictive (i.e., “It is the case that you will guard”) and an imperatival (i.e., “I am commanding you to guard”) sense. Some translations render תִּשְׁמֹר in Gen 17:9 “you shall guard” or “you must guard” in order to bring out the latter nuance.

#### MORPHOLOGY

Why does the Tav of תִּשְׁמֹר lack a Daghesh Lene?

When preceded by a **consonant**, a *begadkephat letter* (whether it is located at the beginning or in the middle of a word) takes a Daghesh Lene. E.g.,

מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם	(Eccl 1:1)
עֵץ פְּרִי	(Gen 1:11)
מִשְׁכַּן	(Num 31:47)

When preceded by a **vowel**, a *begadkephat letter* (whether it is located at the beginning or in the middle of a word) does not take a Daghesh Lene. E.g.,

שְׁנֵי כְרוּבִים	(1 Kgs 6:23)
אֶזְכָּרְם	(Exod 22:4)
רְאִיתִי	(Job 4:8)

(There are a few exceptions to the aforementioned rules.)

In Gen 17:9, תִּשְׁמֹר follows בְּרִיתִי, which ends in a vowel. Therefore the Taw in תִּשְׁמֹר has no Daghesh Lene.

### Summary: וְאַתָּה אֶת־בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמֹר

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*As for you, you will keep my covenant.*

### אַתָּה

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Following תִּשְׁמֹר is another instance of the 2ms independent personal pronoun אַתָּה, "you."

### וְזַרְעֶךָ

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וְזַרְעֶךָ, "and your descendants," consists of

- the conjunction Waw
- the masculine noun זָרַע, "seed, descendant(s)"
- the 2ms pronominal suffix ךָּ, "your"

## GRAMMAR

זַרְע sometimes (as here in Gen 17:9) acts as a collective noun; that is, it refers to a plurality (“descendants”) although it is grammatically singular. One indication that זַרְע is collective here is that it is referred to a few words later by means of the plural suffix ׀ם, “their.”

## אַחֲרַיִךְ

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אַחֲרַיִךְ, “after you,” consists of

- the preposition אַחֲרַיִ, “after”
- the pronominal suffix ׀ךְ, “you”

## לְדֹרֹתָם

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לְדֹרֹתָם, “throughout their generations,” consists of

- the preposition לְ, here “for, throughout”
- דֹּרוֹת, the plural of the masculine noun דֹּר, “generation”
- the 3mp pronominal suffix ׀ם, “their”

## MORPHOLOGY

When the plural suffix ׁוֹת is added to הַיּוֹר, the Holem Waw of the latter is written defectively as Holem: הַיּוֹרוֹת. When after this the pronominal suffix ׁם is added to הַיּוֹרוֹת, the Holem Waw of הַיּוֹרוֹת is also written defectively as Holem: הַיּוֹרוֹתֶם.

**Summary:** וַאֲתָהּ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמַר אַתָּה וְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרָיִךְ לְדֹרֹתָם  
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם

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*(And) God said to Abraham, "As for you, you will keep my covenant – you and your descendants after you, throughout their generations."*

## זֹאת בְּרִיתִי

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The verbless clause זֹאת בְּרִיתִי, "this is my covenant" consists of

- the feminine demonstrative pronoun זֹאת, "this"
- בְּרִיתִי, which is made up of the feminine noun בְּרִית, "covenant," and the 1cs pronominal suffix ׁי, "my"

### GRAMMAR

The demonstrative זֹאת may (like other demonstratives) be either an adjective (in which case it functions like an

attributive adjective) or pronoun (in which case it functions like a predicate adjective).

We know the **זאת** in Gen 17:10 is functioning as a pronoun because (like a predicate adjective) it

- (1) precedes the noun it modifies (**בְּרִית**), and
- (2) agrees with **בְּרִית** in gender (fem.) and number (sing.) but not in definiteness

(Recall that **בְּרִיתִי** is definite by virtue of its pronominal suffix.)

## אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ

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The relative clause **אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ** consists of

- the relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר**, “which”
- **תִּשְׁמְרוּ**, “you will keep,” the Qal Imperfect 2mp of **שָׁמַר**

### TRANSLATION

As with **תִּשְׁמַר** in Gen 17:9, **תִּשְׁמְרוּ** here may be considered to have both a predictive and imperatival sense. (See further above.)

The relative clause **אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ** modifies **בְּרִיתִי**; that is, much like an attributive adjective, **אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ** supplies extra information about the noun **בְּרִיתִי**.

## בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זַרְעֵךְ אַחֲרָיִךְ

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Here now are three instances of the preposition **בֵּין**, “between.” The objects of the first two are pronouns:

**בֵּינִי**                      between **me**

**וּבֵינֵיכֶם**                and (between) **you**

The object of the third **בֵּין** is a noun phrase:

**וּבֵין זַרְעֵךְ**                and (between) **your descendants**

### GRAMMAR

Note that the pronominal suffix in **וּבֵינֵיכֶם** is 2mp, whereas the suffix in **זַרְעֵךְ** is 2ms.

To **זַרְעֵךְ** is added the prepositional phrase **אַחֲרָיִךְ**, “after you,” which consists of

- the preposition **אַחֲרַי**, “after”
- the 2ms pronominal suffix **יָךְ**, “you”

## 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

**Summary:** בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זַרְעֶךָ אַחֲרָיִךְ

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*between me, you, and your descendants after you*

הַמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל-זָכָר

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הַמּוֹל is a verb form which we have not yet studied. It may be translated somewhat literally “to be circumcised.”

לְכֶם, “to you,” (i.e., “belonging to you”) consists of

- the preposition לְ, “to”
- the 2mp pronominal suffix כֶּם, “you”

כָּל-זָכָר, “every male,” consists of

- the adjective כָּל- (often spelled כָּל), “every”
- the masculine noun זָכָר, “male person, man”

כָּל-זָכָר לְכֶם הַמּוֹל means “every male belonging to you is to be circumcised.” (Note that the word order in English is almost opposite from the Hebrew word order.) הַמּוֹל לְכֶם כָּל-זָכָר is a verbless clause in Hebrew, but an English translation must supply a form of the verb *to be* (namely, “is”).

## Final Translation

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9 (And) God said to Abraham, “As for you, you will keep my covenant – you and your descendants after you, throughout their generations.”

*10 This is my covenant, which you will keep, between me, you, and your descendants after you: every male belonging to you is to be circumcised."*