



Insights & Revelations

What is an Infinitive Absolute?

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The “infinitive absolute” is a grammatical structure in Biblical Hebrew. It uses a verb, and repeats the verb to add emphasis. There are other functions for the “infinitive absolute” in Biblical Hebrew, however for now, we are going to focus on the “infinitive absolute” as adding emphasis to the action of the verb.

When we take a verb like רָוַץ- which means “to rush”, we repeat it a second time, in order to add emphasis. For instance, **רָוַץ- תָּרוּץ** means “most certainly rush”. It implies the action of “rushing”, and adds greater emphasis and conviction of the action being performed.

An excellent book for Biblical grammar is *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* written by Bill T. Arnold, and John H. Choi. They are professors at theological seminaries. Both illustrate the “infinitive absolute” as a phrase demonstrating the conviction of the action that’s about to happen. But it can also be used adverbially. This whole function can change the meaning of the sentence. Here are three examples:

Exodus 22:16:

וְכִי־יִפְתָּהּ אִישׁ בְּתוּלָהּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־אֲרָשָׁהּ וְשָׁכַב עִמָּה מְהֵרָה יְמַהֲרָנָה לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה:

“When a man seduces a virgin, who is not engaged, and have sex with her, he will **most certainly pay** for her to become his wife”.

The phrase מְהֵרָה יְמַהֲרָנָה - “is pay will pay her”.

This is the infinitive absolute for the verb “pay.” Grammatically speaking, YHVH is telling the male who seduced her that he will make her his wife. The reason being is because her reputation has been marred because she had sexual relations out of wedlock.

Genesis 2:17:

וַיִּמְעַץ הַדֵּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיֹום אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

“But from the tree of knowledge of good, and bad, you will not eat from it, for in the day you eat from it, you will **most certainly die**”.

The phrase מוֹת תָּמוּת - “die dying” is also in the infinitive absolute.

Basically, YHVH is emphasizing the action that will explicitly happen when they eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In Genesis 5, testimony records the death of Adam, so it came to pass.

And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and **he died**. (*Bereshith/Genesis 5:5*)

Exodus 22:23:

אִם־עָנָה תַעֲנֶנּוּ אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם־צָעַק יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמַע אֲשַׁמַּע צַעֲקוֹ:

If you will most certainly afflict them, and they certainly shriek out to me, then I will certainly adhere to their shriek.

The infinitive absolute occurs in this verse 3 times. Verse 22 is a reference to the fatherless and the widows. If someone afflicts them, then YHVH will most certainly destroy the those who afflict them. He says this with emphasis.

Inheritance rights are given to families. So, the fatherless, and widows don't belong to families and have no means to grow and provide food for themselves. If someone afflicts them, they cannot do anything about it. In this situation, YHVH intervenes and becomes their father and husband, and will destroy the individual who would afflict them.