What are participles?

Read the following sentence:

Hearing a loud noise, the boy woke up.
Here the word hearing qualifies the noun boy as an adjective does. It is formed from the verb hear and has an object – noise. The word hearing, therefore, has the properties of a verb and an adjective and is called a participle.

A participle is a word which is partly a verb and partly an adjective.

Note that in the example sentence given above, the phrase ‘hearing a loud noise’ which is introduced by a participle is called a participle phrase.

Study the following examples:

Knocking at the door, he demanded admission.
We met a girl carrying a basket full of vegetables.
The old woman, thinking all was safe, attempted to cross the road.
The italicized words in the above sentences are all examples of what are called present participles. Note that present participles end in -ing and represent an action as going on or incomplete or imperfect.

Present participles formed from transitive verbs, take objects.

Now study the following sentences:

We saw trees laden with fruits.
Deceived by his friends, he committed suicide.
Driven by rain, we took shelter under a tree.
The italicized words in the above sentences are all examples of what are called past participles. The past participle usually ends in -ed, -d, -t, -en or -n. It represents a completed action or state.
What are participles?

Besides the present and past participles, we have what is called a perfect participle which represents an action as completed some time in the past.

Having rested for a while, we continued our journey.
Participles are often used as simple qualifying adjectives in front of nouns.

Barking dogs seldom bite.
A rolling stone gathers no moss.
His tattered coat needs mending.
A burnt child dreads fire.
He is a learned man.
When used as an adjective, the past participle has a passive meaning.

A burnt child = a child who is burnt.
A painted doll = a doll which is painted.
When used as an adjective, the present participle has an active meaning.

A barking dog = a dog which barks
A rolling stone = a stone which rolls