

Hebrew Reading

2 Types of Syllables:

Open Syllable- Cv (Consonant-Vowel)

ב ת ו¹ ל פי רה ח

Closed Syllable- CvC (Consonant-Vowel-Consonant)

בן אב שיר שוב פל² חם כל

Exception: The vowel letter ו may start a word.

ומה

Dagesh

1. Dagesh is the dot that occurs in a letter. There are two types of dagesh, weak and strong.
2. Weak Dagesh changes the sound of the "Begadkepat" letters.

ב = b ב = v , פ = p פ = f

3. Strong dagesh doubles the sound of a letter and may appear in most letters of the alphabet.

ל = ll מ = mm ב = bb ד = dd

4. How to distinguish weak and strong dagesh:
 - a. Weak dagesh occurs at the beginning of a word with the Begadkepat letters.

דלת delet בן bēn

- b. Strong dagesh usually occurs within a word.

רבנים rabbîm קיטל qittēl

² Shewa at the end of closed syllables is silent Shewa.

Shewa

1. There are two types of shewa: vocal and silent
2. Vocal Shewa occurs in an open syllable

וְ w^e לֵ l^e בֵ b^e

3. Silent shewa occurs at the end of a closed syllable

יִקְרָא yiqrāʔ מַבְדִּיל mabdîl

4. When there are two shewas in a row, the first is silent, the second is vocal

וְנִשְׁמָחָה v^eniśm^eḥā^h

5. A closed syllable at the end of a word usually does not have shewa

Gutturals

1. There are 5 letters in the alphabet that have special characteristics. They are called 'gutturals' because their sounds are made in the throat. They are:

ה ח א ע and ר

2. Gutturals usually do not double with dagesh. Dagesh only very rarely occurs in gutturals.

~~אֵ~~ → אֵ

3. Gutturals do not take a vocal shewa, but the vowel changes to a half vowel.

~~אֵ~~ → אֵ

4. Gutturals prefer to take 'a' vowels rather than 'i' or 'u'.

~~אֵ~~ → אֵ

5. Gutturals at the end of a word often take 'Furtive Patah'.

Furtive (sneaky) Patah

When a guttural (usually ה) occurs at the end of a word, it often takes a patah, which is written slightly to the right of the letter and pronounced before the guttural.

רוּחַ rūah מְשִׁיחַ mašîah

Mappiq

Mappiq is a dot that only occurs in the letter ה at the end of a word. It indicates that the ה is a consonant and not a vowel letter.

מַהּ = ma (ה is silent) מֶהּ = mah (ה is pronounced)

Maqeph

Maqeph is a horizontal line that joins two words (one of which is usually only one syllable). The two are pronounced together as one word (similar to an English hyphen).

אֶל-מָקוֹם וַיְהִי-כֵן

Soph Pasuq

Soph pasuq is a mark that resembles a large colon. Soph pasuq literally means "end of verse" and it is used to mark the end of a verse.

אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

Kethib – Qere

When the Masoretes added the vowel points to the consonant text of the Hebrew Bible, they did not change the consonants at all because they held them to be sacrosanct.

When they found what they considered a misspelling or corrupt text, they did not change the text. Instead, they noted the correction in the margin (similar to a modern footnote).

The uncorrected word in the text is called the "Kethib" (Written) and the corrected word in the margin is called the "Qere" (Read).

The vowel points from the Qere were put into the text with the Kethib, even though they often make the word unreadable.

Examples:

Est. 1:16 Kethib	מִוֹמֶכֶן
Qere	מִמּוֹכֶן
Read	מִמּוֹכֶן

The Divine Name: Some Qere (called perpetual Qere) are so common that they are not put in the margin, but the reader is expected to know them. The vowel points are still added to the Kethib. The most common is the Divine Name יְהוָה . Ancient Hebrews would not pronounce the Divine Name. And every time it occurred in the text, they would substitute the word אֲדֹנָי (Lord). The vowels from אֲדֹנָי are added to the consonants יהוה which was probably pronounced Yahweh or Yahveh. Some have mistakenly read this word with the vowels from the Qere to get the word Jehovah.

יְהוָה

Accents

There are many other marks in the Masoretic text. Most of which are accents. Accents tell where the stress of the word is when reading. Hebrew accents also tell divisions within verses and sometimes can be helpful for interpretation. Many scholars think that accents somehow marked how the text was sung or chanted in ancient times. For our purposes, we can ignore the Hebrew accents. Most Hebrew words are accented on their final syllable with a few exceptions.

Reading Practice and Hebrew Songs

WTT Psalm 1:
רְשָׁעִים וּבְדַרְךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשֵׁב לִצְיִים לֹא יֵשֵׁב:

2 כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה חִפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלַיָּה:

3 וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל-פְּלִגֵּי מַיִם אֲשֶׁר פִּרְיוֹ יִתֵּן בְּעֵתוֹ וְעָלְהוּ לֹא-יִבּוֹל וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ:

4 לֹא-כֵן הֲרָשָׁעִים כִּי אִם-כַּמֶּץ אֲשֶׁר-תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ:

5 עַל-כֵּן לֹא-יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט וְחַטָּאִים בַּעֲדַת צְדִיקִים:

6 כִּי-יִזְרַע יְהוָה דֶּרֶךְ צְדִיקִים וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד:

Hinneh Mah Tov Psalm 133:1

הִנֵּה מַה טוֹב

tov

ma

hinney

Behold how good

וְנֵעִים וּמַה

naeem

uma

and-how pleasant

אֶחָיִם שֶׁבֶת

acheem

shevet

to-dwell brothers
(when brothers dwell)

יַחַד גַּם

yachad

gam

even/also together
(in unity)

Psalm 23:1

רְעִי יְהוָה
(אֲדֹנָי)
roee adonay

The LORD my-shepherd
(the LORD is my shepherd)

אֶחְסָר לֹא
echsar lo

not I will want
(I will not want)