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Class Number

305A3

Class Title

INTRODUCTION TO HEBREW
AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Date

May 4, 2022

Credits

2

Level

Graduate Level

This Syllabus is Approved for
Baptist International University School of the Scriptures

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. S. Desent".

N. S. Desent, Ph.D., Th.D., D.D.

CLASS 305A3 INTRODUCTION TO HEBREW AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

This Syllabus is an *Introduction to Hebrew and the Old Testament*. This class informs the student history of the Hebrew language, the Old Testament, and its manuscripts. This class also teaches the student the basics of the Hebrew language so he can read the words, study the words, and have a good understanding of how the Hebrew language functions. This class, being an *introduction*, is not intended to make the student an expert in the Hebrew language. The class is comprehensive for the scope, and profitable as a first step. We have provided other more advanced follow-up studies for those students who wish to continue their study.

This Syllabus can be used in conjunction with other Class Syllabi, which have Teaching on other subjects.

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**CLASS 305A1 INTRODUCTION TO HEBREW
AND THE OLD TESTAMENT**

A Syllabus Approved for Baptist International University School of the Scriptures – 2 Credits.

N. Sebastian Desent, Ph.D., Th.D., D.D.
Historic Baptist Church

May 4, 2022

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Scripture References

2 Timothy 3:16

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

Matthew 5

18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

John 5

39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

Matthew 24

35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Mark 13

31 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

Luke 21

33 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

Matthew 28:20

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

1 Corinthians 14:37

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

2 Peter 3

15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;

16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Luke 4

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on

the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

1 Peter 1:25

But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Lesson 18: Understanding Diacritical Markings

I. Hebrew Diacritical (vowel) markings

A. Hebrew orthography includes three types of diacritics:

- *Niqqud* in Hebrew is the way to indicate vowels, which are omitted in modern orthography, using a set of ancillary glyphs. Since the vowels can be understood from surrounding, context can help readers read the correct pronunciations of several letters of the Hebrew alphabet (the rafe sign and other rare glyphs are also listed as part of the niqqud system but are not in common use).
- *Geresh* and *gershayim*, two diacritics that are not considered a part of niqqud, each of which has several functions (e.g. to denote Hebrew numerals).
- *Cantillation*, “accents” which are used exclusively to indicate how Biblical passages should be chanted and may possess a punctuating function.

II. The Niqqud

A. In modern Hebrew orthography, vowel and consonant pointing is seldom used, except in specialized texts such as dictionaries, poetry, or texts for children or for new immigrants.

B. Hebrew has five vowel phonemes—/i/, /e/, /a/, /o/ and /u/—but many more written symbols for them. *Niqqud* distinguish the following vowels and consonants.

C. See chart below.

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Name	Symbol	Transliteration	English Example	Hebrew	Alternate Names
Hiriq	◊	i	seek	הִירִיק	n/a
Tzere	◊̄	e and ei	men	צִירִי or צִירָה	
Segol	◊̇	e, (ei with succeeding yod)	men	סְגוֹל	
Patach	◊̆	a	far	פְּתַח	
Kamatz	◊̄̄	a, (or o)	far	קָמָץ	
Sin dot (left)	שׁ	s	sour	שִׁין	
Shin dot (right)	שׂ	sh	shop	שֵׁין	
Holam Haser	◊̆̄	o	bore	חֹלֶם חָסֵר	
Holam Male or Vav Haluma	◊̆̄̄			חֹלֶם מָלֵא	
Dagesh or Mappiq	◊̄̄̄	N/A	N/A	דָּגֵשׁ or מַפְיֵק	
Shuruk or Vav Shruqa	◊̄̄̄̄	u	cool	שׁוּרוּק	
Kubutz	◊̄̄̄̄̄			קִבּוּץ	
Below: Two vertical dots underneath the letter (called sh'va) make the vowel very short.					
Shva	◊̆̄̄	apostrophe, e,	<i>silent</i>	שׁוּׁא	n/a
		or nothing			
Reduced Segol	◊̇̄̄	e	men	חֹטֵף סְגוֹל	<i>Hataf Segol</i>
Reduced Patach	◊̆̄̄	a	far	חֹטֵף פְּתַח	<i>Hataf Patakh</i>
Reduced Kamatz	◊̄̄̄̄̄	o	bore	חֹטֵף קָמָץ	<i>Hataf Kamatz</i>

Note 1: The symbol "ס" represents whatever Hebrew letter is used.

Note 2: The letter "ש" is used since it can only be represented by that letter.

Note 3: The *dagesh*, *mappiq*, and *shuruk* are different, however, they look the same and are inputted in the same manner. Also, they are represented by the same Unicode character.

Note 4: The letter "ר" is used since it can only be represented by that letter.

III. Vowel Comparison Chart

Vowel Comparison Table					
Vowel length					
Long	Short	Very short	Notes	Transliteration	English Example
א	א	א	2, 3	a	far
י	י	י	2, 3, 4	o	cold
ו	ו	n/a	5	u	you
י	י	n/a		i	ski
ע	ע	ע	2	e	let
Notes:					
1. These vowels lengths are not manifested in Modern Hebrew.					
2. Adding two vertical dots (sh'va) to the "short-vowel" diacritic produces the diacritic for "very short vowel" (Hebrew: חטף הַתָּא <i>ḥatáf</i>).					
3. The short /o/ and long /a/ are represented by the same diacritic.					
4. The short /o/ is usually promoted to a long /o/ (holam male, vav with dot above) in Israeli writing for the sake of disambiguation.					
5. The short /u/ is usually promoted to a long /u/ (shuruk, vav with middle dot) in Israeli writing for the sake of disambiguation.					

IV. The Meteg

- A. The *Meteg* is a vertical bar placed below a character next to the niqqud for various purposes, including marking vowel length and secondary stress. Its shape is identical to the cantillation mark *sof pasuq*.

V. Cantillation

- A. Cantillation has a more limited use than vowel pointing, as it is only used for reciting the Tanakh, and is not found in children's books or dictionaries.
- B. In general, each word in the Tanach has one cantillation sign. This may be either a *disjunctive*, showing a division between that and the following word, or a *conjunctive*, joining the two words (like a slur in music).
- C. *Disjunctives* divide a verse into phrases, and within each phrase all the words except the last carry *conjunctives*. (There are two types of exception to the rule about words having only one sign. A group of words joined by hyphens is regarded as one word, so they only have one accent between them. Conversely, a long word may have two—e.g., a disjunctive on the stressed syllable and the related conjunctive two syllables before in place of meteg.)
- D. The *disjunctives* are traditionally divided into four levels, with lower-level disjunctives marking less important breaks.
- The first level, known as “Emperors,” includes *sof pasuk / siluk*, marking the end of the verse, and *atnach / etnachta*, marking the middle.
 - The second level is known as “Kings.” The usual second level disjunctive is *zakef qatan* (when on its own, this becomes *zakef gadol*). This is replaced by *tifcha* when in the immediate neighborhood of *sof pasuk* or *atnach*. A stronger second level disjunctive, used in very long verses, is *segol*: when it occurs on its own, this may be replaced by *shalsholet*.
 - The third level is known as “Dukes.” The usual third level disjunctive is *revia*. For musical reasons, this is replaced by *zarka* when in the vicinity of *segol*, by *pashta* or *yetiv* when in the vicinity of *zakef*, and by *tevir* when in the vicinity of *tifcha*.
 - The fourth level is known as “Counts.” These are found mainly in longer verses and tend to cluster near the beginning of a half-verse: for this reason their musical realization is usually more elaborate than that of higher-level disjunctives. They are *pazer*, *geresh*, *gershayim*, *telisha gedola*, *munach legarmeh* and *qarne farah*.
 - The general conjunctive is *munach*. Depending on which *disjunctive* follows, this may be replaced by *mercha*, *mahpach*, *darga*, *qadma*, *telisha qetannah* or *yerach ben yomo*.

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- One other symbol is *mercha kefulah*, double *mercha*. There is some argument about whether this is another conjunctive or an occasional replacement for *tevir*.
- Disjunctives have a function somewhat similar to punctuation in Western languages. *Sof pasuk* could be thought of as a full stop, *atnach* as a semi-colon, second level disjunctives as commas and third level disjunctives as commas or unmarked. Where two words are written in the construct state (for example, *pene ha-mayim*, “the face of the waters”), the first noun (*nomen regens*) invariably carries a conjunctive.

VI. The *Geresh*

A. *Geresh* is a mark, ⟨'⟩ that may be used as a diacritic, as a punctuation mark for initialisms, or as a marker of Hebrew numerals. It is also used in cantillation.

B. As a diacritic, the *geresh* is combined with the following consonants:

Letter	Value	with <i>geresh</i>	Value	English Example	Usage
ג	[g]	ג'	[dʒ]	age	For slang and loan words (phonologically native sounds)
ז	[z]	ז'	[ʒ]	vision	
צ	[ts]	צ'	[tʃ]	change	
(non standard)					
ך	[v]	ך'	[w]	quiet	
ך	[d]	ך'	[ð]	there	For transliteration of sounds in foreign languages (non-native sounds, i.e. sounds foreign to Hebrew phonology).
ח	[h]	ח'	[χ][ʃ]	tech	
ס	[s]	ס'	[sʰ]	n/a	
ע	[ʕ]	ע'	[ʏ]	n/a	
ר	[r]	ר'			
ת	[t]	ת'	[θ]	think	

VII. The Gershayim

- A. The *Gershayim* between the penultimate and last letters (" e.g. פּוֹצֵט"א) marks acronyms, alphabetic numerals, names of Hebrew letters, linguistic roots and, in older texts, transcriptions of foreign words.
- B. Placed above a letter (ֿ e.g. פֿרִי) it is one of the cantillation marks.
- C. *Gershayim* (Hebrew: גֶּרְשָׁיִם, without *niqqud* גֶּרְשָׁיִים), also occasionally *grashayim* (Hebrew: גֶּרְשָׁיִם), is two distinct typographical marks in the Hebrew language. The name literally means “double geresh.”
- D. *Gershayim* most commonly refers to the punctuation mark (״). It is always written before the last letter of the non-inflected form of a word or numeral. It is used in the following ways:
- To indicate an acronym. For example: דו"ח (singular), דו"חות (plural), “report” represents דִּין וְחֶשְׁבוֹן; and מ"כ (masculine), מ"כית (feminine), “squad commander” represents מִפְקֵד כִּיתָה.
 - To indicate a multi-digit Hebrew numeral. For example: י"ח represents 18. (Single-digit numerals are indicated with a following geresh.)
 - To indicate the names of Hebrew letters, differentiating them from any homographs. Compare הוּא שָׁרְטֵט עֵין “he sketched an eye” with הוּא שָׁרְטֵט עֵי"ן “he sketched an ayin.”
 - To indicate Hebrew word roots. For example: the root of תַּשְׁבִּיעִים /taʃbe'tsim/ “crossword puzzles” is שִׁב"ש (š—b—š); the root of לְהַטוֹת /leha'tot/ “to tilt, to conjugate” is נְט"ה (n—ṭ—h); and the root of הִסְתַּכְּרְנוּת /histankre'nut/ “becoming synchronized” is סִנְכְּר"נ (s—n—k—r—n).
 - In older texts, to indicate the transliteration of a foreign word. This use corresponds to English’s use of italics. For example: in printed works of Rashi, the town of Rashi’s birth, Troyes, is spelled טרוי"ש.

VIII. Hebrew Syllables – Accent marks

Hebrew Syllables

Hebrew Accent Marks

Most Hebrew words are generally accented on the **last syllable** of the word:

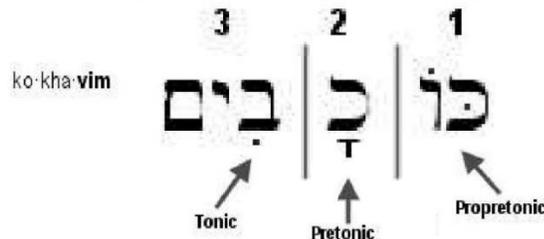


However, some words (segolate nouns, furtive patach nouns, certain verb forms) accent the next to last syllable. In the vocabulary sections of the units, I will indicate non-standard accents by using the symbol "<" above the accented syllable:



Syllable (Phonetic) Classification

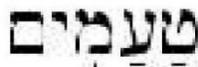
Some Hebrew grammars identify syllables according to the following scheme:



The "tonic" syllable is the syllable that receives the stress or accent; the "pretonic" syllable is the syllable before the tonic syllable, and the "propretonic" syllable is the syllable before the pretonic. Don't let this nomenclature intimidate you: in the Scriptures, accented syllables are usually identified with one or more accent marks (see below).

The Masoretes and the Masoretic Text

Between the 7th and 9th centuries A.D, a group of Jewish scribes called the Masoretes added vowel signs (*nikkudot*), cantillation symbols and accent marks (*ta'amim*) to the text. This process came to be known as the *Masorah* (tradition). The marked text was called the Masoretic Text and became the standard text for the Jews around the world.



Accents of the Masoretic Text

Every word in the Tanakh (except those joined by a hyphen or maqgef) carries an accent mark on its "tonic" syllable (i.e., the syllable that receives the stress). In the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia there are 27 prose and 21 poetic accent marks used in the text. These marks (like the vowel marks) may appear above or below the word.

Three Main Accent Marks

Most accent marks can be classified according to whether they are disjunctive (pausal) or conjunctive (connecting).

Disjunctive Accents

Disjunctive accents mark a pause or break in the reading of the text, and function something like commas, semicolons, and colons in English. There are 18 disjunctive accent marks you might see in the Masoretic text, but the two most important are:

- **Atnach** - Placed under the last word of the first half of a verse.
- **Silluq** - Placed under the last word of the second half of a verse.



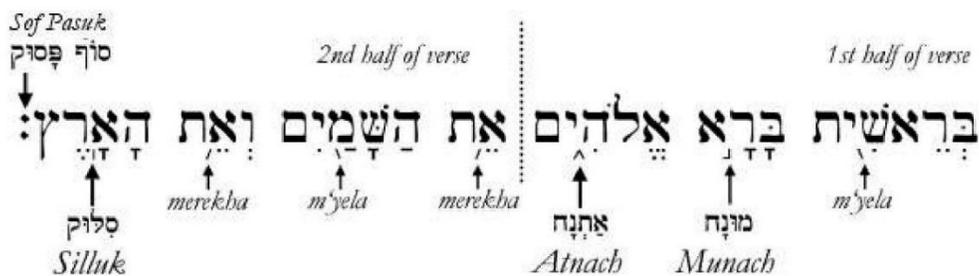
Conjunctive Accents

Conjunctive accents connect two words in the text. There are 9 conjunctive accent marks you might see in the Masoretic text, but the most important is:

- **Munach** - Placed under a word that is connected with a following word.



The following shows Genesis 1:1 as you might see it in a typical Masoretic text:



Note: You do not need to memorize the names of these accent marks; however, when you see one of them in your reading of the Tanakh, accent the syllable where the mark appears (for example, the silluq in the last word of the *pasuk* (verse) tells us to accent the pretonic syllable: ha-**a**-rets).

The mark at the end of the *pasuk* (:) is called a **Sof Pasuk**, and simply indicates the end of the verse (somewhat like a period in modern English writing).

The Least You Should Know...

In general, unless otherwise indicated by some sort of accent mark, assume that the Hebrew word you are looking at is accented on the last syllable.

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Vowels are normally long in open syllables (i.e., *ba, be, bo*) and short in a closed syllables (*ab, eb, ob*).

Reference: The Rules of Stress

The following information is provided for reference purposes only:

1. If the last syllable has a long vowel, it usually has the stress:

לוי

2. A long vowel in a closed syllable gets the stress:

צפון

3. A closed unaccented syllable must take a short vowel:

אלף

4. The Sheva (or chateph form) never receives the stress.

אשר

5. Verbs are often accented on the second syllable

שמרת

6. If a word has a Maqqef (hyphen), the stress usually shifts away from the preceding word and attends to the following word.

בן-אדם ← בן אדם

In the example above, the words *ben adam* means "son of man." With the Maqqef, the phrase still means "son of man," but the accent moves to the word *adam*, resulting in a closed, unaccented syllable for the first word. The vowel therefore changes from Tseré (long) to Segol (short), according to rule 3, above.

Note: You may also be interested in Helmut Richter's article regarding Hebrew Cantillation marks (special accent tags used for chanting the Torah).

Lesson 19: Review and the Hebrew Numbering System

Hebrew Alphabet

Level: Basic

The Hebrew and Yiddish languages use a different alphabet than English. The picture below illustrates the Hebrew alphabet, in Hebrew alphabetical order. Note that Hebrew is written from right to left, rather than left to right as in English, so Alef is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and Tav is the last. The Hebrew alphabet is often called the "alefbet," because of its first two letters.

- Hebrew uses a different alphabet than English
- Hebrew is written right-to-left
- The Hebrew alphabet has no vowels, but pronunciation aids are often added
- There are several styles of Hebrew writing
- Hebrew letters have numerical values
- Writing in Hebrew may require a special word processor and fonts

Letters of the Alefbet

ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א
Teit	Cheit	Zayin	Vav	Hei	Dalet	Gimel	Beit	Alef
(T)	(Ch)	(Z)	(V/O/U)	(H)	(D)	(G)	(B/V)	(Silent)
ס	ן	נ	מ	מ	ל	ך	כ	י
Samekh	Nun	Nun	Mem	Mem	Lamed	Khaf	Kaf	Yod
(S)	(N)	(N)	(M)	(M)	(L)	(Kh)	(K/Kh)	(Y)
ת	ש	ר	ק	ץ	צ	ף	פ	ע
Tav	Shin	Reish	Qof	Tzadei	Tzadei	Fei	Pei	Ayin
(T/S)	(Sh/S)	(R)	(Q)	(Tz)	(Tz)	(F)	(P/F)	(Silent)

Table 1: The Hebrew Alphabet

Contents

- Letters of Alefbet
- Vowels and Points
- Styles of Writing
- Ancient Hebrew
- Transliteration
- Numerical Values
- Fonts and Word Processors

Related

- Hebrew Language: Root Words

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If this sounds like Greek to you, you're not far off! Many letters in the Greek alphabet have similar names and occur in the same order (though they don't look anything alike!): Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta ... Zeta ... Theta, Iota, Kappa, Lambda, Mu, Nu ... Pi ... Rho, Sigma Tau.

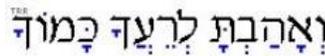
The "Kh" and the "Ch" are pronounced as in German or Scottish, a throat clearing noise, not as the "ch" in "chair."

Note that there are two versions of some letters. Kaf/Khaf, Mem, Nun, Pei/Fei and Tzadei. The second version, usually extending below the baseline of the letter, is the "final" form of the letter, used only at the end (the left side) of a word. When a letter with a second pronunciation (discussed along with [Table 3](#) below) appears at the end of a word, it almost always takes the second pronunciation, so I have identified the final forms of Kaf and Pei above with their second pronunciation.

Vowels and Points

Like most early Semitic alphabetic writing systems, the alefabet has no vowels. People who are fluent in the language do not need vowels to read Hebrew, and most things written in Hebrew in Israel are written without vowels.

However, as Hebrew literacy declined, particularly after the Romans expelled the Jews from Israel, the rabbis recognized the need for aids to pronunciation, so they developed a system of dots and dashes called nikkud (points). These dots and dashes are written above, below or inside the letter, in ways that do not alter the spacing of the line. Text containing these markings is referred to as "pointed" text.

 Illustration 1 is an example of pointed text. Nikkud are shown in blue for emphasis (they would normally be the same color as the consonants). In Sephardic pronunciation (which is what most people use today), this line would be pronounced: V'ahavtah l'reyahkhah kamokhah. (And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. [Leviticus 19:18](#)).

Most nikkud are used to indicate vowels. Table 2 illustrates the vowel points, along with their pronunciations. Pronunciations are approximate; I have heard quite a bit of variation in vowel pronunciation.

Vowel points are shown in blue. The letter Alef, shown in red, is used to illustrate the position of the points relative to the consonants. The letters shown in purple (Vavs and Yods) are technically consonants and would appear in unpointed texts, but they function as vowels in this context.

Vav, usually a consonant pronounced as a "v," is sometimes a vowel pronounced "o" as in "alone" (transliterated "o") or "oo" as in "moon" (transliterated "u" or "oo"). When a Vav has a dot on top, it's usually pronounced "o", but sometimes "vo". When it has a dot in the middle, it's usually pronounced "u", but sometimes "v". So how do you know which way to pronounce these Vav forms? There are simple rules:

1. If the letter before it has a vowel (even a silent vowel), it is pronounced as a Vav
2. If the Vav itself has a vowel underneath it, it is pronounced as a Vav
3. Otherwise, it's pronounced as a vowel.

Table 2: Vowel Points

	a as in father
	Sephardic: a as in father Ashkenazic: aw as in saw
 or 	ey as in they
	e as in met
 or 	i as in machine
 or 	o as in alone
 or 	oo as in moon
	At end of syllable: silent In middle of syllable: a schwa sound, like the a in alone
	A schwa sound, with just a hint of the a as in father
	A schwa sound, with just a hint of the aw as in saw
	A schwa sound, with just a hint of the e as in met

Table 2: Vowel Points

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הַעוֹלָם Three common prayer words, found in just about every blessing, illustrate these rules: ha'olam,
ha'olam b'mitz'votav and v'tzivanu. Ha'olam pronounces the Vav with a dot on top as you would expect: as
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו an "o" sound. B'mitz'votav has a Vav with a dot on top, but it's pronounced "vo." You have to
b'mitz'votav pronounce the "v" because the consonant before it has its own vowel (albeit a silent one, the
וְצִיָּנוּ vertical dots) and a Vav vowel can't follow another vowel. Note that the consonant before the Vav
v'tzivanu in ha'olam has no vowel (although the consonant is silent). In v'tzivanu, the Vav in the middle of
the word has a vowel of its own underneath (looks like a T), so it is a consonant and is
pronounced as a "v" sound. The Vav with a dot in the middle at the end of the word is pronounced as you would
expect, as a "u" sound, because it has no vowel and the consonant before it has none.

There are a few other nikkud, illustrated in Table 3.

The dot that appears in the center of some letters (we saw it above in the Vav) is called a dagesh. It can appear in just about any letter in Hebrew. With most letters, the dagesh does not significantly affect pronunciation of the letter; it simply marks a split between syllables, where the letter is pronounced both at the end of the first syllable and the beginning of the second. With the letters Beit, Kaf and Pei, however, the dagesh indicates that the letter should be pronounced with its hard sound (b, k, p) rather than its soft sound (v, kh, f). See Table 3. In *Ashkenazic* pronunciation (the pronunciation used by many *Orthodox Jews* and by many older Jews), Tav also has a soft sound, and is pronounced as an "s" when it does not have a dagesh. That's why you may have heard people speak of the female *coming-of-age ceremony* as a **bas** mitzvah instead of a **bat** mitzvah. The ritual of *circumcision* is most commonly referred to as a **bris**. Both words end with an undotted Tav. With Vav, as we saw above, it usually (but not always) indicates a "u" sound instead of the usual "v" sound.

בּ	ב
B	V
כּ	כ
K	Kh
פּ	פ
P	F
תּ	ת
T	T (S)
וּ	ו
U	O V
שׁ	ש
Sh	S

Table 3:
Other Nikkud

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Shin is pronounced "sh" when it has a dot over the right branch and "s" when it has a dot over the left branch. The letter is called Sin when the dot appears on the left, and functions as a completely separate letter of the alphabet, even to the extent of appearing in a separate chapter in dictionaries!

מִשֶּׁה The dot over the Shin or Sin can sometimes merge into an "o" vowel next to it, so that an "osh" sound or a "so" sound usually have just one dot instead of two next to each other. The best-known example of this is the name Moshe (Moses), which has an "o" vowel followed by a Shin and the dots combine so there is no visible vowel on the first consonant.

Styles of Writing

The style of writing illustrated above is the one most commonly seen in Hebrew books. It is referred to as block print, square script or sometimes Assyrian script.

For sacred documents, such as [torah scrolls](#) or the scrolls inside [tefillin](#) and [mezuzot](#), there is a special writing style with "crowns" (crows-foot-like marks coming up from the upper points) on many of the letters. This style of writing is known as STA"M, an acronym for "Sifrei Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzot," which is where you will see that style of writing. For more information about the STA"M alphabet, including illustrations and relevant rules, see [Hebrew Alphabet used in writing STA"M](#).

There is another style commonly used when writing Hebrew by hand, often referred to as Hebrew cursive or Hebrew manuscript. Table 4 shows the complete Hebrew alphabet in a font that emulates Hebrew cursive.

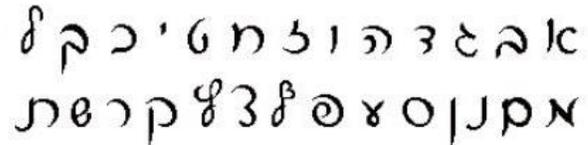


Table 4: Hebrew Cursive Font



Table 5: Rashi Script

Another style is used in certain texts, particularly the [Talmud](#), to distinguish the body of the text from commentary upon the text. This style is known as Rashi Script, in honor of [Rashi](#), the greatest commentator on the [Torah](#) and the [Talmud](#). Rashi himself did not use this script; it is only named in his honor. Table 5 shows the complete

Hebrew alphabet in a Rashi Script font.

K'tav Ivri: Ancient Hebrew Script

As mentioned above, the Hebrew alphabet that we use today is referred to as Assyrian Script (in Hebrew, K'tav Ashuri). But there was once another way of writing the alphabet that the [rabbis](#) called K'tav

Ivri, which means "Hebrew Script." Scholars call it Paleo-Hebrew or Proto-Hebrew. Many examples of this ancient way of writing the Hebrew alphabet have been found by archaeologists: on coins and other artifacts. It is quite similar to the ancient Phoenician writing. Note that there are no final forms, as there are for some letters in the Hebrew scripts we use today, which is why there aren't as many letters here.

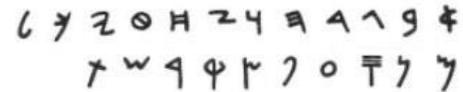


Table 6: K'tav Ivri (Paleo-Hebrew)

The rabbis of the [Talmudic](#) period were well aware of this ancient K'tav Ivri, and they raised the question whether the [Torah](#) was originally given in K'tav Ivri or K'tav Ashuri. A variety of opinions are expressed in the Talmud at [Sanhedrin 21b-22a](#): one opinion states that the Torah was originally given in K'tav Ivri, but was changed to K'tav Ashuri in the days of Ezra, during the Babylonian Exile (the Babylonians used K'tav Ashuri, and consequently the Jews in exile used it in the same way that we [transliterate](#) Hebrew into the Roman alphabet). Another opinion says that the Torah was written in K'tav Ashuri, but that holy script was denied the people when they sinned and was replaced with another one; when the people repented, the K'tav Ashuri was restored. A third opinion states that the Torah was always in K'tav Ashuri.

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The general consensus is that the Torah was given in K'tav Ashuri, because the Talmud makes other references that don't make sense in K'tav Ivri. The Talmud talks about final forms of letters in the original Torah, but K'tav Ivri doesn't have final forms. It talks about the center of the Samekh and the Final Mem miraculously floating when the [Ten Commandments](#) were carved all the way through the tablets, but there is no Final Mem in K'tav Ivri, and neither Samekh nor Mem would have a floating center in K'tav Ivri as they do in K'tav Ashuri.

All authorities maintain that today, the only holy script is K'tav Ashuri. Any [Torah scrolls](#), [tefillin](#) or [mezuzot](#) must be written in K'tav Ashuri, and specifically in a style of K'tav Ashuri known as STA"ם, discussed [above](#).

K'tav Ivri is understood to be in the nature of a font, like Rashi script, rather than in the nature of a different alphabet, like Greek, Cyrillic or Roman. The names of the letters, the order of the letters, and the [numerical value](#) of the letters are apparently the same in both K'tav Ashuri and K'tav Ivri; thus, any religious significance that would be found in the numerical value of words or the sequence of the alphabet is the same in both scripts. The only difference is the appearance.

Transliteration

The process of writing Hebrew words in the Roman (English) alphabet is known as transliteration. Transliteration is more an art than a science, and opinions on the correct way to transliterate words vary widely. This is why the Jewish [festival of lights](#) (in Hebrew, Cheit-Nun-Kaf-Hei) is spelled Chanukah, Chanukkah, Hanuka, and many other interesting ways. Each spelling has a legitimate phonetic and orthographic basis; none is right or wrong.

The Roman letters in Table 1 above are probably the most common transliterations of those consonants in America, except that Khaf is often transliterated as ch. I prefer to use kh to distinguish between Khaf and Cheit, but that's just my preference. Fei is often transliterated as ph, which I like because it makes it clear that this is the same letter as Pei. That's also part of why I like kh for khaf, because kaf is usually transliterated as k, not c.

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It's the vowels that make transliteration particularly complicated. Americans pronounce the English vowels differently (local accents), and Americans don't all pronounce Hebrew in quite the same way (certainly not the same way they do in Israel), so it's hard to write the Hebrew words in English letters that Americans would pronounce in a recognizable way. There are also different opinions about how to represent the schwa vowels. Do we use an apostrophe (') or a vowel that sounds close (usually an "e")? And do we use a hyphen to separate prefixes like ha (which is the definite article "the" in Hebrew)? Transliteration from different sources could be hard to recognize as the same original Hebrew text!

Numerical Values

Each letter in the alefbet has a numerical value. These values can be used as numerals, similar to the way Romans used some of their letters (I, V, X, L, C, D, M) as numerals. Table 6 shows each letter with its corresponding numerical value. Note that final letters have the same value as their non-final counterparts.

The numerical value of a word is determined by adding up the values of each letter. The order of the letters is irrelevant to their value: the number 11 could be written as Yod-Alef, Alef-Yod, Hei-Vav, Dalet-Dalet-Gimel or many other ways. Ordinarily, however, numbers are written with the fewest possible letters and with the largest numeral first (that is, to the right). The number 11 would be written Yod-Alef (with the Yod on the right, because Hebrew is written right-to-left), the number 12 would be Yod-Beit, the number 21 would be Kaf-Alef, the number 611 would be Tav-Reish-Yod-Alef, etc. The only significant exception to this pattern is the numbers 15 and 16, which if rendered as 10+5 or 10+6 would be a name of G-d, so they are normally written Teit-Vav (9+6) and Teit-Zayin (9+7).

Table 7: Values of Hebrew Letters

100	ק	10	י	1	א
200	כ	20	כ, כּ	2	ב
300	ש	30	ל	3	ג
400	ת	40	ד, דּ	4	ד
		50	ה, הּ	5	ה
		60	ו	6	ו
		70	ז	7	ז
		80	ח, חּ	8	ח
		90	ט, טּ	9	ט

Table 6: Values of Hebrew Letters

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Because every letter of the alphabet has a numerical value, every word also has a numerical value. For example, the word Torah (Tav-Vav-Reish-Hei) has the numerical value 611 ($400+6+200+5$). There is an entire discipline of [Jewish mysticism](#) known as Gematria that is devoted to finding hidden meanings in the numerical values of words. For example, the number 18 is very significant, because it is the numerical value of the word Chai, meaning life or living. Donations to Jewish charities are routinely made in denominations of 18 for that reason (\$18, \$36, \$180 and \$360 are quite common). It is often very confusing to gentile charities when Jews make donations in these kinds of numbers!

Some have suggested that the final forms of the letters Kaf, Mem, Nun, Pei and Tzadei have the numerical values of 500, 600, 700, 800 and 900, providing a numerical system that could easily render numbers up to 1000. However, there does not appear to be any basis for that interpretation in Jewish tradition. A cursory glance at any Jewish tombstone will show that these letters are not normally used that way: the year 5766 (2005-2006) is written Tav-Shin-Samekh-Vav ($400+300+60+6$; the 5000 is assumed), not Final Nun-Samekh-Vav ($700+60+6$). Indeed, writing it in that way would look absurd to anyone familiar with Hebrew, because a final letter should never appear at the beginning of a word! But even where numerology is used only to determine the numerical values of words, you will not find examples in Jewish tradition of final letters being given different values. For example, in traditional sources, the numerical value of one [name of G-d](#) that ends in Final Mem is 86, not 646.

In the early days of the World Wide Web, I received several e-mails pointing out that the numerical value of Vav (often transliterated as W) is 6, and therefore WWW has the numerical value of 666! The Internet, they say, is the number of the beast! It's an amusing notion, but Hebrew numbers just don't work that way. In Hebrew numerals, the position of the letter/digit is irrelevant; the letters are simply added up to determine the value. To say that Vav-Vav-Vav is six hundred and sixty-six would be like saying that the Roman numeral III is one hundred and eleven. The numerical value of Vav-Vav-Vav in Hebrew would be $6+6+6=18$, so WWW is equivalent to life! (It is also worth noting that the significance of the number 666 is a part of Christian numerology, and has no basis that I know of in Jewish thought).

While we're on the subject of bad numbers, it is worth noting that the number 13 is not a bad number in Jewish tradition or numerology. Normally written as Yod-Gimel, 13 is the numerical value of the word ahava (love, Alef-Hei-Beit-Hei) and of echad (one, as in the daily prayer declaration, G-d is One!, Alef-Cheit-Dalet). Thirteen is the age of responsibility, when a boy becomes [bar mitzvah](#). We call upon G-d's mercy by reciting his Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, found in [Exodus 34:6-7](#). [Rambam](#) summed up Jewish beliefs in [Thirteen Principles](#).

Hebrew Numbers

Modern versus Traditional Number Forms in Hebrew Writing

Most Hebrew text today uses European digits (0, 1, 2, 3...9) to represent numbers. However, religious or biblical text, and calendars in Hebrew will use the traditional form which uses Hebrew letters as numeric values.

Hebrew Letters And Their Number Values

Each letter in the Hebrew alphabet (or aleph-bet) has a numerical value. The first 10 letters (consonants actually) have the values 1-10. The next 9 letters are valued 20, 30, ... 100. The remainder are valued 200, 300, and 400. The number values for each character are shown in the table below. There is no representation for zero (0). This is the system used by Hillel II in the fourth century A.D., when he prescribed the rules for the Hebrew calendar system.

Later, the final forms of the letters kaf, mem, nun, pe, and tzadi were used for the missing values 500, 600, 700, 800, and 900.

Number Values For Hebrew Letters

These tables show the number values for hebrew letters. Left-to-right readers will prefer the table with left-to-right ordering. Right-to-left readers will prefer the table with right-to-left ordering. Otherwise the tables are identical. The number values do not change with writing direction. The tables are presented as a convenience to readers. (They also highlight the ease with which [table direction](#) can be changed in HTML markup by adding "DIR=RTL" to the table element.)

Left-To-Right Ordering										Right-To-Left Ordering									
Value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Value
Value x 1	א Alef 05D0	ב Bet 05D1	ג Gimel 05D2	ד Dalet 05D3	ה He 05D4	ו Vav 05D5	ז Zayen 05D6	ח Het 05D7	ט Tet 05D8	ט Tet 05D8	ח Het 05D7	ז Zayen 05D6	ו Vav 05D5	ה He 05D4	ד Dalet 05D3	ג Gimel 05D2	ב Bet 05D1	א Alef 05D0	Value x 1
Value x 10	י Yod 05D9	כ Kaf 05DB	ל Lamed 05DC	מ Mem 05DE	נ Nun 05E0	ס Samekh 05E1	ע Ayin 05E2	פ Pe 05E4	צ Tzadi 05E5	צ Tzadi 05E5	פ Pe 05E4	ע Ayin 05E2	ס Samekh 05E1	נ Nun 05E0	מ Mem 05DE	ל Lamed 05DC	כ Kaf 05DB	י Yod 05D9	Value x 10
Value x 100	ק Qof 05E7	ר Resh 05E8	ש Shin 05E9	ת Tav 05EA											ת Tav 05EA	ש Shin 05E9	ר Resh 05E8	ק Qof 05E7	Value x 100
Value (later)! x 100	ק Qof 05E7	ר Resh 05E8	ש Shin 05E9	ת Tav 05EA	ף Final Kaf 05DA	ם Final Mem 05DD	ן Final Nun 05DF	פ Final Pe 05E3	ץ Final Tzadi 05E5	ץ Final Tzadi 05E5	ף Final Pe 05E3	ן Final Nun 05DF	ם Final Mem 05DD	ף Final Kaf 05DA	ת Tav 05EA	ש Shin 05E9	ר Resh 05E8	ק Qof 05E7	Value (later)! x 100

Note¹: The final forms of the letters kaf ף, mem ם, nun ן, pe ף, and tzadi ץ were not used in Hebrew numbers originally, but in later years they were added to represent the values 500, 600, 700, 800, and 900.

Example

The number 764 in Hebrew is: תשסד.
The value is calculated as 400 (ת) + 300 (ש) + 60 (ס) + 4 (ד) = 764.

Hebrew Number Formation

Hebrew numbers are formed differently from Western or European numbers. In the west, only 10 digits are used, and the position of the digit indicates its value in powers of 10 beginning at 1, so the digit value is multiplied by 1, 10, 100, 1000, etc. as the position increases from right to left. (Being position-based, a zero digit is an absolute requirement.)

Hebrew numbers on the other hand, simply add the values of each letter together and the position doesn't matter. However, they are generally written from largest to smallest, which in the right-to-left Hebrew script, means the largest is right-most. For numbers greater than 799, tav (400 ת) is repeated.

Numbers are formed by choosing the hebrew letter with the largest value that doesn't exceed the number and then selecting the next largest valued letter that reduces the remainder. For example, to represent 765, the largest valued letter is tav (400 ת) leaving a remainder of 365. Adding the letter shin (300 ש) leaves 65. Adding somekh (60 ס) and he (5 ה) eliminate the remainder. So 765 is represented by tav, shin, somekh, he: תשסה.

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Exceptions to Hebrew Number Formation

There is one exception. Numbers ending in 15 or 16 would be written as yud-he (10+5) and yud-vav (10+6), but the letters "yud he vav he" spell out the name of God and for religious reasons are not used. Instead, by convention, tet-vav (9+6 טו) and tet-zayin (9+7 טז) are always used.

Well ok, there is another exception- Some numbers spell out a word with strongly negative or positive connotations. In these cases, the order of the letters might be changed. The number 18 for example, yud-het, uses the same letters as the word for life het-yud. So instead of יח, you may see חי.

Thousands, Millions



Thousands are represented by the same letters as the unit values, sometimes a character similar to an apostrophe is appended. The character is a punctuation mark called geresh. When geresh is not available, the single quote (U+0027) is often substituted. A space (U+0020) often separates thousands, millions, etc. The pattern for numbers 1-999 is repeated for each thousand from 1,001- 999,999. Millions and Billions etc. are formed by extending and repeating the pattern.

Examples

The number 764 in Hebrew is: תשסד.

The value is calculated as 400 (ת) + 300 (ש) + 60 (ט) + 4 (ד) = 764.

This table shows different numbers written in hebrew. The numbers in blue show the special handling for numbers ending in 15 and 16.

1-10	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י
11-20	יא	יב	יג	יד	טו	טז	יז	יח	יט	כ
711-720	תשי"א	תשי"ב	תשי"ג	תשי"ד	תשי"ה	תשי"ו	תשי"ז	תשי"ח	תשי"ט	תש"ך
5,821-5,830	ה'תכ"א	ה'תכ"ב	ה'תכ"ג	ה'תכ"ד	ה'תכ"ה	ה'תכ"ו	ה'תכ"ז	ה'תכ"ח	ה'תכ"ט	ה'תל"א

Here are a few more examples:

1,000 א'

1,000,000 א' א'

3,001,764 ג' א' תשס"ד

Numbers Mixed With Text



Using letters for numbers, there is the possibility of confusion as to whether a string of letters is a word or a numerical value. Therefore, when numbers are used with text, punctuation marks are added to distinguish their numerical meaning. Single character numbers (numbers less than 10) add the punctuation character geresh after the numeric character. Larger numbers insert the punctuation character gershayim before the last character in the number.

Examples of Numbers with Geresh and Gershayim

This table shows numbers written in hebrew with the geresh and gershayim punctuations marks, as they would be if the numbers were embedded in text.

1-10	א'	ב'	ג'	ד'	ה'	ו'	ז'	ח'	ט'	י'
11-20	יא"א	יב"ב	יג"ג	יד"ד	טו"ה	טז"ו	יז"ז	יח"ח	יט"ט	כ"י

It may be difficult to distinguish a number embedded in text (and therefore followed by geresh) that is less than 10, from several thousand of the same amount (e.g. 5 versus 5,000). They are both written as a single letter followed by geresh. In these situations, the hebrew word for thousand may be written out.

Hebrew Calendar

The year 2004 in the Gregorian calendar is (for most of the year) the year 5764 in the Hebrew calendar. The 5000 is generally dropped on calendars and so the year is written as 764 or תשס"ד. The year 2005 is written 765 or תשס"ה. This form of representation for years is also used for [copyright dates](#).

Note: The Hebrew calendar year begins on Rosh Hashanah which generally occurs during the month of September or October. Since the Hebrew calendar does not begin on January 1 nor end on December 31, the Hebrew year will span two Gregorian years. (Or conversely, the Gregorian year will span two Hebrew calendar years.) For example, the year 2004 will span the Hebrew calendar years 5764-5765. The year 5764 began on the eve of September 26, 2003 and ends on September 14, 2004. On September 15, 2004 the year 5765 begins.