

1 *Introduction to Tiberian Hebrew Accents*

As we begin our exploration of the Hebrew accent, it is necessary to lay a foundation for understanding the masoretic accentuation system. Thus, in this first chapter we will present a brief overview of the masoretic traditions and introduce two kinds of Hebrew accents found in the Twenty-One Books: disjunctive and conjunctive accents. We will also discuss the 28 Hebrew accents' names and their accentual positions.

1.1 The Tiberian Hebrew Accents

In transmitting the ancient legacy of the Hebrew Bible, the Masoretes developed a written system for the vocalic tradition that had been orally transmitted throughout the centuries. They were truly guardians of the Hebrew language tradition¹ rather than innovators.² Goshen-Gottstein asserts, “The work of the Masoretes, which reached a peak in the Aleppo Codex, is to be understood as the invention and perfection of an ever more refined graphic notation for an age-old oral tradition which endeavored to note down with the greatest possible

¹ Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, 194–222; Kutcher, “Contemporary Studies in Northwestern Semitic,” 21–51.

² Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza*, 164–186.

exactness, the smallest details of the customary liturgical way of reading the Bible.”³

There are three masoretic traditions: Babylonian, Palestinian, and Tiberian. Each tradition uses different graphemes for the vowel and accent signs. The Babylonian and Palestinian traditions were eventually supplanted by the Tiberian system, considered the best tradition because its system of vocalization and accentuation is the most comprehensive and sophisticated of the three.

The Tiberian tradition adds the following components to the traditional consonantal text: (1) a particular layout of the text and codicological form of the manuscripts; (2) indications of divisions of paragraphs (known in Hebrew as *pisqa’ot* or *parashiyot*); (3) accent signs; (4) vowels; (5) notes on the text, written in the margins of the manuscript; and (6) masoretic treatises at the end of the text.⁴ The accents in the Tiberian tradition are the subject explored in this book.

There are two kinds of Hebrew accents in the Twenty-One Books: disjunctive accents and conjunctive accents. Disjunctive accents indicate stresses as well as phrasal divisions ranging “from full stop to various shades of shorter pauses.”⁵ Hence, disjunctives function as separators. However, disjunctives do not suffice to indicate all word stresses because any word without a disjunctive accent may also bear word stress. For this reason, an additional accent type is necessary. This other type of accent, called a conjunctive, normally functions to connect two disjunctives. Conjunctives were not originally considered accents, but they later came to be treated as one kind of accent because they bear relatively weak stresses as connectors between dominant disjunctive accents.

³ Goshen-Gottstein, “The Rise of the Tiberian Bible Text,” 93. Harry Orlinsky comments, “All the Masorettes, from first to last, were essentially preservers and recorders of the pronunciation of Hebrew as they heard it.” See also Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible*, xxxii.

⁴ Khan, *A Short Introduction to the Tiberian Masoretic Bible and Its Reading Tradition*, 3.

⁵ Waltke and O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 29.

1.1 The Tiberian Hebrew Accents

3

The functions of disjunctive and conjunctive accents will be discussed in detail in Chapters 2–6. Here, I simply list the names of the accents in the Twenty-One Books and describe their marking positions (see Tables 1–2).

1.1.1 Disjunctive Accents

Table 1 *Disjunctive accents in the Twenty-One Books*

Name	Accent position	Remarks	Meaning
<i>Soph Pasuq</i>	⋈	At the end of a whole verse	“end of a verse”
<i>Silluq</i>	⋈	–	“separation”
<i>Athnach</i>	⋈	–	“cause to rest”
<i>Segolta</i>	⋈	Postpositive	“cluster”
<i>Shalshleth</i>	⋈	–	“triplet”
<i>Little Zaqeph</i>	⋈	–	“small upright”
<i>Great Zaqeph</i>	⋈	–	“big upright”
<i>Rebia</i>	⋈	–	“resting”
<i>Tiphcha</i>	⋈	–	“disturbance”
<i>Zarqa</i>	⋈	Postpositive	“scattering”
<i>Pashta</i>	⋈	Postpositive	“extending”
<i>Yethib</i>	⋈	Prepositive	“resting”
<i>Tebir</i>	⋈	–	“broken”
<i>Geresh</i>	⋈	–	“expulsion”
<i>Garshaim</i>	⋈	–	“double expulsion”
<i>Pazer</i>	⋈	–	“scattering”
<i>Great Pazer</i> (or <i>Qarne Para</i>)	⋈	–	“big scattering”
<i>Great Telisha</i>	⋈	Prepositive	“big drawing out”
<i>Legarmeh</i>	⋈	–	“break”

1.1.2 Conjunctive Accents

Table 2 *Conjunctive accents in the Twenty-One Books*

Name	Accent position	Remarks	Meaning
<i>Munach</i>	דְּבֵר־	–	“sustained”
<i>Mahpak</i>	דְּבֵר־	–	“inverted”
<i>Mereka</i>	דְּבֵר־	–	“prolonged”
<i>Double Mereka</i>	דְּבֵר־	–	“doubly prolonged”
<i>Darga</i>	דְּבֵר־	–	“stopping”
<i>Azla</i> (or <i>Qadma</i>)	דְּבֵר־	–	“proceeding”
<i>Little Telisha</i>	דְּבֵר־	Postpositive	“small drawing out”
<i>Galgal</i>	דְּבֵר־	–	“rolling over”
<i>Mayela</i>	וַיִּצְאֵנָה	Only before <i>Athnach</i> or <i>Silluq</i>	“inclined”

The following accents appear in Exodus 1:1.

Little Zaqeph *Pashta* *Rebia*
 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרֵימָה
 Athnach Tiphcha Munach

Little Zaqeph
 את יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ →
 Soph Pasuq Silluq Tiphcha Mereka Munach

Because of the variety of Tiberian Hebrew accents, it can be difficult to remember them all, but it is important to memorize at least the following accents that appear most often: the disjunctive accents *Soph Pasuq*, *Silluq*,

1.2 Discussion of Accentual Positions

5

Athnach, Tiphcha, Little Zaqeph, Segolta, Tebir, Pashta, Zarqa, Rebia, Geresh; and the conjunctive accents Munach, Mahpak, and Mereka.

1.2 Discussion of Accentual Positions

Having listed the disjunctive and conjunctive accents, we turn now to several notable characteristics of their positions:

- (1) *Soph Pasuq* has not traditionally been considered one of the disjunctive accents because it does not mark the stressed syllable of any word. Instead, at the end of a verse, it functions as a marker to distinguish the current verse from the next verse. Thus, its function as a separator is identical with that of other disjunctive accents, and it always occurs with *Silluq*. For this reason, this book treats *Soph Pasuq* as one of the disjunctives.
- (2) Hebrew accents can have three major positions:
 - a. Most accents are placed in normal position, in other words, over or under the stressed syllable of a word.
 - b. The three accents (*Segolta, Zarqa, and Little Telisha*) are placed over the second half of the final letter of a word. They are the so-called postpositive accents. *Pashta* is also postpositive, but its positioning differs slightly from the other postpositive accents, and it must be distinguished from *Azla* because both accents' signs are identical.⁶
 - (i) When the last syllable of a word is stressed, and when that syllable is closed (CVC type), *Azla* is located over the stressed syllable, while *Pashta* is over the second half of the last letter.

⁶ Cohen, *The System of Accentuation in the Hebrew Bible*, 8–9.

<i>Azla</i>	<i>Pashta</i>
דָּבַרְ	דָּבַרְ

- (ii) When the last syllable of a word is stressed, and when that syllable is open (CV type), *Azla* is located over the last letter, while *Pashta* is over the second half of the last letter.

<i>Azla</i>	<i>Pashta</i>
עֲבַדְדָּ	עֲבַדְדָּ

- (iii) When the last syllable of a word is not stressed, *Azla* appears over the stressed syllable. However, unlike other postpositive accents, two *Pashtas* are used: one over the second half of the stressed syllable, and another over the second half of the last letter. Although two *Pashtas* are used, only the second *Pashta* (the one over the second half of the final letter) counts. The first *Pashta* is just a marker to indicate the stressed syllable.

<i>Azla</i>	Two <i>Pashtas</i>
מִלְדָּ	מִלְדָּ

- c. There are two prepositive accents: *Yethib* (under the first letter of a word) and *Great Telisha* (over the first letter of a word). The signs of *Yethib* and *Mahpak* are identical, but *Mahpak* appears under the stressed syllable, immediately following the vowel sign, whereas *Yethib* is always placed in front of the vowel sign of the first letter.

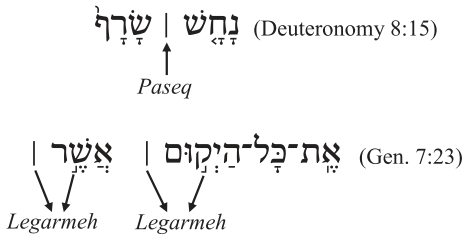
<i>Mahpak</i>	<i>Yethib</i>
דָּבַרְ	דָּבַרְ

- (3) There are two accents appearing together with *Paseq* (a vertical stroke): *Shalsheth* and *Legarmeh*. In the Three Books (the so-called poetic books), *Shalsheth* appears

1.3 Summary

7

either as a conjunctive or as a disjunctive accent depending on the presence of *Paseq*. *Shalshleth* with *Paseq* is a disjunctive accent, but *Shalshleth* without *Paseq* serves as a conjunctive accent. The shape of *Legarmeh* looks exactly like a combination of *Munach* and *Paseq*. Appendix D explains in detail how to distinguish between *Legarmeh* and a combination of *Munach* and *Paseq*.



- (4) *Mayela* is not a true conjunctive accent, but a secondary accent like *Metheg* (identical with *Silluq* in shape). As a secondary accent, *Mayela* only appears in the same word stressed by *Athnach* or *Silluq*. Because the shapes of *Mayela* and *Tiphcha* are identical, W. Wickes suggests that *Mayela* is indeed *Tiphcha* as a secondary accent.⁷ *Mayela* appears where *Metheg* would be expected. For example, Leviticus 21:4 has:



1.3 Summary

In this chapter, we explored several items that lay the foundation for understanding Hebrew accents. We surveyed

⁷ Wickes, *A Treatise on the Accentuation of the Twenty-One*, 73.

the three masoretic traditions and presented the disjunctive and conjunctive accents in the Twenty-One Books. We also discussed the 28 Hebrew accents' names and their accentual positions. This provides us a basis for examining the functions and specific characteristics of the accents, topics that will be covered in the next several chapters.

1.4 Exercises

For each provided Bible verse, circle the accents, write their names, and identify whether they are disjunctive or conjunctive.

(1) Genesis 1:1

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת
 הָאָרֶץ:

(2) 1 Samuel 2:1

וְתִתְּפֹלֵל חֲנָה וְתֹאמַר עֲלֵךְ לִבִּי בֵּיהוָה
 רָמָה קִרְנֵי בֵּיהוָה רָחַב פִּי עַל-אֹיְבֵי כִּי
 שָׂמַחֲתִי בִישׁוּעֹתֶיךָ:

(3) Deuteronomy 1:1

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-כָּל-
 יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּמִדְבַּר בְּעֵרְבֵהּ מִזֶּמֶר
 סוּף בֵּין-פָּאָרָן וּבֵין-תְּפֵל וְלִבְנוֹ וְחִצְרֵת וְדִי
 זֶהב:

1.4 Exercises

9

(4) Genesis 2:1-4

וַיִּכְלֹוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל-צְבָאָם:

וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר
 עָשָׂה וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ
 אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ
 כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר-בְּרָא
 אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת: