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 tradition rather than innovators. 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

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Introduction to Tiberian Hebrew Accents

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 Masoretes, 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.
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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Accent position</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soph Pasuq</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>At the end of a whole verse</td>
<td>“end of a verse”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silluq</td>
<td>א</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“separation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athnach</td>
<td>א</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“cause to rest”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segolta</td>
<td>ס</td>
<td>Postpositive</td>
<td>“cluster”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shalsheloth</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“triplet”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Zaqeph</td>
<td>מ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“small upright”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Zaqeph</td>
<td>מ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“big upright”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebia</td>
<td>מ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“resting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiphcha</td>
<td>מ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“disturbance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zarqa</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>Postpositive</td>
<td>“scattering”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pashka</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>Postpositive</td>
<td>“extending”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yetbib</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>Prepositive</td>
<td>“resting”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiber</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“broken”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geresh</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“expulsion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garshaim</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“double expulsion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pazer</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“scattering”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Pazer (or Qarn) Para</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“big scattering”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Telisha</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>Prepositive</td>
<td>“big drawing out”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legarmeh</td>
<td>יתפ</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“break”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.1.2 Conjunctive Accents

Table 2 Conjunctive accents in the Twenty-One Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Accent position</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Munach</td>
<td>דבע</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“sustained”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahpak</td>
<td>דבע</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“inverted”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mereka</td>
<td>דבע</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“prolonged”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Mereka</td>
<td>דבע</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“doubly prolonged”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darga</td>
<td>דבע</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“stopping”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azla (or Qadma)</td>
<td>דבע</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“proceeding”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Telisha</td>
<td>דבע</td>
<td>Postpositive</td>
<td>“small drawing out”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galgal</td>
<td>דבע</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>“rolling over”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayela</td>
<td>דבע</td>
<td>Only before Athnach or Silluq</td>
<td>“inclined”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following accents appear in Exodus 1:1.

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

Atnach, 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.

Introduction to Tiberian Hebrew Accents

Azla

Pashta

(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.

Azla

Pashta

(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.

Azla

Two Pashtas

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.

Yethib

Mahpak

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

either as a conjunctive or as a disjunctive accent depending on the presence of *Paseq*. *Shalsheleth* with *Paseq* is a disjunctive accent, but *Shalsheleth* 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 *Atnach* or *Silluq*. Because the shapes of *Mayela* and *Tiphcha* are identical, W. Wickes suggests that *Mayela* is indeed *Tiphcha* as a secondary accent. 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

בראשית בראשית אלהים את השמים ואת
הארץ:

(2) 1 Samuel 2:1

ותʉלפל חנה וטאפרו עליך לעלך ביהודת
רעה כרני ביהודת רות פי עלייזי׃ כ

שמחתך בשנותך:

(3) Deuteronomy 1:1

œלך השכיב ושותר דרכ מושה אלך
ишראל عشر אריך חמדך קמדך ונהלך
שת ברייאתך וביריאתך לצבתך והי

והי:

Introduction to Tiberian Hebrew Accents

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1.4 Exercises

(4) Genesis 2:1-4

1.4 Exercises

(4) Genesis 2:1-4

1.4 Exercises

(4) Genesis 2:1-4

1.4 Exercises

(4) Genesis 2:1-4

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(4) Genesis 2:1-4

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