The Fundamentals of Hebrew Accents

This book is designed to serve as a textbook for intermediate Hebrew students and above. Sung Jin Park presents the fundamental features of the Tiberian Hebrew accents, focusing on their divisions and exegetical roles. Providing innovative methods for diagramming biblical texts, the volume explores the two major rules (hierarchy and dichotomy) of disjunctive accents. Students will also attain biblical insights from the exegetical application of the biblical texts that Hebrew syntax alone does not provide. Park’s volume shows how the new perspectives on Hebrew accents enhance our understanding of biblical texts.

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The Fundamentals of Hebrew Accents

Divisions and Exegetical Roles Beyond Syntax

SUNG JIN PARK
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In loving memory of my late professor, David B. Weisberg, who introduced me to the wonderful world of the Masorah
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Preface

As the title indicates, this volume presents the fundamental features of the Tiberian Hebrew accents, focusing especially on their divisions and exegetical roles. My attention was first drawn to the Tiberian accentuation system during the period of my doctoral study at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion. My late professor, David B. Weisberg, to whom I dedicate this book, opened my eyes to the wonderland of the Masorah. Due to its intricacies, there are still unsearched areas in this field; the masoretic accentuation systems remain largely unexplored, especially when compared with other linguistic features, such as grammar, syntax, and semantics. As an introductory guide to Tiberian Hebrew accents, I hope this book opens a door for many Hebrew students to the world of masoretic studies.

As a preface, I would like to make several comments about the limits and scope of this volume:

1. This volume is designed to serve as a textbook for intermediate Hebrew students and above. The best place to use this book is between learning the Biblical Hebrew syntax and learning textual criticism. Once students learn the syntax of Biblical Hebrew, they are ready to use Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) based on the Tiberian Hebrew tradition. Students will appreciate learning about the Hebrew accents before they explore text-critical issues. This volume uses BHS as a main text for discussions and examples.
2. This book deals with the Tiberian Hebrew accents. There are three masoretic traditions: Babylonian, Palestinian, and Tiberian. Each tradition carries different graphemes for the vowel and accent signs. The Tiberian system represents the latest development among the masoretic traditions because of its full-fledged systematic structure of vocalization and accentuation. For discussion of the Babylonian and Palestinian accentuation systems, please refer to Appendix B.

3. There are two accentuation systems in the Tiberian manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible: one used in the “Three Books” (Psalms, Proverbs, and Job [except for the narrative portion of Job 1:1–3:1 and 42:7–17]) and the other in all the remaining material (the so-called Twenty-One Books). This book considers only the latter, which represents a more developed and improved system than the former, although both systems are functionally the same. On the accents in the “Three Books,” see Appendix C.

4. Although the issues of pausal forms are deeply associated with Hebrew accents, this book will not deal with them in detail. Rather, it mainly concerns Hebrew accents and their divisions and exegetical roles.

5. The book has eight chapters. Hebrew professors may wish to teach through this book for eight weeks, covering one chapter a week. Some chapters include exercises to help students reinforce what they have learned.

6. I refer to several major works throughout this book. These works are as follows:

Mordecai Breuer, פיסוק תעמיסים שבמערשים: הורח דקוק הפעמים (Jerusalem: Hahistadrut Hatzionit, 1958) and סעפו ימי קסניאים (Jerusalem: Mikhlah, 1982);
Miles B. Cohen, The System of Accentuation in the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Milco Press, 1969);
Preface


William Wickes, *A Treatise on the Accentuation of the Twenty-One So-Called Prose Books of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1887); and


There are numerous people to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude during the preparation of this volume. In particular, I have benefited from interactions with several scholars who have offered comments and assistance: James D. Price (Temple Baptist Seminary), Aron Dotan (Tel Aviv University), David Marcus (The Jewish Theological Seminary), Alan F. Cooper (The Jewish Theological Seminary), and Eugene H. Merrill (Dallas Theological Seminary).

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Abbreviations

BHS  Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BJRL Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester
HS Hebrew Studies
IOMS International Organization for Masoretic Studies
JANES Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society
JQR Jewish Quarterly Review
JSJ Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSS Journal of Semitic Studies
MAS The Masoretic accentuation system
MT The Masoretic Text
ODL Outstanding Dissertation in Linguistics Series
PLO Porta Linguarum Orientalium
SBEC Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity
SBLMS Society of Biblical Literature Masoretic Studies
SGG Studies in Generative Grammar
VT Vetus Testamentum