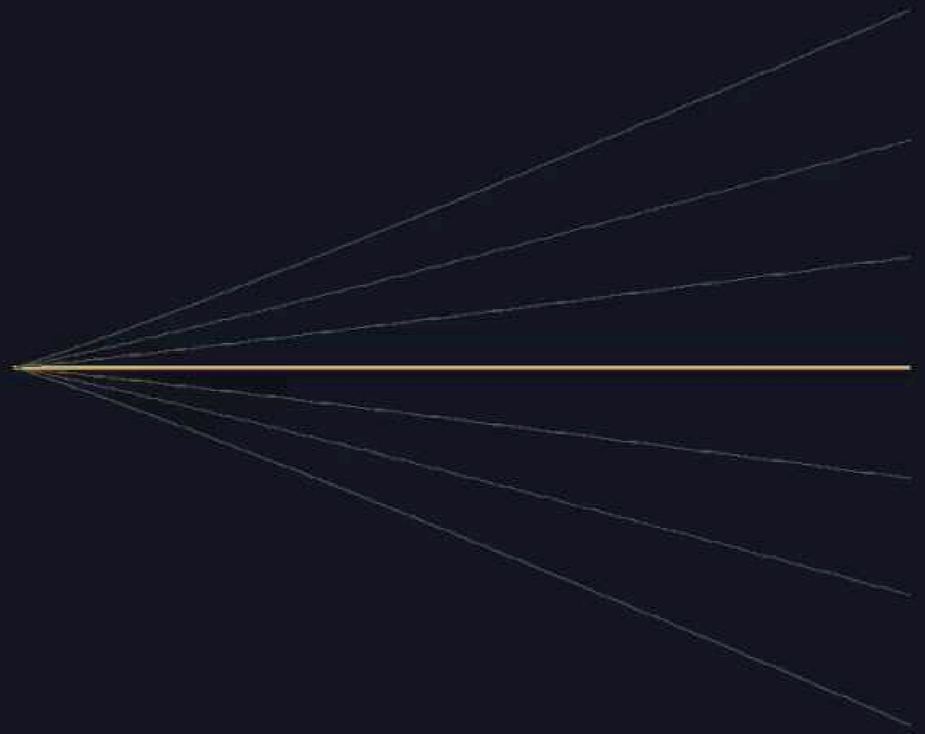
ANDERSON ACADEMY

HEBR 101 B · Introduction to Biblical Hebrew (Brief course)

Lecture 2 · about 7 min

Vowels, Syllables, and Pronunciation



A library of university-level courses

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Writing without vowels

- Consonants only
- Readers supplied vowels
- Like a text message
- Harder once speech changed

¶ 2.1

This works well for native speakers, but as Hebrew ceased to be everyday speech,

Vowel letters

- He, a final a
- Vav, o or u
- Yod, i or e
- Mothers of reading

¶ 2.2

Vav could stand for o or u, yod for i or e, and he for a final a.

The Masoretes

- **Seventh century AD** — work begins
- **Tiberias in Galilee** — main centre
- **About AD 930** — the Aleppo Codex
- **AD 1008** — the Leningrad Codex

¶ 2.3

and inside the letters to show the vowels and the chanting of the text.

Preserving the text

- Consonants left unchanged
- Pronunciation from tradition
- Masorah means tradition
- The Leningrad Codex, 1008

¶ 2.4

The oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible with their points, the Leningrad Codex of AD 1008,

Main vowels

A and e

- Patach, a
- Qamets, a
- Segol, e
- Tsere, e

I, o, and u

- Hiriq, i
- Holem, o
- Qibbuts, u
- Shureq, u

¶ 2.5

Holem gives o, as in more.

Vowel length

- Long, short, and very short
- Qamets sometimes short o
- Explains changes in words
- Learn sounds first

¶ 2.6

For a beginner, it is enough to learn the sounds above and to know that grammars speak of length,

The sheva

Vocal

- Very short vowel
- Like the a in about
- At the start of a word

Silent

- No vowel at all
- Closes a syllable
- In the middle

¶ 2.7

Sometimes it marks no vowel at all, closing a syllable; this is silent sheva.

The dagesh

Hardening

- Hard sound
- In begadkephat letters
- B instead of v

Doubling

- Doubled letter
- In most consonants
- Shillem, double l

¶ 2.8

In many letters it doubles the consonant, so that a word like shillem, he repaid, has a doubled l.

Syllables and stress

- Every syllable starts with a consonant
- Open or closed
- Stress usually on the last syllable
- Some words stress the one before

¶ 2.9

A syllable is open if it ends in a vowel and closed if it ends in a consonant.

Where the stress falls

First syllable

- Melekh
- Sefer
- Bayit

Last syllable

- Shalom
- Davar
- Elohim

¶ 2.10

Many nouns of this shape, called segolates after their e vowels, behave this way: sefer, book, and bayit, house.

Sounding out davar

Dalet with qamets, da

Bet without dagesh, va

Resh with no vowel, r

Davar

¶ 2.11

Resh ends the word with no vowel, r. Together: davar.

Traditions of pronunciation

Ashkenazi

- Tav without dagesh as s
- Shabbos
- Central and eastern Europe

Sephardic

- Tav kept as t
- Shabbat
- Spain and the Mediterranean

¶ 2.12

Yemenite Jews preserved some older sounds, such as distinct gutturals.

Academic transliteration

- Used in commentaries
- Marks every letter
- Shows vowel length
- Recognise it when you meet it

¶ 2.13

It writes chet as h with a dot below and ayin as a raised reversed comma.

Reading speed

- Pointed text feels crowded
- Slow at first is normal
- Consonant and vowel as one unit
- Accuracy first, speed later

¶ 2.14

much as you read an English syllable.

The accents

- Punctuation and music
- Mark verse end and middle
- Divide verses into parts
- A guide to reading

¶ 2.15

Followed carefully, the accents divide each verse into meaningful parts,

Points in use

Modern Hebrew

- Usually unpointed
- Points in poetry and children's books

Biblical Hebrew

- Almost always pointed
- Points carry grammar

¶ 2.16

So learn them well: they turn a string of consonants into a word you can pronounce,

Practice

- Sound out each word
- Name consonant and vowel
- Say it with correct stress
- Ten minutes a day

¶ 2.17

Then say them at normal speed with the correct stress.