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History of the Ancient and Modern Hebrew Language

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Excursus 3

Some Key Differences Between Biblical and Israeli Hebrew

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Table 34

Some Key Phonemic Distinctions in Biblical, Tiberian Masoretic and Israeli Hebrew

Item	<u>EBHP</u> (c. 850-550 BCE)	<u>TH</u> (c. 850 CE)	<u>IH</u> (present)
Location of <u>Stressed Syllable</u> in Words	<u>phonemic</u> not graphically marked in consonantal text	<u>phonemic</u> Tiberian accent sign identifies syllable stress.	<u>phonemic</u> not graphically marked in unpointed text
<u>Gemination</u> ¹ i.e. Consonantal <u>Doubling or</u> <u>Lengthening</u>	<u>phonemic</u> ² not graphically marked in consonantal text ³	phonemic but with very light phonemic load ⁴ Marked by dagesh forte/ḥazaq	non-phonemic and not graphically marked. Germination that exists (e.g. דִּיבְרָתִי pronounced [di'barət̪i]) not related to its function or location in Biblical Hebrew
<u>Vowel Quality</u>	<u>phonemic</u>	<u>phonemic</u> ⁵	<u>phonemic</u>
<u>Vowel Quantity</u>	phonemic See following box	non-phonemic and not indicated by vowel system except for ultra short vowels	non-phonemic

Table 35

Original Typical Semitic 3 Way Opposition in Biblical Hebrew
Reduced to 2 Way in Israeli Hebrew with Loss of Emphatic
Consonants

<i>Place of Articulation</i>		<i>Voiced⁶</i>	<i>Voiceless⁷</i>	<i><u>Emphatic</u></i>
<u><i>Dentals</i></u>	<u>EBHP</u> * <u>/EBHP/</u> * <u>[EBHP]</u> (c. 850-550 BCE)	ד = /d/ [d] (דלל "to be thin, poor")	ת = /t/ [t̪] (תלם "furrow") (תלל "to mock")	ט = /t̪/ [t̪ˤ] (טלם a place name and possibly also a noun meaning "black" or the like) (טלל "to resonate")
	<u>MT</u> pronounced as <u>IH</u> <u>/IH/ [IH]</u> (present)	ד = /d/ [d] (דלל "to be thin, poor")	ת = /t/ [t̪] identical in pronunciation to ט = /t̪/ [t̪] (תלם "furrow") (תלל "to mock" identical to טלל "to resonate")	non-existent
<u><i>Sibilants</i></u>	EBHP * <u>/EBHP/</u> * <u>[EBHP]</u> (c. 850-550 BCE)	ז = /z/ [z] (זרז "to be isolated")	ס = /s/ [s] (פרס "to split, break bread") ש = /š/ [ʃ̪] (פרש "to spread out, stretch over") ש = /š/ = sh [ʃ̪] (פרש "to give a clear decision")	צ = /s̪/ [s̪ˤ]. Less likely [<u>ʃ̪</u>] [<u>ʃ̪ˤ</u>] (פרץ "to break through")
	MT pronounced as IH <u>/IH/ [IH]</u> (present)	ז = /z/ [z] (זרז "to be isolated")	ס = /s/ [s] identical in pronunciation to ש = /š/ [s] (פרס "to split, break	Non-existent. Replaced by צ = /s̪/ [<u>ʃ̪</u>]

<i>Place of Articulation</i>		<i>Voiced⁶</i>	<i>Voiceless⁷</i>	<u><i>Emphatic</i></u>
			bread" identical in pronunciation to פרש "to spread out, stretch over") ש = š=sh [ʃ] (פרש "to give a clear decision")	
<u><i>Palatals-velars</i></u>	EBHP */EBHP/ *[EBHP] (c. 850-550 BCE)	ג = /g/ [g] (גבל */ga'bal/ "he marked a boundary")	כ = /k/ [k] (כבל "binding")	ק = /q/ [kʰ] (קבל "receiving") (פרק "to tear away")
	MT pronounced as IH /H/ [H] (present)	ג = /g/ [g] (גבל [ga'val] "he marked a boundary")	כ = /k/ [k] identical in pronunciation to ק = /q/ [k] (כבל "binding" identical in pronunciation to קבל "receiving")	non-existent

Table 36

Sound Shifts Between Biblical and Israeli Hebrew

<u>EBHP</u> */EBHP/ * <u>[EBHP]</u> (c. 850-550 BCE)	<u>MT</u> pronounced as <u>IH</u> <u>/IH/ [IH]</u> (present)	Hebrew Letter
/ʔ/ [ʔ]	/ʔ/ [∅]	א
/h/ [h]	Rarely [h] frequently silent ([∅]) or glottal stop ' [ʔ]	ה
/w/ [w]	/w/ [v]	ו
/ħ/ [ħ]	/ħ/ [x]	ח
/t/ [t]	/t/ [t]	ט
/c/ [ç]	c [∅]	צ
/g/ [g]	c [∅]	ג
/š/ [ʃ]	/š/ [ʃ]	ש
/q/ [kʰ]	/q/ [k]	ק
/ś/ [ʃ]	/ś/ [s]	שׁ

Table 37

Some Impacts of Phonemic Change Between Biblical and Israeli Hebrew

Word	<u>EBHP</u> */EBHP/+ * <u>[EBHP]</u> (c. 850-550 BCE)	<u>TH</u> /TH/+ * <u>[TH]</u> (c. 850 CE)	<u>MT</u> pronounced as <u>IH</u> <u>[IH]</u> (present)
העיר "to awaken"	/hi'ʕir/ [hi'ʕi:r] or [<u>he'ʕi:r</u>]	/he'ʕir/ [he:ʕi:r]	[he'iʕɪr] [ɛ'iʕɪr] [ɛ'iʕɪ]
האיר "to light up"	/hi'ʔir/ [hi'ʔi:r] or [<u>he'ʔi:r</u>]	/he'ʔir/ [he:ʔi:r]	
המלך "the king"	/ham'malk/ <u>[hem'melk]</u> or [hem'melək]	/ham'melək/ [hem'me:ək]	[ha'melɛx] or [ʔamɛlɛx] or [a'mɛlɛx]
מלח "salt"	/'milh/ <u>[milh]</u> or ['meləħ]	/'meləħ/ ['me:leħ]	['mɛlax]
אשה "woman"	/'iš'šā/ [i'ʃe:]	/'iš'šā/ [i'ʃɔ:]	[i'ʃa]
איש "her husband"	/'iša:(h)/ <u>[i'ja:h]</u> or [i'je:]	/'išāh/ [i'ʃɔ:h]	
נפל "he fell" (in narrative context)	/way'yippul/ [wey'yɪppul] or <u>[wey'yɪppɔ]</u>	/way.yip'pol/ [wey.yip'po:l]	[va.i'pol] or [va.yip'ol] or [vay.i'pol]
יכנס <i>niphal</i>	/yik.ka'nis/ <u>[yik.ke'nɪs]</u> or [yik.ke'nɛs]	/yik.kā'neš/ [yik.ko:'ne:s]	[yə.ka'nɛs]
יכנס <i>piel</i>	/ya.kan'nis/ <u>[ye.ken'nɪs]</u> or [ye.ken'nɛs]	/yə.kan'neš/ [yə.ken'ne:s]	

* see [Berman](#) for other examples

Table 38

Verbal Stems (=Themes=Binyanim) in Biblical and Israeli Hebrew

Name and Main Meaning	Active			Passive			Reflexive, Reciprocal etc.		
	*EBHP */EBHP/ * [EBHP] (c. 850-550 BCE)	TH /TH/* [TH] (c. 850 CE)	IH [IH] (present)	*EBHP */EBHP/ * [EBHP] (c. 850-550 BCE)	TH /TH/* [TH] (c. 850 CE)	IH [IH] (present)	*EBHP */EBHP/ * [EBHP] (c. 850-550 BCE)	TH /TH/* [TH] (c. 850 CE)	IH [IH] (present)
<i>Qal</i> /basic meaning of root	/qa'tal/ [qe'tel]	/qâ'tal/ [qo:'te:l]	[ka'tal]	/niq'tal/ [niq'tel]	/niq'tal/ [niq'te:l]	[nik'tal]	/hitqat'til/ [hitqet'til] or [hitqat'tel]	/hitqat'tel/ [hitqet'te:l]	[hitka'tel] or [itka'tel]
<i>Pi'el</i> intensive etc.	/qit'til/ [qit'til] or [qit'tel]	/qit'tel/ [qit'te:l]	[ki'tel]	/qut'tal/ [qut'tel]	/qut'tal/ [qut'te:l]	[ku'tal]			or [itka'tel]
<i>Hiphil</i> causitive	/hiq'til/ [hiq'ti:l]	/hiq'til/ [hiq'ti:l]	[hik'til] or [ik'til] or [ii'til]	/huq'tal/ [huq'tel] or [hoq'tel]	/hoq'tal/ [hoq'te:l] or /huq'tal/ [huq'te:l]	[huk'tal] or [uk'tal]			

Tenses and Aspects in Israeli Hebrew

As compared to Biblical Hebrew (see [Tenses or Aspects in Biblical Hebrew](#)) Israeli Hebrew uses the same basic verb forms (יִקְטֹל קוֹטֵל קָטַל) but their meaning is past-present-future⁸ not, as in Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew whether they are complete or not.

The fundamental concept is whether an act is past present or future at the time being described not at the time of the narrator. For the past the form שמר (ša'mar) is used; for the present and immediate future the active participle (שומר) is used; for the future and modal the form ישמר (yiš'mor) is used often with the prefix ׀. Verbs of state have largely been replaced, in Mishnaic and Israeli Hebrew, by adjectives.

This subject is discussed in detail in [Glinert 1989](#).

It is interesting to note that in Israeli Hebrew, there is wide use of the normal infinitive as a general imperative, no doubt under the influence of European languages (eg. German). This recreates a major use of the infinitive absolute in Biblical Hebrew well described by Haiim Rabin (*A Textbook of Israeli Hebrew* p. 315) as "...used in commands that are addressed to nobody in particular, but are valid for everybody; its use is in such cases comparable to that of the imperative.

Significantly, an example will be found in the Decalogue."

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¹ For gemination see [Lipinski 1997](#) pp. 179-184; [Joüon-Muraoka 1991](#) § 18; and [Hoffman 2004](#) pp. 99-101. The symbol for gemination is either the consonant written twice e.g. *dibber* or written to indicate that the consonant is long e.g. *dib:er*.

² See Gibson 1965 pp. 36-37.

³ [Joüon-Muraoka 1991](#) §27db "Where an identical consonant was originally doubled at the end of a word, it is simplified: so לב but לבי, חק but חקי.

⁴ [Blau 1976](#) p. 16 and See [Joüon-Muraoka 1991](#) §18aa.

⁵ a. From [Blau 1976](#) pp. 34-37

The Tiberian vocalization system, as far as full vowels are concerned, denotes vowel quality, rather than quantity. As a matter of principle, every vowel sign may denote both historically long and short vowels.... Therefore, whenever transcriptions mark length, they rest on the historical reconstruction of a linguistic stage preceding that of the Tiberian vocalization, rather than on traditional, vocalization....

Since vowel marks were developed only after the consonants and matres lectionis of the Bible text had become stabilized ... even the occurrence of a vowel letter after a vowel mark cannot be regarded as a certain indication of the vowel being long: it maybe due to plene spelling.... Accordingly, there is, in principle, no difference whether or not a vowel sign is followed by a vowel letter; even *qibbuš* (ֻ) and *šuruq* (וּ) are essentially identical.... Their respective use depends only whether or not the consonantal text exhibited vowel letters.

9.3. From the historical point of view, it is generally assumed that the vowel system of Proto-Semitic consisted of three (naturally) long and three short vowels, viz. *ā, ī, ū, a, i, u*.

9.3.1. Proto-Semitic *ā* was generally preserved in unstressed syllables ... whereas in stressed syllables it shifted to *ō*....

9.3.2. Proto-Semitic *ī*, as a rule, is continued by Hebrew *ī*....

9.3.3. Proto-Semitic *a* is, as a rule, preserved in Hebrew in closed unstressed syllables....

9.3.4. Proto-Semitic *i* in an unstressed closed syllable is often preserved.... In stressed closed syllables *i* shifted to *a*, the so-called [Philippi's law](#). At the tune of his shift nouns in *status absolutus* still preserved the case vowels, whereas in *status constructus* they had already dropped them (the weak stress of nouns in *status constructus* still enabled the action of Philippi's law)....

9.3.5. Proto-Semitic *u* in an unstressed closed syllable is, as a rule, reflected by *q* (as קדשו (*qədšō*) "his holiness"), when preceding a double consonant by *u* (as כלם (*kullām*) "all of them"),....

b. From [Blau 1976](#) pp. 11-12

3.5 Defining the phonological system of the vowels is rather intricate. As to the full vowels, *ā, ī, ū, a, i, u*, and *ə* (וּ) have doubtlessly to be considered phonemes, and presumably *ɔ* as well. The opposition *ə*: zero (i.e., *šwa mobile* : *šwa quiescens* ...) is phonemic as well ... and perhaps also the ḥaṭafs *ɔ̄, ɔ̇, ɔ̈*, though their functional load is very light....

3.6. Syllabic structure and the full vowels contained in the syllables are interdependent. Therefore, it is important for the beginner to differentiate between the different types of syllables and between the main categories of full vowels occurring in them....

3.6.1. A syllable terminating in a vowel is called an open syllable; that ending in a consonant a closed one

3.6.2. For the beginner, it is convenient to distinguish between the following three classes of vowels:

Long vowels: *ā, ī, ū, a, i, u* (*qameš gadol* ...), *ɔ̄, ɔ̇, ɔ̈, ɔ̉, ɔ̊, ɔ̋*.

Short vowels: *ə, ɔ̄, ɔ̇, ɔ̈, ɔ̉, ɔ̊, ɔ̋* (*qameš ḥaṭuf*), *ɔ̌, ɔ̍*.

Vowels which are indifferent as to length, either long or short: *ə, ɔ̌, ɔ̍*.

3.6.3. *An open syllable usually has a long vowel, a closed unstressed one ... a short vowel. Closed stressed syllables, as a rule, contain long vowels....*

- ⁶ With voiced consonants the vocal chords are vibrated, which can be felt in the throat. All vowels are voiced.
- ⁷ With voiceless or unvoiced consonants the vocal chords are not vibrated, so there is no vibration in the throat.
- ⁸ See sect 24.1, 24.9, 24.9, 24.10, 41.4 in [Lipinski 1997](#).