

WEEK 2

Hebrew Consonants (Part 2)

This week we continue to look at the Hebrew consonants, and we shall begin talking a little about the vowels used in the Hebrew language. Below is a table similar to the one in the previous notes, but you will notice a number of letter variations that have been added to the original list of consonants. The main differences are highlighted below. It is important to notice whether they use a different transliteration symbol or not.

Symbol	Name	Pronounced	Translit.	Symbol	Name	Pronounced	Translit.
א	Aleph	Guttural stop	ʾ	ל	Lamed	l (line)	l
ב	Bet	b (boat)	b	מ	Mem	m (men)	m
בּ	Vet	v (vote)	v	נ	Nun	n (nun)	n
ג	Gimmel	g (gull)	g	ס	Samex	s (sun)	s
גּ	Gimmel	g (gull)	g	ע	Ayin	Guttural stop	ʿ
ד	Dalet	d (din)	d	פ	Peh	p (pin)	p
דּ	Dalet	d (din)	d	פּ	Feh	f (fun)	p
ה	Heh	h (house)	h	צ	Tsadeh	ts (bats)	ṣ
ו	Vav	v (vote)	w	ק	Qoph	k (kill)	q
ז	Zayin	z (zoo)	z	ר	Resh	r (run)	r
ח	Chet	ch (Bach)	ḥ	ש	Shin	sh (shot)	š
ט	Tet	t (tea)	ṭ	שׁ	Sin	s (sun)	ś
י	Yod	y (yes)	y	ת	Tav	t (tea)	t
כּ	Kaph	k (kill)	k	תּ	Tav	t (tea)	t
כ	Kaph	ch (Bach)	k				

Important Notes

Only six letters in Biblical Hebrew can contain a *weak dagesh* (also called *dagesh lene*, the dot inside the letters above). These letters are known as BeGaD KeFaT letters. The *dagesh* originally served as an indicator for the reader to pronounce the letter either as a spirant¹ or a plosive.² In modern pronunciation, only three of the letters change in pronunciation when the *dagesh lene* is added.

¹ A vocalization in which breath is forced through a restricted opening; it may also be termed a fricative.

² A vocalization produced by complete closure of the oral passage and subsequent release accompanied by a burst of air, as one would pronounce “p” in English.

Pronunciations altered by *dagesh lene*

- i. The letters ב/בּ/בֿ are pronounced hard when they appear with a *dagesh lene*—[b] as in “boat”, [k] as in “kill”, and [p] as in “pin”.
- ii. The letters ב/בּ/בֿ are pronounced softly when they do not have a *dagesh* inside—[v] as in “vote”, [ch] in “Bach” or “loch”, and [f] as in “fun.”

Pronunciations unaltered by *dagesh lene*

- iii. No discernable differences exist in the pronunciation of the remaining three BeGaD KeFaT letters: ג and גּ are a hard [g] as in “gull”; ד and דּ are a hard [d] as in “din”, ת and תּ are a hard [t] as in “ten”.³
- iv. Although there are no discernable differences in vocalization for these three letters in modern pronunciation, historically they would have been pronounced slightly differently depending on the presence of the *dagesh*.⁴

Transliteration of BeGaD KefeT

- It is important to note that these letters have a different transliteration symbol depending on whether the *dagesh* is inside the letter or not. Take some time to study the table above and note the differences between the transliteration symbols

Final Forms

- There are no capitals in Biblical Hebrew, but some letters have a final form. These final forms do not alter their pronunciation, just the form of the letter appears differently when it appears at the end of a word. In the table above they appear in red letters
- Both the pronunciation and the transliteration of these letters remains the same. Thus, the transliteration of the word שפן is šp̄n.⁵

Gutturals

- Another group of letters that you need to be aware of are the gutturals: ע, א, ה, ח, and ר.
- These letters, traditionally, are all pronounced from the back of the throat. As we proceed in this course, you will see that they behave differently to other letters in the alphabet. For the time being, you just need to be aware of them.

³ Traditionally, the reconstructed pronunciations were

ג (“g”) originally pronounced as a soft “g”, as in “gin”

ד (d) historically a dull “th” sound, as in “that”

ת (t) originally pronounced “th” as in “cloth”

⁴ See JM §5-o for more details.

⁵ Note here the line under the [p], which designates the omission of the *dagesh*.

Similar Formations

- With the addition of the final forms, you will no doubt discover that more confusion may exist between the letters, and at the early stages of your learning you may have difficulty identifying each letter. It is especially important to work on distinguishing these letters now.
- Some of the main points of confusion concern the following:
 - כ / ב (bet and kaph)
 - ך / ד / ר (final kaph, daleth, and resh)
 - ן / ו / י (final nun, waw, and yod)
 - ז / ו (waw and zayin)
 - ג / נ (gimmel and nun)
 - ם / ס (final mem and Samek)
 - ח / ה / ת (het, heh, and taw)

Introduction to the [a] vowel

- Originally, the Hebrew language was only written with consonants (see the ancient Hebrew letters in the first handout). This consonantal tradition continued throughout the post-biblical era, and even through the New Testament era. Yes, this means that the text Jesus read from did not have any vowels.
- The lack of vowels naturally meant that words were more open to different interpretations. A word such as מלך, for example, could mean “he reigned”, “a king” “reign!” “Molek (a Canaanite god).”
- Without the vowels, it is still possible to read and make decent sense of words with the consonants alone. Consider the phrase “lv th lrd yr Gd wth ll yr hrt nd ll yr mght” Although no vowels are inserted, you can still get a sense for what is written
- Even though there were reading traditions that surrounded the consonantal tradition, there was not uniform system used to reflect the vowel tradition. This situation changed between 600-900 AD, when the vowel system was added
- Because the consonantal tradition had already been established over hundreds of years, the vowels needed to be added without upsetting any of the pre-existing consonants. Consequently, the vowel system developed fits either below or above the extant consonant tradition (sometimes inside). The result is that the ancient consonant tradition is preserved, and the vocal tradition is also recorded
- Just like English, there are 5 vowel sounds in Hebrew [a], [e], [i], [o], and [u]. For this week, we shall focus on the [a] vowel only
- The [a] vowel may be extended, long, short, or reduced⁶ and it appears underneath its consonant. The table below demonstrates the transliteration and pronunciation of the [a] vowel, using the consonant כ.

⁶ There are other variations, but we will learn about those next week.

	Name	With בּ	Pronounced	Translit
Extended [a]	(With <i>Matris lectionis</i>)	בָּהּ	[a] as in “bat”	bāh
Long [a]	<i>Kamaṣ</i>	בֶּהּ	[a] as in “bat”	bā
Short [a]	<i>Pataḥ</i>	בֵּהּ	[a] as in “bat”	ba
Reduced [a]	<i>Hataph pataḥ</i>	בֵּיּהּ	[a] as in “bat”	bă

- As far as pronunciation goes, all instances of the [a] vowels are pronounced the same. Traditionally, however, there would have been differences in how they were pronounced. You may see variations of how they are pronounced in certain grammars, but for the sake of simplification, we shall maintain the modern Hebrew pronunciation where the two forms are not distinguished when spoken
- It is important to note that the transliteration of the two vowels differs. Carefully consider the transliteration examples below

	Transliteration	Translation
בַּת	bat̲	Daughter
אָב	ʔāb̲	Father
רָע	rā ^c	Wicked/ evil
אַהֲבָה	ʔahăbāh	Love
אָמַר	ʔāmar	He said
דָּבָר	dābār	Word/thing

- Note that the [a] vowels have different representations in the transliterations. Some a long (with a line above), whilst others are short (without the line above)
- The table above also reflects two important terms. *Transliteration* is the process of converting Hebrew letters into English letters (Latin, strictly speaking). *Translation* converts the Hebrew word into an English translation.

Homework Exercises

Transliterate these words into English characters (pay attention to the dagesh)

קטן

שלח

עץ

אלהים

אדני

עליון

שלום

כתף

משה

דוד

מלך

Reconstruct the Hebrew words from these transliteration symbols. Do not forget to use final forms and dagesh where necessary.

ḥmws.....

šlwm

škm

nṭn

ṭḥwn

ḡmrw

zmn

mlḥmh

hšlyk

ṭḡlh

knq

Transliterate these words into English characters. Note: the [a] vowel has been added here. Pay attention to the dagesh too.

Reconstruct the Hebrew words from these transliteration symbols. Do not forget to use final forms and dagesh where necessary.

גָּד

pārāh.....

עֵבֶר

śamak

קָל

hākām

שָׁמֵר

tāmār

שָׁנָא

dān

אֵל

taḥtan

לָמַד

šālap

מָתָן

mālāk

שָׁבָה

malkāh

תָּהָר

dārak

מָלַד

sāmāk

Practice writing Hebrew letters. Write ten of each regular letter and alternate the letters with a final form. Pay attention to where the top and the bottom of each letter sits.

Handwriting practice lines for Hebrew letters. Each letter is shown in its regular form and its final form on the right side of the lines.

- Line 1: Regular form of **א** (Aleph) and final form of **א**.
- Line 2: Regular form of **ב** (Bet) and final form of **ב**.
- Line 3: Regular form of **ג** (Gimel) and final form of **ג**.
- Line 4: Regular form of **ד** (Dalet) and final form of **ד**.
- Line 5: Regular form of **ה** (He) and final form of **ה**.
- Line 6: Regular form of **ו** (Vav) and final form of **ו**.
- Line 7: Regular form of **ז** (Zayin) and final form of **ז**.
- Line 8: Regular form of **ח** (Chet) and final form of **ח**.
- Line 9: Regular form of **ט** (Tet) and final form of **ט**.
- Line 10: Regular form of **י** (Yod) and final form of **י**.
- Line 11: Regular form of **כ** (Kaph) and final form of **כ**.
- Line 12: Regular form of **ל** (Lamed) and final form of **ל**.
- Line 13: Regular form of **מ** (Mem) and final form of **מ**.
- Line 14: Regular form of **נ** (Nun) and final form of **נ**.
- Line 15: Regular form of **ס** (Samekh) and final form of **ס**.
- Line 16: Regular form of **ע** (Ayin) and final form of **ע**.
- Line 17: Regular form of **פ** (Pe) and final form of **פ**.
- Line 18: Regular form of **צ** (Tsadi) and final form of **צ**.
- Line 19: Regular form of **ק** (Kaph) and final form of **ק**.
- Line 20: Regular form of **ר** (Resh) and final form of **ר**.
- Line 21: Regular form of **ש** (Shin) and final form of **ש**.
- Line 22: Regular form of **ת** (Tet) and final form of **ת**.

ז

מ / ם

נן

ס

ע

פ / ף

צ / ץ

ק

ר

ש

ש

ת

- 1) With the addition of the final forms, further confusion may arise with identifying Hebrew Letters. Practice identifying similar letters from the text below. Mark every instance of the following letters as indicated

ז mark with a circle

ך mark final nun with a yellow highlighter

ח mark with a square

י place a triangle above them

ב place a circle above them (whether there is a dot inside or not)

כ place a vertical line above it (whether there is a dot inside or not)

ך mark final kaph with an "x" above it

וַיְבָרַח דָּוִד (מְנוּוֹת) [מְנוּוֹת] בְּרִמָּה וַיָּבֵא וַיֹּאמֶר | לִפְנֵי יְהוֹנָתָן מֶה עָשִׂיתִי מִה־עוֹנֵי
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ חָלִילָה לָּא תָמוּת הַנֵּה ² וּמִה־חֲטָאתִי לִפְנֵי אָבִיךָ כִּי מִבִּקֵּשׁ אֶת־נַפְשִׁי:
(לו־עָשָׂה) [לֹא־עָשָׂה] אָבִי דָבַר גְּדוֹל אוֹ דָבַר קָטָן וְלֹא יִגְלֶה אֶת־אָזְנִי וּמִדּוֹעַ יִסְתִּיר
וַיִּשָׁבַע עוֹד דָּוִד וַיֹּאמֶר יְדַע אָבִיךָ כִּי־³ אָבִי מִמֶּנִּי אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֵין זֹאת:
מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־יְדַע־זֹאת יְהוֹנָתָן פֶּן־יַעֲצֹב וְאוֹלָם חִי־יְהוּהוּ וְחִי נַפְשֶׁךָ
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן אֶל־דָּוִד מִה־תֹּאמַר נַפְשֶׁךָ וְאַעֲשֶׂה־לָּךְ: פ ⁴ כִּי כִפְשַׁע בֵּינִי וּבֵין הַמּוֹת:
וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־יְהוֹנָתָן הִנֵּה־חֹדֶשׁ מָחָר וְאַנְכִי יֹשֵׁב־אִשָּׁב עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאָכּוֹל ⁵
אִם־פָּקֵד יִפְקֹדֵנִי אָבִיךָ וְאַמְרָתְךָ ⁶ וְשִׁלַּחְתָּנִי וְנִסְתַּרְתִּי בַשָּׂדֶה עַד הָעֶרֶב הַשְּׁלִישִׁית:
נִשְׂאֵל־נִשְׂאֵל מִמֶּנִּי דוֹד לְרוּץ בֵּית־לָחֶם עִירוֹ כִּי זָבַח הַיָּמִים שָׁם לְכָל־הַמְּשַׁפָּחָה:

1) Draw a line between the Hebrew proper name and the English equivalent

Jacob	משה	Tamar	לאה
Israel	יהודה	Esau	פנען
Judah	יהושע	David	שרה
Joshua	אברהם	Rachel	אסתר
Jerusalem	אהרון	Esther	יוסף
Shechem	יעקב	Saul	תמר
Adam	ירושלם	Joseph	דוד
Moses	שכם	Canaan	שאול
Pharaoh	אדם	Solomon	רחל
Aaron	ישראל	Nebuchadnezzar	עשו
Abraham	פרעה	Leah	שלמה
		Sarah	נבוכדנאצר

APPENDIX I: REMEMBERING WORDS AND VOCABULARY

Perhaps the most common question posed to me as a teacher of Biblical Hebrew is, "How can you help me remember the vocabulary?" Ultimately, the answer must be that I can't, because I am not in the position of the Most High.

In spite of my mortal status, I would still like to share with you some of the tips that I have learned along the way that have assisted me in learning numerous languages over the past ten years.

- **Mind games.** Do not let your mind play tricks on you. When you first see a long list of words to learn, your first impression is that you will simply never be able to remember them all. This is invariably not true. The human mind is an extremely powerful machine that has a very capably memory. In 1999 I spent the summer in Israel learning a new language for the first time in twenty years. When I was first told that I had to remember approximately 100 words a week, my first thought was that it was impossible. Once I stopped crying, cancelled therapy, and got past that feeling of helplessness (and after my wife slapped me across the face and told me to get a grip of myself) I found that the task was not as daunting as it looked
- **Effort.** For some reason, people think that after attending a lesson and being introduced to fifteen new words that they should, miraculously, know all of these words, and that if they do not, they have poor memories or are not very good at languages. What they fail realize is that only about 1% of society can learn this quickly. The rest of us have to invest some kind of time and effort into learning the vocabulary. The next big problem is how you can utilize your time and efforts to get the best results. The following points may or may not be of assistance.
- **Recite.** Always recite *aloud* the new words in your vocabulary rather than saying them to yourself. That way you have two of you senses (speech and sound) working together to help you remember. Do not worry too much about the precise pronunciation. With the Hebrew consonants and the vowels you should all be able to pronounce the words relatively consistently. This should be enough (of course this does not mean you are allowed to pronounce a *tsere* as an "a", etc.)! One warning for your recitation, do not use transliterated characters (Hebrew written in English)! Though it may seem easy and helpful in the initial stages, it will soon become a millstone around your neck, and a fetters on your feet. Ultimately, the only outcome is that you will learn the letters much slower than you would ordinarily.
- **Association.** The challenge of remembering vocabulary is creating a link between the Hebrew word on a piece of paper and an image in our minds that recalls the meaning of the word. I have found that this is best achieved via association. How does this work? If I were given a Hebrew word such as Be'ER to remember, I would look at the word and as ask "what does it remind me of? For me the answer is the word "Bear". I now have a concrete image that I need to link to the meaning of the word Be'ER, which means "well (a hole with water in)". This, with my imagination, I would do by picturing a huge grizzly stuck in well. Now, when looking at the word Be'ER, the meaning is recalled together with the image. Anther example would be from

the word 'AMA'H, which means "maid". For this word, my closest association was the English word "Armour" (I know, I know, it's not exactly the same, but it works for me!). The image I now conjure up in my mind is that of a maid (not that I have one of course) clanking up and down my staircase in armour whilst she is cleaning the house. I have found that the more crazy the picture the more easily it sticks in my mind. You may also find that if you add smell and sound to the images you create they may also help you.

- **Long/Short Term Memory.** Be aware of long- and short-term memory. Throwing words into short term memory can be easily accomplished, e.g., looking over a list of words immediately before a test. Though this will probably help you to get through the test, in the long run it is detrimental to your continued success in learning Hebrew. Soon after the test, you will inevitably find that the majority of those words are lost, and you will experience nothing but frustration when attempting to read a biblical text (this is your objective, remember). Placing words into long-term memory, highly recommended, usually involves association (such as the technique mentioned above) or some kind of practice that includes repetition and recollection.
- **Stickies.** In certain instances you may find that it is not possible create a suitable image. In these situations, it is wise to write the word down on a post-it note with the translation on the back, and stick to your fridge or a door or some other object you frequently walk past. First this will help you refresh you memory with the meaning of the word (if you try to remember it every time you pass it). Second, you may soon be able to associate the image that you stuck the note to with the meaning of the word in question.
- **Flash cards.** An alternative, or supplement, to the above, is that of flash cards. I found that creating my own flash cards (Hebrew word on one side and its meaning on the other) and flicking through them was especially helpful when traveling on the bus every day to university. Flash cards should be used as an alternative to lists of vocabulary. When you try to memorize words in a list, you usually remember them within a set context, and when the word is later seen outside the context, it becomes difficult to recognize.
- **Substitution.** Some of you may also find it useful to play with sentences, by writing English sentences down and substituting Hebrew equivalents whenever possible. Thus you could end up with something like, "ANI said to my BANIM not to climb the ETZIM in the GAN" (such phrases can also be spoken in real life situations as well).