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## THE DUAL ACCENTUATION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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A perpetual source of confusion and misunderstanding has been the dual accentuation found on the Ten Commandments, both in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. For the casual reader of the MT, these accentuations merely reinforce his already strong conviction that the accents are but exotic doodlings, with no serious relationship to the text. For the student, the dual accentuation presents a series of difficulties and contradictions without parallel elsewhere in the accentuation of the MT. And for the bewildered printer, it has provided the raw material for untold errors, omissions, and conflation of versions.

Through a developmental and analytical approach, the existence of dual accentuation of the Ten Commandments will be explained, the two accentuations will be isolated, and an etiology of the alternate versions will be proposed. Our analysis is based on well-known principles of accentuation, some of which are briefly summarized and diagrammed in the Appendix.

Although many explanations for the dual accentuation have been offered, most appear contrived and do not demonstrate adequate knowledge of the Masoretic accents. A serious investigation of the two sets of accents may begin fruitfully by studying the statement of Rabbi Yaakov ibn Ḥabib and cited by Norzi in his Masoretic commentary :  
מנחה שי

[הטעם] האמת לכל זה מפורסם שיש ב' קריאות בדבורות. האחד כשקורא היחיד בינו לבין עצמו אינו מדקדק לקרוא כל דבור ודבור בפני עצמו אלא מחלק הפסוקים כסדר נגון קריאתו. ודבור לא יהיה לך שהוא ארוך עושה ממנו פסוקים רבים וכן זכור את יום. ור' דבורות אחרונים שהם קטנים עושה מכולם פסוק אחד. אבל הקורא בציור שיקרא כל דבור ודבור בפני עצמו בין שיהיה גדול בכח בין שיהיה קטן. יתחייב מזה שינוי בטעמים ונקודות ודגוש ורפה להבדיל בין שתי הקריאות כפי סדר הנקודה.

The true reason for all this is well known. There are two ways of reading the Ten Commandments: When an individual reads privately, he does not take care to read each commandment separately but, rather, divides the verses in the normal manner of reading. Thus, the second commandment, which is long, he splits into many verses, and similarly with the Sabbath commandment; while the four commandments near the end, which are short, he joins into one verse. But the public reader is obligated to read each commandment separately, whether the commandment is long or whether it is short. This

In order to achieve a special purpose, then, the additional set of accents ignores the standard criteria of syntax and length, which influenced the division of the text into verses. These criteria are reflected in the first accentuation, and, indeed, in the rest of the MT. The public reading of the Ten Commandments, the symbolic reenactment of that event which called the nation of Israel into being, was to resemble as closely as possible the original declamation of those words. The public reading was to be (and still is, in traditional synagogue practice), שְׂמַרְתָּ הַדְּבָרִים 'the ten pronouncements'.

Figure 1 displays three accentuations of the second pronouncement. The first and the second are the public and private accentuations, as found in the MT, while the third is our own hypothetical public accentuation, based solely on the rules of syntactical division as employed in the rest of the MT. In that third accentuation, the major dichotomy has been placed at the logical middle of the pronouncement ( $\overline{\text{D} \text{I} \text{A} \text{Y} \text{M} \text{H}}$ ), after the twenty-eighth of fifty words, separating the three prohibition clauses from the description of three of God's attributes. As is evident, the coincidences of internal disjunctive accents between the private accentuation and the MT public accentuation is considerable, while the coincidences between the private accentuation and our hypothetical public accentuation are minimal. Thus, it is seen that the public accentuation is merely a revision of the private accentuation and not an independent tradition.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., C. D. Ginsburg, *חורה וניאים בחורים* (London, 1926; reprinted, Jerusalem, 1969), vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Miles B. Cohen, The System of Accentuation in the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Milco Press, 1969), pp. 14, 21.



tremely difficult. For what is clearly a syntactical division within a clause, is represented by an accent of a disjunctive level higher than that accent which ends the clause (in blatant contradiction to the rule of hierarchy of disjunctives).<sup>5</sup> The third word, וְהָאֵלֹהִים, is accented with יִבְרָךְ-קוֹל (d1) while the end of the clause, וְעָרְךָ, is accented merely with יְרִין (d2). Figure 5 contrasts the present accentuation with the accentuation of the nearly identical clause in Lev. 26:13, where the corresponding word וְהָאֵלֹהִים, accented with יְרִין (d2), is followed by וְעָרְךָ, accented with the stronger disjunctive, מִןחֶמְדָּךְ (d0)

|                  |            |             |                 |
|------------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|
| d0               | d2         | d3          | d1              |
| מבית עבדים לא... | מאדן מצרים | אשר הוצאתיך | אנכי יהוה אלהיך |

Exod. 20:2

|               |                 |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| d0            | d1              | d2              |
| מדת לדם עבדים | אשר הוצאתי אתכם | אני יהוה אלהיכם |

Figure 5

That  $\text{ḥḇ-ḥḇ}$  on the word  $\text{אֶלֶּיךָ}$  presents a further problem, in that it precedes  $\text{ḥḇ}$ , on the word  $\text{וְעָנֶנּוּ}$  (fig. 3, line 6). For if this accentuation is to be maintained, then it would be the only instance of  $\text{ḥḇ}$  following  $\text{ḥḇ-ḥḇ}$  in the entire MT.<sup>6</sup>

This popular version, then, must be regarded with much suspicion. Other printed editions, from the earliest to the most recent, have not been able to present even this problematic version accurately, reproducing old typographical errors and confusions, and introducing new ones. These must of necessity be dispensed with.

Thus, the investigation must be begun anew, and our attention is now directed to the Ben Asher tradition as reflected in many

<sup>5</sup>See Appendix, and Cohen, pp. 38-39.

<sup>6</sup>William Wickes, A Treatise on the Accentuation of the Twenty-one So-called Prose Books of the Old Testament (London, 1887; reprinted, New York: Ktav, 1970), p. 72.

manuscripts, and, amongst the printed editions, *Biblia Hebraica* in both Exodus and Deuteronomy, and the Letteris text in Deuteronomy.<sup>8</sup> Figure 6 illustrates a normative Ben Asher accentuation, as reflected in many manuscripts with strong Ben Asher tendencies.

[illegible]

Fig. 6. Normative Ben Asher version: Dual accentuation

<sup>7</sup>R. Kittel and P. Kahle, eds. (Stuttgart, 1937). Fig. 6 actually reproduces this printing with the following corrections made on the basis of readings found in a number of manuscripts:

|          |                 |     |                 |          |                 |     |                 |
|----------|-----------------|-----|-----------------|----------|-----------------|-----|-----------------|
| line 2:  | לֹא־יְהִי־הָיָה | for | לֹא־יְהִי־הָיָה | line 2:  | לֹא־יְהִי־הָיָה | for | לֹא־יְהִי־הָיָה |
| line 3:  | הַמִּתְּנָה     | for | הַמִּתְּנָה     | line 3:  | הַמִּתְּנָה     | for | הַמִּתְּנָה     |
| line 3:  | וְאָשֶׁר        | for | וְאָשֶׁר        | line 10: | וְאָשֶׁר        | for | וְאָשֶׁר        |
| line 10: | וּבְנֵי־        | for | וּבְנֵי־        | line 10: | וּבְנֵי־        | for | וּבְנֵי־        |
| line 11: | יִבְחָמוּךָ     | for | יִבְחָמוּךָ     | line 15: | יִבְחָמוּךָ     | for | יִבְחָמוּךָ     |

The reading of -לָךְ for -לְךָ (line 9) corrects an omission in Biblia Hebraica, not supported by the Leningrad Codex (cf. Deut. 5:13).

<sup>8</sup>With the exception of the extraneous הַ on the word לְהַ in the first pronouncement.

The accentuation of the word עֲלֵיךְ at the end of the first pronouncement (line 1) with both אֲחֵיךָ and כִּי־נָא in the Ben Asher tradition is the origin of the misunderstanding which gave rise to the inferior version discussed previously (fig. 3), as well as several other versions. Early readers, in attempting to separate the two accentuations, were influenced by a rabbinic midrash<sup>9</sup> where the opinion is found that the first two pronouncements were spoken to the people directly by God himself, rather than by Moses. Thus, when confronted with the dual accentuation on the word עֲלֵיךְ at the end of the first pronouncement, the accentuation with אֲחֵיךָ was naturally chosen for the public reading, since it connected the first two pronouncements together, in accordance with the above midrash. Of course, once the first clause is concluded with אֲחֵיךָ (d0), it is now automatic that the יְהוָה־נָא (d1) on the word אֲחֵיךָ is construed to be part of this accentuation.<sup>10</sup> Figures 7 and 8 illustrate the public and private accentuations as understood by such Masoretes as Menahem Lonzano who, in his Masoretic commentary *as Menahem* above-mentioned midrash to support his separation of the accents.

אֲבִי יְהוָה אֲחֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הִצַּאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּרֵית עֲבָדִים:  
 לֹא יְהוָה־לָּךְ אֲחֵיךָ אֲחֵיךָ עַל־פִּנִּי לֹא תִשְׁשֶׁה לָּךְ פֶּסַל ו  
 וְכִלְחֻמֶּיךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁמֵיךָ מִמֶּלֶךְ וְאֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ מִסְתַּחֲוֹתָ אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם  
 מִתַּחַת לְאֶרֶץ לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תִקְבְּרֵם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה  
 אֲחֵיךָ אֵל קָדָם פֶּקֶד עֵן אֶת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שְׂלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים  
 לְשָׁנָא וְעַשָּׂה חֶסֶד לְאֶלְפִים לְאֹהֲבֵי וְלִשְׂמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתֵי:  
 אֲבִי יְהוָה אֲחֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הִצַּאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּרֵית עֲבָדִים:  
 לֹא יְהוָה־לָּךְ אֲחֵיךָ אֲחֵיךָ עַל־פִּנִּי לֹא תִשְׁשֶׁה לָּךְ פֶּסַל ו  
 וְכִלְחֻמֶּיךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁמֵיךָ מִמֶּלֶךְ וְאֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ מִסְתַּחֲוֹתָ אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם  
 מִתַּחַת לְאֶרֶץ לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תִקְבְּרֵם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה  
 אֲחֵיךָ אֵל קָדָם פֶּקֶד עֵן אֶת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שְׂלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים  
 לְשָׁנָא וְעַשָּׂה חֶסֶד לְאֶלְפִים לְאֹהֲבֵי וְלִשְׂמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתֵי:  
 אֲבִי יְהוָה אֲחֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הִצַּאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּרֵית עֲבָדִים:  
 לֹא יְהוָה־לָּךְ אֲחֵיךָ אֲחֵיךָ עַל־פִּנִּי לֹא תִשְׁשֶׁה לָּךְ פֶּסַל ו  
 וְכִלְחֻמֶּיךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁמֵיךָ מִמֶּלֶךְ וְאֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ מִסְתַּחֲוֹתָ אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם  
 מִתַּחַת לְאֶרֶץ לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תִקְבְּרֵם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה  
 אֲחֵיךָ אֵל קָדָם פֶּקֶד עֵן אֶת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שְׂלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים  
 לְשָׁנָא וְעַשָּׂה חֶסֶד לְאֶלְפִים לְאֹהֲבֵי וְלִשְׂמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתֵי:

Fig. 7. Normative Ben Asher version:

Public accentuation (Lonzano, et al.)

Fig. 8. Normative Ben Asher version:

Private accentuation (Lonzano, et al.)

<sup>9</sup>Babylonian Talmud, *Makkot* 23b-24a: אמר רב חמנא מאי קרא תורה: הוי אנכי ולא יהיה צוה לנו משה מרשה תורה בגימטריא שית מאה וחד טרי הוי אנכי ולא יהיה לך מפי הגבורה שמענום

<sup>10</sup>According to the rule of hierarchy of disjunctives. See n. 5 above.

<sup>11</sup>Berlin, 1745, p. 11a.

The public accentuation resulting from this separation, however, was apparently seen to be problematic. Two difficulties are evident: (1) It is an unthinkable distortion of the principles of biblical accentuation to allow a single verse to harbor two אֲחֵיךָ accents,<sup>12</sup> as appear here on עֲלֵיךְ (line 1) and עֲלֵיךְ (line 6); and (2) לֹא־תִקְבְּרֵם in the MT is found after אֲחֵיךָ has already appeared in the verse,<sup>13</sup> which is here the case with אֲחֵיךָ on עֲלֵיךְ (line 1) and עֲלֵיךְ on עֲלֵיךְ (line 4).

An examination of scores of relevant Bible manuscripts, model codices, and Geniza fragments in the collections of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and of the British Museum,<sup>14</sup> indicates that two solutions to these problems were widespread. In the first solution, as found in dozens of Yemenite manuscripts, the attempt to reflect the midrash in the accentuation (by connecting the first and second pronouncements) was abandoned. Figure 9 illustrates this accentuation, where the אֲחֵיךָ on עֲלֵיךְ has been replaced by עֲלֵיךְ.<sup>15</sup> Now only the single אֲחֵיךָ, on עֲלֵיךְ (line 6), remains, and the עֲלֵיךְ (line 4) therefore no longer follows an אֲחֵיךָ. However, this accentuation introduces a new problem, namely, the absence of an אֲחֵיךָ in the first pronouncement. For it has been demonstrated that when the major division is followed by six or more words, the major dichotomy, as indicated by אֲחֵיךָ, always appears.<sup>16</sup>

אֲבִי יְהוָה אֲחֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הִצַּאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּרֵית עֲבָדִים:  
 לֹא יְהוָה־לָּךְ אֲחֵיךָ אֲחֵיךָ עַל־פִּנִּי לֹא תִשְׁשֶׁה לָּךְ פֶּסַל ו  
 וְכִלְחֻמֶּיךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁמֵיךָ מִמֶּלֶךְ וְאֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ מִסְתַּחֲוֹתָ אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם  
 מִתַּחַת לְאֶרֶץ לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תִקְבְּרֵם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה  
 אֲחֵיךָ אֵל קָדָם פֶּקֶד עֵן אֶת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שְׂלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים  
 לְשָׁנָא וְעַשָּׂה חֶסֶד לְאֶלְפִים לְאֹהֲבֵי וְלִשְׂמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתֵי:

Figure 9

<sup>12</sup>A corollary of the rule of hierarchy of disjunctives (see n. 5 above) applied to a proper definition of אֲחֵיךָ (see Cohen, pp. 30-31).

<sup>13</sup>Wickes, p. 85, n. 1.

<sup>14</sup>Microfilm collection of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

<sup>15</sup>Accompanied by the required change in conjunctive accent, מִצְוֹתֵי instead of מִצְוֹתֵי.

<sup>16</sup>Wickes, p. 64, n. 7. Note that the exceptions cited by Wickes do not occur in manuscripts of the Ben Asher tradition.

In the second solution demonstrated by the manuscripts, the influence of the midrash on the accentuation remained. In order to eliminate the troublesome  $\text{מִתְחַלֵּף}$  at the end of the first pronouncement while at the same time combining the first two pronouncements into a single verse, a new accentuation was created. The end of the first pronouncement was reaccented by analogy with the practice followed when the several verses (private accentuation) of the next pronouncement were combined into a single long verse (public accentuation). Figure 10 illustrates this accentuation, where the sequence  $\text{וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ}$  followed by a phrase is substituted at the end of the first pronouncement, just as it appears at the end of the first two verses of the second pronouncement. This, it will be noticed, is the actual accentuation found in Exodus 20 in the Letteris text (fig. 3) and in many other printed versions. As outlined above, the problems with this accentuation are twofold: (1) the division of a  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  (d2) phrase, that ending with  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  (d1) on  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  (fig. 3, line 2); and (2) the precedence of  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  on  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  (fig. 3, line (line 6)).

מִתְחַלֵּף  
עַל-פִּי  
אֶתְחַלֵּף אֶלֶיָּהֶם  
וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ  
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ פֶּסֶל

Figure 10

In summary, not only is the standard separation of the Ben Asher dual accentuation which reflects the midrash (figs. 7 and 8) problematic, but also the attempted corrections of that separation have clearly not improved the matter.

Returning to the original Ben Asher dual accentuation (fig. 6), it will now be demonstrated that, given a proper separation of the two accentuations, no problems are apparent. Figures 11 and 12 illustrate the proper separation of accents into the public and private accentuations.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that, contrary to what has been assumed previously, the accentuation with  $\text{מִתְחַלֵּף}$  belongs to the private accentuation, while it is the accentuation with  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  which appears in the public accentuation. In other words, the first pronouncement is, according to the private accentuation, only a part of the first verse. But that one verse of

<sup>17</sup>Note that this separation is not the same as the accentuation proposed by Wickes (after Heidenheim), p. 87, n. 8, who demands that only a single accentuation is to appear on the first pronouncement.

the private accentuation contains more than one pronouncement should be no cause for question: the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth pronouncements are all contained in a single verse according to the private accentuation (fig. 4). In general, long pronouncements are divided into several verses in the private accentuation, while short pronouncements, such as the first, are combined with others to comprise a verse of the private accentuation.

The difficulties encountered with the previous separations and emended versions are not to be found in this separation (figs. 11 and 12): (1) According to both the public and the private accentuations, the disjunctive accent on  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  (line 1), marking the division within the clause, is no longer of a higher level than that disjunctive accent which concludes the clause. In the public reading the accentuation is  $\text{מִתְחַלֵּף}$  (d0) followed by  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  (d1), while in the private reading the accentuation is  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  (d0), followed by  $\text{מִתְחַלֵּף}$  (d1). (2) There are no lengthy pronouncements without  $\text{מִתְחַלֵּף}$ . (3) No longer does  $\text{מִתְחַלֵּף}$  appear in any verse more than once. (4) No longer on the word  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  (line 4) no longer follows either  $\text{וְהָיָה}$  or  $\text{מִתְחַלֵּף}$  in the same verse.

אֶתְחַלֵּף אֶלֶיָּהֶם וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ  
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ פֶּסֶל  
וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ  
מִתְחַלֵּף אֶלֶיָּהֶם  
וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ  
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ פֶּסֶל  
וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ  
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ פֶּסֶל

Fig. 11. Normative Ben Asher version:  
Public accentuation (correct)

אֶתְחַלֵּף אֶלֶיָּהֶם וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ  
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ פֶּסֶל  
וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ  
מִתְחַלֵּף אֶלֶיָּהֶם  
וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ  
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ פֶּסֶל  
וְהָיָה קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ קְדָשׁוֹ  
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ פֶּסֶל

Fig. 12. Normative Ben Asher version:  
Private accentuation (correct)

Careful examination of precise manuscripts and printings reflecting the Ben Asher tradition adds further support to this separation of accentuations. In such sources great care is taken wherever possible to position the accent of the private reading to the right of that of the public reading. In the Masorah of some manuscripts, the private accentuation is referred to by the term *קטן* 'former accents', while the public accentuation is referred to as *גדול* 'latter accents'. In figure 6 one can find several words in which two accents are placed both above and both below the same letter. For example, *וְהָיָה* and *וְהָיָה* (line 4) both appear first with *קטן* and then with *גדול*, and *וְהָיָה* (line 6) appears first with *קטן* and then with *גדול*, all in accordance with the separation in figures 11 and 12. It can be seen in particular that the accentuation of the word *וְהָיָה* at the end of the first pronouncement (line 1) is with *קטן* first (i.e., in the private accentuation) and *גדול* second (i.e., in the public accentuation). It is helpful to contrast this word to the word *וְהָיָה* (line 6), where the order of the accents is reversed, indicating that the *קטן* on *וְהָיָה* belongs to the public accentuation, while the *גדול* is part of the private accentuation.

In conclusion, the following have been shown: (1) The second accentuation is a modification of the basic syntactical accentuation, and allows the reader at public gatherings to recite the Ten Commandments as ten individual pronouncements. (2) The Ben Asher dual accentuation was misunderstood, resulting in a separation of accents which was problematic. (3) The "corrected" accentuations offered by many manuscripts and most popular editions also contain problems and anomalies not found elsewhere in the MT. (4) The Ben Asher accentuations, when correctly separated, satisfactorily fulfill all the requirements of both the private and the public readings, while presenting no difficult or unprecedented configurations of accents.

## APPENDIX

# Summary of Fundamentals of Accentuation in the Masoretic Text

## Disjunctive accents

d0 (disjunctive accents of the highest level):

אברהם, סלר,

d1 (disjunctive accents of the second level):

סגול, זקן-זקל, זקן-זקל

d2 (disjunctive accents of the third level):

רַכִּיעַ , פִּשְׁטָא , תַּבְרַח , זִרְקָא

d3 (disjunctive accents of the lowest level):

מִצַּח לַגְרָמִיָּה (ג), גֶּרֶשׁ, תְּלִישׁ-גְּדֻלָּה, פֶּזֶר

## Conjunctive accents

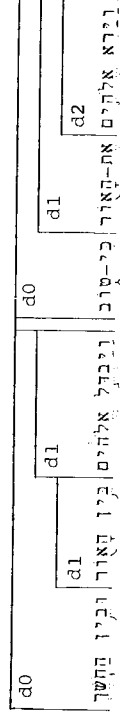
מִלְכָּה, מַלְאָךְ, מֶלֶךְ, מֶלֶךְ, מֶלֶךְ

Principle of continuous dichotomy: The verse is divided into two parts, those parts are then further divided into two parts each, and so on. The process is repeated until each subdivision consists of at most two words.

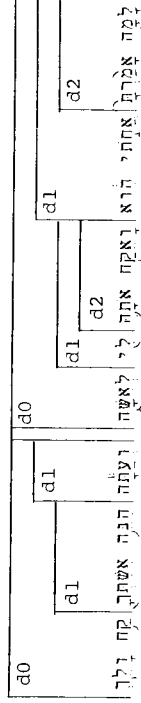
Principle of hierarchy of disjunctive accents: The disjunctive accent which divides a phrase is of one level lower than the disjunctive accent which marks the end of that phrase.

## Accentuation diagrams

All divisions are represented by vertical lines, the height of the line being determined by the relative importance of the division. The attached horizontal line indicates the range of the phrase terminated by that division.



Gen. 1:4



Gen. 12:19

For a more complete description, see Miles B. Cohen, The System of Accentuation in the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Wilco Press, 1969).



1. See some of the titles in my Prolegomenon to W. Wickes, *Two Treatises on the Accentuation of the Old Testament* (New York, 1970), pp. XXXII-XXXIII.
2. P. Kahle *apud* Bauer-Leander, *Historische Grammatik der Hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testaments*, §9u, pp. 141-142.
3. H. Graetz, "Die Anfänge der Vocalzeichen im Hebräischen," *MGWJ* 30 (1881), pp. 348-367, 395-405 (henceforth: Graetz).
4. Graetz, p. 360.
5. Vol. XVI, pp. 1401-1482.
6. Graetz, pp. 362-363, 404-405.
7. S. Frensdorff, *Das Buch Ochia W'ochlah* (Hannover, 1864) [henceforth: Ochla].
8. T. Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, trans. J. A. Crichton (London, 1904), p. 6.
9. J. B. Segal, *The Diacritical Point and the Accents in Syriac* (1953), pp. 38-39.
10. Graetz, p. 357.
11. G. Bergsträsser, *Hebräische Grammatik*, I (Leipzig, 1918 [1962]), § 9b.
12. P. Kahle, *ibid.*, pp. 93-94.
13. Graetz, pp. 360ff.
14. S. Frensdorff, *Die Massora Magna* (1876; reprinted: Ktav Publishing House, New York, with a Prolegomenon by G. E. Weil, 1968), p. 8 of the list of masoretic terms.
15. Graetz, p. 351.
16. Graetz, p. 357.
17. *Textus II* (1962), p. 106.
18. Cf. his words in an editor's remark to Weil's article in *Textus (ibid.)*, note 11a.
19. *Siphre ad Deuteronomium*, edit. H. S. Horowitz and L. Finkelstein (Berlin, 1939; republished: New York, 1969), p. 133.
20. S. L. Skoss, *Saadia Gaon, The Earliest Hebrew Grammarian* (Philadelphia, 1955), pp. 27-30. Skoss also published the Arabic original of this chapter with an English translation in his article "A Study of Hebrew Vowels from Saadia Gaon's Grammatical Work 'Kutub al-Lughah'," *JQR* N.S. 42 (1951/2), pp. 283-317.
21. Translation by Skoss in the above-mentioned (note 20) article, p. 293.
22. Translation by Skoss (*ibid.*), p. 303.
23. Z. Ben-Hayyim, "The Vowel Theory of Saadia Gaon" [Hebrew], *Leshonenu* 18 (1952/3), p. 92.
24. Found in several sources among which also an ancient masoretic chapter published by S. Baer and H. L. Strack in their edition of *Dikduke ha-ṭamim* (Leipzig, 1879) as §36, but which certainly does not belong to that treatise.
25. In his doctoral thesis *The Babylonian Vocalization and the Linguistic Tradition it Reflects* (Jerusalem, 1968, in offset), pp. 187-189.
26. Vol. 2, pp. 310-311, §606.
27. J. B. Segal, *ibid.*, p. 9.

# THE MASORETES AS EXEGETES: SELECTED EXAMPLES

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The accentuation of the MT represents an early exegetical commentary on the Bible. For the accents indicate a syntactical division of a verse, combining words into phrases and showing the relationship of component phrases to each other. Thus, the accentuation often reveals the Masoretes' understanding of a verse as clearly as if they had written a commentary in words. Most often, the accentuation demonstrates the simple meaning of the verse, but at times the accentuation reflects an intriguing alternate interpretation, even that of a rabbinic midrash.

Three verses have been chosen in which the accentuation is crucial to understanding the verse. The accentuations will now be compared and contrasted to other exegeses of the verses to illustrate the potential of the accents as an exegetical tool. Our analysis is based on well-known principles of accentuation, some of which are briefly summarized and diagrammed in the Appendix.

A fine example of the accents' reflecting an interpretation other than that most commonly accepted is found in Isa. 56:9. The accentuation found in the Leningrad and Cairo manuscripts is reproduced in figure 1. The accepted translation of this verse is: "All animals of the field, come to eat! Likewise, all you animals in the forest!" The basis of this translation is clear. Contextually, this verse has been deemed by scholars to be the beginning of a unit of prophecy which denounces the incompetent leaders of the people. The prophet, in an allegory which alludes to the people who were defenseless owing to the lack of leaders, invites wild beasts to devour the flocks which were left unprotected by their wicked shepherds. This logically satisfying interpretation finds additional support in the demands of parallelism within the verse and linguistic considerations within the various units of prophecy.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Edward L. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 2 (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, 1943), p. 211; John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 153; J. Skinner, *Isaiah: Chapters XL-LXVI* (Cambridge: University Press, 1910), p. 150; et al.

<sup>2</sup>S. D. Luzzatto, *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1970), pp. 371-72.

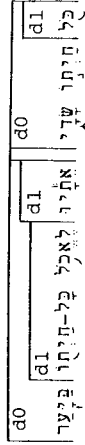


Fig. 1. MT accentuation

Were the Masoretes to have intended this interpretation, however, they would have employed the accentuation shown in figure 2,<sup>3</sup> where the major dichotomy, as indicated by the  $\text{מְאֻחָא}$ , follows the word  $\text{לְאֶחָד}$ , separating the two hemistichs. Clearly, the traditional accentuation, with the major dichotomy after the word  $\text{יָחִיד}$  (fig. 1), would have us render the verse differently: "All animals of the field, come to eat all the animals in the forest." Wickes and Luzzatto, two of the most diligent students of the accents, dispensed with this accentuation as being "ridiculous"<sup>4</sup> and  $\text{לְאֶחָד}$  'far-fetched'.<sup>5</sup>

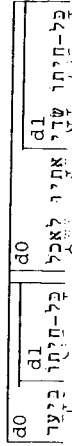
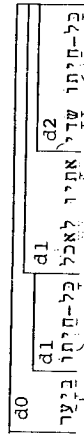


Fig. 2. Hypothetical accentuation

What, then, made the Masoretes, along with other medieval commentators such as Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Kimhi, interpret this verse in such a peculiar manner? Apparently, the accentors were influenced by the section structure of the MT. An inspection of the best manuscripts, such as Leningrad and Cairo, and most printed editions reveals that a space, indicating a sectional division, occurs in the text after the verse in question, not before. Thus, these commentators were seeking to interpret the verse, not as the opening of a new section, as later scholars would have it,

<sup>3</sup>Or, alternately:



The interpretation suggested by this version is identical to the interpretation suggested by fig. 2.

<sup>4</sup>William Wickes, *A Treatise on the Accentuation of the Twenty-one SO-called Prose Books of the Old Testament* (London, 1887; reprinted, New York: Ktav, 1970), p. 136.

<sup>5</sup>Luzzatto, p. 371.

but rather as the conclusion of the previous section. Accordingly, following the promise of rewards for those who pursue justice and keep the Sabbath (56:1-8) comes a further reassurance: the animals of the field (the weak animals) shall eat the animals of the forest (the strong animals). Various commentators assign different identities to the symbolic field and forest animals, but the spirit remains unchanged: the righteous shall prosper, while the wicked shall suffer.

With the intent of the accentuation of the MT understood, it remains to confront a difficulty in the accentuation of the last three words of the verse. As seen in figure 1, the accentuation with the disjunctive accent  $\text{מְאֻחָא}$  on the second occurrence of the word  $\text{יָחִיד}$  indicates that the word  $\text{יָחִיד}$  is an adjectival modifier: 'the animals who are in the forest', which is not parallel to  $\text{יָחִיד}$  'field-animal', a construct form, at the beginning of the verse. Apparently, the early accentors did not understand the second  $\text{יָחִיד}$  as part of a construct since it is followed by a prepositional prefix  $\text{בְּ}$ ; therefore, they accented the second  $\text{יָחִיד}$  with a disjunctive accent, as if it were an absolute form. Later grammarians did in fact understand this phrase as a construct, and in accordance with that understanding, a new accentuation appeared, preferred by Luzzatto<sup>6</sup> and found in a few printed editions.<sup>7</sup> As seen in figure 3, the second  $\text{יָחִיד}$

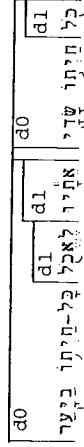


Fig. 3. Revised MT accentuation

was instead accented with the conjunctive accent  $\text{מְאֻחָא}$ , and the  $\text{יָחִיד}$  of  $\text{כָּל הַיָּחִידִים}$  was spirantized accordingly, indicating the construct form and providing a true parallel to  $\text{יָחִיד}$ . That a construct form may indeed contain a prepositional prefix was shown by Kimhi<sup>8</sup> in such cases as Judg. 8:11. Figure 4 displays the construct phrase  $\text{כָּל הַיָּחִידִים בְּיָעַר}$ , where  $\text{כָּל הַיָּחִידִים}$  is accented with the conjunctive accent  $\text{מְאֻחָא}$ , and the second word contains the prepositional prefix  $\text{בְּ}$ .

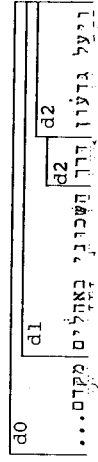


Fig. 4. Judg. 8:11

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Including the Brescia Bible (1494).

<sup>8</sup>Kimhi's commentary on Isa. 56:9.

When preparing his Bible, Letteris<sup>9</sup> was apparently persuaded by the evidence at hand and sought to present the same version that Luzzatto preferred. Unfortunately, although he succeeded in properly portraying the accents, he neglected to make the corresponding change in vocalization, namely, the spirantization of the  $\text{נ}$  in  $\text{נָּקָה}$ , yielding his reading (fig. 5), the only reading which can truly be called "ridiculous" and "far-fetched."

כל הנהו שיהא לאכל בלחמיהו ביער:

Fig. 5. Letteris text

A second example of a verse whose accentuation is essential to its interpretation is Judg. 6:24. After stating that Gideon built an altar to God, the verse continues,  $\text{וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ יְהוָה שָׁלוֹם}$ . The simple meaning of this clause is 'and he called it "God is Peace"'. However, the accentuation of this clause (fig. 6), with

|                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| d0             | d1             |
| וַיִּקְרָא-לוֹ | יְהוָה שָׁלוֹם |

Fig. 6. MT accentuation

the disjunctive  $\text{שָׁלוֹם}$  on the Tetragrammaton, does not reflect this simple meaning; furthermore, it does not accord with the typical accentuation for the naming of holy places. That typical accentuation can be seen in figure 7, yielding 'and Abraham called the

|                      |                       |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| d0                   | d1                    | d2              |
| וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם | שֵׁם-הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא | יְהוָה יֵשׁוּעַ |

Fig. 7. Gen. 22:14

name of that place "God Will See". Or, referring to Moses's building an altar, figure 8 yields 'and he called its name "God Is My Banner"'. From these and other examples<sup>10</sup> it may be seen that when a holy place is given a two-word name, the first word of

|                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| d0                | d1              |
| וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ | יְהוָה יֵשׁוּעַ |

Fig. 8. Exod. 17:15

<sup>9</sup>London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1866.

<sup>10</sup>Jer. 23:6, 33:16; Ezek. 48:35.

which is the Tetragrammaton, the Tetragrammaton is accented with a conjunctive accent and is followed by a  $\text{פָּזָה}$ . Thus, it is an unusual accentuation in Judg. 6:24, which is nonetheless found in all early manuscripts and printed editions.

As was his practice, Wickes emended the accentuation of this verse on the basis of a few manuscripts, by giving the Tetragrammaton a conjunctive accent,  $\text{נָּקָה}$  (fig. 9).<sup>11</sup> He then further suggests, on the basis of the parallel passages, that a  $\text{פָּזָה}$  is required, although there is no support from manuscripts and although the addition of this  $\text{פָּזָה}$  would contradict Masorah lists which keep careful count of occurrences of the  $\text{פָּזָה}$ . We need not take

Judg. vi. 24. Some Gold.—as Ox. 13, 2324; Hanl. 5773; Erf.

2—and the Soncino ed., point  $\text{וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ יְהוָה שָׁלוֹם}$ , and this is no doubt correct; except that, according to the Pseph rules, we ought to have  $\text{וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יְהוָה שָׁלוֹם}$ , comp. Ex. xvii. 15; Ezek. xlviii. 35.

<sup>9</sup> This too is what is meant in Midrash rabba on Leviticus, Par. 9.

Fig. 9. Wickes, p. 132

issue with Wickes's procedure of emending accentuations which are well attested in all accurate manuscripts and early printings, in order to match his theoretical understanding of the accents. However, we must object to his citing of a rabbinic midrash (as seen in the footnote reproduced in fig. 9) as support for his emendation, when it is precisely this midrash which led to the anomalous accentuation (fig. 6) in the first place. That midrash reads:

גִּדְלוֹ שְׁלוֹם שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקֹּדֶשׁ נִקְרָא שְׁלוֹם.  
הָיָה הוּא רַחֲמִי וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ ה' שְׁלוֹם.

"Great is peace, for the name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is Peace, as that which is written in the Scriptures, 'וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ ה' שְׁלוֹם' and he called God, Peace'.<sup>12</sup> It can plainly be seen that it is this midrash which prompted the original accentuation, which connects the object to the verb, rather than to the following word (fig. 6). On the other hand, the typical accentuation, the one found in all the similar passages (figs. 7 and 8), does not reflect this homily. There is no view that 'נָּקָה' or 'יֵשׁוּעַ' is considered a name of God. Again, the rabbis, using this midrash,

<sup>11</sup>Wickes, p. 132.

<sup>12</sup>Leviticus Rabbah 9:9.

conclude that the word  $\text{שָׁלוֹם}$ , like the other names of God, may not be uttered in a bathhouse.<sup>13</sup> But there is no such law regarding  $\text{שָׁלוֹם}$  or  $\text{מָלֵךְ}$ . It is therefore obvious that the cited mishrash is reflected in the unique and special, original accentuation of this verse, and not, as claimed by Wickes, in the emended version which matches all similar verses.

It is curious to note the strange accentuation of this verse found in the Snaith Bible.<sup>14</sup> We have demonstrated<sup>15</sup> that, despite the editor's claim to the contrary, the Snaith text is merely a poor revision of the Letteris Bible, with many of the misprints of the latter reproduced anew. For this verse, British Museum Manuscript Or. 2626-28, the fine, accurate manuscript which Snaith claims to have used as the basis of his text, displays the original and widely attested accentuation discussed above. Snaith's real basis, however, was primarily the Letteris Bible. Beginning with Letteris's version (fig. 10), Snaith changed the  $\text{מָלֵךְ}$  on  $\text{לִי-אֱלֹהִים}$  to a  $\text{מָלֵךְ}$ , and the  $\text{מָלֵךְ}$  on the Tetragrammaton to a  $\text{מָלֵךְ}$ , on the basis of the manuscript reading. However, Snaith

$\text{מָלֵךְ-אֱלֹהִים}$

Fig. 10. Letteris text

neglected to remove the  $\text{מָלֵךְ}$  which Letteris had inserted in his text in order to match the parallel passages. But since a  $\text{מָלֵךְ}$  may not follow a disjunctive accent,<sup>16</sup> the Snaith text is left with an extraneous  $\text{מָלֵךְ}$  (reproduced in fig. 11). The reading chosen by Wickes might be called untraditional, since it ignores a longstanding rabbinic and Masoretic tradition, but only the reading which appears in the Snaith text must be deemed impossible and in need of emendation.

$\text{מָלֵךְ-אֱלֹהִים}$

Fig. 11. Snaith text

<sup>13</sup>Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 10a-b.

<sup>14</sup>London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1958.

<sup>15</sup>The Snaith Bible: A Critical Examination of the Hebrew Bible Printed for the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1958, "HUCA 45 (1974).

<sup>16</sup>Wickes, p. 120.

Our final example is the accentuation of Isa. 3:24:

$\text{וְהָיָה$   
 $\text{וְהָיָה כְּשֶׁם מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה}$   
 $\text{וְהָיָה חֲנוּכָה נִקְפָה}$   
 $\text{וְהָיָה מַעֲשֵׂה מִקְשָׁה קִרְיָה$   
 $\text{וְהָיָה פְחִיגִיל מְחֹרָה שָׁךְ}$   
 $\text{כִּי תִחַת יָדָי.$

The verse is usually rendered:

And it shall come to pass, that  
Instead of spices there shall be rottenness;  
And instead of a girdle, rags;  
And instead of curled hair, baldness;  
And instead of a garment, sackcloth;  
Burning instead of beauty.

The word  $\text{כִּי}$  is usually explained to mean 'burning', a form of the word  $\text{קָרַח}$ , found in Exod. 21:24. Preferring this interpretation, Luzzatto believed he found the accentuation needed for this interpretation in a few late manuscripts, among them, three Erfurt manuscripts,<sup>17</sup> where the word  $\text{כִּי}$  is accented with the disjunctive accent  $\text{מָלֵךְ}$  (fig. 12).

|                  |               |                 |                |                  |  |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|--|
| d0               | d1            | d0              | d1             | d2               | d2                                       |
| $\text{וְהָיָה}$ | $\text{כִּי}$ | $\text{תִּחַת}$ | $\text{יָדָי}$ | $\text{וְהָיָה}$ | $\text{מַעֲשֵׂה מִקְשָׁה קִרְיָה}$       |
|                  |               |                 |                |                  | $\text{וְהָיָה פְחִיגִיל מְחֹרָה שָׁךְ}$ |

Fig. 12. Luzzatto's accentuation

However, a more careful analysis of the verse reveals that the accentuation does not really support the rendering of  $\text{כִּי}$  'burning'. For if the final three words were intended to be merely the fifth in a series of parallel expressions, a totally different accentuation would have been required for the verse. Whenever a series of parallel elements is to be divided by the ac-

<sup>17</sup>Luzzatto, p. 49.

cents, the division is in the middle; if an odd element remains, it is generally assigned to the first half.<sup>18</sup> Figure 13 demonstrates the typical division of a verse with five parallel expressions, where the major dichotomy is placed after the third expression.

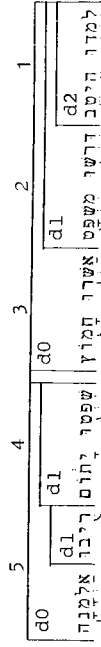


Fig. 13. Isa. 1:17

sion. Thus, if 'burning' was intended in the original accentuation of the verse, the accentuation would have appeared as in figure 14, where the major dichotomy is placed after the third element. Clearly, the placement of the major dichotomy after the fourth element was the result of a differing interpretation of the verse.

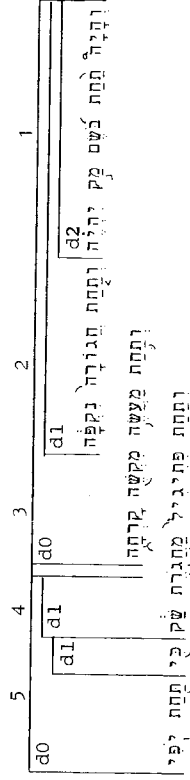


Fig. 14. Hypothetical accentuation

That differing interpretation is reflected in the seemingly strange accentuation found in the overwhelming number of manuscripts and printed editions (as illustrated in fig. 15), where the disjunctive  $\text{אָפֶּק}$  is placed on the word  $\text{הָהָה}$ . Two interpretations *ibn Ezra* offers reflect this accentuation of the verse. First, he quotes Saadiah as translating  $\text{אָפֶּק}$  'for' (כִּי) the contrary ( $\text{הָהָה}$ ) is more appropriate.<sup>19</sup> *Ibn Ezra* then offers another interpretation:<sup>20</sup> 'for' (כִּי) instead of ( $\text{הָהָה}$ ) beauty ( $\text{אָפֶּק}$ ), the above-mentioned disasters shall be'.<sup>21</sup> These

<sup>18</sup>Mordecai Breuer, *פִּסְטוֹק טַעֲמִים שְׂבָנָקָה* (Jerusalem, 1958), p. 121.

<sup>19</sup>Abraham *ibn Ezra*, *The Commentary of ibn Ezra on Isaiah*, ed. M. Friedländer (New York: Feldheim, n.d.), Heb. vol. p. 9; cf. Eng. vol. p. 24.

<sup>20</sup>Also reflected in the Targum, Rashi, Kimhi, and Abarbanel.

<sup>21</sup>*Commentary of ibn Ezra*, Heb. vol. p. 9; cf. Eng. vol. p. 24.

וְהָיָה  
וְהָיָה  
וְהָיָה  
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וְהָיָה

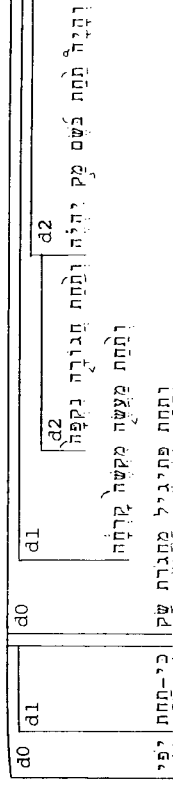


Fig. 15. Top, reproduction of Leningrad B19a Bottom, corresponding accentuation diagram

two interpretations accord with the standard accentuation for two reasons: (1) The final expression,  $\text{אָפֶּק}$ , is now a separate unit, being in opposition to the rest of the verse; therefore, the placement of the major dichotomy immediately before it is appropriate. (2) The placement of a disjunctive accent on  $\text{הָהָה}$ , rather than on  $\text{אָפֶּק}$ , syntactically connects these two words, according well with the understanding of  $\text{אָפֶּק}$  as a coordinating conjunction.

When  $\text{אָפֶּק}$  was later interpreted as a noun, it was given the disjunctive accent  $\text{אָפֶּק}$ . However, the later accentors did not complete the reaccentuation necessary for their new interpretation, which would have required relocating the major dichotomy, as demonstrated above.

We now turn our attention to the attempts of the modern printed editions and scholarly texts to present this verse. According to Norman Henry Snaith, the Letteris Bible has a close relationship to Erfurt Manuscript 3.22. It appears, then, that Letteris confronted the same evidence that Luzzatto did and also opted for the accentuation which indicates that  $\text{אָפֶּק}$  is a noun, 'burning'. Unfortunately, Letteris failed to make all the necessary changes in order to present this reading correctly, and printed instead the version reproduced in figure 16, with the disjunctive  $\text{אָפֶּק}$  located on  $\text{אָפֶּק}$ , but with a spirantized  $\text{הָהָה}$ , as if  $\text{אָפֶּק}$  were still syntactically connected to  $\text{הָהָה}$ .

וְהָיָה

Fig. 16. Letteris text

<sup>22</sup>Norman H. Snaith, "The Ben Asher Text," *Textus* 2 (1962), p. 8.

Worse yet are the egregious errors found in Biblia Hebraica<sup>23</sup> and also in the new Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.<sup>24</sup> Examination of the Leningrad and Cairo manuscripts<sup>25</sup> reveals that the reading of figure 15 is easily discernable in both manuscripts. The  $\text{נָּבַב}$  under the 'n and the  $\text{-נָּבַב}$  connecting 'ב and  $\text{נָּבַב}$  are readily visible, and the absence of the  $\text{נָּבַב}$  in the 'n accords with the clear  $\text{נָּבַב}$  stroke above the 'n.

Notwithstanding, Biblia Hebraica presents the reading reproduced in figure 17, with a  $\text{נָּבַב}$  in the 'n. Where Letteris, whose accentuation demands a  $\text{נָּבַב}$ , neglected to insert one, this edition has inserted an extraneous  $\text{נָּבַב}$ ! Furthermore, a reader who does

נָּבַב נָּבַב

נָּבַב נָּבַב נָּבַב

Fig. 17. Biblia Hebraica

not have a facsimile of the Leningrad manuscript handy, would not readily identify this reading as a mere misprint. For to make matters worse, there is a note in the upper apparatus of Biblia Hebraica referring to 'ב (reproduced in fig. 17) reading 'thus in Cairo and Leningrad manuscripts, and in Second Rabbinic Bible of Bomberg', thereby claiming distinguished support for this reading, although in fact none of these sources do support this foolish misprint. Compounding the error, the apparatus offers a most absurd emendation, also reproduced in figure 17. The reading proposed calls for both the disjunctive  $\text{נָּבַב}$  on the word 'ב and a  $\text{-נָּבַב}$  connecting it to the next word, in addition to a  $\text{נָּבַב}$  (instead of  $\text{נָּבַב}$ ) as the conjunctive accent on the word  $\text{נָּבַב}$ , preceding  $\text{נָּבַב}$ . As a final touch, the 'n of  $\text{נָּבַב}$  has been given a  $\text{נָּבַב}$ .

We may attempt to reconstruct the intentions of the editors of Biblia Hebraica. They chose to present the standard accentuation in the body of the text. The note in the apparatus, which should have appeared as in figure 18, was to suggest that although

נָּבַב נָּבַב

נָּבַב נָּבַב נָּבַב

Fig. 18. Corrected Biblia Hebraica

<sup>23</sup>R. Kittel and P. Kahle, eds. (Stuttgart, 1937).

<sup>24</sup>K. Elliger, W. Rudolph, H. P. Rüger, and G. E. Weil, eds. The Book of Isaiah, ed. D. Winton Thomas (Stuttgart, 1968).

<sup>25</sup>In facsimile. Codex Leningrad B19a (Jerusalem: Makor, 1971). Codex Cairo of the Bible (Jerusalem: Makor, 1971).

the Cairo and Leningrad manuscripts and the Second Rabbinic Bible all display this accentuation, they would prefer the accentuation as found in the Erfurt manuscripts, which reflects the understanding of 'ב as a noun, 'burning'. This was done even though the editors thereby introduced the problem of the misplacement of the major dichotomy, as discussed previously.

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia has not fared much better in its presentation of a reading for this phrase. Apparently, the editors trusted Biblia Hebraica's report of the reading of the Leningrad manuscript, and presented once again the same impossible reading, as shown in figure 19, with the extraneous  $\text{נָּבַב}$  in the

נָּבַב נָּבַב

נָּבַב נָּבַב נָּבַב

Fig. 19. Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia

'n. These editors decided not to propose an emendation in agreement with the Erfurt manuscript. Quite satisfied with the traditional accentuation, they only wanted to correct the difficulty of the reputed Leningrad version, namely the extraneous  $\text{נָּבַב}$  in 'n. Therefore, their critical apparatus contains the note shown in figure 19: 'read with several manuscripts which have a spirantized 'n'. In the critical apparatus, then, the editors have proposed an emendation to the body of the text, unaware of the fact that what they were emending was merely the erroneous version printed in Biblia Hebraica, not that of any other printed edition or manuscript! Furthermore, their proposed emendation merely reproduces the reading found in the vast majority of manuscripts and printed editions, including the Leningrad manuscript itself, the very manuscript that the body of their text is supposed to present.

In conclusion, we have shown, first, that the accentuation is a useful exegetical tool, revealing various understandings of biblical grammar and syntax, as well as, on occasion, a rabbinic mishrash. Second, in instances where the accentuation found in early manuscripts represents a strange understanding, variant accentuations often developed secondarily in manuscripts and printed editions. Finally, in situations where variants do exist, modern editions are embarrassingly sloppy in presenting a consistent reading, often presenting instead a humorous conflation of the various readings.

# A STUDY OF THE OLDEST DATED ORIENTAL BIBLE TEXTS<sup>1</sup>

I. O. Lehman

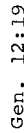
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1. The present study is a by-product of an Anglo-American manuscript project, which was first announced in the London Times of 23 May, 1963, as forming a Corpus of dated Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts. Ours is the oldest research project of this kind, whilst there is a later more limited Franco-Israeli project and a new Leiden book on Hebrew scripts. Our project has been proceeding slowly, since in many respects the required preliminary studies are missing to the present day.

2. Here I want to limit myself to two aspects only: The oldest dated Ben-Asher Codex of 895 and some Chinese Torah scrolls, one of which has been claimed to be a thousand years old.

There are four principal Ben-Asher Codices according to Kahle: The Cairo Codex of 895, the British Museum MS. 4445, the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad codex B 19a. The last was used for the Stuttgart Biblia Hebraica. The first has only recently become accessible in a facsimile edition by Makor Publishers in Jerusalem entitled the "Codex Cairo of the Bible from the Karaite Synagogue (!) at Abbasiya" with a short introduction by Dr. S.

Cairo manuscript has...been doubted, but this is part of a general trend among scholars." Concerning this codex two diametrically opposed views exist, that of Kahle and that of Lipschütz, his pupil. Kahle writes that the Cairo codex is "written and provided with punctuation and Masora in A.D. 895 by Moshe Ben Asher, Ahron's father." The oldest member of the Ben Asher family we know lived in the second half of the 8th century and the last, Aaron, in the former half of the 10th. Dr. Lipschütz in a gathering at the Bonn Bible congress of 1962 declared the colophon to be a forgery. What does the internal evidence show?



1. Studies in Hebrew Manuscript Traditions, No. 15.