

### III. STRANGE MARKS IN THE HEBREW TEXT

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#### A. INTRODUCTORY NOTE

That we do not major on the Hebrew accents is obvious. That they have considerable value will become apparent. Our neglect of them is born of a newer style of doing things. But if you obtain just a minimal bit of information about them, it will do you a lot of good.

Historically the accent marks came into being as part of the Tiberian system of pointing...between 600 and 900 AD. The pointing was established so that the pronunciation of Hebrew should not be lost and the accents were set so that the rhythm and expression of the language should not disappear. In addition to showing the stressed syllables, etc., the accent marks also showed word relationships. That is what interests us most at this time.

The Masora did the following things in connexion with their zealous study:

- they completed a finished pointing system
- the established a uniform method of accentation including the placing of tone and the relation of syllables.
- the prepared a mass of critical notes for observations of all sorts of variations and deviations from the traditional text. These notes are not of uniform value but serve many useful purposes in the determination and reading of the text.
- the made at least some innovations such as paragraph divisions, sentence arrangements, reading allotments, etc., all to lay special stress on particular items in the Old Testament.
- and they prepared a system of defense against inadvertent (to say nothing of purposeful) changes in the text. Copying and reproduction errors cannot be totally eliminated but the Masora tried.

Some of the detail behind this information will be found in our course on Old Testament Introduction...and soon thereafter be forgotten. If you have had this course, you will find it useful to review the first portion of the OTI syllabus, that part discussing the text. You may also wish to read the comments in Wurthwein: The Text of the Old Testament, or Ginsburg: Introduction to the Masoretico-Critico Edition of the Hebrew Bible. More detailed grammatical notes are given in the opening sections of Gesenius: Hebrew Grammar, para 15 ff. Remember that you are reading for the sake of information and not memorization.