

B. THE HEBREW ACCENT MARKS

1. Purpose and Use

a. The first use is to show where the stress is laid...where the tone of the accent is placed. Hebrew tends to accent the ultima when possible and in this way it "reads us" so to speak. But some words take the accent syllable earlier (segholate nouns, for instance) and the addition of some preformatives tends to withdraw the accent. Without proper accent no word is correctly pronounced...whole sounds are misrepresented and the total meaning in doubt. Therefore, to the mind of the reader who is interested in correctness of tone and the proper maintenance of the text, accentation is very important. We do not do enough of this sort of work, so the second use is more directly meaningful to us.

b. In this second use, the marks are used to show the relationship between words in the sentence. This is very helpful to the English-thinking reader since it prevents him from thinking of the words as being independent units and is forced to see them as part of a total picture. The accent marks tell him what words are dependent on one another and how this dependency is understood. Used in this fashion, the accent marks are identified in two camps:

- (1) Conjunctive...marks that show word 1 in dependency on word 2.

*It must be seen that each Hebrew word has its own accentation so long as it is not bound to another with maqqeph. The accent on the first word tells one how it relates to the second...not vice versa.*

This information will often aid you in spotting the subjects of verbs, modifiers, and objects of verbal action, etc.

- (2) Disjunctive...marks that show word 1 is not dependent on word 2.

These accents divide words one from another as the conjunctives bind them. Disjunctives mark the end of clauses, thought units, and sentences.

c. It is important to remember that these words, like the normative vowels, themselves, are (were)devised by the Masora and were never part of the autograph. If one of the prophets came back and looked at our text, he would probably be bewildered by those strange and insecure markings. But -while they are not inspired, they are traditionally well-supported and are instructive in the more fluent and enjoyable reading of Hebrew. True, when one can read "like a native", these signs have little significance then, but up until that time they are helpful and most of us are a long ways from that time!

2. The Disjunctive accents

We will not list all of them...they seem to be legion to an innocent Goyim-type instructor. But some are more important (or more common) and have greater force than others so we mention them in particular: