

**THE HEBREW ACCENTS
OF THE TWENTY-ONE
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE**

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The Hebrew accents of the twenty-one Books of the Bible by Arthur Davis

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ARTHUR DAVIS

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OF THE
Twenty-one Books of the Bible
(כ"א ספרים)

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(לְמִנְצַחַּ בְּנִינּוֹת מִשְׁבִּיר)

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BY

ARTHUR DAVIS.

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION.

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THE HEBREW ACCENTS.

INTRODUCTION.

The Hebrew Accents;—the origin, the development, the history, the function of these symbols, is the purpose of the following pages.

There is a well-known rule laid down by the famous and keen-sighted Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (12th Century) כל פירוש שאיננו על פירוש הטעמים לא תאבה (No interpretation can be adopted unless in accord with the massoretic punctuation.)

The sacred writings—Torah, Prophets and Hagiographa—were written in archaic style, the letters were unaccompanied by vowel or punctuative signs. Certain letters were surmounted with aureole or tittle and a few letters were dotted above with נקודות, as in Deut. xxix. 28. (There are ten places in the Torah where a letter or group of letters is so dotted, and according to Midrash, these נקודות betoken occult interpretations of the text.) Isolated irregularities—such as a large or small or defective letter—were

rigidly reproduced; nothing was added, nothing was taken away.

Inside the sacred text there was naught to indicate the way in which it was traditionally recited, beyond the slight guidance afforded by the *matres lectionis* ׀, ״, ך. The reading of the text was taught orally, and thus was it handed down from generation to generation. It was—in the quaint language of the Talmud—*הלכה למשה מסיני*—“a Mosaic tradition received on Sinai.” The accents and the vowel system are an integral part of the Massorah. The Massorah is the magic key that at once opens the sealed letters of the sacred text, and casts them in the grip of fetters, so that not a jot or tittle shall pass away. Verses, words, and letters are counted, all variations and peculiarities are noted, and the number of times they occur. The middle words or letters of a book are recorded, and every phenomenon, redundancy or deficiency is rigidly preserved and reproduced.

Punctuation is governed by the length of each individual verse, and some explanation of the scheme involved in the main and sub-divisions of the text, may not be out of place, though it is impossible to deal exhaustively with the subject in these pages.

The manuscript scroll of the Torah is dissected only by variously prescribed blank spaces.

(a) Between the “Five Books”—*ספריים* (a blank space, the equivalent of four lines.)

(b) Between the paragraphs (a blank space on the line of the text).

There are 669 blank paragraph spaces:—

290 are open—**פתוחות** (the blank space occurring at the end of a line).

379 are closed—**סתומות** (the blank space occurring in the middle of a line).

The terms **פתוחה** and **סתומה** apply respectively to the dividing blank spaces, but the name is also given to the paragraphs so divided from the following ones.

(c) 5845 verses—**פסוקים**.

The manuscript unpunctuated scroll of the Law contains no space indicative of the division into verses. The space of "a hair's breadth" between each letter, and the equivalent in space of "a small letter" between each word, is adhered to throughout the text.

The massoretic text is written after this pattern, but symbols are introduced into the blank spaces, thus: **פ** or **ס**, depending upon it being **פתוחה**—open or **סתומה**—closed.

In the same fashion certain of these blank spaces are marked thus: **פ פ פ** or **ס ס ס** indicating 54 sections **פרשיות**. (The eleventh and twelfth **פרשיות** are not divided by space or symbol.)

There is a further general division of the whole Torah into 154 pericopes—**סדרים**, to regulate, probably, the reading of the Law in the synagogue in accordance with a three years' cycle instead of the annual cycle generally adopted at present. These divisions are not visible in the text, and are known only by massoretic rubrics.

The 5,845 verses are indicated by a small vertical line drawn under the accentuated letter of the last word.

The divisions of the other books of the Bible are less complex, and, for the student's purpose, the main facts may be set forth in a tabulated form:—

			No. of Sections. No. of Verses.	
			סדרים	פסוקים
Joshua	...	...	14	656
Judges	...	...	14	618
Samuel	...	...	34	1506
Kings	...	...	35	1534
Isaiah	...	...	26	1295
Jeremiah	...	...	31	1365
Ezekiel	...	...	29	1273
Twelve Minor Prophets			21	1050
Psalms (150 Psalms)	...	...	19	2527
Proverbs	...	...	8	915
Job	...	...	8	1070
Canticles	...	...	...	117
Ruth	...	...	...	85
Lamentations	...	...	...	154
Ecclesiastes	...	...	4	222
Esther	...	...	5	166
Daniel	...	...	7	357
Ezra (including Nehemiah)	...	...	10	688
Chronicles	...	...	25	1565

The foregoing figures are taken from the Massorah collected by Jacob ben Chayim.

The remark made above, regarding the divisions termed סדרים, relates also to these books of the Bible.