

**A SHORT HEBREW  
GRAMMAR  
WITHOUT POINTS**

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A Short Hebrew Grammar Without Points by Samuel Sharpe

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**SAMUEL SHARPE**

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A SHORT  
HEBREW GRAMMAR

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BY SAMUEL SHARPE,

*Author of "The History of Egypt."*

לחנך משל וסליצה  
דברי דבסאם וחיזום :  
Proverbs i. 6.



רבות לשונות בארץ בשמים אחת

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## P R E F A C E .

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HEBREW is a simple rude language, and one of the easiest for a beginner to read and understand in the narrative parts of the Bible, or indeed in any part when he has the translation open before him. But such is the variety of possible meanings which a word will sometimes bear that it is one of the most difficult languages for an experienced scholar to translate with certainty. It has no auxiliary verbs, such as those by which exactness is gained in English; and has but few inflexions, by which the same exactness is gained in Greek. Even when it was a living language it could not have enabled a speaker to express himself with the logical precision of our own language; and when the speakers reduced their words to writing, they made it yet more obscure by using fewer letters than we should think necessary, and often by the omission of all vowels.

This difficulty later editors of the Scriptures have endeavoured to remove by the introduction of the vowel points, or marks added to the letters to supply the necessary vowels. It is generally acknowledged that these points were not added until after A.D. 700, or shortly before A.D. 1000. About that time the grammatical study of the language

flourished among the Jews, and Grammars were written; the introduction of the points led to the need of Grammars suited to the pointed text.

The simplicity of the language, and the use of the points may be explained by examples of doubtful passages. Thus in Psalm xlii. 5, 6 (6, 7), פָּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי, *of his countenance. O my God*, may be read as פָּנֵי רֵאֲלֵהִי *of my countenance, and my God*. In Ps. lxxxi. 5 (6) שָׁמוֹ, in the Authorised Version *this he ordained, may be his name*. In Job xxxvii. 6 וַיֵּץ may be either *his strength, or be ye violent*. This uncertainty the Jewish scholars, about the year A.D. 900, undertook to remove by adding the vowel points, which further allowed them to read the scriptures aloud, with a better chance of being understood. But the Jews always scrupulously avoided adding the points to the sacred rolls used in the synagogues.

Against the use of the points it may be said that if we accept their guidance we may be sometimes misled by them. Nor do they give any real help to the thoughtful scholar; for after looking to the points we then have to consider whether they have been rightly placed. And further, if we rely upon them we shall certainly be overlooking some questions which are most important towards rightly understanding the language; namely, by what methods, or arrangement of the words, did the writers mean us to know the exact meaning of a word so insufficiently spelt; or were they in their minds so inexact as sometimes to think it of no importance which of several meanings the reader should give to it.

The Hebrew people were imaginative, poetic, eloquent, and fond of exaggeration; and also unscientific, and careless of accuracy. We, on the other hand, are more prosaic and

more exact; and we are apt to look for exactness where it is not to be found. The introduction of the vowel points into the text of the Bible gives a misleading appearance of modern Western accuracy to an ancient Asiatic book.

Our knowledge of the past we owe mainly to tradition. In the case of the Hebrew Scriptures that traditional knowledge has been preserved for us in the Greek translation of the Septuagint, in the Latin Vulgate, in the Jewish commentaries, in the vowel points, and in the more modern kindred languages, such as the Arabic. All these must be studied by those who would gain for themselves a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew language. But they are not necessary for a beginner. He may accept the knowledge derived from those sources as it is embodied for his use in our best Dictionaries and translations. But if he wishes to read the original writings he must read them as they were written without points.

The first scholar who after the revival of learning proposed to reject the vowel points, which the Jews had added to their scriptures, was Bulæus, who in 1658 published his *Methodus Hebraica* at Utrecht. He was followed by Masclef, who published his *Grammatica Hebraica, a Punctis aliisque inventis Massorethicis libera*, at Paris in 1716. His work raised much controversy; it was made known to English readers by Parkhurst, who added a grammar without points to his lexicon; and though many scholars have adopted Masclef's opinion of the little worth of the points, except as a commentary, and for the power of reading aloud, yet the best grammarians and lexicographers have naturally followed the Jews in using them, as they thereby explain the text and the commentary at the same time.

The following pages are founded upon Masclef's Grammar;



and also upon Gesenius's Grammar with the rejection of those parts which relate to the points. Though far from being all that is wanted, they may be useful to beginners, and also to those who, like the writer, think the Massoretic points should be looked at simply as a modern commentary, and who may think them, if used otherwise, rather a hindrance than a help towards gaining a true insight into the Hebrew mind as the writers display it in the Scriptures.

The student who rejects the points will not find himself at all troubled by their presence in books which retain them; except indeed that in some Lexicons words beginning with *ו* are divided into two classes; and accordingly there are two places in such a Lexicon where such a word must be looked for.

The few pages of Chaldee in the Bible, to which of course this Grammar is not fitted, are Ezra iv. 8-vi. 18; vii. 12-26; Daniel ii. 4-vii.; Jeremiah x. 11.

S. S.

32, HIGHBURY PLACE.  
August 20, 1876.

\*.\* A few short notes at the bottom of the page, and a larger one in p. 40, On the Syntax, have been added by a friend of the Publishers.

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