Hebrew Letters, Words and Roots Defined Within Their **Ancient Cultural Context**

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Hebrew Alphabet Chart

Table 5

Early				Middle Script	Late Script	Modern		
Script	Picture	Name	Sound			Script	Name	Sound
�ய	Head of an ox	al	**a**	ʞ	✕	α	aleph	**silent**
ᴸᴵ	Tent floorplan	bet	**b,bh**	ᑫ	ყ	β	beyt	**b,bh**
ᴸ	Foot	gam	**g**	ᐱ	λ	χ	gimel	**g**
ᴛ	Tent door	dal	**d**	ᐃ	ꓬ	δ	dalet	**d**
⚇	Arms raised	hey	**h,e**	ᴲ	ᴨ	ε	hey	**h**
Ɣ	Tent peg	waw	**w,o,u**	ᵮ	ꓒ	ф	vav	**v,o,u**
ᴄ	Mattock	zan	**z**	ᵾ	ꓜ	ζ	zayin	**z**
ᴤᴵ	Tent wall	hhets	**hh**	ᴴ	ᴨ	η	hhet	**hh**
⊗	Clay basket	thet	**th**	⊗	ᴑ	υ	tet	**t**
ᴗ	Closed hand	yud	**y,i**	ꓜ	ꓶ	ι	yad	**y**
ᴡ	Open palm	kaph	**k,kh**	ᵞ	ꓱ	Κ κ	kaph	**k,kh**
ᴜ	Shepherd staff	lam	**l**	ᴜ	ꓹ	λ	lamed	**l**
ᴧᴧ	Water	mah	**m**	ᵚ	ꓳ	Μ μ	Mem	**m**
ᐟ	Sprouting seed	nun	**n**	ᵴ	ꓹ	Ν ν	nun	**n**
⚷	Thorn	sin	**s**	⚷	ꓵ	ξ ω	samech, sin	**s**
⊙	Eye	ayin	**`**	ᴑ	ꓴ	ο	ayin	**silent**
⊃	Open mouth	pey	**p,ph**	ꓲ	⊃	Π π	pey	**ph**
ᴖᴧ	Man on side	tsad	**ts**	ꓤ	ꓝ	Ψ ψ	tsadey	**ts**
ᴗ	Horizon	quph	**q**	ꓒ	ꓑ	θ	quph	**q**
ᴤ	Head of a man	resh	**r**	ꓩ	ꓶ	ρ	resh	**r**
ᴸᴴ	2 front teeth	shin	**sh**	ᴡ	ꓻ	σ	shin	**sh**
┼	Crossed sticks	taw	**t**	✕	�	τ	tav	**t**
ᴕ	Rope	ghah	**gh**	ᴑ	ꓴ	γ	ayin	**silent**

Letter Characteristics
We usually associate two characteristics for each letter, a form and a sound, as in the first letter of our alphabet whose form is "A" and has the sound "a". The **Ancient Hebrew alphabet has four characteristics**: **form, sound, name and meaning.**

Form
The original letter is pictographic, meaning it represents a picture of something, such as the letter ⊃ representing a mouth. The original form is determined by examining the archeological record of ancient

Semitic inscriptions and other related scripts such as the South Arabian and Punic. The name of the letter will help to determine the original pictograph.

Each pictograph is associated with a single syllable of two consonants. This syllable is also the name of the letter. The name of the letter ⟨⟩ is "p*e*h" and is also the Hebrew word for "mouth". The name is determined by comparing the various names of this letter as used in Semitic languages as well as other non Semitic languages that have adopted the Semitic alphabet.

Meaning
The mnemonic meaning of a pictograph is the extended meanings related to the pictograph. These mnemonic meanings most often are related to the pictograph by their function rather than appearance. For example, the letter ⟨⟩ has the extended mnemonic meanings, speak, blow and open, functions of the mouth.

Sound
The first letter of the syllabic name provides a singular sound for the purpose of forming words and sentences. The phonetic value of the letter ⟨⟩ is therefore a "p". The original sound is determined by ***comparing the sound of the letter*** as used in other Semitic languages as well as non-Semitic languages that have adopted the Semitic alphabet.

Ancient Hebrew Pronunciation

The following rules will assist the reader with pronouncing the Hebrew words without relying on the nikkud (vowel pointings) as used in most lexicons and dictionaries.

Spirants and Stops

A spirant is a letter whose sound can be prolonged. Some examples of this from the English language are the v, z, f, and sh. A stop is a letter whose sound ends abruptly such as the b, p, d and t. A few of the Hebrew letters will have a different pronunciation depending on their position within the word. The letter ⟨⟩ will usually be pronounced as a stop (b) when at the beginning of the word and as a spirant (v) when it is anywhere else in the word. For example the word ⟨⟩ is pronounced "bar" while the word ⟨⟩ is pronounced "rav". Another letter that will change is the letter kaph - ⟨⟩. When at the beginning of a word it will be pronounced as a stop (k), otherwise it will be pronounced as a spirant (kh – pronounced like the ch in the name Bach). The only other letter that will change is the letter pey - ⟨⟩. When at the beginning of a word it will be a stop (p), otherwise it will be a spirant (ph).

Vowels

Four of the Hebrew letters double as consonants and vowels. These are the ⟨⟩ (al), ⟨⟩ (hey), ⟨⟩ (uau/waw) and the ⟨⟩ (yud). The al can be a glottal stop (silent pause) or the vowel sound "a". The **hey** is an **"h" as a consonant** or an **"e" as a vowel**. The **uau/waw** is a **"w" as a consonant** or an **"o" or "u" as a vowel**. The **yud** is a **"y" as a consonant** or an **"I" as a vowel**. The **uau/waw and the yud** are the two **most commonly used as vowels in Hebrew words**. When the waw appears at beginning of a syllable it will use the consonantal "w" sound. The same with the yud which will use the consonantal "y" when at beginning of a syllable.

Another type of vowel is the implied vowel sounds. This means that the **vowel is not written** but is **necessary in order to pronounce the word**. An example of this is the word ⟨⟩ (grain) which consists of the two consonant B and R and cannot be pronounced without a vowel between them.
In most cases the **implied vowel will be an "a" or an "e".** In this case the implied vowel is the "a" and the word ⟨⟩ is pronounced "BaR".

Syllables

There are **two types of syllables, open and closed**. A **_closed syllable_** will include a **_consonant-vowel-consonant combination_** while an **_open syllable_** will have a **_vowel-consonant combination_**. The **_vowel may be one of the four consonant/vowel letters_**, usually the yud (**I**) or the waw (**O or U**) or an implied vowel. In most cases the final syllable will be a closed syllable. The word †𐤉𐤍𐤋𐤃 **(covenant)** will have two syllables. The first is 𐤋, an open syllable pronounced "be", and the second is †𐤉𐤍, a closed syllable pronounced "riyt".

Generally a word with three consonants will be divided as Cv-CvC. A word with four consonants will be divided as Cv-Cv-CvC or CvC-CvC. When a word includes five consonants the breakdown is usually Cv-Cv-Cv-CvC or CvC-Cv-CvC.

If the word includes one of the four consonant/vowel letters, **_its position within the word will determine if it is used as a consonant or a vowel._** Generally, when the consonant/vowel is placed at the beginning of a syllable or the end of a closed syllable it will take on the consonantal sound. When it is in the middle of a closed syllable or the end of an open syllable it will take on the vowel sound.

Masoretic Vowels

The Hebrew text of the Bible was originally written with only the twenty two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. About one thousand years ago a group called the Masorites created a system of dots and dashes called "nikkud" and placed them above and below the consonants to represent the vowels. It was discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls that the four Hebrew letters, the al, hey, waw and yud, were used as vowels.
The Masorites removed these vowels (usually the waw and yud) and replaced them with the nikkud.

The Hebrew words in this [ancient Hebrew] lexicon have re-inserted the waw and yud wherever the nikkud pointings for the **"o", "u"** and **"i"** appear. This is to restore the spelling of Hebrew words based on the **_original vowels of Hebrew words_** rather than the nikkud.

Because the nikkud are of fairly recent origin and not part of the original Hebrew text they are not included in the _Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible_. In many cases the nikkud can be misleading causing one to rely more on them than on the consonants themselves for the meaning of the word.

All spoken sounds can be grouped into seven different categories. Table 10 below lists these categories and the letters that correspond to them.

Table 10

Category	Location	English	Hebrew
Labials	lip sounds	bfpvw	𐤌𐤅𐤐𐤁
Dentals	tooth sounds	dt	†𐤈𐤈𐤃
Gutturals	throat sounds	ghjkqxy	𐤉𐤒𐤊𐤇𐤏𐤄𐤀
Liquids	tounge sounds	lr	𐤓𐤋
Nasals	nose sounds	mn	𐤍𐤌
Fractives	whistle sounds	csz	𐤔𐤎𐤑𐤆𐤂
Vowels	**breath sounds**	**aeiou**	𐤉𐤅𐤏𐤄𐤀

Transliterations

Some words in the Lexicon are **transliterated rather than translated** such as the names of unknown minerals, plants and animals, instruments and all weights and measures. **The method for transliterating Hebrew letters is defined in Table 12.**

Table 12

Hebrew	English	Pronunciation
	a **e**	f<u>a</u>th<u>e</u>r <u>e</u>gg
	b v	<u>b</u>at <u>v</u>ine
	g	<u>g</u>ood
	d	<u>d</u>og
	h	<u>h</u>igh
	w **o** u	<u>w</u>ater <u>o</u>ld t<u>u</u>ne
	z	<u>z</u>ebra
	hh	Ba<u>ch</u>
	th	ba<u>th</u>
	y **i**	<u>y</u>ellow fl<u>y</u>
	k kh	<u>k</u>ite Ba<u>ch</u>
	l	<u>l</u>ine
	m	<u>m</u>an
	n	<u>n</u>ame
	s	<u>s</u>ign
	ah	*silent*
	p ph	<u>p</u>an <u>ph</u>one
	ts	po<u>ts</u>
	q	<u>k</u>ite
	r	<u>r</u>ain
	sh	<u>sh</u>out
	t	<u>t</u>ime
	gh	ri<u>ng</u>