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Learning to Read Biblical Hebrew

An Introduction to the Language of the Old Testament

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A few thoughts at the beginning

So you want to set off on an exciting journey to learn the Hebrew script? You will not regret your decision! Even the shapes of the different letters are very attractive.

However, this is probably not the only reason for your interest in the Hebrew language. You believe that the Bible is a very exciting book, you have certainly read a lot of it and now you want to get an idea of how the Old Testament was originally written too. If the Bible, God's eternal and living word, is so attractive for you, that is a good motive for your study!

The object of this book is to teach you to read the Hebrew alphabet step by step. You will practise the letters in conjunction with names, words and phrases that are taken directly from the Old Testament. The more familiar you are with it, the easier it will be to recognise things!

The goal here is not for you to be able to "speak Hebrew", but to familiarise yourself with the script to such an extent that the next step, the one involving a proper Hebrew text book, will be fairly easy. There are some suggestions for this at the end of the book. The goal of the book is not to enable you to write the letters either. Of course, you can try to write these interesting signs, but in real life you will hardly ever need to do that.

Strictly speaking, as there are so many good English Bible versions and excellent resources on the original languages, there is no need to study Hebrew or Greek in order to understand the message of the Bible. And yet, when studying Hebrew and the Old Testament, you will get a better grasp of your Bible and that is always beneficial. It should certainly benefit others too! Just think of how great a need there is for men and women to commit themselves to Bible translation! What a challenge – is that perhaps relevant for you too?

By studying Hebrew, you will not become a better Christian. It can help you, though, to get more familiar with the major topic of the Bible which is – even in the Old Testament – the Lord Jesus Christ. In case you want to show off by saying that you are doing such exotic things like Hebrew, please put the book down immediately. That will not help anybody!

Some practical information

This is a work book, which means that you are expected to write your answers into this book. If you use a pencil, others might be able to use the book after you. Of course, you will need to have a Bible. I would recommend one that is not too free in its translation,

but one that follows the original text fairly closely. The New King James Version has been used throughout this text book.

Most of what is presented on the following pages has been deliberately simplified. You need to be encouraged and make quick progress. So, if you are an expert already, please bear with me if the presentation is less detailed than you would expect from a "proper" text book. There will always be something more for you to examine for yourself.

You will also have to be prepared for things that look "irregular" to you, particularly if you have already studied other languages. Try to relax! Do not attempt to grasp every detail or reduce everything to a general rule. Be open and accept things as they are. Languages are fascinating and dynamic!

You will need even more patience when it comes to proper names in the Bible. In this course, I have chosen the spelling variants used in the New King James Version. Depending on the Bible version you have, there may be very different ways of spelling names – for various reasons. For example: *Job*, *Elijah* and *Elisha* are *Hiob*, *Elia* and *Elisa* in German Bibles; *Obadiah* and *Haggai* are *Abdias* and *Aggée* in French Bibles; and *Nebuchadnezzar* is *Nabucodonosor* in Spanish! Just be prepared to find quite a lot of variations in spelling and pronunciation.

Hebrew makes no distinction between capital and small letters. You will be able to read them once you reach the end of this book! By then, you will have read some proper nouns and other words that you have never encountered before and you will have grasped the basics of how Hebrew grammar works. All this will help you understand Biblical names and discover how things fit together. On the last pages, you will also learn about other benefits of knowing the Hebrew alphabet.

Do not go too fast. Revise frequently. Go back through the book and check things. Be grateful for the progress that you have made.

When writing these pages, I once again felt a longing to delve much more deeply into the Hebrew language. I was unfortunately too old when I first started to study it. That is why I did not get as far as I wanted to. However, I wish to pass on to you what I have learned. You are probably still young, so this book can stimulate you to continue your Hebrew studies. I wonder whether I will succeed in inspiring you.

I trust you will enjoy tackling the fascinating Hebrew script – and the part of the Bible where you find it.

The names of the Hebrew consonants and vowels have been taken from the following book: "A Modern Introduction to Biblical Hebrew" by John F.A. Sawyer.

Chapter 1

Let us start right at the beginning – with Adam. Not only does he appear at the very start of the Bible, but his name also starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So here is your first word: *Adam*.



Perhaps you already know something about the letters that are used in the New Testament. In Greek, this name looks like this: 'Αδάμ.

However, when it comes to the Hebrew letters, very little probably makes much sense to you. What you see, is three "big" letters and some "minor details" underneath. What does it all mean? If we are going to get to grips with this, we really have to start at the very beginning. When reading Hebrew, we have to start "at the end", because we read Hebrew from right to left! That means that a Hebrew Bible is opened with the spine on the right.

What are the letters that correspond to the four letters in the English word *Adam*? At first glance, it does not seem to be that simple – but it makes everything exciting!

Only consonants are normally written in Hebrew, for example, d, g, k, l, n and so on. The vowels, such as a, e, i are added as you read. That means, of course, that you must understand what you are reading in order to be able to add the right vowels. How does that

work? Maybe an example taken from the English language can help:

nn sss r tn mls

I am pretty sure that you have *not* worked out that this is meant to represent "nine asses or ten mules". However, it is not as depressing as that, if you look at the following example:

n th bgnnng Gd crtd th hvns nd th rth

This time, without making too much effort, you have been able to read the first sentence of the Bible – with no vowels in it!

A Hebrew word, then, always has a basic structure consisting of consonants (very often three) and they represent the basic meaning of the word – even without the vowels.

It is a comforting fact, however, that common Hebrew Bibles that you can buy in a bookshop show both consonants *and* vowels. (In contrast, a normal Hebrew newspaper in modern Israel does *not* show the vowels!)

But let us return to the beginning and our first word

אָדָם

The three letters that you can see are the actual consonants; and the signs or points underneath are the vowels and they are pronounced

after the consonants to which they are attached. No doubt, you have already recognised that the two vowel points correspond to /a/¹. You will have to think hard to find out which *three* consonants should appear in *Adam*. In English, there are definitely only two: /d/ and /m/.

It is normal in Hebrew that not every letter (that means: every consonant) is pronounced. (We will simply ignore the fact that this letter was originally pronounced as a glottal stop.) To express things another way: there are consonants that function as "carriers" for a vowel and these consonants are not pronounced. This is the case here with the first letter of the word, the letter א – do not forget that we have to read from right to left!

This beautifully shaped sign is typical of the Hebrew script. Its name is **Aleph**, and it is – as mentioned above – the very first letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Although this letter is in the same position as the letter A in our English alphabet (or the letter Alpha α in the Greek alphabet), it is only pronounced /a/ when the vowel points representing /a/ are written below it. Do you understand? So, if a different vowel point is put below Aleph, only this vowel is pronounced, as the Aleph itself remains silent.

¹ As a rule, the pronunciation of a word will be written between two slashes. (However, I do not follow the International Phonetic Association, but I use letters that should be more practical for you.)

By the way:

Each language has its own fascinating particularities and it is best to simply accept them as they are. Even your own native language is far from being "logical"! (But it is one of God's many gifts to you 😊.)

Let us turn to the second letter. It is called **Daleth**. This is what it looks like: ד, and it is pronounced /d/. Daleth may even have a dot within it ד̣, but that does not change its pronunciation. You will find the same vowel point for /a/ as below Aleph: א̣. (This vowel point is called: **Qames**.) The combination of Daleth and Qames gives us the sounds /da/.

The last letter of the word is a **Mem** and must be pronounced /m/.

Do you realise that you have just read your first Hebrew word?

REVISION

To be on the safe side, we will quickly summarise what we have just learned:

→ Hebrew is read from right to left.

→ All the letters are actually consonants. (There are no pure vowels in the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.)

→ However, Hebrew Bibles in print do have vowel points connected to the consonants. They are placed below or above letters and are spoken *after* the consonant that they belong to. (In this book, by the way, punctuation marks, such as commas, full stops, colons etc. are placed *beside* a character and are nothing more than punctuation marks; they are not vowel points.)

→ א is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and its name is Aleph. Without a vowel, it is silent; we only pronounce the vowel point below it.

→ The vowel point for /a/ is אַ and it is called Qames. Therefore אַ is simply pronounced /a/.

→ The combination of דַ (Daleth plus the vowel point for /a/) will therefore be pronounced /da/. Daleth here has a dot inside it: דַ is pronounced in the same way.

→ The last character in the word is Mem מַ, which is pronounced as /m/.

You have now learned three consonants and one vowel point and you can read the name of the first man in Hebrew!

Now for an exercise, as you have to get used to what Hebrew script looks like. Please find the word *Adam* in the following Hebrew sentence and mark it.

זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם
בְּיוֹם בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בְּדִמּוּת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ

After looking at it carefully, I hope you realised that the word actually occurs twice. You will find this sentence in Genesis 5:1.

By the way:

Someone who wants to believe the Bible, but thinks that God might have created everything through evolution is playing with fire. There is no place for Adam, if that is your point of view. It does not seem to make any sense either because the Lord Jesus says in Mark 10:6 "But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female'." And the same is true of the last verse of Jesus' genealogy in Luke 3 – and the times that Paul mentions Adam in his letters! People who question the historicity of the first pages of the Bible are questioning its whole content.

ANSWER

The two places where the word *Adam* occurs are shaded in grey.

זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם
בְּיוֹם בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בְּדִמּוּת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ

After this initial success, you will certainly want to continue with chapter 2 immediately.

Chapter 2

We have just looked at the first man, אָדָם. How did God make him? In Genesis 2:7, you can read that He took "the dust of the ground". And that is why אָדָם also means "from the ground". In Hebrew, the connection is very clear, as *ground* is *adamah*. The basic meaning of the three consonants is actually *red* – like reddish soil.

In the book of Genesis, we read about a man who wanted to obtain something red to eat, using any means possible, even if it involved selling his birthright. Do you remember his name? Yes, it was Esau, and he was even given another name because of that. You can read about him in Genesis 25:30.

A NEW LETTER

If you look carefully at his extra name *Edom*

אֶדוֹם

you will discover something interesting: three of the letters in it are identical to the ones in *Adam*. The vowel point underneath Aleph represents a vowel like the one in the English word *wet*.

In its basic form, this vowel has only three dots; it is called **Seghol**, and, when linked to Aleph, it looks like this: אֶ. If there are two

more dots next to the three basic ones נ, the pronunciation is weaker. To simplify matters, we can say that both נ and נ are pronounced like the /e/ in *wet*.

A new letter has crept in between Daleth and Mem. Its name is **Waw** and this is its basic form: ו.

This is a very tricky character! When used as a consonant it is pronounced like the first sound in *very*: /v/.

However, it can also be combined with a vowel point and then it is pronounced as a vowel!

In our new word אֶוֹם, there is a dot on top of Waw and the whole thing is then pronounced /o/.² In this case, Waw is, like Aleph, only the "carrier" of the vowel sound.

The letter Waw has one more peculiarity too: when it looks like this: וּ, it is pronounced /u/!

All this might sound rather confusing and does perhaps not fit your idea of how a letter is supposed to have any plain and "logical" pronunciation, at least to some degree. The best thing to do is simply be prepared for quite a few more surprises when it comes to the Hebrew alphabet!

² Later we will learn that this dot on its own, when placed at the top left of the consonant letter, is also pronounced /o/; for example וּ, which is pronounced /do/.

Let us quickly summarise things:

- Waw on its own ו is a consonant as in *very*: /v/.
- Waw with a dot on top, as in אִרְוֹם, is pronounced /o/.
- Waw with a dot in the middle ו, is pronounced /u/.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

The letter Waw appears quite often in the Hebrew Bible, especially at the beginning of a new sentence when it looks like this: וְ. In some English Bible versions, this is literally translated by *and*. You might have wondered why, for example in the King James Version, many sentences in the Old Testament start with that little word *and* – now you know!

This וְ merges with the following word and does not, as in English, stand alone. Depending on its context, it also takes other vowel points (even וּ), but its meaning remains the same.

A NEW LETTER

There is one more letter that is pronounced /v/ and it is called **Beth**. This takes us back to the Hebrew alphabet.

Before we go any further: by now you should have realised where the English word *alphabet* comes from. It is a borrowed Greek word, because, in Greek, the first letters of the alphabet are *alpha* and *beta*. However, these names originally go back to the Hebrew names of the letters *Aleph* and *Beth*.

So, **Beth** is the second letter in the alphabet after א – and this is what it looks like: ב. Please note its shape, especially the bottom right part, because there is another letter which does not have this "angle".

We have said that Beth is pronounced /v/, but there are cases where it becomes /b/ when we pronounce the word in English. You will find an example of this below.

If Beth has a dot in the middle (בּ), it is always pronounced /b/ in Hebrew. (This shows you that extra small signs do not always represent vowels. The dot in the middle of a letter does occur quite often, although it does not always have the same function.)

We will now combine the two first letters of the Hebrew alphabet and put an /a/ (Qames) underneath Aleph – which then gives us a very important word:

אָ

It means *father* and is pronounced /av/. Do you think you can find it in the following Hebrew sentence?

אֲדֹנִי שָׁאַל אֶת־עַבְדּוֹ לֵאמֹר הֲיֹשְׁלָכֶם אָב אִו־אָח

Here, Joseph is quoted, asking whether his brothers still have their father or another brother (Genesis 44:19).

A NEW LETTER

Now look at the following name, also taken from the book of Genesis:

אֲבֵרָם

You should by now be familiar with three of the consonants and even one of the vowel points. What is new is the third letter in the word (keep in mind, we are reading from the right!), which is ר. Its name is **Resh** and it is pronounced /r/.

Here again, you will have to look at its shape carefully. The upper right corner is rounded and that distinguishes it from ד, the Daleth that you already know. Please take note of these very important details.

Now for the two vowel signs. The dash underneath Aleph also represents /a/, but its pronunciation is usually shorter than Qames. The name of this Hebrew vowel point is **Pathah**.

When we looked at the Hebrew equivalent for *and*, we saw ׃. Here again we find this "colon", this time under Beth. It is a weak /e/ (or rather /ə/) as in *ago* and its Hebrew name is **Shwa**. (When it is combined with Seghol ׃, Qames ׃ or Pathah ׃, it weakens the pronunciation of these vowels.)

By now you will certainly realise that the Hebrew vowel system is quite tricky. However, as your objective is to be able to read Hebrew (and not write it), just relax and enjoy it all! Later on, you will find a chart detailing the pronunciation of each character, but for the time being you will have to make do with this somewhat simplified description.

Very often, Shwa is not pronounced at all, but it must be written when two consonants are next to each other with no vowel between them, as in the word אֶבְרָם.

You should have now recognised the patriarch Abraham's original name *Abram* (pronounced /avram/), which means "exalted father".

The Bible reference where *Abram* becomes *Abraham* (in English, we use /b/ in both cases) is Genesis 17:5. Please find the two different words in the following sentence and mark them. You will find the answer at the end of this chapter.

וְלֹא־יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת־שְׁמֶךְ אֲבֹרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמֶךְ אֲבֹרָהֶם

This chapter contained quite a lot of new material! To help you remember it, here is a summary of the consonants and vowel points, including the ones from chapter 1.

REVISION

→ The consonants

א Aleph – is only a "carrier" of vowels without having a distinct sound.

ב Beth – pronounced /v/ (or, in names such as Abraham, /b/). With a dot in the middle בּ, it is always /b/.

ד or דּ: Daleth – pronounced /d/

ו Waw – pronounced /v/, but with a dot on top וּ /o/; with a dot in the middle וּ /u/

מ Mem – pronounced /m/. Please note that this variant of the letter only stands at the end of a word! Its "normal" shape is מ.

ר Resh – pronounced /r/

→ The vowel points

As they do not stand on their own, you will find them here together with a Beth.

בָּ בַּ /ba/: Qames (long /a/)

בֶּ בֵּ /ba/: Pathah (short /a/)

בֶּ בֵּ /be/ like in *wet*: Seghol

בְּ /be/ (weak, like in *ago*) – or at times completely silent when
between two consonants

→ The ב at the beginning of a word and with a vowel point often
(but not always!) represents *and* in English.

→ Take care to distinguish between Resh ר and Daleth ד.

By the way:

When the Lord Jesus said: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass
away than for one tittle of the law to fail" (Luke 16:17), He was
probably referring to the little detail that makes a distinction be-
tween, for example, Resh ר and Daleth ד.

ANSWER

In this sentence, you had to find the Hebrew word for *father*:

אֲדֹנִי שָׁאֵל אֶת־עַבְדּוֹ לֵאמֹר הֲיִשְׁלָכֶם אֶב אֲדֹאֵחַ

And here is where *Abram* and *Abraham* are in the Hebrew Bible:

וְלֹא־יָקָרָא עוֹד אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמוֹ אַבְרָהָם

I am sure you coped without any problems. If you think there is something in the last word אַכְרֵיהֶם that has not been explained yet, why not go to chapter 3 straightaway?

Chapter 3

Here you can see how much you remember from the first two chapters. Please write the relevant English words.

אָדָם	-
אָב	-
אָרום	-
אָבֶרם	-

At the end of the previous chapter, you saw the long form of the Name *Abraham*: אַבְרָהָם. No doubt you recognised the new letter in the word – and its pronunciation.

A NEW LETTER

The letter **He** (in the alphabet, it follows Daleth), has this shape: ה and is normally pronounced /h/. (At the end of a word, it usually remains silent. If it still needs to be pronounced as /h/, it is written with a dot in the middle: הֶ.) Please note that the line on the left does not continue to the top corner! This makes the letter different from another one that you will learn soon.

When the letter He is placed before a noun, it assumes the grammatical function of the definite article (in English *the*). Fortunately, in Hebrew there is no need here to distinguish gender as in many other languages. Nor is there an indefinite article (in English *a/an*).

Of course, He must be given a vowel point to ensure that it is pronounced, for example הֵּ. Depending on the context, other vowels may be used. What is so special about this definite article is that it is not, as in English, a word on its own, but it is combined with the following noun (like Waw, mentioned in chapter 2, meaning *and*).

Now have a look at this word: הָאָדָם. If you combine all you have learned so far, you should be able to pronounce it /haadam/. Literally, it means "the Adam". As the definite article is not used here in English (in contrast to French (*l'homme*) or German (*der Mensch*), you will only find "man" in your English Bible.

Exercise A

You will find an example of this in Genesis 2:7. Please mark "(the) man".

וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לַנֶּפֶשׁ הַיָּה

Before we look at the new letter that is very similar to He, here is another exercise. As you only know very few letters (though you already know a third of the Hebrew alphabet!), the examples presented here are somewhat unusual. However, they really are names that occur in the Bible. If you want, you can look at the summary at the end of chapter 2 before doing the exercise.

Exercise B

Draw lines to link up with the matching English words:

מוֹאָב	1. Mara (Ruth 1:20)
מֶרָא	2. Arvad (Ezekiel 27:11)
וְהַרְבֵּה	3. Moab (Genesis 19:37)
מֶרַב	4. Merab (1 Samuel 14:49)
מֶרֶב	5. Hadad (Genesis 36:35)
אַרְבֹּד	6. Rabbah (Joshua 15:60)

Here are a few notes to help you:

- You will have definitely recognised מוֹאָב as *Moab* and you remember the shape of Mem at the end of a word ם. It has its "normal" shape here. (It can also occur with a dot in the middle םִ.)

- Do you remember what you learned about Beth? It is sometimes pronounced /b/ and sometimes /v/!
- Naomi gave herself the name **נָמִי** (which means *bitter*). You might think that Aleph at the end is pointless. However, please note, that our starting point is the Hebrew form of the name, and in Hebrew, it is spelled with Aleph at the end!
- The word **וְהָרַבָּה** perhaps made you sweat. You ought to know all the letters and vowel points. However, how do you analyse this word? This is proof of how important it is to find the "root" of the word, as other parts seem to merge with it.
- You should remember וְ at the beginning of a word. We saw it in chapter 2 and translated it by *and*. What follows next is הָ and you should even be familiar with this by now: it is the definite article, which is placed in front of a proper name here. All the rest should be clear. The whole word is literally "and the Rabbah".
- In the word **מִיָּבֵנִי** a new vowel point crept in. But you certainly interpreted the two dots underneath the Mem as representing /e/ as in the English word *grey*. The name of this vowel point is **Sere**.
- **אֶרְוֹד** was perhaps the easiest word to read: *Arvad*. The Shwa between the consonants Resh and Waw remains silent.

A NEW LETTER

We now come to the new letter that we said was very similar to He ה and this is the reason why we need to carefully distinguish the two.

Its name is **Heth**, and its vertical line on the left touches the top line: ח. It is pronounced like the /ch/ sound in *Loch* or in the German word *Bach*. As its pronunciation does not differ that much from He (they are both gutturals!), Heth is often pronounced as /h/ too. Therefore an /h/ in a name does not show you automatically whether there is a He or a Heth in the Hebrew name.

Noah's second son, for example, חָם was originally pronounced /cham/, although we normally write *Ham*.

Here is another example: in Exodus 17:10, Moses, Aaron "and Hur" חֹרִי are on top of the mountain, praying for their people in battle. You can see that the Hebrew pronunciation is /chur/.

A NEW WORD

In chapter 2, you saw the Hebrew form of Joseph's question (Genesis 44:19), when he asked whether his brothers still had their father or even had another brother. The word for *brother* is the last

one in the sentence and it is pronounced /ach/. This is what it looks like again:

אָח

Exercise C

Draw lines to link up with the translations.

(and) *Aharah* (1 Chronicles 8:1)

חֲרָחֹר

(and) *Habor* (1 Chronicles 5:26)

וְאַחֲרָה

Harhur (Ezra 2:51)

רָחֵל

Rachel (Genesis 29:6)

וְחָבוֹר

A NEW LETTER

Once again, we are confronted by a new letter! However, that was not a problem for you, as you discovered the ל pronounced /l/ in *Rachel*. The name of the letter is **Lamedh**, and it also occurs with a dot in the middle לְ with no change in pronunciation. A striking feature of this letter is that it is the only one in the alphabet that protrudes above all the other ones. Do you not think that most of them look as if they could fit into an imaginary square? (This is the reason why the Hebrew alphabet is also called square or block script.)

Exercise D

Can you find the name of Jacob's first wife in the following sentence?

וַיְהִי בִבְקָר וַחֲנָה-הוּא לְאָה

If you are not too sure, read Genesis 29:25.

Exercise E

What is the name of the King who wrote down his wisdom in Proverbs 31? He introduces himself in verse 1 as:

לְמוֹאֵל

Exercise F

One of Shem's sons was *Lud*. Please mark his name in the following sentence (1 Chronicles 1:17).

בְּנֵי שֵׁם עִלָּם וְאַשּׁוּר וְאַרְפַּכְשָׁד וְלֹד וְאַרְם וְעֹז

Here again, you will find Waw in front of the name, as in all the other names in the list. However, as we stated earlier, you can see that different vowel points are attached to it.

Exercise G

What is the name of the place where Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, was staying?

לוֹ דָּבָר

You will find the answer in 2 Samuel 9:4+5.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

The letter Lamedh has an important grammatical function. You already know that Waw, which precedes a noun and has a vowel point, means *and*. In this chapter, you have learned that He with a vowel point represents the definite article. In the same manner, Lamedh can be placed in front of a noun or a name and it then means *to* or *for*. It may also simply indicate the dative case (answering the question "to/for whom"), as, for example, in Genesis 3:21:

לְאָדָם

For whom did God make tunics of skin? "(for) Adam (and his wife)"

And here, Jacob explains *to* Rachel that he is one of her relatives (Genesis 29:12):

לְרַחֵל

REVISION

Let us list all the letters that we have seen so far in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. Revision is very important and it will save you from having to keep thumbing through the book.

1	א	Aleph	<i>"carries" a vowel</i>
2	ב ב	Beth	/v/ – ב always /b/
4	ד ד	Daleth	/d/, to be distinguished from ד!
5	ה ה	He	/h/ – it is often not pronounced
6	ו	Waw	/v/ – ו /o/, ו /u/
8	ח	Heth	/ch/ (as in <i>Loch</i>) or /h/. Make sure you distinguish it from ח!
12	ל ל	Lamedh	/l/
13	מ מ	Mem	/m/ – final position: ם
20	ר	Resh	/r/ – not to be confused with ד!

Here are all the vowel points that we have seen so far in combination with Aleph:

אִ אִ	/a/ (long)	Qames
אְ אְ	/a/ (short)	Pathah
אֵ	/e/ as in <i>grey</i>	Sere
אֶ אֶ	/e/ as in <i>wet</i>	Seghol
אִּ	/e/ (weak!) or not pronounced	Shwa

→ The definite article is ה (He) plus a vowel point, placed in front of the noun and merging with it.

→ Lamedh with a vowel point in front of and merging with a noun or name expresses the dative case and is translated by *to* or *for*.

→ It is important to be able to recognise these small word parts when analysing a word in order to discover its root. If you want to find a noun in a dictionary, you will have to ignore the definite article, Waw or Lamedh in front of it.

→ In addition to the word for *father* אב /av/, you now know the word for *brother*: אח /ach/.

→ If אב־אח־א means "father or brother" you know one more word: אוֹ for *or*. Its pronunciation is simply /o/. Aleph only serves as a vowel "carrier" for the ו. Here, the word is linked to the following noun by a dash. This results in the two words being pronounced as one sound group. The name of this kind of hyphen is **Maqqeph**.

ANSWERS

Exercise A

The word that is shaded represents "(the) man".

וְהָיָה הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

Exercise B:

3 מִזְאָב	5 הָרֹד
1 מִרְא	4 מִרְב
6 וְהִרְבָּה	2 אֲרֹד

Exercise C:

(and) <i>Aharah</i> (1 Chronicles 8:1)	וְאַחֲרָח
(and) <i>Habor</i> (1 Chronicles 5:26)	וְחָבוֹר
<i>Harhur</i> (Ezra 2:51)	חֲרָחוֹר
<i>Rachel</i> (Genesis 29:6)	רָחֵל

Exercise D:

The shaded word is *Leah*:

וַיְהִי בִבְקָר וַתֵּנֶה הוּא לְאָה

Exercise E:

The wise king's name in Proverbs 31 is *Lemuel*.

Exercise F:

What is shaded here is the name of *Lud* preceded by *and*.

בְּנֵי שֵׁם עֵילָם וְאַשּׁוּר וְאַרְפַּכְשָׁד וְלֹד וְאַרְם וְעוּז

Exercise G:

Mephibosheth is brought from *Lo Debar*.

Chapter 4

In this chapter, you will first learn two more important letters plus another vowel point. Then you will have another opportunity to practise what you have learned so far on some more Old Testament names.

A NEW LETTER

We will now fill the gap at position three in the alphabet by learning the letter **Gimel**. It is always pronounced /g/. It either looks like this: ג or this: גּ, with no difference in pronunciation.

If we combine Gimel with its neighbour in the alphabet, we get the name of the seventh son of Jacob:

גִּד

No translation needed!

You can find the names of *Gog* and *Magog* in the book of Ezekiel (38:2).

Here they are in Hebrew:

גִּיגִּוּג

What is the name of the place in Genesis 26:6 where Isaac lived?

גֵּרָר

It was *Gerar*. If you look at the whole sentence in Genesis 26:6, you will find that there is something in front of the name:

וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק בְּגֵרָר

This ב is a "prefix" that is used very often. It expresses proximity and is translated by *in* here in English.

You already know Waw meaning *and*, He as the definite article and Lamedh expressing the dative case. Here, Beth is placed in front of a noun and merges with it. Of course, it also needs a vowel point.

To illustrate this, we might write *inGerar* in English. (By the way, did you notice that there is no longer a dot in the middle of Gimel? This kind of change happens very often. However, I think we said that we would simply accept these things.)

The dot *inside* Beth, as you already know, shows how we need to pronounce this consonant. The dot *underneath* Beth must, of course, be a vowel point, because otherwise the transition to /g/ would be very hard to pronounce.

This dot stands for the vowel /i/ and its name is **Hireq**.

It is important to be meticulous when it comes to these "small" signs. Are they *inside*, *below* or *above* a letter? This is extremely important for pronunciation and meaning.

Here is an example of how Gimel /g/ and Hireq /i/ go together. Can you read the name?

גִּלְגָּל

It is the name of the first camp of the Israelites after they crossed the river Jordan. You can find it in Joshua 4:19. When it says that they camped "in Gilgal", we might again expect Beth in front of the name. Correct, here it is:

בִּגְלָל

Hopefully you are getting used to the many changes that the vowels often undergo, because now, there is no /i/ but /a/! However, the consonants remain consistent.

A NEW LETTER

A letter that is relatively similar to Gimel ג is the letter **Nun נ**. As you can see, the only difference is the shape at the bottom right corner. Here again, it is important to be very precise. The letter is pronounced /n/. Nun too may have a dot in the middle נ, but this does not change its pronunciation.

You certainly remember that the letter Mem מ has a variant ם that is used when the letter occurs at the end of a word. The same is true of Nun: it looks different in final position: ן. You must make a distinction between Nun and Waw ו, as the latter does not extend below the line.

Let us now have a look at an example where a "normal" Nun, a final Nun and a Waw (here as a vowel) occur together: Can you read this word?

נִין

It is *Nun*, Joshua's father. That is why Joshua is often called "the son of Nun", for example in Exodus 33:11. This is what it looks like in Hebrew:

בֶּן־נִין

Because the name *Benjamin* means ("Son of the Right Hand") or *Ben-Oni* ("Son of My Sorrow"), you will get some idea of the meaning of the consonants בֶּן. They mean *son*. You will often find the vowel /i/ in combination with a proper name. The word in its isolated form is pronounced /ben/ and is written

בֶּן

Besides the words for *father* אב and *brother* אח you have now learned a third family relation term: בן for *son*.

As we mentioned earlier, you will now have an opportunity to practise. However, we will first sum up the new things that you have learned in this chapter.

REVISION

- The sound /g/ corresponds to ג or ג. It is called Gimel.
- At the beginning of a word, ג (provided with a vowel point) expresses proximity and is translated as *in*, for example.
- A dot *underneath* a letter stands for the vowel /i/. It is called Hiriq.
- The letter Nun נ or נ is pronounced /n/ and has to be distinguished from Gimel ג. In its final position, the vertical line is longer: ן.
- The word for *son* is /ben/: בן.

Here is an extended list of the summary that we had in chapter 3 to help you complete the following exercise.

→ Consonants

1	א	Aleph	"carries" a vowel
2	ב	Beth	/v/ or /b/. ב always /b/
3	ג	Gimel	/g/
4	ד	Daleth	/d/ – to be distinguished from ד!
5	ה	He	/h/ – often not pronounced
6	ו	Waw	/v/ – ו /o/, ו /u/
8	ח	Heth	/ch/ as in <i>Loch</i> or /h/. Distinct from ח!
12	ל	Lamedh	/l/
13	מ	Mem	/m/ – final position: ם
14	נ	Nun	/n/ – distinct from נ! Final position: ן
20	ר	Resh	/r/ – not to be confused with ר!

→ All the vowels we have had so far (in simplified form)

א	א	/a/ (long)	Qames
א	א	/a/ (short)	Pathah
א		/e/ as in <i>grey</i>	Sere
א		/i/	Hireq
א	א	/e/ as in <i>wet</i>	Seghol
א		/e/ (weak, as in <i>ago</i> !) or silent	Shwa
ו		/o/	
ו		/u/	

And now for the exercises.

Exercise A

1. You will find the word *Lebanon* in 1 Kings 7:2. When looking for it, please note the definite article in front of the word.

וַיִּבֶן אֶת־בֵּית יְעַר הַלְבָּנוֹן

2. One of Aaron's sons was *Nadab*. Please find his name in the following verse (Numbers 3:2):

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אֶלְעָזָר וְאִיתָמָר

Exercise B

Please draw lines from the following names to their corresponding English forms:

לָבָן	Nabal
אֹדֶר	David
נֹדֶד	Mahlon
נָבֶל	Laban
אַבְנֵר	Abner
נֹדֶד	Nod
מִזְלֹן	Ur
אַבְנֵר	Amon

Exercise C

You now have to find out, without any extra help, what the English equivalents are.

- | | | |
|---|------------|---|
| 1 | הַנָּאֵל | - |
| 2 | רָחֵב | - |
| 3 | נַחֻם | - |
| 4 | אֲחִיד | - |
| 5 | הַמֶּן | - |
| 6 | בְּרַבְלָה | - |

ANSWERS

Exercise A1:

וַיֵּבֶן אֶת־בֵּית יַעַר הַלְבָּנוֹן

Exercise A2:

וַאֲלֵה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־אֶהֱרָן הַכֹּהֵן נֹד וַאֲבִיהוּא אֶלְעָזָר וַאֲיִתְמָר

Exercise B:

לָבָן	Laban
אֹר	Ur
נֹד	Nod

נָבָל	Nabal
אֲמוֹן	Amon
דָּוִד	David
מַחֲלֹן	Mahlon
אַבְנֵר	Abner

Exercise C.

1. Daniel – 2. Rahab (the harlot in Jericho – was that perhaps a little more challenging?) – 3. Nahum (one of the Minor Prophets) – 4. Ehud (one of the judges in Israel) – 5. Haman (the man who persecuted the Jews in the book of Esther) – 6. "at Riblah" – Did you manage that one? This place name, as found in 2 Kings 25:21, is definitely not very well-known; you also needed to recognise that Beth in front expresses location.

Did you know that you have already learned half the Hebrew alphabet plus most of the vowels? Take a short break and then continue with the next chapter!

Chapter 5

After having completed the exercises at the end of the last chapter, you will certainly be prepared for the second half of the alphabet.

A NEW LETTER

You have already met the two names of the youngest son of Jacob. His mother first called him *Ben-Oni* ("Son of My Sorrow"; Genesis 35:18):

בֶּן-אוֹנִי

His father, however, called him *Benjamin*, which means "Son of the Right Hand":

בְּנִימִן

In both words, you see a new letter, which is also the smallest one in the whole Hebrew alphabet. Its name is **Yodh**, it is pronounced /y/ as in *yes* and it has this shape: י. When Jesus Christ says in Matthew 5:18 that one *jot* will by no means pass from the law, he is referring to this small letter Yodh.

To say that Yodh י is pronounced /y/ is only part of the story, as you may have already noticed. It is only pronounced /y/ when it is a consonant (e.g. the first Yodh in *Benjamin*). However, it also occurs frequently in combination with a preceding Hireq, the dot be-

low that is pronounced /i/. You will find this at the end of the two words בֶּן־אֹנִי and בְּנִימִין. This combination of Hireq and Yodh is called **Hireq magnum** and is pronounced as a long /i/.

In the book of Joshua (chap. 11), Joshua defeats the king of Hazor. His name is:

יָבִין

The first Yodh is to be read as /y/ (as in *yes*), while the second Yodh follows the Hireq underneath Beth and makes it a long /i/: *Jabin*.

Here are some exercises for you. You will find Yodh used both as a consonant and in combination with the vowel Hireq.

Exercise A

What is the name of the man who judged Israel for twenty-two years? (Judges 10:3)

יֵאִיר

Exercise B

At the end of the book of Job, (chap. 42:14) Job had three daughters. One of them is called

יְמִימָה

Exercise C

Jacob had a son and the men in charge of the tabernacle duties were later named after him (Genesis 29:34):

לוי

Exercise D

The name of another son was given to the whole people (Genesis 29:35):

יהודה

By the way:

"Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed" (Revelation 5:5). Have *you* found peace in the victory of Jesus Christ?

Exercise E

Here are a dozen more names for you to practise:

- | | | |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1 | יונה | _____ |
| 2 | יואל | _____ |
| 3 | יואב | _____ |
| 4 | נינה | _____ |
| 5 | נחמיה | _____ |
| 6 | חירם | _____ |

7	יובל	_____
8	יריחו	_____
9	מזרים	_____
10	אוריה	_____
11	ומריבה	_____
12	ירמיהו	_____

Now for the confirmation of how well you can read Hebrew.

ANSWERS

Exercise A: Jair

Exercise B: Jemimah

Exercise C: Levi (/levi/)

Exercise D: Judah (perhaps somewhat more challenging?)

Exercise E:

1	יונה	Jonah (Jonah 1:1)
2	יואל	Joel (Joel 1:1)
3	יואב	Joab (2 Samuel 2:18)
4	ניניוה	Niniveh (Jonah 1:2)
5	נחמיה	Nehemiah (Ezra 2:2)
6	חירם	Hiram (2 Samuel 5:11)
7	יובל	Jubal (Genesis 4:21)

8	יְרִיחוֹ	Jericho (Joshua 2:1)
9	מִרְיָם	Miriam (Exodus 15:20)
10	אֲוִרְיָה	Uriah (2 Samuel 11:3)
11	וּמִרְיָבָה	and Meribah (Exodus 17:7) – Did you recognise the first Waw meaning <i>and</i> ?
12	יִרְמְיָהוּ	Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1) As you see, our English way of writing and pronouncing words may be very different from the original.

A NEW DIACRITICAL MARK

A dot crept into Yodh in the name אֲוִרְיָה. We will keep things simple and say that it does not change the pronunciation. However, this might be the right moment to say a few words about a dot *within* a letter. Its name is **Daghesh**, and we can explain it simply as follows.

The dot originally changed the pronunciation of some letters. No dot meant that the consonant was a fricative, while a dot created a plosive or stop. You can still see this, for example, in Beth: בּ is the fricative /v/, whereas ב is the plosive /b/. (There are two more letters, where Daghesh creates this change in pronunciation.) How-

ever, there is no difference in pronunciation between ך and ך or ך and ך nowadays.

The Daghesh doubles the consonant (or we might say, makes it longer) in the case of other consonants. This is true, for example, for Lamedh, Mem and Nun, but also for Yodh in the name Uriah. However, we will ignore any possible differences in pronunciation here.

Can you read the following name? You will find a Daghesh in Yodh here too. The bearer of this name is commonly associated with the question of suffering.

אִיּוֹב

Correct! It is *Job*. You can once again see that we do not always pronounce the names in English as they are written in Hebrew.

By the way:

Have you ever thought about the answer God gave Job about why he had suffered so much? Please take a rest and read chapters 38 to 41. You will see that God simply presents His creative majesty. Job can only say: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4). Do *you* recognise God in His unconditional sovereignty?

TWO IMPORTANT WORDS

This small letter Yodh is very important. It is used to write the name of God! Perhaps you already know the word. Here it is:

אלהים

This word for God can be rendered *Elohim*. The dot on top of the He represents the vowel /o/. As we saw in chapter 2, /o/ (which you have learned so far as ו) can also be written by a dot on the top left corner of a letter. As there is no space on top of Lamedh, the dot is moved somewhat to the left towards He. Its name is **Holem**.

The ו is then called **Holem magnum**.

By the way:

The word אלהים is also used for human judges (Exodus 21:6) or heathen gods (Exodus 12:12). The basic meaning of the word is "one to be feared". Do *you* fear God?

As you certainly know, God also revealed Himself to his people as "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). This name as the God of Israel has the meaning of "the one who exists eternally". This is what the Hebrew word looks like:

יהוה

You might have had difficulty pronouncing these letters and there is good reason for that. It is assumed that the word יהוה originally was *Yahwe*. However, in reverence for the name of God, it was not spoken. Instead, *Adonai* – "(my) Lord" – was used. The vowels of this word were then – in a slightly modified way – transferred to this so-called *Tetragrammaton* (meaning "four letters") יהוה.³ When reading the name, you may say *Yahwe* or *Adonai*. In English Bibles, you will commonly find *LORD*.

After this in-depth study of the small letter Yodh, you will now face an exercise where the other letters that you know occur too. Please write the English name in the middle column. Try not to consult your Bible (unless you get really stuck).

1	רְאוּבֵן	_____	Genesis 29:32
2	חֲנִי	_____	Ezra 5:1
3	נִמְרֹד	_____	Genesis 10:8
4	נָחוֹר	_____	Genesis 11:27
5	הָרֵן	_____	Genesis 11:27
6	אֱלִיהוּא	_____	Job 32:5
7	הָגָר	_____	Genesis 21:9
8	בְּחָרָב	_____	Exodus 17:6

³ This led, by the way, to the erroneous pronunciation of the word as *Jehovah*.

ANSWERS

1. Reuben – 2. Haggai – 3. Nimrod – 4. Nahor – 5. Haran – 6. Elihu – 7. Hagar – 8. *in* Horeb (with **כִּי** expressing proximity)

Chapter 6

We only managed to learn one letter in the last chapter – and it was a very small one! However, there is no point in just rushing through the material. By now, you will have realised that there is actually quite a lot in the Hebrew script that requires your full attention. That is why we are now going to revise all the things that you have learned so far.

REVISION

Let us start with some very important words:

→ יְהוָה is frequently the name of the God of Israel. You may say *Yahwe* or *Adonai*. In many Bibles, this name is translated as *LORD*.

→ The common word for God is אֱלֹהִים. The ending of the word is, grammatically speaking, a plural form. This might be an indication of the one God who is a triune God: *Father* אב, *Son* בן and *Spirit*.

The letters for the last word already appear in the second verse of the Bible – and you know them all. Here they are: רוּחַ. In Genesis 1:2 you can read "the Spirit of God": רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים.

The word for *Spirit* is pronounced /ruach/. Please note that, contrary to the general rules, the Pathah under the final ך is pronounced *before* the consonant here.

By the way:

If God is your אלהים and His יהוה is your *Adonai*, then I am your אלהים.

And it is His יהוה who makes us one!

→ You also know that ו (with various vowels) stands for *and* (always merging with the noun), and you know או meaning *or*.

→ You are also familiar with the definite article: He ה with a vowel, always preceding a noun, just like Waw and the two consonants that follow here:

→ Lamedh ל plus a vowel expresses the dative case or may be translated *for, to*; and Mem מ plus a vowel expresses proximity and may be translated *in, at, with*.

→ Now for the vowels:

א א	/a/ (long)	Qames
א א	/a/ (short)	Pathah
ע	/e/ as in <i>grey</i>	Sere

א	/i/ (short)	Hireq
אִ	/i/ (long)	Hireq magnum
אֵ אֶ	/e/ as in <i>wet</i>	Seghol
אְ	/e/ (weak!) as in <i>ago</i> , or silent	Shwa
אֹ	/o/	Holem
אָ	/o/	
אִּ	/u/	

→ There are not only dots *underneath* or *above* a letter, but also *within*. In the latter case, we call the dot Daghesh. It not only shows the distinction between a fricative and a plosive (as, for example, ב and בּ), but it also doubles the consonant, so that its pronunciation is somewhat longer.

→ Let us sum up all this in the following chart of consonants:

- 1 א Aleph "carries" a vowel
- 2 בּ ב Beth /v/ – בּ always /b/
- 3 גּ ג Gimel /g/
- 4 דּ ד Daleth /d/ – to be distinguished from ד!
- 5 הּ ה He /h/ – often not pronounced

6	וּ	Waw	/v/ – וּ /o/, וּ /u/
8	ח	Heth	/ch/ as in <i>Loch</i> or /h/. Distinct from חה!
10	יּ	Yodh	/y/ – in combination with Hireq: long /i/
12	לּ	Lamedh	/l/
13	מּ	Mem	/m/ – in final position ם
14	נּ	Nun	/n/ – do not confuse with נ! Final position: ן
20	רּ	Resh	/r/ – to be distinguished from ר!

Exercise A

Let us turn to Jacob's children. You already know several of his sons:

רְאוּבֵן	-
לֵוִי	-
יְהוּדָה	-
נָדָב	-

The names of דָּן *Dan* and Jacob's daughter דִּינָה *Dinah* will be no problem for you now.

A NEW LETTER

If you look at יוֹסֵף you will meet another of Jacob's sons and two new letters. You will have certainly recognised that we are talking about *Joseph*.

The name of the letter ס or ס is **Samekh** and it comes after Nun in the alphabet. It is pronounced /s/ as in *kiss*. Please note that you need to distinguish it from a final Mem ם, which is much more angular.

When a pause is required when reading the Psalms, you often find the word

סֵלָה

This is normally rendered *Selah* in our English Bibles.

In the following verse (Genesis 13:13), can you find the name of the town where the inhabitants were exceedingly wicked and sinful.

וְאִנְשֵׁי סְדֹם רָאִים וְחַטָּאִים לִיהוָה מְאֹד

In this name, you will find that there is only a slight difference between Samekh and a final Mem. The first vowel is a Shwa, but in English we pronounce it here like the vowel in *pod*. Yes, it is *Sodom*, the second word in the sentence (from the right, of course).

(Did you also notice the penultimate word, the Tetragrammaton, the name of the God of Israel? Here it has Lamedh with Pathah in front, which gives us the meaning "before the Lord" in English.)

A NEW LETTER

We have to discuss one more new letter in *Joseph's* name יִסְּף. It is the last one and exceeds the usual square frame of the letters. It is, of course, pronounced /f/.

As you know from Mem and Nun, there are letters (נ and מ) that have an extra form when they are placed at the end of a word (ן and ם). This is also true of this new letter **Pe**. Its simple form fits within the imaginary square of the other letters: פ, but it looks like this at the end of a word: ף.

Can you think of one of the authors of the Psalms who has the two new letters together in his name?

אֶסְפָּה

By the way:

In one of his songs, perhaps his most famous one, this man Asaph says: "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon

earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25). What do *you* desire?

You might be wondering why the name of this letter is Pe, when it is pronounced /f/. Well, it is actually pronounced /p/ when it has a Dagghesh inside: פּ.

This is not new for you. As you know from Beth, the Dagghesh distinguishes between a plosive (in this case: /p/) and a fricative (here /f/).

From now on, make sure that you notice whether there is a Dagghesh or not. It will very often help you to look at how the English equivalent is pronounced.

By the way:

If you know some German, you might not be surprised that /p/ and /f/ are actually related. Look at English *hope* and compare this with the German word *hoffen*. – And why do we say /f/ in the Greek word for brotherly love, *philadelphia*, if we write it as ph? Because the Greek sound here, a *Phi* φ, was originally a strongly aspirated /p/, which is close to /p/ plus /h/. Try it and you will see that it is quite close to the sound /f/.

This is phonetics, the study of the smallest units of language, and it is really exciting! It makes our Creator appear even greater. Just think for a minute what a feat it is for your speech organs to utter a single word!

Exercise B

We encounter Elkanah at the beginning of 1 Samuel. He was going to be Samuel's father. Elkanah had two wives and their names are shaded in the following Hebrew line. Can you find their English equivalents?

שֵׁם אֶחָת תָּנָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פְּנִינָה

Exercise C

Eli, the high priest, had two wicked sons. Here are their names. Can you read them?

חֲפָנִי פִנְחָס

Exercise D

Please write the English equivalents of the following Hebrew names and words.

(You have now certainly become accustomed to accepting some minor differences in how the words were originally spoken in He-

brew and how we pronounce them in English. So, there is not always an exact equivalent in English for the Hebrew letters פ and פ either.)

- 1 אפרים -
- 2 סנחריב -
- 3 פור -
- 4 פניאל -
- 5 פסגה -
- 6 אפור -
- 7 אופיר -
- 8 פרפר -

In case you need some help:

1. One of Joseph's sons (Genesis 41:52) – 2. A king of Assyria (2 Kings 18:13) – 3. A lot that is cast in Esther 3:7 – 4. This is where Jacob wrestled with God (Genesis 32:31). – 5. The hill where Balaam offered sacrifices (Numbers 23:14) – 6. Part of the garments for the high priest (Exodus 28:4) – 7. Gold was brought from here (1 Kings 10:11). – 8. A river in Damascus (2 Kings 5:12)

REVISION

Let us sum up all the new things from this chapter:

→ The letter Samekh ס is pronounced /s/ and has to be distinguished from the final Mem ם.

→ Pe with a Daghes (the dot within!) is pronounced /p/ and looks like this: פּ. If there is no dot (פ), the pronunciation is /f/. At the end of a word, the shape of the letter is: ף.

ANSWERS

Exercise A:

Reuben – Levi – Judah – Gad

Exercise B:

Hannah and Peninnah (1 Samuel 1:2)

Exercise C:

Hophni and Phinehas (1 Samuel 1:3)

Exercise D:

1. Ephraim – 2. Sennacherib – 3. Pur – 4. Penuel/Peniel – 5. Pisgah – 6. Ephod – 7. Ophir – 8. Pharpar.

Chapter 7

How are you coping with everything? If you are struggling, please go back and look through the revision section in chapter 6 again.

Here are the 'real' Hebrew words that you have encountered so far:

אב	/av/	father
אח	/ach/	brother
בן	/ben/	son
או	/o/	or
יהוה	(Yahwe, Adonai)	the LORD
אלהים	/elohim/	God
רוח	/ruach/	spirit
אפוד	/efod/	ephod

Using the Hebrew letters that you already know, you should now be able to read the words that follow. Please write them down as you would pronounce them. Take your time for each group of words, check the following section to discover whether you have the right answer and memorise them. You will need them to complete the following exercises.

1	stone	אֶבֶן	_____
2	blood	דָּם	_____
3	mountain	הָר	_____
4	bread	לֶחֶם	_____
5	mother	אִם	_____
6	why	לָמָּה	_____
7	day	יוֹם	_____
8	today	הַיּוֹם	_____
9	Lord	אֲדוֹן	_____
10	night	לַיְלָה	_____
11	book, letter	סֵפֶר	_____
12	fish	דָּג	_____
13	mercy, goodness	חֶסֶד	_____
14	prophet	נָבִיא	_____
15	he	הוּא	_____
16	light	אוֹר	_____
17	very, much	מְאֹד	_____
18	hand	יָד	_____
19	God	אֱלֹהִים	_____
20	horse	סוּס	_____

21	one	אֶחָד	_____
22	big, great	גָּדוֹל	_____
23	word, thing	דָּבָר	_____
24	red	אָדָם	_____
25	no, not	לֹא	_____
26	Praise the LORD	הַלְלֵיהּ	_____
27	amen	אָמֵן	_____

What follows now proves that you already know how to read words, even those that you have not yet learned. You will also obtain some more information on a number of words to help you to understand them better and memorise them.

It is possible that you did not understand absolutely everything when trying to write down the pronunciation of these words. Perhaps you found different solutions here and there. What is important is that you receive some kind of feedback. I firmly believe that your reading went well!

ANSWERS plus comments

1 stone אֶבֶן /even/ e like in *wet*

Samuel set up a stone and called it Ebenezer (1 Samuel 7:12). It means "Stone of Help."

2 blood דָּם /dam/

3 mountain הָרַר /har/

In Exodus 3:1, Horeb is called "the mountain of God" הַאֱלֹהִים הָרַר (*Elohim* with the preceding definite article).

4 bread לֶחֶם /lechem/ e as in *wet*
Bethlehem means "house of *bread*".

5 mother אֵם /em/

6 why לָמָּה /lama/

You certainly know this word from the question that the Lord Jesus asked on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In Mark 15:34, it is quoted in Aramaic, which is part of the same language group as Hebrew and was the everyday language in Jesus' day.

7 day יוֹם /yom/

The *Day* of Atonement is called "*Yom Kippur*"

8 today הַיּוֹם /hayom/

Literally: "the day"

9 Lord אָדוֹן /adon/

Do you remember the alternative pronunciation of יהוָה *Adonai* (my LORD)?

10 night לַיְלָה /laila/

11 book, letter סֵפֶר /sefer/ first e as in
grey, the second one
as in *wet*

The translation of the place name Kirjath *Sepher* (Judges 1:12) is
"city of the *book*".

12 fish דָּג /dag/

Dagon was the Philistine fish idol (1 Samuel 5:2).

13 mercy, goodness חֶסֶד /chesed/ e as in *wet*

14 prophet נָבִיא /navi/

15 he הוּא /hu/

16 light אֹר /or/

When God speaks for the first time in the Bible, he says: יְהִי אוֹר
"Let there be *light*".

17 very, much מְאֹד /meod/ e as in *ago*

18 hand יָד /yad/

19 God אֵל /el/

Another very common word for *God*. If you add /i/ to the word, it means *my* as in Matthew 27:46 "Eli, Eli, lama ...".

20 horse סוּס /sus/

21 one אֶחָד /echad/ e as in *wet*

22 big, great גָּדוֹל /gadol/

23 word, thing דָּבָר /davar/

24 red אָדָם /adom/

In chapter 2, you learned that *adamah* originally means "reddish soil", from which *Adam* was taken.

25 no, not לֹא /lo/

26 Praise the LORD! הַלְלֵי-יְיָ HALLELUJAH!

27 amen אָמֵן /amen/

By the way:

The root of the word for *amen* appears for the first time in Genesis 15:6 when it says about Abram that "he *believed* in the LORD." When he said amen to God's promises, that is "so be it" or "that is for sure", God accounted this statement of trust and faith to him as righteousness.

Do *you* believe God's promises?

Now you will certainly want to read these new words in their proper biblical contexts. As you know, Hebrew is not English and that means you will not always find the same word order in Hebrew as you expect with your English background. For example, instead of "the day of the LORD is great", you will find "great day LORD". In Hebrew, the word *is* is often omitted. The genitive case, which expresses possession or relationship (as in "the grace of God"), is used in a different way from English too. More on that later. Hebrew also uses the definite article in a different way from English!

Let us now do some work! Please do not forget that there might be something like a prefix at the beginning of words.

Exercise A

Connect the Hebrew words with their English meanings.

- | | | |
|----|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | חֶסֶד אֱלֹ | a the word of God |
| 2 | חֶדֶם | b (the) bread |
| 3 | אֶם יוֹאָב | c sapphire stone |
| 4 | דְּבַר אֱלֹהִים | d the goodness of God |
| 5 | הַר־נְבוֹ | e the hand of God |
| 6 | אָמֵן וְאָמֵן | f Joab's mother |
| 7 | אֶבֶן־סַפִּיר | g red horse |
| 8 | הַלְחָם | h Mount Nebo |
| 9 | סוּם אָדָם | i the blood |
| 10 | יְדֵי הָאֱלֹהִים | j Amen and amen |

Exercise B

Please find the English translation by checking the Bible passages indicated. (As you do not know too many words yet, some of the following word groups might sound rather out of context.)

1	הַר־פָּאָרֶן	Habakkuk 3:3
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2	בְּתֵר הַמּוֹרִיָּה	2 Chronicles 3:1
---	---------------------	------------------

3	יְהִי אֹרֶךְ יְיָהִי אֹרֶךְ	Genesis 1:3
4	(נִימֹן) יִהְיֶה דָּג גָּדוֹל	Jonah 1:17
5	דָּוִד אָבִי חֶסֶד גָּדוֹל	1 Kings 3:6
6	בְּסֶפֶר (תּוֹרַת) אֱלֹהִים	Joshua 24:26
7	דְּבַר־יְהוָה (אֶל-) אַבְרָם	Genesis 15:1
8	אֵלֶיָּה תִּנְבִּיא	Malachi 4:5

Exercise C

And now for an exercise without any help at all! How would you translate the following?

- 1 בָּהֶר יִהְיֶה - _____
- 2 לֹא נָבִיא - _____
- 3 בִּיד־יְהוָה ... בִּיד־אָדָם - _____
- 4 יוֹם וּלְיָלָה - _____
- 5 גָּדוֹל מְאֹד - _____

6	אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֵי לְמָה	-	_____
7	חֲנִי הַנְּבִיא	-	_____
8	אִם אֶסָּא	-	_____
9	יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים	-	_____
10	אֲמֵן הַלְלוּ-יָהּ	-	_____

ANSWERS

You must be eagerly waiting for the answers! I am sure you were able to do all these exercises without any problems.

Exercise A:

1d (Psalm 52:1) – 2i (Exodus 12:13) – 3f (2 Samuel 17:25) – 4a (1 Samuel 9:27) – 5h (Deuteronomy 32:49) – 6j (Psalm 72:19) – 7c (Ezekiel 1:26) – 8b (Deuteronomy 8:3) – 9g (Zechariah 1:8) – 10e (1 Samuel 5:11)

Exercise B:

1. Mount Paran – 2. On Mount Moriah – 3. "Let there be light"; and there was light. – 4. The LORD (had prepared) a great fish. – 5. (You have shown) great mercy (to your servant) David my father. – 6. In the book (of the law) of God – 7. The word of the LORD [came] (to) Abram. – 8. Elijah the prophet

Exercise C:

1. In the mountains of Judah (Joshua 20:7) – 2. No prophet (Zechariah 13:5) – 3. The hand of the LORD ... the hand of man (2 Samuel 24:14) – 4. Day and night (Genesis 8:22) – 5. Very great (Exodus 11:3) – 6. My God, My God, why (Psalm 22:1) – 7. Haggai the prophet (Haggai 2:10) – 8. The mother of Asa (2 Chronicles 15:16) – 9. "The LORD, He is God!" (1 Kings 18:39) – 10. Amen! Praise the LORD! (Psalm 106:48)

Let us finish the work that you have done so far with these words:

יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים

אָמֵן הַלְלוּ־יָהּ

Chapter 8

After doing so well in the last chapter, we are now going to tackle some more letters. You already know 14 of the 22 Hebrew consonants! In this chapter, you will get to know three new ones.

A NEW LETTER

We will first look at **Ayin**. This is what it looks like: א; and it is pronounced like Aleph א – which means, practically speaking, it is not pronounced at all. When dealing with Aleph, we said it only carries vowels and, put simply, that is also true of Ayin.

As the Hebrew alphabet only contains consonants, you might guess that Aleph and Ayin are consonants as well. That is actually true! They are, however, consonants that we do not transcribe with a letter in European languages. This needs some further explanation. The typical feature of a consonant in general is that when we exhale, the air is obstructed in some kind of way. This may result in a complete stop like in /p/ or in a weaker obstruction as in the fricative /f/.

In German, for example, any word that starts with a vowel does actually have a very short stop produced by the vocal cords before the vowel is spoken.

This so-called glottal stop also occurs in British English, for example, in the Cockney pronunciation of *better*, where the -tt- is replaced by a short stop in the vocal cords.

If we go back to Aleph and Ayin, we can state that they originally stood for some similar kind of laryngeal sounds. We simply do not pronounce them now.

Let us look at some words in which Ayin ע occurs. Please try to find the English equivalents for the following examples.

Exercise A

- | | | |
|---|------------|-------|
| 1 | עֵרֶן | _____ |
| 2 | עֲבָדֶיָּה | _____ |
| 3 | עֲגִלּוֹן | _____ |
| 4 | נִדְעוֹן | _____ |
| 5 | עֲמוֹס | _____ |

Here are the Bible passages where you can find the names that you are looking for:

1. Genesis 2:15 – 2. Obadiah 1:1 – 3. Judges 3:17 – 4. Judges 6:13
- 5. Amos 1:1