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[Biblical Hebrew Poetry and Word Play](#)

Reconstructing the Original Oral, Aural and Visual Experience

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[History of the Ancient and Modern Hebrew Language](#)

[Biblical Hebrew Poetry and Word Play - Reconstructing the Original Oral, Aural and Visual Experience](#)

Changes in Pronunciation Between [BH](#), [TH](#) and the Biblical Text pronounced as [IH](#)

most of which Alter the Syllabic Structure of Nouns

Issue	Example	Reconstructed <u>Proto-Hebrew</u> (c. 1200 BCE)	Reconstructed <u>Early Biblical Hebrew Pronunciation</u> <u>/EBHP/</u> <u>[EBHP]</u> (c. 850-550 BCE)	<u>Tiberian Hebrew</u> <u>/TH/+ [TH]</u> (c. 850 CE)	Biblical Text pronounced as <u>IH</u> (present)
		<u>BHA phase 1</u> and <u>phase 2</u>	<u>BHA phase 3</u> Influence of spoken <u>Hebrew Dialects on</u> <u>Literary Language</u>	<u>BHA phase 5</u> Influence of <u>Aramaic</u> , Greek and perhaps Arabic	Stress Mainly Follows Tiberian Accents <u>Influence of European</u> <u>Languages</u>
<u>Segolate</u> Masculine singular	ילד "boy"	/waldu/ > /yaldu/	/yald/ [yald] or [yaləd] (1 syllable)	/yeḷəd/ [yeḷ:leḏ] (2 syllables)	/yeḷəd/ (2 syllables)
	חמ"ג גבר	/gabru/	/gabr/	/geḇer/	/geḇer/

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			['gabr] or ['gabərd] (1 syllable)	['gə:vəʔ] (2 syllables)	['gəvəʔ] (2 syllables)
	ספר "book"	/'sɪpru/	/'sɪpr/ ['sɪpr] or ['sɛpəʔ] (1 syllable)	/'sɛpəʔ/ ['sɛ:fəʔ] (2 syllables)	/'sɛpəʔ/ ['sɛfəʔ] (2 syllables)
	קדש "holyness"	/'qudʂu /	/'qudʂ/ ['qudʂ] or ['qodəʂ] (1 syllable)	/'qodəʂ/ ['qo:dəʂ] (2 syllables)	/'qodəʂ/ ['kodəʂ]
	מות "death"	/'mawtu/	/'mawt/ ['mawt] (abs.) /mawt/ [mɔwt] (constr.)	/'māwəʔ/ ['mɔ:wəʔ] (abs.) /mot/ [mo:t] (constr.)	/'mawəʔ/ ['mavəʔ] (abs.) /mot/ [mo:t] (constr.)
Segolate Masculine Plural	מלכים (absolute) "kings" מלכי (construct) "kings of-"	/mala'kīma/ /malakay/	/malakīm/ /malakay/ [mal(a)kay] or [mal(a)key]	/mlākim/ [mɛlb:kɪ:m] /mal kə/ [mal.kə:]	mlaħim /mal kə/
Segolate	תחת "beneath,	/'taħtu/	/'taħt/	/'taħat/	/'taħat/ (2 syllables)

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masculine singular and addition of short helping vowel to ease pronunciation of guttural n	instead of-" (originally substantive functioning as preposition)		[ˈtaħt] or [ˈtaħət] (1 syllable)	(2 syllables)	
	פחד "fear, trembling"	/ˈpaħdu/	/ˈpaħd/ [ˈpaħd] or [ˈpaħ yald d] or [ˈpaħăd] (1 syllable)	/ˈpaħad/ (2 syllables)	/ˈpaħad/ (2 syllables)
noun ending	עפרת "lead"	/˘oːpartu/ > /˘oːpart/	/˘oːpart/ [˘oːpart] or [˘oːparət] (2 syllables)	/˘oːpəreṯ/ (3 syllables)	/oːpəreṯ/ [oːfereṯ] (3 syllables)
	פלשת 'Philistia'	/paˈlištʰu/ > /palištʰ/	/paˈlištʰ/ [paˈlištʰ] or [paˈlišet] (2 syllables)	/pˈlešetʰ/ (3 syllables)	/pˈlešetʰ/ (3 syllables)
Other Segolate	פרי "fruit"	/ˈpiryu/	/ˈpiryu/ >> /ˈpiry/ (/EBHP?/) > /ˈpiri/	/pri/ (pausal /pəri/)	/pri/ (pausal /pəri/)

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			(/EBHP?/)		
Synope of Certain Reduced Vowelsⁱⁱ	אדמתי "my earth"	/ʾadama ^{ti} /	/ʾad(a)ma ^{ti} /	/ʾadma ^{ti} / [ʾadma: ^{ti}]	/adma ^{ti} /
Post First Temple Period addition of short helping vowels to ease pronunciation of gutturals – this has the effect of adding a syllable	גבה "high" (adjective)	/gabuhu/ > /gabo:h/	/gabo:h/ ("h" is consonantal) (2 syllables)	/gabo.ah/ ("h" is consonantal) (3 syllables)	/gabo.a/ [gavo.a] (3 syllables)
	יעשה "he will do"	/ya ^c śê/	/ya ^c śê/ > /yi ^c śê/ (2 syllables)	/ya ^c śe/ [ya ^c śe:] (3 syllables)	/ya.a ^c śe/ (3 syllables)
	שמח "happy"	/ša ^m ihū/	/ša ^m me:h/ (2 syllables)	/šâ ^m e.ah/ [šo: ^m e:.ah] (3 syllables)	/ša ^m e.ah/ (3 syllables)
	רקיע "firmament"	/ra ^q i ^u /	/ra ^q i ^e / (2 syllables)	/râ ^q i.a ^c / [ro: ^q i:.a ^c] (3 syllables)	/ra ^q i.a/ (3 syllables)
	נח "Noah"	/nuhū/	/no:h/ (1 syllable)	/noah/ [no:.ah] (2 syllables)	/no.ah/ (2 syllables)

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	"Jacob" יעקב	/ya ^e qubu/	/ya ^e qoːb/ (2 syllables)	/ya ^e qoːb/ [ya ^e äːqoːv] (3 syllables)	/ya.aˈkɔb/ [ya.aˈkov] (2 syllables)
<u>Heterogeneous</u> <u>Diphthongs</u>	מים "water"	/'maymu/ > /'maym/ like the English word "mime"	/'maym/ (1 syllable)	/'mayim/ (2 syllables)	/'mayim/ (2 syllables)
	שמים "heavensw"	/ša'maymu/	/ša'maym/ (2 syllables)	/ša'mayim/ (3 syllables)	/ša'mayim/ (3 syllables)
	מצרים "Egypt"	/miš'raymu/	/miš'raym/	/miš'rayim/	/mits'rayim/
	אפרים "Ephriam"	/'ip'raymu/	/'ip'raym/	/'eɸ'rayim/	/eɸ'rayim/ [eɸ'rayim/]
	בית "house"	/'baytu/	/'bayt/	/'bayit/	/'bayit/
	ירושלם "Jerusalem"	/yurūša'laymu/	/yurūša'laym/	/yrušā'layim/	/yurūša'laym/

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				[yəru:šə:'layim]	

בית

[bayt] > [bayit]

Quoted from *Development of the Canaanite Dialects: An Investigation in Linguistic History* by Zellig S. Harris, American Oriental Series, Vol 16, 1939 pp. 29-32

[ay] > [ê]; [aw] > [ô]

... In early Semitic, diphthongs were phonologically vowel + syllable-closing [y] or [w] ; as such they were always either final or followed by the consonant which began the next syllable : [baytu]. Since every syllable in early Semitic began with a consonant, inter-vocalic [y] and [w] must be considered phonologically as hetero-syllabic, not making a diphthong, but rather beginning the next syllable: [baytiya] of my house.' In Canaanite, diphthongs were monophthongized in all positions, accented and unaccented, medial and final, except when another [y] or [w] followed; thus [ḥayyîm] life,' [ḥayyê] `life (cst.),' [taw] < [tawwu] 'mark,' all remained in Phoenician and Hebrew. The diphthongs [iy], [uw] in medial position had been monophthongized. in Canaanite times....

New diphthongs arose later in final position, all of which, with the exception of the last group, were later monophthongized ... when [h] elided in the 3rd person suffixes in Hebrew ... [-ahū] > [-aw], somewhat later > [-ô]

In Jerusalem Hebrew, unaccented diphthongs were monophthongized as throughout Canaanite, but accented diphthongs remained.... In the nifal verb, the monophthongization could not take place until the verb stress shift : [nawda^a] > [nawda^c] > [nawda^e] > [nôda^e] 'it became known.' This was also true of those hifil verb forms which did not have [i] in the second syllable, e. g., the infinitive absolute: the Assyrian transcription *a-u-si-*'(III Rawlinson 10. 2. 28) [hawšⁱ], later > [hōšê^{ac}], shows the form before the verb stress shift, or in any event before the reduction of the diphthong. This will explain the biblical Hebrew forms, except for the absolute nouns of type [ḥêq] 'bosom,' [yôm] 'day,' which may be due to analogy of the construct forms, or to borrowing from Hebrew dialects where the monophthongization had been complete (cf. the possibly dialectal [lêl] in Jes. 21.11, variant to [layl] 'night.'

Later, after final short vowels were dropped, and the medial diphthongs came to be in doubly closed syllables, they were pronounced as two syllables; [bayt] > [bayit]; [ênaym] > [ênayim]; [mawt] > [mawet]. This was part of the late general tendency to break final consonant clusters by anaptyctic ("segolate") vowels. Final diphthongs remained: [mātay] 'when.'

... It has been suggested that this divergence of Jerusalem Hebrew is a later development, that Jerusalem had originally gone with the rest of Canaanite, but that later foreign influences caused a restoration of the diphthongs in some cases. Such new formations, extending from loan-words which might have come to Jerusalem from a dialect where diphthongs had been preserved, would indeed be possible. However, the fact that the diphthong does not occur in some special group of words or in some morphologic class, but can be explained as having been preserved in one phonetic environment (stress), argues for a regular phonetic development. The probability is therefore that when this change first spread in Canaanite there were some areas, specifically Jerusalem, in which stress was a deciding factor for its occurrence.

ⁱ See Development of the Canaanite Dialects: An Investigation in Linguistic History by Zellig S. Harris, American Oriental Series, Vol 16, 1939 p. 67.

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