

# **Biblical Hebrew Grammar for Beginners**

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## Hebrew Consonants

The Hebrew alphabet consists of twenty-two consonant symbols, or letters, some of which have more than one function. The symbols for *alef* א, *heh* ה, *vav* ו, and *yod* י, for example, may represent a consonant or a vowel. Likewise, the symbol ש represents two distinct sounds: "sh" שׁ and "s" שׂ, distinguishable in the orthography by the placement of the dot on top of the letter. Six consonants: *bet*, *gimel*, *dalet*, *kaf*, *pe*, and *tav*, have two variants: a stop (that is, a sound pronounced with stoppage of the air flow, like "b" or "p"), indicated in the orthography by a dot inside the letter (בּ בֵּ בֶּ בִּ בֹּ בָּ), and a fricative, that is, a "soft" sound pronounced with friction in the vocal organs, like "f" or "v", which lacks the dot when written (ב בֵּ בֶּ בִּ בֹּ בָּ). The stops are pronounced "b" "g" "d" "k" "p" and "t". The parallel fricatives are "v", "gh" (somewhere between "g" and "r"), "th" as in the word "the", "ch" as in the name Bach (NOT as the "ch" in Charlie!), "f", and "th" as in the word "bath", respectively. The dot that marks the stop variants is called *dagésh*. Speakers of modern Hebrew do not distinguish between the fricative and stop variants of *gimel*, *dalet* and *tav* ת ד ג, and the only variants they separate in speech are "b"/"v", "k"/"ch", and "p"/"f".

Five Hebrew consonants are represented by a different symbol when they appear at the end of the word (as opposed to initial or medial position): *kaf*, *mem*, *nun*, *pe*, and *tsade* are written as ך ם ן ף ץ when final, compared to כ פ נ מ כּ when non-final.

Hebrew consonants are presented in the table below. Listed are the names of the consonants, the sounds they represent for a speaker of Modern Hebrew, the way they are transliterated in our text (in parentheses), and the character representing them in the Hebrew orthography.

| name        | sound and transliteration   | character |
|-------------|---|-----------|
| <i>álef</i> | carries the sound of the following vowel but has no sound of its own other than a slight stoppage of the air flow at the back of the throat (') | א         |

|               |  |                                      |
|---------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| <i>bet</i>    | like "b" in "boy" (b)<br>has the variant בּ, pronounced like "v" in "veil", after a vowel (v)  | ב                                    |
| <i>gímel</i>  | like "g" in "garden" (g)   | ג                                    |
| <i>dálet</i>  | like "d" in "dog" (d)  | ד                                    |
| <i>heh</i>    | like "h" in "horse" (h)  | ה                                    |
| <i>vav</i>    | like "v" in "voice" (v)  | ו                                    |
| <i>záyin</i>  | like "z" in "zebra" (z)  | ז                                    |
| <i>chet</i>   | "h" pronounced further back in the throat,<br>like the "ch" in Bach (ch)   | ח                                    |
| <i>tet</i>    | like "t" in "toad" (t)   | ט                                    |
| <i>yod</i>    | like "y" in "yard" (y)   | י                                    |
| <i>kaf</i>    | like "k" in "key" (k)<br>has the variant כּ, pronounced like like "h"<br>but further back in the throat or like the<br>"ch" in Bach, after a vowel (ch)  | כ<br>ך in word-final<br>position     |
| <i>lámed</i>  | like "l" in "loom" (l)   | ל                                    |
| <i>mem</i>    | like "m" in "mirror" (m)   | מ<br>ם in word-<br>final<br>position |
| <i>nun</i>    | like "n" in "nod" (n)  | נ<br>ן in word-final<br>position     |
| <i>sámekh</i> | like "s" in "sea" (s)  | ס                                    |
| <i>áyin</i>   | carries the sound of the following vowel but<br>has no sound of its own other than a slight<br>stoppage of the air flow at the back of the<br>throat (') | ע                                    |
| <i>pe</i>     | like "p" in "park" (p)<br>has the variant פּ, pronounced like "f" in<br>"fawn", after a vowel (f)  | פ<br>ף in word-final<br>position     |

|              |   |                               |
|--------------|---|-------------------------------|
| <i>tsádi</i> | like "ts" in "cats" (ts)  | צ<br>ץ in word-final position |
| <i>kof</i>   | like "k" in "key" (k)   | ק                             |
| <i>resh</i>  | like "r" in "rock", but pronounced deep in the throat, much like the French "r" (r) | ר                             |
| <i>shin</i>  | like "sh" in "sharp" (sh)   | שׁ                            |
| <i>sin</i>   | like "s" in "sea" (s)   | שׂ                            |
| <i>tav</i>   | like "t" in "toad" (t)  | ת                             |

**The following online exercises are recommended for practice:**

[The Hebrew Alphabet](#)

[Hebrew Consonants](#)

[Letter Recognition](#)