

Wrap-up: The whole alphabet

The film, word for word, about 13 min. Hebrew words said aloud are given in Hebrew script, then as they sound.

0:00 Every letter

Six lessons ago, you did not know alef. Today you know every letter in the Hebrew Bible; and there are one million, one hundred and ninety-seven thousand of them. But you met them a few at a time, between kings, and roots, and little words. Today we lay them all on one board, in order. We tie up three loose ends.

And we close the stage.

0:28 The easy one

שָׁלוֹם Shalom, and welcome to the first wrap-up. I am Moreh Ezra. A wrap-up stands at the end of a stage. It teaches almost nothing new. It puts what you know in order, so that nothing rattles when you walk on.

So this is the easy one. Five short parts. The alphabet, in its order. The letters that look alike. The letters from the throat.

Every vowel, on one board. And the dot, which has taken on more work since we last counted. Three small things will be new, and I shall say so when they come. And at the end, as always, a verse.

1:06 Twenty-two letters in order

Here they are, in their order, from the right. Alef, bet, **גִּימֶל gimel**, **דָּלֶת dalet**, **הֵא he**, vav, **זַיִן zayin**, **חֵית het**, Tet, yod, **כַּף kaf**. Lamed, mem, **נוּן nun**, **סָמֶךְ samekh**, **עַיִן ayin**, **פֵּא pe**, **צָדֵי tsade**, **קוֹף qof**, resh, shin, tav. Twenty-two. That order has hardly moved in three thousand years.

Hardly; I shall come back to that. You need it for two things. The first is the dictionary. Every Hebrew dictionary runs from alef to tav; and without the order, you will read half the book every time you look up a word. The second is poetry.

The poets of the Bible wrote alphabets: poems where each verse begins with the next letter. Psalm one hundred and nineteen is the great one. Eight verses for alef, eight for bet, and so on, down to tav. One hundred and seventy-six verses: the longest chapter in the Bible. The poet could not stop before tav.

In Lesson six, Boaz called Ruth a woman of valour. The book of Proverbs ends with a poem about such a woman: twenty-two verses, from alef to tav. Praise from A to Z. And the book of Lamentations is four alphabets, and then a silence: chapter five has twenty-two verses, and no alphabet at all. Now the hardly.

In chapters two, three and four of Lamentations, פֵּא **pe** comes before עַיִן **ayin**. Two letters have changed places. Either the order was not quite settled yet; or somebody's teacher has a great deal to answer for.

2:43 The five end-shapes

Five letters change their shape at the end of a word. כַּף Kaf, mem, נוּן **nun**, פֵּא **pe**, צָדֵי **tsade**. Four of them drop a tail below the line. Mem shuts itself into a box. Say the five in order, and they make one word: כַּמְנְפָּץ **kamnefets**.

It means nothing whatever. It is a peg, to hang five letters on. One word for each. מֶלֶךְ **Melekh**: a king. שָׁלוֹם **Shalom**: peace.

בֵּן **Ben**: a son. כֶּסֶף **Kesef**: silver. אֶרֶץ **Erets**: the earth. And one verse in the whole Bible holds every letter of the alphabet, and all five end-shapes as well. Zephaniah, chapter three, verse eight.

I went through all twenty-three thousand verses to be sure; so that you do not have to.

3:34 Letters that look alike

Most slips in reading come from a handful of letters that look alike. Bet, and כַּף **kaf**. Bet has a corner, and a small foot sticking out behind. כַּף **Kaf** is round. דָּלֶת **Dalet**, and resh.

The corner is D: you know that one. And if you still mix them up, you are in good company. In Genesis, among the great-grandsons of Noah, there is a people called the Dodanim. The book of Chronicles copies the same list; and there, they are the Rodanim. One verse earlier, Riphath has become Diphath.

Somewhere, a long time ago, a scribe had a bad afternoon with these two letters. Next: הֵא **he**, חֵית **het**, tav. הֵא **He** has a gap at the top left. חֵית **Het** is shut. Tav has a foot.

Then vav, זַיִן **zayin**, and final נוּן **nun**. Vav is plain. זַיִן **Zayin** wears a hat. Final נוּן **nun** goes on down, below the line. סָמֶךְ **Samekh**, and final mem.

Round, and square. עַיִן **Ayin**, and צָדֵי **tsade**. עַיִן **Ayin** has a tail that runs away to the left. צָדֵי **Tsade** sits flat on the line. And גִּימֶל **gimel**, and נוּן **nun**.

גִּימֶל **Gimel** has a foot. נוּן **Nun** has a flat base. Now four pairs that do not look alike, but sound alike. כַּף **Kaf** with its dot, and קוֹף **qof**: both say K. Tav, and Tet: both say T.

סָמֶךְ **Samekh**, and sin: both say S. And alef, and עַיִן **ayin**: both say nothing, in perfect agreement. Once, each of them had a sound of its own. The spelling has not forgotten. It is how you find a word in the dictionary; and how you tell one root from another.

5:20 Letters from the throat

Four letters are made in the throat. Alef, הֵא **he**, חֵית **het**, עַיִן **ayin**. Resh often keeps them company. More than one letter in five in the Bible is one of these four. They are a family; and like most families, they have habits.

Three of them; and they explain spellings that you have already read. Habit one: they will not be doubled. The little word the doubles the letter after it. הַשָּׁמַיִם **Ha-shamayim**: the heavens; with a dot in the shin. Before alef, it cannot.

So its own vowel grows long instead. הָאָרֶץ **Ha-arets**: the earth. In Lesson two I told you that the vowel changes there. Now you know why. Habit two: they will not carry a bare שְׁוָא **shewa**.

Under an ordinary letter, a word may begin with one. בְּרֵאשִׁית **Bereshit**. A throat letter wants a little more: so the שְׁוָא **shewa** is given a vowel to sit beside it. The hurried e: אֱלֹהִים **Elohim**. The hurried a: אֲשֶׁר **asher**; who, or which.

The hurried o: אָהֳלוֹ **oholo**; his tent. I counted the hurried vowels in the Bible. Thirty thousand, seven hundred and five. More than ninety-eight in every hundred stand under one of these four letters. Habit three: they like the sound ah.

Open your mouth, and say ah. That is your throat. Your doctor asks for that vowel for a reason. So when a word ends in חֵית **het** or עַיִן **ayin**, a small ah slips in, before the letter. רוּאַח **Ruach**: spirit.

נוֹאַח **Noach**: Noah. שֹׁמֵעַ **Shomea**: one who hears.

7:03 Every vowel on one board

Now, every vowel on one board. Hebrew has five vowel sounds; and each can be long, short, or hurried. That is the whole system. The rest is names; and names are for examinations. The first sound: ah.

Long: קָמָץ **qamets**. Short: פַּתַח **patach**. Hurried: the hurried a. Eh. The long one: צֵירֵי **tsere**; with or without a yod behind it.

Short: סֶגּוֹל **segol**. Hurried: the hurried e; and the שְׁוָא **shewa** itself. Ee. Long: with a yod. Short: without.

Oh. Long: the dot on top; with its vav, or without. Hurried: the hurried o. Short: wait. Oo.

Long: the vav with the dot in the middle. Short: three dots on a slant. That is the board; with one hole in it. The short o. Here it is.

Look closely. It is a קָמָץ **qamets**. That is the first new thing today; and it is the one trap in the vowels. The same sign: but in a short, shut syllable, with no stress on it, it says o. Its name is קָמָץ חָטוּף **qamets hatuf**.

You have been saying it for weeks. Here is the word for all. It looks like kal. It is כָּל **kol**; more than four thousand times. חָכְמָה **Chokhmah**: wisdom.

And the first vowel of אָהֳלוֹ **oholo**, his tent. Why one sign for two sounds? The scribes who invented the signs said the two alike; so, for them, one sign was enough. The trap was laid later, by people who pronounce the way I do. I apologise.

Do not work it out. This course writes the sound under every word; and the common ones, you will simply know.

Now: letters that help a vowel, and say nothing themselves. You know the yod after a חִירִיק **hireq**, and the vav. Three more. צֵירֵי **Tsere**, with a yod: בֵּין **bein**; between. The second new thing: סֶגּוֹל **segol**, with a yod.

אֱלֹהֶיךָ **Elohekha**: your God. And קָמָץ **qamets**, with a silent הֵא **he** at the end of a word. מַלְכָּה **Malkah**: a queen. לָיְלָה **Laylah**: night.

9:21 One dot, four jobs

Now the dot. In Lesson three it had two jobs, and no extra pay. It has four now. The pay has not changed. Job one: it makes a letter hard.

בָּרָא **Bara**: he created. B, not V. Job two: it doubles a letter. הַמַּיִם **Ha-mayim**: the waters. Lean on the mem.

Job three: inside a vav, it is the vowel oo. רוּחַ **Ruach**. And job four, the last new thing today: a dot in a הֵא **he**, at the end of a word. You know that a last הֵא **he** is silent. With a dot in it, it is a real h again.

לָהּ **Lah**: to her. A careful reader breathes it out. The rest of us mean to. The dot is called מַפִּיק **mappiq**; and more than four times in five, it means her, or its. Now two words that you met in Lesson four.

The man is put in the garden לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ **le-ovdah u-le-shomrah**: to work it, and to keep it. That day I said: do not mind the vowels. Today you may mind them. Each word has the short o that looks like a קָמָץ **qamets**. And each ends in a הֵא **he** with a dot: it.

And I counted the dots. One hundred and seventy thousand, eight hundred and twenty-six of them. No vowel sign in the whole Bible is written as often as that one dot. It does four jobs, because somebody has to.

10:46 **Genesis 1:31**

Now the verse. It closes the six days of creation. Everything in it has a name now. You read it first; take your time.

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה Va-yar Elohim et kol asher asah, **וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד** ve-hinneh tov me'od. **וַיְהִי עֶרֶב** Va-yehi erev, **וַיְהִי בֹקֶר** va-yehi voqer, **יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי** yom ha-shishi. And God saw all that he had made; and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning: the sixth day. Three things to see.

כָּל Kol: the short o that looks like a **קָמָץ** qamets. **אֲשֶׁר** Asher: the hurried a, under a throat letter. **הַשִּׁשִּׁי** Ha-shishi: the, and after it, a doubled shin.

And now, count with me. Six times in this chapter, God saw that it was good. **כִּי טוֹב** Ki tov. The seventh time, with everything made, it is **טוֹב מְאֹד** tov me'od: very good. But the six are not shared out evenly.

Day three has two. And day two has none. Day two is a Monday. I make no comment. One thing more.

Tet, as you know, is the rarest letter in the Bible. The first Tet of all stands in this chapter; in the word **טוֹב** tov. It waited for a good word.

12:19 **Before next time**

That is the whole writing system, in one piece. Twenty-two letters. Five end-shapes. Five vowels, at three speeds. And one overworked dot.

Stage two is tied up. One thing to do before next time. Open Psalm one hundred and nineteen in your own Bible. Many Bibles print a strange word over every eight verses. Aleph.

Beth. Gimel. Perhaps you have skipped them for years. They are your alphabet. Read them down the page, in order: all twenty-two.

And the exercises on this page will show you what has stuck. Next time: the verb; and what Hebrew really means, when it says: he created.

Until next time: **לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם** lekh leshalom. Go in peace.