

The Hebrew Writing System – Lesson 10

Hebrew is an inflected language. This means that changes in parsing and grammar are accomplished by altering (inflecting) the words. These changes follow patterns that will be learned in the following lessons. Hebrew also commonly adds prefixes and suffixes to words, sometimes making the word much longer than it originally would have been.

As we learn about inflecting Hebrew words, some exceptions to the previously presented rules will emerge. One exception is the half-closed syllable. This is a syllable that ends in a vocal shewa (the rule is that a shewa that ends a syllable is a silent shewa). Some words normally contain a vowel, but when inflected the vowel is changed to a shewa. In this case, the shewa may be vocal even if the rules say it should be silent. Obviously this can only be determined by knowing the vocabulary form of the word, and so there is no other rule for identifying half-closed syllables.

It is fairly common to see words joined together by a hyphen (for example: עַל-פְּנֵי) much like in English. This mark is called a “makkef”. Makkef joins the two words together. They are pronounced together, and grammatically they are essentially considered one word. Sometimes, this joining together using a makkef will cause the pointing to be adjusted from what it would be otherwise.

אֶל-יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אַחֲרַי בֶּן-נֹון הִזָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבָנַי
תִּצְלִיחַ הַשָּׁמַשׁ וְהַלְבָּנוֹן כָּל-מָקוֹם אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן

Vocabulary

בַּיִת house

דָּם blood

לֶחֶם bread

מָקוֹם place

תּוֹרָה law