

Correspondence

More thoughts on Hebrew Vowel Points

**From : Mr. Michael Kimmitt. N. Wales.
To: The Editor of the British Reformed Journal.**

The Hebrew Vowel Points

It is well known that the Hebrew Alphabet consists of 22 letters - all of which are Consonants. Since a demonstration is worth a long explanation the effect in English is as if we wrote the well known sentence:

TH CT ST N TH MT

and since Hebrew is written and read from right to left it would really look like this:

TM HT N TS TC HT

Since a totally vowel-less Alphabet is inconvenient in time HE- ה; VAV- ו; YOD- י; came to represent the long vowels.

As long as the language is living there is no particular problem in such a system - but if English were no longer spoken we might not know whether the Feline was pronounced CAT or COT or CUT or even CET, CIT or possibly CYTE.

When Hebrew was in time displaced by Aramaic it is supposed that the pronunciation was in danger of being lost and the vowel signs were invented to give guidance but reverence for the sacred text meant they were placed under it - not in the text itself; an operation which was carried out around the seventh century of our era.

Now it was the opinion of Owen as well as many other learned men that the vowel points were an original part of the inspired Scriptures but the following arguments seem to tell against this.

Weingreen states that: "Even to-day, the Hebrew Scrolls of the Law which are read in the Synagogues are unpointed, i.e. without vowel signs." Perhaps some of our readers can confirm this? Certainly a Synagogue I passed from time to time in Birmingham had to my recollection a sign made up simply of the (consonantal) letters.

Further, in Israel today, now that it is again a living language, though immigrants are initiated with a pointed Newspaper, once a degree of proficiency is reached, they will pass on to normal papers which are unpointed

and which shows it is perfectly possible, once the sounds of the words are known, to read and understand Hebrew without pointing.

What seems to me to be decisive is the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I have only seen a copy of one or two sections but there lies before me as I write a picture of Isa. 38:8 - 40:28 from c. 100 BC which appears totally devoid of any pointing at all. I have not been able to discover whether that applies generally - again one of our readers may be able to help.

What then of the argument from Mt. 5: 18 that: 'one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled'? It is irrelevant! The word 'Jot' transliterates the Greek 'iota' and corresponds to the Hebrew YOD- י and the 'tittle' refers to the minor marks which distinguish certain Hebrew letters e.g:

Daleth, the Hebrew D is ד

Resh, the Hebrew R is ר

(The reader should note the little "nib" at the top right corner of the Daleth. This is what modern experts regard as the "tittle" of Matt. 5 : 18. This little "nib" is missing on the resh. Obviously it's presence or absence can be of crucial importance. *Ed.*)

Editor's comment:

Mr. Kimmitt's view as expressed above is the standard view of modern scholars. It is directly opposed to that position put by Dr. Ella in the correspondence of issue No. 17 of the BRJ, firstly and notably on the matter of the interpretation of the "tittle" of Matt. 5:18, and further, as to the evidence concerning vowel pointing from pre-Massoretic times. (Pre 600 AD).

Mr. Kimmitt desires to open up some debate on this issue, and hopes that other readers will be able to respond and/or shed further light on this issue. Please do write in.