

Diachronic Diversity in Classical Biblical Hebrew

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9. FPL י- VERSUS הַ-

Across ancient Hebrew sources and traditions, the dominant form of the FPL verbal suffix is vowel-final הַ-.¹ In terms of biblical material, this is true of the written and reading components of both the Tiberian biblical tradition and the SP, as well as of BDSS manuscripts. Beyond biblical sources, it is also true of QH and the Mishna (see Hornkohl 2023, 171–81 for further references and discussion). A minority alternative is orthographically consonant-final י-. At issue in the present chapter is the character and biblical distribution of this minority form within the Masoretic tradition, which is often arguably levelled in the Tiberian pronunciation tradition via the apparently secondary addition of a final vowel, resulting in the anomalously defective vowel-final graphic combination יַ-. Both forms plausibly derive from PS *-na* (cf. Arabic).

In terms of frequency, the prefix conjugation (*yiqtol*, *way-yiqtol*) is the only category for which meaningful patterns may be perceived and, as such, is the focus of the present chapter. The FPL imperative and the infinitive construct with 3FPL suffix occur too infrequently for the detection of distributions of any significance. Nor are their respective patterns of incidence sufficient materially to alter conclusions based on the distribution of the prefix conjugation.

¹ See Blau (2010, 203–4, §§4.3.3.1.2n–4.3.3.2.1n) on the ancient Hebrew FPL endings in the broader comparative Semitic context.

1.0. The Combined Tiberian Biblical Tradition

Hornkohl (2023, 172) presents the following tabulation of FPL prefix conjugation forms in the Tiberian biblical tradition (according to L).

Table 1: Distribution of 2/3FPL prefix conjugation forms in Tiberian BH (see Hornkohl 2023, 179, for citations)

	הָ-	לְ-	לְ-
Genesis	15	1	12
Exodus	7	0	11
Leviticus	10	0	0
Numbers	11	0	1
Deuteronomy	1	0	2
Joshua	3	0	0
Judges	5	0	0
Samuel	15	0	3
Kings	8	0	0
Isaiah	37	0	0
Jeremiah	29	0	0
Ezekiel	58	0	7
Hosea	4	0	0
Joel	1	0	0
Amos	3	0	0
Obadiah	1	0	0
Jonah	0	0	0
Micah	4	0	0
Zechariah	9	0	1
Malachi	1	0	0
Psalms	20	0	0
Job	12	0	0
Proverbs	10	0	0
Ruth	16	0	0
Song of Songs	1	0	0
Lamentations	3	0	0
Esther	2	0	0
Daniel	4	0	0
Nehemiah	1	0	0
Chronicles	4	0	0
TOTAL	295	0	1

Several facts emerge from the statistics. First, vowel-final orthography and pronunciation dominate, with a comparatively small minority of consonant-final spellings and a lone instance where consonant-final pronunciation coincides with consonant-final spelling in the form of לְ-. Notwithstanding the extant Masoretic vocalisation, it is reasonable to speculate that consonant-final

orthography implies formerly more frequent consonant-final pronunciation (more on this below).

Second, consonant-final spellings are not evenly distributed throughout the biblical text. Instances of FPL prefix conjugation forms terminating in י- accumulate appreciably in the Pentateuch, where they account for more than a third of the cases, i.e., 27 of 71. Indeed, the Torah accounts for over 70 percent of the 38 cases of FPL prefix conjugation forms ending in י- in the Masoretic Hebrew Bible.

Within the Pentateuch the distribution is uneven. Consonant-final forms are common in Genesis (13 of 28 cases) and dominant in Exodus (11 of 18), and, though few, also in Deuteronomy (2 of 3); in these books the ratio of הַי- to י- is 23 to 25. By contrast, consonant-final spellings are absent from Leviticus (out of 10 cases) and nearly so in Numbers (1 of 12).

Beyond the Pentateuch, consonant-final forms are rare, accounting for just 11 of the 224 cases of FPL prefix conjugation forms. They are found in just three loci. In Samuel, one-sixth of the 18 cases show י-, while Ezekiel, with more FPL prefix conjugation forms than any other book, has an incidence of just over 1 in 10 (7 of 65), which is similar to Zechariah's 1 in 10.

2.0. The Pentateuch

The conspicuous concentration of FPL י- in the Pentateuch, especially Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy, is remarkable. The absence of י- forms in Leviticus might lead one to assume that the distribution of הַי- versus י- is, perhaps at least in part, a function

of putative source. As Table 2 shows, the data seem to point in a different direction.

Table 2: FPL prefix conjugation forms with ה- and י- according to reputed source (identification of sources according to Friedman 1989, 246–55; for citations, see below, §5.0, Table 4)

	ה-	י-
J	9	10
E	13	8
P	21	6
DTR ¹	1	1
Other	0	1
	44	26

All sources with more than a single case of each alternant show some degree of mixing of vowel- and consonant-final FPL prefix conjugation morphology. In J and E the figures for both forms are significant. For its part, P shows definite preference for ה-, though consistently has י- in Genesis–Exodus and ה- in Leviticus–Numbers. If the purported sources showing mixed usage were at one time more consistent in this regard, or if P in Leviticus and Numbers once showed greater heterogeneity, is impossible to determine, as original tendencies may well have become blurred in the processes of redaction and transmission.

In this connection, it is worth mentioning that individual sections show a mixture of forms (even if reflecting a single putative source): Gen. 19 (J): 2 ה-, 2 י-; 41 (E): 9 ה-, 2 י-. Consider the combination of forms in the following short spans.²

² Beyond the Pentateuch, note also the mixture of forms in 1 Sam. 18.7; Ezek. 16.55.

- (1) וַיִּצַּג אֶת־הַמִּקְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר פָּצַל בְּרֶהֱטִים בְּשִׁקְתוֹת הַמָּיִם אֲשֶׁר^ו תִּבְּאֵן הַצֹּאֵן
לְשִׁתוֹת לְנֹכַח הַצֹּאֵן וַיִּחְמְנוּ בִּבְאֵן לְשִׁתוֹת: וַיַּחְמוּ הַצֹּאֵן אֶל־הַמִּקְלוֹת
וַתִּלְדֹּן הַצֹּאֵן עֲקָדִים נִקְדִּים וּטְלָאִים:

‘He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks would come to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted.’ (Gen. 30.38–39 [J])

- (2) וְהִנֵּה אֲנִיחֵנוּ מֵאֲלֵמִים אֲלֵמִים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה אֲלֵמְתִי וְגַם־נִצָּבָה
וְהִנֵּה תִסָּבִינָה אֲלֵמְתֵיכֶם וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶינּוּ לְאֵלֵמְתִּי:

‘Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf.’ (Gen. 37.7 [J])

As Barr (1989, 127–30) observes, most of the verbs in question occur too infrequently in FPL forms to extrapolate much from their incidence. The exception is הָיָה ‘be’, with 44 cases total. In the Torah, the ratio of ן- to ך- is 11 to 9; elsewhere it is 19 to 5. This is in line with the observation made above regarding the uniqueness of the Torah in evincing forms with ן-. It is no surprise that the most commonly occurring verb is the one that most frequently preserves irregularity.³

Finally, no obvious phonological or prosodic factor governing the selection between alternants is apparent.

³ In this connection it is worth mentioning that all cases of ן- in P, which, again, are restricted to Genesis–Exodus, involve the verb הָיָה (6 ×). By contrast, in Leviticus, P has only the ן- form of הָיָה (2 ×).

3.0. Orthographic versus Linguistic Explanations

As in other cases of apparently defective spelling of final *ā*-vowels—most notably, 2MS verbal ת- and nominal ך- (see Hornkohl 2023, 101–44) and נער with feminine singular referent (see below, ch. 9)⁴—though the phenomenon is explicable in purely orthographic terms, the combined Tiberian written-reading tradition furnishes evidence of pronunciation diversity supportive of a morphological, i.e., linguistic, explanation.

Standard feminine plural morphology in BH comes in both vowel- and consonant-final alternatives. Consult Table 3.

Table 3: FPL morphological variety in Tiberian Biblical Hebrew⁵

	נה-	ן-
2FPL independent pronoun	4	1
3FPL independent pronoun	48	—
2FPL nominal suffix (affixed to noun/preposition)	4	14
3FPL nominal suffix (affixed to noun/preposition)	68	180
2FPL suffix on infinitive construct	—	1
3FPL suffix on infinitive construct	4	6
3FPL suffix on verb (finite or participle)	—	9
FPL imperative	17	5

In a few categories, Masoretic BH exhibits no morphological variety, but in many there seems to have been some degree of diversity or fluctuation. Intriguingly, in all the above categories,

⁴ Hornkohl (2023, 103, fn. 3) also lists the 3FS object/possessive suffix הִיא־, e.g., אֶלֶיהָ ‘to her’, not אֶלֶיהָ*, and the *ketiv* עת with *qere* עֵתָה ‘now’ (Ezek. 23.43; Ps. 74.6); cf. the consistent form עת in Iron Age Hebrew epigraphy (Arad; Lachish; Murabba‘at).

⁵ Cf. also the problematic 2FPL וְהַשְׁלֵכְתֶּנָּה (Amos 4.3).

the written and pronunciation components of the tradition are in harmony, agreeing on vowel- or consonant-final morphology, with no indication of dissonance between spelling and vocalisation.

In this context of FPL morphology, the endings of the prefix conjugations stand out. According to the pronunciation tradition, just a single case—the poetic תְּהִיְוּ ‘they will be’ (Gen. 49.26)—is consonant-final. All other cases of consonant-final orthography are pointed ך-, i.e., as vowel-final, in opposition to the consonant-final realisation expected of the written form. Yet the anomalous character of this spelling for final \bar{a} , for which a *mater heh* is expected (and most often present), coupled with the known oscillation between vowel- and consonant-final FPL morphology more broadly, almost certainly points to a phonological distinction behind the orthographic diversity (Andersen and Forbes 1986, 180–81; Barr 1989, 130–31; Hornkohl 2023, 174). The view adopted here is that the spelling ך- reflects vowel-final realisation and that the spelling ך- originally reflected consonant-final realisation. In line with Second Temple convention, however, the realisation of ך- was almost universally levelled for purposes of linguistic harmonisation with the dominant vowel-final alternative, thereby creating the consonantal-vocalic dissonance preserved in the anomalous ך- of the extant combined Tiberian written-reading tradition. The consonant-final ending of poetic תְּהִיְוּ ‘they will be’ (Gen. 49.26) was presumably left as is due to its embedding in archaic poetry, where non-standard morphology was more readily tolerated.

4.0. Interpreting the Data

Vowel- and consonant-final variation in FPL morphology seems to be an ancient feature in Hebrew and the Semitic languages, more broadly (Blau 2010, 203–4, §§4.3.3.1.2n–4.3.3.2.1n). As noted above, each can be derived from PS *-nā*. As such, both the הַ- and יְ- FPL prefix conjugation morphological alternants may be considered early. By contrast, based on Second Temple biblical and extrabiblical evidence, there is no doubt that vowel-final prefix conjugation (and imperatival) forms eventually came to dominate as standard. With just a few exceptions, this is seen in the combined Samaritan written-reading tradition, the BDSS, Jerome’s Latin transcriptions, Ben Sira, the QH of the NBDSS, and RH (Hornkohl 2023, 174–77).

It is, then, reasonable to postulate a situation of early diversity in FPL prefix conjugation morphology that gradually gave way to standardisation of vowel-final forms. The difference between the consonantal and vocalic components of the Tiberian tradition can be interpreted as a result of the manifestation of distinct phases in this process, with the orthography preserving an earlier phase of diversity and the vocalisation showing later extension of vowel-final morphology. From this perspective, it is not surprising that Tiberian LBH evinces total agreement between its constituent written and reading components, or that the consonant-final form is comparatively rare in TBH Ezekiel and Zechariah. The preservation of a mixed picture of vowel- and apparent consonant-final morphology in the Torah, with a sizeable minority of FPL יְ- endings, along with the rather smaller minority in Samuel, also fits with the proposed theory.

The diachronic development as described does not, however, explain every fact. What of CBH texts that contain FPL prefix conjugation forms, but eschew completely the use of consonant-final morphology? And, especially, why such a dichotomy between the CBH of the Torah and the CBH of the relevant works in the Prophets and Writings when it comes to the preservation of consonant-final FPL morphology? While in any situation of viable alternants language users may consistently opt for one over the other—as in Leviticus and Numbers in the Torah (though in the Torah, too, there may be a degree of secondary blurring)—one wonders whether the nearly homogenous use of FPL הַי- in the CBH Prophets and Writings is authentic. It is possible—though neither provable nor disprovable—that the lop-sided preference for vowel-final הַי- in CBH outside the Torah is artificial, the result of the secondary imposition of post-exilic morphological norms on an Iron Age II situation that otherwise, as in the Torah, would have shown greater morphological diversity. For its part, the Torah may have better preserved ancient heterogeneity by dint of its relatively early consolidation and perceived sanctity. While this account is by no means certain or, for that matter, even necessary, the hypothesised textual preservation of primary, diachronically authentic, data combined with secondary features variably applied within the biblical corpus, explains the diachronically complex dichotomy involving FPL prefix conjugation morphology in the CBH of the Tiberian Pentateuch and beyond.

5.0. Appendix

Table 4: FPL Prefix Conjugation Forms in the Tiberian Pentateuch According to Putative Source (per Friedman 1989, 246–55)

	נה-	ן-
Genesis	3.7 (J) ותַּפְלֹחָנָה	19.33 (J) ותִּשְׁקֶינִי
		35 (J) ותִּשְׁקֶינִי
		36 (J) ותִּהְרֶינִי
	24.61 (J) ותִּרְכַּבְנָה	
	61 (J) ותִּלְכְּנָה	26.35 (P) ותִּהְיֶינִי
		27.1 (J) ותִּכְהֶינִי
	30.38 (J) וַיַּחַמְנָה	30.38 (J) תִּבְאֵן
		39 (J) ותִּלְדֶּן
	31.14 (E) ותִּאמְרָנָה	
		33.6 (E) ותִּגְשֶׁן
		6 (E) ותִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶינִי
	37.7 (J) ותִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶינִי	37.7 (J) תִּסְבִּינָה
	41.2 (E) ותרַעֲיֶנָה	
	3 (E) ותַעֲמֹדְנָה	
	4 (E) ותִּאכְלֶנָה	
	7 (E) ותִּבְלַעְנָה	
	18 (E) ותרַעֲיֶנָה	
	20 (E) ותִּאכְלֶנָה	
	21 (E) ותִּבְאֵנָה	
		41.24 (E) ותִּבְלַעֲנִי
		36 (E) תִּהְיֶינִי
	53 (E) ותִּכְלִינָה	
	54 (E) ותִּחַלִּינָה	
		49.26 (J) תִּהְיֶינִי
Exodus	1.10 (E) תִּקְרֹאנָה	
		1.17 (E) ותִּירָאנִי
		18 (E) ותִּחַיֶּינִי
		19 (E) ותִּאמְרֶן
	2.16 (J) ותִּבְאֵנָה	
	16 (J) ותִּדְלֶנָה	

	16 (J) וְתַמְלִיאָנָה	
	18 (J) וְתַבְאָנָה	
	8.5 (E) תִּשְׁאָרְנָה	2.19 (J) וְתַאמְרָן
	7 (E) תִּשְׁאָרְנָה	
		15.20 (E) וְתַצְאָן
		25.27 (P) תְּהִיִּין
		26.3 (P) תְּהִיִּין
		27.2 (P) תְּהִיִּין
		28.21 (P) תְּהִיִּין
		21 (P) תְּהִיִּין
Leviticus	4.2 (P) תַּעֲשִׂינָה	
	13 (P) תַּעֲשִׂינָה	
	22 (P) תַּעֲשִׂינָה	
	27 (P) תַּעֲשִׂינָה	
	5.17 (P) תַּעֲשִׂינָה	
	7.30 (P) תְּבִיאָיָה	
	10.19 (P) וְתִקְרָאנָה	
	23.15 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	17 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	17 (P) תַּאֲפִינָה	
Numbers		25.2 (J) וְתִקְרָאן
	27.1 (P) וְתִקְרָבָנָה	
	2 (P) וְתַעֲמִידָנָה	
	35.11 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	13 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	14 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	15 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	36.3 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	4 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	6 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	6 (P) תְּהִיִּינָה	
	11 (P) וְתְהִיִּינָה	
Deuteronomy	1.44 (DTR ¹) תַּעֲשִׂינָה	
		21.15 (Other) תְּהִיִּין
		31.21 (DTR ¹) תַּמְצָאן

