

DAGESH

The *dagesh* is a dot that can appear in the middle of most Hebrew letters, with the exception of the gutturals (א, ה, ח, ט, ע).¹ The two most prevalent types in the Hebrew Bible are the weak *dagesh*, and the strong *dagesh*. When learning biblical Hebrew, it is important for students to distinguish between the two.

Weak Dagesh (Lene)

- Only appears in six letters of the Hebrew Alphabet, ב, ג, ד, כ, פ, and ת—also known as BeGaDKeFaT.
- Represents a single letter, therefore the *peh* in מִשְׁפָּחָה only has the value of a single letter, *mišpāḥāh* (cf. Strong *Dagesh*, below.)
- As a general principle, when a *dagesh* appears in a BeGaDKeFaT at the beginning of a syllable, then it is weak *dagesh*. In the word דָּרָךְ for example, because the *dāleth* is a BeGaDKeFaT and appears at the beginning of a syllable (the beginning of the word), it is a weak *dagesh*. Similarly, because the silent *shewa* marks the end of a syllable, we see a weak *dagesh* opening the second syllable in מִשְׁפָּחָה
- In certain instances, weak *dagesh lene* is absent from the beginning of a word. This usually happens when the word appears after an open syllable.

Strong Dagesh (forte)

- Appears in any letter, with the exception of the gutturals, as mentioned above; therefore, a *dagesh* appearing in any non-BeGaDKeFaT is a strong *dagesh*.
- When Strong *dagesh* is present within a BeGaDKeFaT, it has the same effect of a weak *dagesh* regarding pronunciation: it changes the spirant into a plosive.
- Strong *Dagesh* usually represents gemination, a doubling of letters. The form בִּקְשׁ is transliterated as *biqqēš* because the strong *dagesh* represents a geminated *qof*. (The doubling may come as a result of assimilation, when a weak letter such as *nun* joins the letter it follows)
- The strong *dagesh* appears after any full vowel whether long or short, as with the word שֵׁשׁ.
- In certain circumstances the strong *dagesh* is omitted over a *shewa* when it is ordinarily expected. Thus, in Exod 4:19 we meet the form הַמְּבַקְשִׁים (from בִּקְשׁ) without an expected strong *dagesh* in the *qof*
- Certain verb patterns automatically include *dagesh forte* as part of their formation. For example, the *dagesh forte* in the verb בִּקֵּשׁ (*piel*) is part of the stem.
- Certain noun patterns similarly include a strong *dagesh* as part of their formation (e.g., בִּלְהָ).

¹ In certain instances, the ה, at the end of a word, may contain a dot within it (הֿ) that is called a *mappiq*.