

## The Historical Division of Hebrew Speech and Hebrew Writing

The Hebrew language has been preserved in its present form over the last three millenia in its (1) orthography, (2) morphology, (3) main vocabulary. This historical unity has meant, from the socio-linguistic point of view, that an average student may to this day claim equal familiarity with all historical strata of the language, with practically none of it archaic and alien to the point of unintelligibility.

Historical division is necessary in the description of such a protracted development. Unfortunately historical strata of *spoken* Hebrew do not provide us with a key, because of (a) paucity of information on archaic Hebrew speech and (b) the practical extinction of spoken Hebrew for a period of fifteen hundred years until its renaissance in modern Land of Israel.

The history of the *written* language thus lends itself to the following division:

I. The thousand years until the beginning of the C.E., with the *Biblical* paradigm preferred.

II. Until ca. 950 C.E. with preference of the *Mishnaic* paradigm, which was nothing but the spoken language of the early centuries B.C. and C.E. as fixed in writing.

III. The following nine hundred years with *all norm absent* as a result of widespread linguistic experimentation, hybridization and translation to engulf novel subject matter, mainly in the countries of Arabic speaking peoples and European language countries.

IV. Last — from the mid-nineteenth century to the present: it begins with Biblical purism, developing into the eclecticism of the modern spoken and written language, comprising Biblical and Mishnaic elements with a stray admixture of Gallicisms and foreign elements.