The division of the Hebrew Bible into verses is an ancient Jewish tradition reflected in the accentuation system, which marks the end of every verse by placing the accent silluq under the last word of each verse.¹ This division was originally transmitted orally: thus, the Mishnah assumes a division of the Bible into verses: “He who reads in the Torah may not read less than three verses” etc. (Megillah 4:4); this division was assumed by R. Ika Bar Abin, in the name Rav Hananel, in the name of Rav, to have been accomplished by Ezra (Babli, Nedarim 37b).² Eventually, the accentuation system was committed to writing during the period of the massoretes (c. seventh century).

The different accentuation systems (Tiberian, Babylonian, Palestinian) have different signs to mark the accents, but apparently agree, in general, regarding the actual verse division.³ Nevertheless, a number of

¹ In addition, two vertical dots were placed after the last word of the verse. However, this was not done consistently in all of the early biblical manuscripts. See I. Yeivin, The Aleppo Codex: A Study of its Vocalization and Accentuation (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 198-9 (Hebrew).
³ For the three accentuation systems, see M. Meidan, “Accentuation,” Encyclopaedia Biblica, vol. 3 (Jerusalem, 1965), col. 398-399 (Hebrew); Dotan (n. 2), col. 1433-4, 1437-41 (Palestinian); 1445-7 (Babylonian); 1433-61 (Tiberian). See also Dotan, col. 1463 concerning the Non-Conventional Tiberian system. The Palestinian and Babylonian systems do not mark an accent on the last word of the verses (see Meidan, col. 399; Dotan, col. 1439 [only rarely in the Palestinian system], col. 1445). Nevertheless, they, too, preserved verse divisions; thus, the Babylonian massorah marks the beginning of every verse in the Pentateuch—see C. D. Ginsburg, The Massorah Compiled from Manuscripts, vols. 1-4 (London, 1880-1905; reduced photo edn.: Jerusalem, 1971 [6 vols.]; New York, 1975), vol. 3, pp. 207-268; Y. Ofer, The Babylonian Masora of the Pentateuch, its Principles and Methods, (PhD. dissertation, Hebrew University, 1995, Hebrew), vol. 2. Similarly, in the Palestinian system, the abbreviated serugin biblical texts reflect a verse
sources show that there were various disagreements regarding verse division. (1) The Babylonian Talmud (Kiddushin 30a) preserves early evidence of a difference (fourth century) regarding verse divisions: e.g. ErezIsrael versus Babylonia concerning Exod. xix 9—the former divided this verse into three. (2) A number of differences have been preserved in the written accentuation system, reflecting two different ways of verse division (apparently between Babylonia and ErezIsrael). Thus, the double accentuation system regarding the Ten Commandments, and the double accentuation system regarding Gen. xxxv 22 (see next source). (3) There are massoretic notes that record differences between the East and the West (Babylonia and ErezIsrael) concerning verse division. (4) The phenomenon of “a break in the middle of a verse” (pisqah beʾemzaʾ pasuq) seems to reflect different opinions concerning the verse division.

In addition to the verses having been divided at an early date, their totals (and half-totals) for the Pentateuch and Psalms were enumerated (Kiddushin 30a). On these matters, too, various traditions were recorded: e.g. (a) total number of verses in the Pentateuch: 5888 (Kiddushin 30a), 5845 (so noted in many Tiberian massoretic MSS); (b) half of the verses in the Pentateuch: Lev xiii 33 (Kiddushin 30a, and Babylonian massorah); Lev. viii 8 (Tiberian massorah); Lev. viii 23 (Massekhet Soferim 9:2).

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5 See Ginsburg, Massorah (n. 3), vol. 4, pp. 414a-415b: one case in Genesis and four in Deuteronomy; Ginsburg, Introduction (n. 4), p. 70 and n. 6; Penkower (n. 4), pp. 115-116; Ofer (n. 3), vol. 1, pp. 124-9.

