

Jot or Tittle – Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17 – Floyd Nolen Jones Th.D., Ph.D.

Being about ⅓ the size of all the other consonants in the Hebrew alphabet, the jot (Hebrew = yod) is by far its smallest letter (י cp. to ה). But a tittle is much smaller. The word tittle (Greek = *keraiia* = *keraiia*) means “a little horn,” an extremity, projection, antenna, apex, etc. From this, some academicians define tittle as the very minute vertical projections on the top left of such letters as ב, כ, ה, ו, ר, ד, ק (b, ch, h, r, d, k).

As tittle can also mean “point,” Dr. Thomas M. Strouse (Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary, Newington, CT), Dr. Chester W. Kulus (Tilton, NH) and others take this to imply that tittles serve as vowels in Hebrew (and that they have existed from Moses until today). This understanding is especially true for the *chirek* which is the smallest vowel point in the Hebrew Old Testament. The *chirek* is a single dot representing their “i” (vowel points in Hebrew refer to a system of dots, a \cdot or a τ that are inserted above, between, or below Hebrew consonants so as to represent vowels: e.g., in the Hebrew word for earth at Genesis 1:2 [אָרֶץ], the dots and the subscript τ are vowels).

McClintock and Strong state that the tittle is that which marks the slightest distinction between the various Hebrew consonants (*Cyclopaedia*, Vol. X, p. 438). Thus, for most Hebrew authorities it is the small overhang (*serif*) whereby their “d” (ד) differs from the “r” (ר), or the difference between their “b” (ב) and “k” (כ), and also that of their “h” (ה) as compared to the “ch” (ח).

In *Vaykira Rabba*¹ we find that if anyone changed the **b** beth into a **k** caph in Hosea 5:7: “They have dealt treacherously **against** the LORD” (hwhy**b** = bayhovah) “he would ruin the world” because the verse would then mean: “They have dealt treacherously **like** the Lord.”

Also: if anyone changed the **h** he into a **j** cheth in Psa. 150:6: “Let everything that hath breath **praise** (llht = tehalel) the LORD” “he would ruin the world” because the command would then be: “Let everything that hath breath **curse** the LORD.”

And: if anyone changed the **b** beth into a **k** caph in Hosea 5:7: They have dealt treacherously **against** the LORD (hwhy**b** = bayhovah) because the verse would then mean: “They have dealt treacherously **like** the Lord.” Thus, we see that jots, and tittles are far more significant than just dotting an “i” or crossing a “t” as we so commonly hear.

These examples, and others that could be given, demonstrate that the best understanding of the New Testament *Koiné* Greek word for tittle (*koiné* = κοινή meaning common as opposed to classical) refers to the horns, extremities, projections, antennas, apexes etc.

¹ *Vaykira Rabba*, s. 19 quoted in Adam Clarke’s Commentary, Vol. 5, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1830), p. 70 (Mat. 5:18). *Vaykira Rabba* is a 5th century (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*) homiletic midrash (a commentary of 37 sermons or lectures) to the Book of Leviticus (*Vaykira* in Hebrew).

found on Hebrew consonants that distinguish the “d” (ד) from the “r” (ר), the “b” (ב) from the “k” (כ), and the “h” (ה) from the “ch” (ח) as given above in paragraph three.