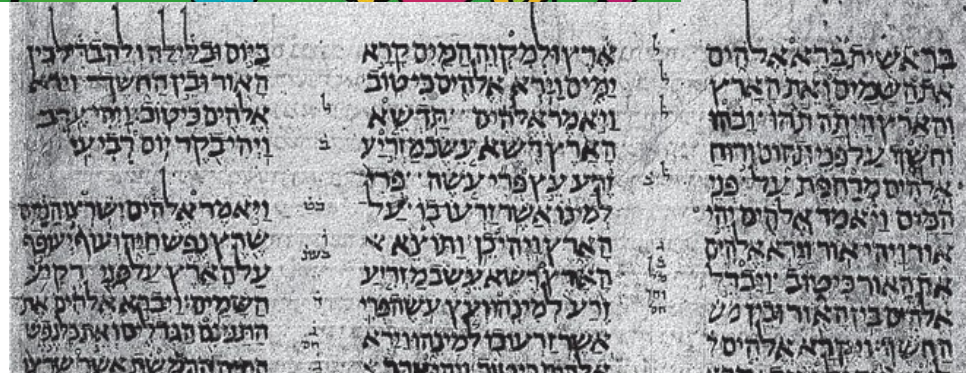
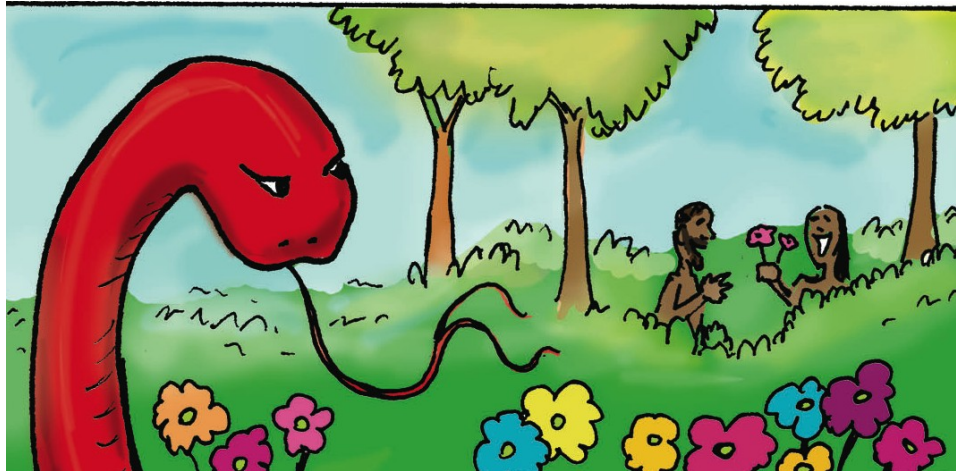


Biblical Hebrew

An Illustrated Introduction



Lessons, Appendices, & Glossaries

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Illustrated by Philip Williams

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Preface

Background

As the case with most elementary textbooks of Classical or Biblical Hebrew, this textbook was born out of the authors' dissatisfaction with the available grammars. Its development began during our time at the University of Wisconsin as graduate instructors of first-year biblical Hebrew courses, from 1996 to 2002. In our years of teaching Hebrew since graduate school, in a variety of institutional contexts, we have continued to shape and alter the textbook, refining its focus and distinctives. In this process we have come to realize that our dissatisfaction is shared by other Hebrew teachers, despite the deluge of new Hebrew textbooks in recent years, and that a market remains for a textbook with a different approach for teaching biblical Hebrew, an approach grounded in modern methods for teaching languages.

Distinctives

This textbook is has seven (often inter-related) distinctives that justify its creation in the midst of the mass of currently available textbooks.

1. Learning an Ancient Language and Second Language Acquisition

We have sought to incorporate more recent ideas about pedagogy into the shaping of the grammar explanations and the exercises. The most obvious feature of the textbook represents its unique strengths: the use of illustrated episodes from Genesis to learn Hebrew. Moreover, all the exercises based on the illustrated Readings use as much Hebrew as possible. That is, we avoid using the model that dominates in other textbooks: the grammar-translation model. Instead of teaching Hebrew as an object to be decoded and then re-coded into the students' native language (e.g., English), the goal of this textbook is to provide the student with competency in reading, listening, and even producing Hebrew. In other words, rather than mastering Hebrew for translation, our aim is that students achieve the ability to *comprehend biblical Hebrew texts*. At the same time, we admit limits to such second-language acquisition approaches in the teaching and learning of ancient, textual corpus-bound languages. As such, there remains a philological realism to our pedagogy coupled with our use of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) techniques. In particular, the exercises included in the textbook center around self-contained narratives from the Bible, and include visual and audio aids for vocabulary memorization and narrative comprehension. In addition, we have provided audio-visual aids for developing oral fluency. Beyond this, there is the instructor's choice: he/she may maintain a text-based atmosphere, focusing on the given exercises, or he/she may establish a "conversation"-based atmosphere, in which the given exercises are used as a platform for extemporaneous modification (and thus greater competency in the productive aspect of learning Hebrew).

2. Language Pedagogy and Grammar Presentation

One of the points of dissatisfaction with grammars currently on the market is that they have tended to provide too much grammatical information for first-year textbook. The effect is that students are overwhelmed and instructors are faced with cutting out the unnecessary clutter. Rather than produce a textbook that is a stand-in for an intermediate grammar, we

have included a minimal amount of grammar to give students facility in reading actual Hebrew texts, and have left to the instructor's discretion the introduction of more advanced descriptions. This approach, of course, also aligns with our SLA-influenced goals. Organizationally, the most notable results of this approach is our decision to relegate summaries of weak verb forms to an appendix along with the customary verb paradigms. In this way we aim to give these discussions their proper place in grammar study, as explanations of forms in the context of reading texts rather than complex morphological explanations abstracted from the practice and skills of reading Hebrew.

3. Organization

The organization of the textbook centers around discrete grammatical issues. The lessons do not present the grammar in the traditional sequence of phonology-morphology-syntax, but recognize that language is learned in small chunks of information that alternate through the various aspects of grammar (including a greater focus on syntax and semantics, areas neglected by current introductory textbooks). The material is also organized to maximize the use of repetition, a key to language acquisition. For example, paradigms are often broken in to halves, so that presentation of the second half reinforces the material already learned.

4. Text-Based Exercises

The lessening of the morphology burden in the grammar has allowed us space to incorporate discussions of grammar that are conducive to reading and understanding Hebrew literature. In particular, we have several lessons that introduce students to important aspects of the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic systems of biblical Hebrew, illustrated with examples from the same texts (Genesis episodes) used for the exercises.

5. Recognition of the Diversity of Hebrew in the Bible

Our choice of a particular corpus (discrete episodes from Genesis) to draw examples from for the discussion of Hebrew syntax, semantics, and pragmatics comes out of a recognition that "Biblical Hebrew" is not a monolithic or uniform language. Rather, preserved in the biblical corpus and extra-biblical ancient epigraphs and texts (e.g., Ben Sira, Qumran) is an array of grammatical peculiarities and divergences. Rather than fall into the philological trap of attempting to be exhaustive, we have chosen to focus our analysis and draw our examples from a small, uniform corpus of prose literature appropriate for first-year readings.

6. Modern Linguistic Background

Our textbook incorporates more recent linguistic explanations of biblical Hebrew in a way that is as jargon-free as possible and understandable to beginning students. The currently available textbooks of biblical Hebrew are astonishingly "behind the times" in their grammar descriptions and terminology. Nineteenth-century theories of the Hebrew verb continue to be presented not because they are correct, but because they "work." However, we are convinced that explanations should be presented that are both accurate and understandable. Biblical Hebrew grammar instruction has also been plagued with idiosyncratic and archaic vocabulary. In place of outmoded Latinate terms such as *status*

constructus, we have sought to employ terms native to language itself and/or in current use in Hebrew linguistic studies, such as *nismach*.

7. Non-Confessional Orientation

The textbook is non-confessional. Religious and theological aims for studying biblical Hebrew have shaped the concerns of many textbooks to the point that they sometimes wed their grammar lessons to “theological” insights from the text. Such overtly confessional approaches unnecessarily precludes other interests in studying Hebrew, such as cultural or linguistic insights. Although we are not adverse to confessional approaches to the Bible (one author teaches at a theological seminary), we think that a textbook written without a confessional stance will serve a wider community of language learners and institutions.

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