

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION



The purpose of the second edition of *Biblical Hebrew* is the same as the first, which is to get students reading Biblical Hebrew prose, and even a bit of poetry, as soon as possible. Ideally, the changes to the textbook and the addition of the CDs and Supplement will make it easier and more enjoyable for students to acquire those skills.

Superficially, the second edition is not strikingly different: the overall concept has not been altered, and its organization and lesson sentences remain the same. But there have been some major modifications and rewriting. The most significant of these is to the design of the vocabulary section. It is more closely keyed to Brown-Driver-Briggs to train students in the use of an academic dictionary; it has been reorganized to better interface with the readings; it is cross referenced to the lessons where such referencing is relevant; it lists derivatives and homonyms together to facilitate association and memorization; it is fuller to help students see at a glance different forms of nouns and verbs; and most important, perhaps, is that it is easier to use since what needs to be memorized for each entry is set in boldface. Word assignments have also been changed. Students are not responsible for learning a block of words over a certain number of lessons. Instead a specific number of words is assigned per lesson: more words per lesson before the reading of extended passages; less after. This pace allows for more opportunity to review and thus absorb. Most pedagogically significant, two new study aids have been added: the recording of words in sets of ten on אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים and vocabulary review exercises at the end of the Supplement. In addition, glosses to the readings have been refined and shortened, and explanations are more precise. Lessons and excurses have been clarified either by rephrasing, abbreviating, or in some cases, rounding out explanations. Exercises have been pruned, and a few sentences after the lessons have been removed because their meanings suffer too much out of context. Verb charts have been more completely filled in and more charts added: the strong verb and 3rd הַ with suffixes, for example. There is also a chart of prepositions with suffixes. One small but significant change is to the reading exercise on page 5 of the first edition. In keeping with the second edition's emphasis on oral fluency, that half-page exercise of words, which a beginner could not understand, has become a full-page Proper Names and Places Reading Exercise, so that one should know immediately, and without external feedback, if he or she is pronouncing the words at least close to correctly. The short writing exercise in the first edition has been expanded into two full writing exercises—one for block, one for script—to familiarize students with both styles. The result of these changes is a tighter, yet more comprehensive textbook.

The most exciting modification to the first edition is that the audiotape, an optional accompaniment to that volume, has been replaced by three compact disks that are integrated into every phase of the course. אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים has a program of reading exercises to help with pronunciation, four of the readings cantillated to Masoretic notation, and some seventeen songs for learning paradigms and grammar concepts. Biblical Hebrew was never like this! Grammatically clear expositions set to catchy tunes make students want to study those hollows and Hif'ils. The cantillations allow the phrasing of passages and verbal sounds and interplay to become apparent. אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים records all the vocabulary

words, in groups of ten, from English to Hebrew. Relieving the tedium of listening to simple translations are clips of songs and mnemonic devices sprinkled throughout. The resulting combination of seriousness and entertainment should make studying simple and fun, and the medium allows one to review any batch of words with the push of a button! 🎧 שְׁבִיחַי consists of over thirty songs, most of which have been taken from Psalms. The melodies to these verses span a range of genres, which represent a variety of both Jewish and Christian ways of hearing the text. One may ask, why songs with a textbook? Aside from the obvious reason that they are aesthetic, pleasurable, and often moving, they help with pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. They make the assertion that the Bible is a text that is meant to be heard and not just silently read and parsed. And one need not wait long for this enjoyment, for as soon as one can read, one is ready to sing. The first two songs recommended are for following along—in one's Hebrew Bible, of course—then slow, short songs are assigned to be learned. As a student's skills increase, he or she can go back to songs sung early on in the course and translate more and more of their components. There is no doubt that to thoroughly enjoy and appreciate Biblical Hebrew, one must become comfortable with its sounds, rhythms, and verbal and compositional devices. To that end, CD assignments—designated by a 🎧—are given at the end of every lesson. May there be many hours of pleasure and reward from this experience.

The third component to the learning program is the *Supplement to Biblical Hebrew*. Keyed to the lessons in the textbook, the Supplement has two functions: one is to provide reinforcement or additional explanation for concepts learned; the other is to give deeper explanations that interest some students but can be ignored by those who are not ready or interested. The two kinds of topics are distinguished by their preformative designators. The details that should be of interest or use to everyone have an **S** before their coordinant number; the more advanced have a **§**. The Supplement is peppered with a variety of mini-quizzes and some true or false questions. (Answers are given in notes at the bottom of each page.) They add variety to the exercises in the main textbook to keep review interesting

Finally, an Answer Key to the textbook is available on-line at [www.yalebooks.com/biblicalhebrew](http://www.yalebooks.com/biblicalhebrew), in PDF, and thus downloadable to be printed out as needed.

No one can eliminate the hard work necessary to learning any language, but one can try to make the effort gratifying. I hope that the changes and additions to the second edition of *Biblical Hebrew* help do just that.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

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The purpose of this book is to get students reading Biblical Hebrew prose, and even a bit of poetry, as soon as possible. To effect this we take an uncommon approach by teaching (in descending order of frequency) the most common constructions, the most common verbs, the most common grammar, and syntax. Because all Hebrew in the book—whether for teaching, illustration, or drill—is Biblical, from the very first students experience the joy of working with genuine material.

In each lesson, a verse or segment generates the concepts to be learned and the workbook style of this grammar demands constant participation. To help students decipher words, explanations focus on recurring, key features rather than on historical and exceptional formations, as the latter tend to spark interest and have value at a more advanced level of learning. Of course, verb paradigms and other didactic necessities are not neglected. Conscientious study of this mixture equips students to approach passages with some analytic skill as early as Lesson 13 when extended Biblical passages are first assigned for reading.

A major section of the book is devoted to annotations to the readings, but only very rarely do the comments translate; rather they identify potential difficulties, and guide the students through a reasoning process which consistently allows them to figure out such critical components as the root of the word, the part of speech, and the syntactical setting. At all times interpretive comments focus on the Hebrew idiom, alerting students to the fact that we are reading this text in a time and culture far removed from its origins, and that we are working with a language which is built quite differently from English. If we can transmit an appreciation for the structure and beauty of the Hebrew text, then we will have succeeded in our task.

The only way we have to explain Biblical Hebrew grammar and syntax is to use English nomenclature. Common structures in English such as adjective, adverb, phrase, and sentence do not always function the same way in a Semitic language such as Hebrew. It is because of this disparity that we decided to develop the Glossary. Its entries focus on points of grammar as well as a vocabulary of terminology, which are valuable in understanding the Biblical text.

A decision we made early on was to omit transliteration although there are many systems around. Some are highly phonetic; these make use of so many diacritical symbols, and require such a sophisticated knowledge of phonics in order to be comprehensible that it is almost like learning a third language to be able to read this Anglicized Hebrew. Other more literal methods are not standardized, and the easiest ones assume that Hebrew sounds are familiar to the English reader, which, of course, they may not be. Practicing reading the lesson sentences and later the more lengthy passages, even if labored at first, should help the students develop skill in reading Hebrew in Hebrew. For those who might find it useful, a tape for reading practice is available.

A necessary but regrettable omission is of accent marks in most places, most particularly in verb charts. Because of the design of the Hebrew font, the inclusion of the accent often obscured the visibility of a vowel. So the accent marks had to go.

The reader will surely notice that punctuation is missing in Hebrew-English segments of the text. We agonized over this decision. But where does one insert the punctuation when Hebrew is read in this direction: ← and then one has to proceed in this direction: → There simply is no graceful way out

of such a predicament, and so we had to assume that readers would be flexible enough to adjust to compensatory measures. When switching from Hebrew to English, we left extra space to create a visual pause, and, of course, a capital letter will signal the start of a new English sentence.

This book is an outgrowth of the elementary Biblical Hebrew course taught by Professor Bonnie Kittel during her tenure at the Yale Divinity School. Along with being an inspiring scholar, Bonnie was an exceptionally gifted and talented teacher. She transmitted her love and enthusiasm for Biblical Hebrew to her students. Not insignificantly, Bonnie was always sensitive to traditions not her own. Bonnie's untimely death was tragic, creating a great personal and professional loss. We hope that her creative style and ability to excite all of those who learned from her are reflected in this volume.

*Deuteronomy 30:14* כִּי־קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבְלִבְּךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ