

INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL HEBREW

Fall Semester 2016

Classroom: Gardencourt 206

Instructor: Johanna Bos

Class assistants: Tim McNinch
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Course Description

In this course we will learn the elements of biblical Hebrew on the basis of the grammar called *The First Hebrew Primer – The Adult Beginners Path to Biblical Hebrew – Third Edition* (Oakland, CA: EKS Publishing, 1992), by Ethelyn Simon, Irene Resnikoff, and Linda Motzkin, a very student-friendly book. The study of language is time-consuming and students need to manage their time carefully so they achieve a balance between Hebrew and their other classes.

Memorization is a key part of learning any language and this is no less so for Hebrew. Hebrew is a strange language to western perceptions because of the different alphabet as well as the different direction of reading. Daily reading practice will do much to become more familiar with the language; read a few words or sentences every day for 10 minutes in addition to working on assignments.

Required texts

The First Hebrew Primer – The Adult Beginners Path to Biblical Hebrew – Third Edition (Oakland, CA: EKS Publishing, 1992), by Ethelyn Simon, Irene Resnikoff, and Linda Motzkin, + CD's, and Supplement.

This grammar originated with the late Ethelyn Simon as a result of her attempt to learn Hebrew as an older adult. Two other editors worked with her on the grammar which is published by Claudia at EKS publishing.

Clines, David J.A. ed., *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009).

Yay! You no longer have to wrestle your way through Brown/Driver/Briggs, also called BDB, or spend a fortune on the newest lexicon by Koehler/Baumgartner aka HAL

Hebrew Bible: Elliger, K. and Rudolph, W., eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1967/77).

English Bibles: *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

The Jewish Study Bible.

These Bibles will become more important as the course progresses and during the Second Semester Exegesis course.

Course Objectives

The main objective of the course, besides gaining sufficient knowledge of the Hebrew language, is to engender love for and commitment to the Hebrew language so it will continue to inform the student's ability to critically and imaginatively interpret Scripture. Sufficient knowledge of the Hebrew language means to read biblical texts making use of the original language with the help of lexical tools and examining the networks of meaning embedded in the text. Some regular practice of memorizing vocabulary will help to minimize the time spent looking up words. Introductory Hebrew is followed by Hebrew Exegesis, which affords the opportunity to improve reading, translating and interpretive skills at a steady rate. In addition, a course in reading and translating biblical Hebrew is offered each semester.

Method

Ordinarily students will receive read-through and explanation of grammar in an audio file to maximize use of class time in exploring questions, reading and translating prepared exercises. The class will meet in two sections, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10-11:20 and 3:00-4:20. Smaller group meetings will facilitate processing grammar and questions. The groups will begin the class period with simple exercises to create a spirit of cooperative and relational learning. In addition, the instructor will introduce a Hebrew WORD and its field of meaning at a number of class sessions to stimulate interest in the use of the language as it enables understanding of Scripture.

Class assistants will be on hand at all times and will set time aside outside of class to help with questions, homework, and preparation for tests. These times will be announced at the beginning of classes. Regular quizzes will test vocabulary building and in addition there will be a mid-term and final, both take-homes.

Requirements and Grading

1. In preparation for this course, all students are expected to have worked through the first sections in Grammar book dealing with alphabet, special letters, simple reading (pp.1-24).
2. Homework to be checked during class.
3. Vocab quizzes, roughly every other week. Gradually, these will include sentence translation. Since the course is not designed to prepare you to speak the Hebrew language, translations in tests will be from Hebrew to English and not vice versa.

4. There will be one mid-term examination, immediately following Research and Study week and a final test during exam days in December. Mid-term and Final Exams are administered electronically.
5. Students are expected to attend all class sessions. Excuses must be cleared with the instructor ahead of time. All homework and other assignments need to be completed on time and all are to be completed in order to pass the course.
6. Use of tablets and other electronic devices in class only by permission.

Class Attendance, Preparation and Participation	25 %
Short Quizzes	25%
Mid-term	20%
Final exam	30%

Policy on Inclusive Language

In speech and in written assignments, it is the policy of the school to avoid divisive terms that reinforce stereotypes or are pejorative. We do not use language that leaves out part of the population, perpetuates stereotyping, or diminishes importance. We do not use male pronouns (such as “men”) to refer to a group that includes females as well.

Direct quotations from translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible’s images for God. (For a resource see: Van Wijk-Bos, Johanna W.H., *Reimagining God - The Case for Scriptural Diversity*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1995).

With this in mind, when we translate biblical Hebrew we will follow the seminary standards for inclusive language.

For further assistance:

http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp.

The Name(s) of God

The God of the Hebrew Bible goes by various names. Many draw on the ancient, Semitic, word for “god,” – *el* or *ilum*. You can find a form of this in the word *Elohim* (Gen.1:1), El-Shaddai (Gen.17:1), and El-Elyon (Gen.14:8).

The most sacred name for God in the Hebrew Bible is written with the consonants Y-H-W-H. These four letters together are referred to as the Tetragrammaton or Tetragram. English translations have historically reproduced these letters as “Jehovah” or THE LORD (in small caps).

When vocalizing Biblical Hebrew, people traditionally read “Adonai,” when encountering the Tetragram. This practice is known as a “perpetual Ketiv/Qere (Ketiv= that which is written [in this case YHWH]; Qere=that which is read [in this case “Adonai”]). We will follow this convention in class. When translating the Tetragrammaton for written or oral presentation, students are asked to use “Adonai,” “Holy One,” or “Holy God,” or “Ha-Shem” (= the Name). For discussion about Christians speaking or writing the Tetragrammaton with vowels, see the following:

Van Wijk-Bos, Johanna W.H. “Writing on the Water – The Ineffable Name of God.” In *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel Kaminsky, eds. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 49-59. This essay is posted on CAMS.

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center and should make use of the available resources at an early date, since violations of seminary policy on academic honesty can lead to a failing grade for the course.

Internet and Cell Phones

The use of laptop computers during class is discouraged. Cell phones are to be turned off. Exceptions may be requested from the instructor.

COMMENTS...

- It will be tempting to think of this course as a “hoop” you need to jump through in order to finish your degree program and to leave all your hard-gained knowledge behind as soon as the first year is over. It is our hope that students will continue to apply the principles of Hebrew and put into practice the basic learnings of the course not only during the rest of their Seminary career but as they become teachers and pastors in their religious community.
- Before you know it, you will be dealing with fairly complex grammatical rules. You should take great care not to fall behind in this class for it will be almost impossible to catch up. Try to relax and keep studying, especially vocabulary and reading. Even if things don't make sense at first, they will most likely do so at second and third consideration. Studying too long at one time may be counterproductive. Find a method that works for you. Blocks of half-hour periods of studying with a break may work better than hours of uninterrupted concentration. Be sensitive to your brain. If it feels that it has stopped taking things in, give yourself a break, and return to the work later. If your

brain stops working in the middle of class, try to keep listening, in spite of your frustration. Keep your attention as much as possible on the presentations; this is not the sort of class in which you can afford to tune the teacher out. Save your questions for the periods provided by the instructor and sessions with class assistants.

- We will begin at a fairly slow pace with one lesson per class session. When possible we will pick up more than one lesson at a time.
- Vocabulary is always included in assignments and will therefore not be separately listed.
- Oral reviews are also included and we will practice these in full session as much as possible.
- If you still need work on the alphabet, recognizing the letters, writing and naming them, by the end of the first class, use tutorial sessions for help.
- If the quantity of assignments seems overwhelming, remember that exercises are often repetitions of the same grammatical rule.
- THE SECRET OF LEARNING HEBREW: LOVE YOUR HEBREW!

ANTICIPATIONS...

- You will probably feel that there is too much new vocabulary to memorize and that it's all too much, too much. Without a basic vocabulary there is not much one can do with a language, however, so word memorization will be a part of the course. Whether this comes easy to you or not, it will at times feel uninteresting theologically and boring. It is one of those tasks that has to be done. It may help to call to mind that all we do, also and perhaps especially the memorization of Hebrew vocabulary, we do "for the greater glory of God."
- Your instructors cannot always read your minds, so let them know when you think you are being stretched to an unreasonable degree. Although in language instruction there is a certain amount of material that must be dealt with, we will try to be as flexible as possible about the schedule.