Biblical Hebrew Grammar for Beginners

What is Biblical Hebrew?

Hebrew belongs to the Semitic language family-- a family of languages spoken in the Middle East, North Africa, and East Africa, which is a sub-group of the Afro-Asiatic family. With other Canaanite languages such as Phoenician and Ugaritic, and Aramaic languages, Biblical Hebrew developed within the Northwest-Semitic branch of the Semitic languages, and has evolved throughout the ages, with Modern Israeli Hebrew exhibiting characteristics that are significantly different from those of the ancient language.

Biblical Hebrew is known to us primarily through the Hebrew Bible. The study of the language must assume that the primary focus of the Bible as a religious/didactic document left much of the lexicon of the language unaccounted for, and that the language as we know it is a formal language, probably quite different from the spoken Hebrew of the time. Biblical Hebrew existed as a spoken language for a period that extended from the 12th century B.C.E to the 5th century B.C.E. In the course of that time, like all languages, it changed and developed. Scholars usually refer to three stages in the development of the language: the archaic (12th-11th centuries B.C.E), the standard (11th-6th centuries B.C.E), and the late stage (6th-5th centuries B.C.E). Most of the materials recorded in the Hebrew Bible are from the standard period. They also reflect the dialect spoken in Judea, as opposed to the northern dialect, which shows up occasionally in the text but was not preserved in the Hebrew Bible.

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Biblical Hebrew Grammar for Beginners is an introduction to the basic grammar of Biblical Hebrew. Our approach is descriptive in that we highlight phenomena that a learner who accesses the Hebrew Bible may observe. We expect engagement at the novice level, and therefore focus on identifying, listing, and grouping as the tasks we expect the learner to be able to complete. We also expect the learner to recognize a small number of words and phrases with their meanings. We do not make an attempt to describe linguistic phenomena in historical terms, nor do we involve the learner in the scholarly discourse on Biblical Hebrew.

Navigation

At this point this resource is composed of a set of PDF documents, which preserve the integrity of the materials irrespective of the machine or browser at the user's end. Navigation is done through the left navigation bar, but in some instances the user is directed to additional information through links in individual lessons. In the winter of 2010 we will add an alternative navigation path, an

annotated introduction to Genesis 1:1-5, which will introduce grammatical issues as they present themselves in the text. We will also provide a topics index and a list of frequently used words and particles.