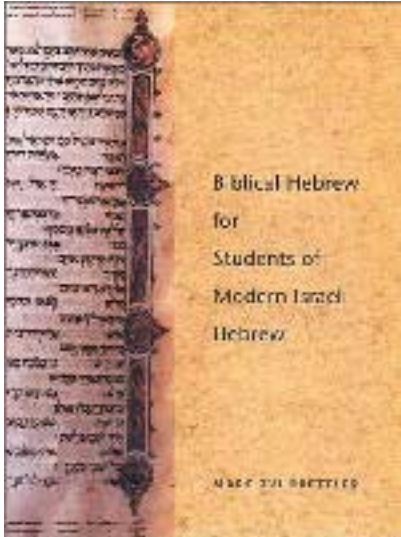


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Brettler, Marc Zvi

Biblical Hebrew for Students of Modern Israeli Hebrew

Yale Language Series

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Marc Zvi Brettler has added to the list of numerous biblical Hebrew grammars a volume that, in his words, “fills a significant void” for the student of Hebrew. It is specific in its audience in that it is directed toward students who already have some knowledge of modern Hebrew and therefore do not need the basic introduction to the language required by those approaching the subject for the first time. Brettler describes biblical and modern Hebrew as two dialects of the same language. It is from this starting point that he has structured this text to point out the “significant differences in vocabulary, spelling, verb formation, use of verbal suffixes, and word order” that is evident between the two “dialects.”

Brettler’s primary focus in structuring the textbook has been the phonology of biblical Hebrew (hereafter BH), which, he contends, simplifies the normally presumed complex linguistic rules. The book has an abundance of grammatical exercises, both Hebrew-English and English-Hebrew, which Brettler contends takes the student beyond the passive knowledge of BH and helps him or her to learn Hebrew as a living language. Brettler has incorporated into his book several of the more popular Hebrew grammars such as Thomas Lambdin’s *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (Scribners, 1971) and Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Harrasowitz). He has also reproduced paradigms from *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford University Press) and Paul Joüon and T. Moraoka’s *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Pontifical Biblical Institute). The text is presented nicely in large and easy-to-read English and Hebrew font. A further reading list

for the student who wishes to go beyond the basics of Brettler's approach is lacking in the book, although perhaps for good reason. Brettler remarks that there are several other grammars (e.g., Ehud Ben Zvi's *Readings in Biblical Hebrew: An Intermediate Textbook*) available that contain such a reading list, but this might be an oversight if one considers that this may be the only grammar a student is able to obtain and utilize.

The book has two main sections: chapters 1–7, which discuss the phonology of BH, and the much larger section, chapters 8–25, which outline the morphology and syntax of the language. Brettler outlines his methodology in the preface (viii–xii) and discusses in a brief introduction (1–4) the history of the language and its use in the biblical texts of Israel. Brettler argues that BH is made up of several dialects that can be seen within the different genres of biblical books. He has emphasized the use of *Standard Biblical Hebrew* (Judean) prose in the textbook, which he contends makes up the largest block of the biblical material. Included in the introduction is a discussion of the nature of BH as one that is primarily theological. This characteristic reveals an important difference between BH and modern Israeli Hebrew (hereafter MH). This difference can be seen in the much larger vocabulary of MH and the lack of a nontheological vocabulary within the Hebrew Bible.

The first main section of the book begins with the chapter “The Consonants of Biblical Hebrew.” Within this chapter (5–10), Brettler points out some of the difficulties that can be encountered within the alphabet itself (e.g., the phonemes *šîn* and *śîn*). He outlines the twenty-three primary consonants and the six allophones—the *bêt-gîmel-dālet-kāp-pê-tāw* letters. Brettler has perhaps made a slight oversight in excluding five Hebrew final form letters from his chart of the consonants. The inclusion of these forms next to their initial and medial forms provides a visual aid for the student when it comes to memorization of the forms. He does, however, include an English transliteration value (which he wisely limits in use) for each of the letters and their allophones. In keeping with his primary focus, Brettler divides the consonants into six phonetic categories: labial, guttural, dental, sibilant, emphatic (or velar), and sonant. These categories will play an important part in the ability of the student to simplify the somewhat-complex vowel changes that are discussed in later chapters. The chapter closes with a twenty-four-word vocabulary list, which may seem a bit much for a beginning student, but keeping in mind this is a text for students with previous knowledge of Hebrew, this list should prove familiar to students of MH. Each chapter also includes a set of constructive exercises that highlight the central theme of each chapter.

Chapter 2 (11–18), “The Vowels,” outlines the very complex Hebrew vowel system. Brettler notes that relative to the history of the biblical text, the vowels are fairly new to BH, appearing only in the early second half of the first millennium C.E. The introduction

of the vowels was primarily due to the attempt to preserve the tradition of liturgical readings. Brettler gives a brief history of debate of the phonemes that the twelve vowel signs represented. He provides three helpful charts that name the vowels, outline the class to which they belong (*a, i, u*, other), and provide the transliteration forms. Again the chapter closes with a very helpful set of exercises which focus on the central point.

Chapter 3 (19–25), “The Cantillation Marks,” is brief and to the point in which Brettler offers an excellent presentation of the subject with helpful charts and explanations. Although it is necessary for the student to recognize what these marks represent, it may have been better served to present them later in the initial section that discusses the phonology of BH (perhaps as ch. 7). Chapter 4 (26–29), “Other Written Symbols,” highlights other important symbols found in the Masoretic Text (hereafter MT) that play a significant part in pronunciation and translation of the text (e.g., *dagesh, makaph, meteg,* and *pasok*). Again, Brettler provides a succinct introduction of the function of each of the symbols in the MT. This chapter lacks the constructive set of exercises found in the previous chapters.

Chapter 5 (30–39), “Syllabification,” is a concise introduction of the division of words and the effect these divisions have upon the vowels of the word. Included in this introduction is a detailed discussion on the vowel *shewa*. Brettler again makes good use of charts to classify the material and finishes with multiple exercises to reinforce the principals set out in the chapter. He also begins to introduce some of the differences between BH and MH, in particular, the vocabulary.

Chapters 6 (40–43), “Some Principles of Hebrew Phonology (Part 1),” and 7 (44–53), “Some Principles of Hebrew Phonology (Part 2),” introduce the basic principles of pronunciation for BH, which in Brettler’s words, “is quite complex, and substantial knowledge of historical linguistics and Semitic languages is needed to understand it.” Brettler’s attempt to explain the use of his synchronic symbols is perhaps too complex for a beginning student. It would have been better to leave the above-quoted statement stand and only explain the evolution of a word on an as-needed basis. Most beginning students are very happy to accept the explanation that the word has evolved because of phonetics. The chart on page 48 is an excellent summary of the vowel reduction rules of BH.

The second section of the book, chapters 8–25, covers the basic grammatical principles of BH. Brettler has followed a standard pattern of introduction of the principles as follows: chapter 8 (54–60), “The Definite Article, the Interrogative *ha’* and Other Interrogative Pronouns”; chapter 9 (61–69), “The Vocalization of the Prepositions—*b, k, l,* and *mn* the Conjunction *w*”; chapter 10 (70–79), “The Morphology of the Noun and the Adjective”; chapter 11 (80–91), “The Syntax of the Noun and the Adjective”; chapter 12 (92–104),

“The Bound Form (Construct): Morphology and Syntax”; chapter 13 (105–19), “The Participle”; chapter 14 (120–28), “The Independent, Demonstrative, and Relative Pronouns”; chapter 15 (129–42), “The Possessive Pronominal Suffixes: The Singular”; chapter 16 (143–58), “The Possessive Pronominal Suffixes: The Plural”; chapter 17 (159–68), “The Numerals”; chapter 18 (169–77), “Introduction to the Verb”; chapter 19 (178–93), “The *qal* of Healthy Verbs”; chapter 20 (194–208), “The *qal* of Verbs with Gutturals”; chapter 21 (209–24), “The *qal* of *p"n*, *p"y*, and *p" "* Verbs”; chapter 22 (225–42), “The *qal* of Hollow Verbs, *l" "* and *l"y* Verbs, and Gemimates”; chapter 23 (243–59), “Combined Deficiencies and the *qal* with Verbal Suffixes”; chapter 24 (260–79), “The Derived Conjugations: Healthy Verbs”; chapter 25 (280–96), “The Derived Conjugations: Other Verbs.”

Within each of these chapters, Brettler introduces each grammatical principle with concise (although on some points a bit complex for the beginning student) explanations. He does attempt to build quickly a vocabulary for the student but unfortunately does not give much opportunity to practice the words early in the learning process in the context of Scripture (only in ch. 11 does he begin to introduce the biblical text in a brief translation exercise). Chapter 13 on “Participles” contains an error on page 106. Brettler lists the four forms of the participle and mistakenly identifies the feminine plural ending as masculine (identifying the masculine and feminine endings as both masculine). In chapters 24 and 25, Brettler provides an introduction of the derived Hebrew verb system making good use of the chart system. Chapter 25, however, lacks charts for the “weak” verbs. He does give references to the verb paradigms that can be found in the Gesenius’s Hebrew grammar, but it would perhaps have been better to have found a place to include these in the text. The book concludes with a set of cumulative exercises that test the student’s overall retention of the material and can serve as a sample exam if needed. The book also contains a concise glossary of grammatical terms and a very useful Hebrew-English/English-Hebrew Lexicon that gives the student conjugated forms of verbs and irregular forms of nouns and adjectives.

Biblical Hebrew for Students of Modern Israeli Hebrew is an excellent Hebrew grammar. Brettler has laid out the grammatical principles in, at most times, clear explanations. His use of the summary charts in each chapter makes it easy for the student to review quickly what was learned in the chapter and to apply it in the relevant exercises at the end of each chapter. Brettler has filled “a significant void” in a long list of Hebrew grammars by producing this volume. Moreover, not only will it fill the void for students of MH; it will prove to be an excellent tool, in particular its use of the summary charts and exercises, for all students of BH.