

Introduction to Using Hebrew Language Tools Syllabus

15 March to 10 May 2016
Whitney Oxford

Institute of Grace
Grace Immanuel Bible Church
Jupiter, Florida

I. Course Description and Objectives

Jesus came—and will come again—to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matt 5:17). How, then, can we understand Him or His task if we do not know the contents of the Law and the Prophets? The better we understand “whatever was written in earlier times” (Rom 15:4), the more intimately we can know our God and Savior. Indeed, the apostle Paul testified that he stated “nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23).

Introduction to Using Hebrew Language Tools seeks to introduce believers to biblical Hebrew and the language tools that facilitate its proper understanding. This introduction seeks to help believers:

- become acquainted with the Hebrew *aleph beth*
- become acquainted with frequently-occurring words in the Hebrew Scriptures
- become acquainted with the categories and use of Hebrew language tools
- recognize key terms and abbreviations used in Hebrew language tools
- better understand the author’s intended meaning
- better understand the New Testament, since its foundation is the Old Testament
- recognize deviant teaching

II. Course Requirements

Participate in class activities and take a final assessment.

WEEK	TOPIC
15 March	Introduction to course Scope and sequence Biblical Philosophy of Language Cautions Introduction to the language of the Hebrew Scriptures <i>Aleph Beth</i> (consonants) and Vocabulary
29 March	Introduction to language tools and resources <i>Aleph Beth</i> and vowels Vocabulary Key terms
5 April	<i>Aleph Beth</i> and Vocabulary Exercises Exegetical issues
12 April	<i>Aleph Beth</i> and Vocabulary Exercises Exegetical issues
19 April	<i>Aleph Beth</i> and Vocabulary Exercises Exegetical issues
26 April	<i>Aleph Beth</i> and Vocabulary Exercises Exegetical issues
3 May	<i>Aleph Beth</i> and Vocabulary Exercises Exegetical issues
10 May	<i>Aleph Beth</i> and Vocabulary Exercises Exegetical issues Hand out take-home assessment

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Class Outline

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“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:18).

Martin Luther: “If the languages had not made me positive as to the true meaning of the word, I might have still remained a chained monk, engaged in quietly preaching Romish errors in the obscurity of a cloister; the pope, the sophists, and their anti-Christian empire would have remained unshaken.”¹

George Mueller: “I now studied much, about 12 hours a day, chiefly Hebrew . . . [and] committed portions of the Hebrew Old Testament to memory; and this I did with prayer, often falling on my knees. . . . I looked up to the Lord even whilst turning over the leaves of my Hebrew dictionary.”²

John Piper: “Weakness in Hebrew and Greek . . . gives rise to exegetical imprecision and carelessness. And exegetical imprecision is the mother of liberal theology.”³

I. Scope and sequence

See class syllabus.

II. Biblical philosophy of language

A. God made language

Language reflects the incomparable creativity of God. Consider what He did when He judged the rebels at Babel.

The image of God in mankind (Gen 1:26-27) separates us from animals. One of the clearest and most fundamental reflections of the image of God in mankind is the qualitative difference between human languages and animal communication.

B. The ultimate and supreme “language” is the Word of God

¹ W. Carlos Martyn, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther* (New York: American Tract Society, 1866), 474.

² George Mueller, *Autobiography of George Mueller* (London: J. Nisbet and Co., 1906), 31.

³ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman 2002), 84.

It is perfect in every way. Four of its key characteristics are that it is pure, concise, precise, and effective—and these characteristics make for beauty. We can and should reflect His image in the way we use our God-given gift of language.

1. Purity

a. God's Word is pure

The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times (Ps 12:6).

b. Our words should be pure

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear (Eph 4:29).

2. Conciseness

a. God's Word is concise

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD'" (Matt 4:4).

b. Our words should be concise

Is there no limit to windy words (Job 16:3)?

When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise (Prov 10:19).

For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God (Eccl 5:7).

For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man (Eccl 6:11)?

Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, "Yes, yes" or "No, no"; anything beyond these is of evil (Matt 5:36-37; cp. Jas 5:12).

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear (Eph 4:29).

3. Precision

a. God's Word is precise

Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt (Exod 12:40-41).

From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days (Dan 12:11).

I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me (John 12:50).

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ (Gal 3:16).

b. Our words should be precise

For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me (1 Cor 14:8-11).

4. Effectiveness

a. God's Word is effective

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it (Is 55:10-11).

b. Our words should be effective

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (Isa 8:20).

“These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates. Also let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate,” declares the LORD (Zech 8:16-17).

All these characteristics contribute to beauty. This is why we are so careful in exegesis and exposition—does it really matter if a word or phrase means this or that? Yes!

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5:18).

For further application:

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matt 12:36-37).

Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Pet 4:11).

III. Cautions

A. Kabbalah, “Bible code,” linguistic mysticism, Jewish mysticism, spiritual energy in orthography, esoteric meanings, etc. Instead, we should seek meaning through normal means—the common principles of language: grammar, syntax, context, and genre. See John 5:39.

B. A “clergy/laity veil of gnostic impenetrability”?

C. Knowing just enough to be dangerous?

Recommended resource: Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*

IV. Introduction to the language of the Hebrew Scriptures

A. Language family

Hebrew is one of many Semitic languages.⁴ Speakers of Semitic languages are descendents of Noah’s son Shem.

B. Thought forms

⁴ Among many others are Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Arabic.

Languages are not different only because they have different alphabets, sounds, vocabulary, syntax, etc. They are also different because they reflect different *thought forms*.

C. Script

Biblical Hebrew was originally written in Phoenician script.⁵ The Biblical Hebrew we generally recognize is written in Aramaic script:

אָבִי⁶

This means that fundamental Hebrew spelling, vocabulary, and syntax were preserved, but the letters took on the script of another language.⁷ This would be something akin to writing the English words “a dog” or “a bat” with the script of another language: “α δογ,” “α βατ.”⁸

D. Morphology

A trilateral⁹ system is predominate. This means that the root words of the bulk of the lexicon are three letters. Changes in the form of words are built off of this trilateral system. See, for example:

בָּרָא¹⁰
בְּרָא
בָּרָא

⁵ Often called Paleo-Hebrew script.

⁶ I.e., “father,” read right to left.

⁷ The primary influence of Aramaic upon Hebrew commenced with the Babylonian captivity.

⁸ Here using a common Greek script.

⁹ I.e., a three-lettered word.

¹⁰ I.e., “he created” (Gen 1:1).

E. The *aleph beth*

There are 22 letters (consonants). There are no capital letters as there are in English and in Greek. Notice the order of the Hebrew *aleph beth* in acrostic texts such as Psalm 119.

Standard Form	Final Form	Name ¹¹	Pronunciation ¹²
א		<i>aleph</i>	(silent) ¹³
ב בּ		<i>beth</i>	<i>b</i> as in <i>bait</i> / <i>v</i> as in <i>Veit</i>
ג גּ		<i>gimel</i>	<i>g</i> as in <i>gavel</i>
ד דּ		<i>daleth</i>	<i>d</i> as in <i>dot</i>
ה הּ		<i>he</i>	<i>h</i> as in <i>hay</i>
ו וּ		<i>waw</i>	<i>w</i> as in <i>wow</i>
ז זּ		<i>zayin</i>	<i>z</i> as in <i>Zane</i>
ח חּ		<i>cheth</i>	<i>ch</i> as in <i>Bach</i>
ט טּ		<i>teth</i>	<i>t</i> as in <i>teeth</i>
י יּ		<i>yod</i>	<i>y</i> as in <i>yoke</i>
כ כּ	ך	<i>caph</i>	<i>k</i> as in <i>calf</i> / <i>ch</i> as in <i>Chabad</i>
ל לּ		<i>lamed</i>	<i>l</i> as in <i>llama</i>
מ מּ	ם	<i>mem</i>	<i>m</i> as in <i>maim</i>
נ נּ	ן	<i>nun</i>	<i>n</i> as in <i>noon</i>
ס סּ		<i>samek</i>	<i>s</i> as in <i>somber</i>
ע עּ		<i>ayin</i>	(silent)
פ פּ	ף	<i>pe</i>	<i>p</i> as in <i>pay</i> / <i>ph</i> as in <i>Faye</i>
צ צּ	ץ	<i>tsade</i>	<i>ts</i> as in <i>tsetse fly</i>
ק קּ		<i>qoph</i>	<i>q</i> as in <i>quiche</i>
ר רּ		<i>resh</i>	<i>r</i> as in <i>rash</i>
ש שּ		<i>shin</i> and <i>sin</i>	<i>sh</i> as in <i>shin</i> / <i>s</i> as in <i>seen</i>
ת תּ		<i>taw</i>	<i>t</i> as in <i>town</i> / <i>th</i> as in <i>thunder</i>

¹¹ The letters are transliterated in a simplified fashion.

¹² There is some variance because of the diaspora of Hebrew speakers in the last 2,500 years.

¹³ The silent letters, *aleph* and *ayin*, take the sound of the vowel which accompanies it. They were probably pronounced slightly differently.