

**Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar** by Gary D. Practico and Miles V. Van Pelt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 476 pages.

**Basics of Biblical Hebrew Workbook** by Gary D. Practico and Miles V. Van Pelt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001. 303 pages.

*Basics of Biblical Hebrew* is a basic, one year course in Biblical Hebrew for the college or seminary student. The *BBH* package consists of a grammar, workbook, CD-ROM containing paradigms and answer keys to the workbook's exercises, and a website ([www.basicsofbiblicalhebrew.com](http://www.basicsofbiblicalhebrew.com)) that offers free overheads, audio pronunciation guides, a flashcard program, errata sheets, and more.

*BBH Grammar*. The grammar divides into five sections: §1 basics of Hebrew writing (chs. 1-3), §2 basics of Hebrew nouns and nominals (chs. 4-11), §3 introduction to Hebrew verbs and the *Qal* stem (chs. 12-23), §4 introduction to derived stems (chs. 24-35), and §5 introduction to the Hebrew Bible (*BHS*). It also includes appendices covering verb paradigms, "diagnostics at-a-glance charts," summary of endings on III-ה verbs, a Hebrew-English lexicon, and a subject index. Each chapter concludes with a summary of the material covered, vocabulary,<sup>1</sup> and an exegetical/Biblical Theological application of a grammar point. The application sections are well-written and theologically informative, at times dealing with *crux interpretum*. Occasionally the authors include a final section providing "advanced information" on the topic discussed in the chapter.

*Section 1*. In their treatment of phonology, the authors follow a classical pronunciation distinguishing the vowel sounds and *begadkephat* letters with and without a *dagesh lene*. One exception is that they treat both נ and כ as silent letters. An extended transliteration system is presented, distinguishing, for example, fricative ת (*t*) and non-fricative ת (*t*) as well as *pathach* (a), *qamets* (ā), and *qamets yod* (â). Vowels are broken into five classes (a,e,i,o,u) rather than the classic three classes (a, i, u). Their two basic guidelines for distinguishing silent and vocal shewas, a laudable advance on the 7-9 I learned, suffers from a unfortunate misstatement. They state, "A silent shewa will always come at the end of a closed syllable," which is true. However, they append an inaccurate clarification: "that is, after a short vowel" (cf. תִּקְטָלְנָה where a silent shewa follows an accented long vowel).

*Section 2*. The treatment of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and numerals contains nothing particularly noteworthy. The explanations are concise and well-written as is typical throughout the grammar.

*Sections 3-4*. The authors retain the standard terminology of "stem" (*Qal*, *Niphal*, *Piel*, etc.) and "conjugation" (Perfect, Imperfect, Imperative) instead of "theme" and "state." The conjugations are presented as inherently conveying a specific type of action with tense being entirely context dependent. For example, the perfect conjugation is used to express a completed action or state of being; the imperfect is used to express incomplete action, habitual or customary action, or modal "values." 12 chapters are devoted to discussing the *Qal* stem. With the perfect and imperfect conjugations, one chapter explores the strong verb forms (קָטַל) and the following chapter covers all of the weak verb forms for that stem. Beginning with waw conversive forms,<sup>2</sup> strong verbs and weak verbs are covered in the

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<sup>1</sup> All words occurring 70x or more are covered in the grammar. Especially helpful is the use of an accent to mark the accented syllable on words where the accent does not fall on the ultima (e.g., בְּיָת)

<sup>2</sup> Practico and Van Pelt acknowledge the term "waw conversive" is both "archaic and a simplification of historical and linguistic realities," but they argue that term is still "descriptive and represents a helpful point of departure" for the first year student (192).

same lesson. This has both the disadvantage of piling a huge amount of variation on the student at once and the advantage of permitting the patterns to be reinforced as the grammar moves through each of the conjugations.

*Section 5.* The grammar concludes with a very helpful identification and explanation of the various components of *BHS*. In their discussion of the textual critical apparatus, the authors make a point of affirming that “the need for textual criticism should not undermine, in any measure, our belief in the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament or our confidence in its providential preservation throughout the centuries” (401). This section concludes with a selection of resources for further study, covering grammars, lexicons, exegetical guides, vocabulary guides, and electronic resources (*Accordance* for the Mac, and *BibleWorks* for the PC).

*BBH Workbook.* The accompanying workbook is a treasure house of exercises. A typical exercise includes sections on parsing, translation, and usage of forms, inflection exercises, translation of Hebrew sentences composed by the authors, sentences taken directly from the OT, and some English-Hebrew sentences. The English-Hebrew sentences are identical to the Hebrew-English sentences composed by the authors. The two sets of sentences are separated within the exercise to facilitate honesty in translation, but the mirrored sentences go a long way to minimize student frustration. Since verbs are not introduced in the grammar until Lesson 12, all verbs in Biblical texts are footnoted and translated. In Exercises 5-12, the student is directed to the grammar’s lexicon for vocabulary he has not yet acquired. An additional “exercise” is added to Exercise 12 in which the authors provide a valuable discussion of “Choosing and Using a Hebrew Lexicon,” focusing specifically on *BDB* and Holladay. Beginning with Exercise 13 the student is directed to a standard lexicon for unknown vocabulary. Sentences taken from the Biblical text come primarily from narrative with a sprinkling of verses from wisdom and prophetic literature. At the beginning of each Bible translation section, a list of proper nouns that occur in the verses is provided. Difficult words or phrases are translated for the student in footnotes.

The exercises for the derived verbal stems focus the student’s attention on the stem “diagnostics” or stem characteristics (e.g., *hireq dagesh qamets* for Niphal non-perfects) rather than learning to inflect the forms from memory. No English-Hebrew translation exercises are provided for the derived stems. A final parsing exercise of 165 verb forms includes all the derived stems. The workbook concludes with 10 translation exercises from the following passages: Gen. 12:10-15; 28:10-16; 37:12-20; 39:7-16; 42:1-9; 43:1-8; Exod. 6:2-8; Deut. 6:4-9; Neh. 9:9-15; and Num. 6:22-26.

I heartily recommend *Basics of Biblical Hebrew* to any college or seminary instruction whose goal for his first-year Hebrew students is to ground them thoroughly in Hebrew phonology, morphology, and grammar, while providing substantial practice in reading the Old Testament in Hebrew.

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