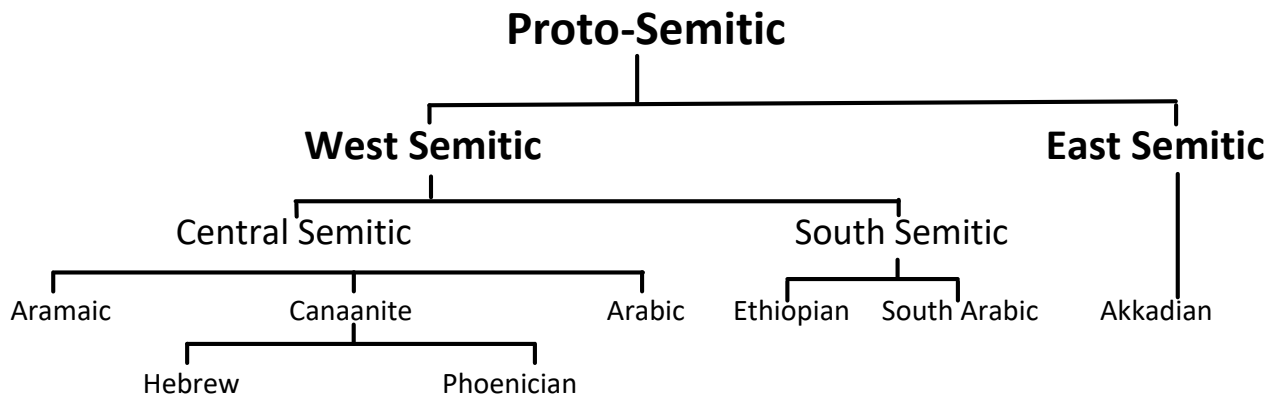


General Introduction

Hebrew Language

Biblical Hebrew is part of the Semitic family of languages, and it emerged as a distinct dialect some time during the second millennium BC. Biblical writers have referred to it in a few different ways: The language of Canaan (Isa 19:19); Judahite (2Kin 18:26); and in the Roman period, Hebrew. Among the other languages in the Semitic family are Akkadian, Ugaritic, Ethiopian (modern Amharic and ancient Ge'ez), Aramaic, Phoenician.



There are two main defining features that define Semitic languages

- **[One]:** They share a considerable amount of vocabulary. Consider, for example, the word “father”:
 - ab (Hebrew)
 - abba (Aramaic)
 - abu (Arabic)
 - abu (Ugaritic)
 - abu(m) (Akkadian)
- In each instance, we can see a basic pattern that echoes throughout each form. From this observation, scholars have argued that behind all Semitic languages lies a single language from which all the others developed. In the various grammars, this language is identified as “Proto-Semitic”
- **[Two]:** Words are based on a tri-literal root system, all Semitic words have a three-letter root that contains a core meaning. Consider the following
 - **Melek** = king
 - **Malkut** = kingdom
 - **Malkah** = queen
 - **Malak** = he ruled
 - **Himlik** = he enthroned
- In each instance above we can see that the root letters, m-l-k repeat in each word. The root carries the general sense of “kinship”, and that is reflected in the translations. This aspect of Semitic language is important because it means that once you learn a root, and can identify it, you will be able to determine the meaning of many more words. Tri-literal roots appear throughout verbs, nouns, and adjectives.

Although it seems difficult for you to distinguish at this stage of your learning, the Hebrew language is not monolithic, and it has in fact changed significantly throughout the years. We will be learning Biblical Hebrew, but there is also the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Mishnaic Hebrew, Medieval Hebrew, and Modern Hebrew. Although the letters and some vocabulary items are similar between the modern and ancient languages, significant differences exist. Even within the spectrum of Biblical Hebrew alone, at least three distinct diachronic phases are detectable: Archaic Biblical Hebrew (ancient poems such as Exodus 15, and Judges 5); Classical Biblical Hebrew (Narratives of Samuel and Kings); and Late Biblical Hebrew (e.g., Esther, Ezra, Chronicles). At this point in your studies, you should not be overly concerned about the differences between these eras, but it is important to be aware of them.

Hebrew Consonants (Part 1)

The Hebrew alphabet contains 22 consonants; the vowel pointing system was added later (AD 500-900). In this, the first week, we shall be learning the basic forms of the 22 Hebrew consonants. Next week, we shall turn our attention to the different forms that some of the 22 consonants may adopt. The pronunciation reflected below represents the modern vocalization. Be aware that various pronunciations of the same Hebrew letters are possible, we shall remain focused on one single tradition. In most cases there is a direct correspondence between Hebrew and Latin characters, however, the variations are noted in the transliterations (Translit.) below.

Symbol	Name	Pronounced	Translit.	Symbol	Name	Pronounced	Translit.
א	<i>Aleph</i>	<i>Guttural stop</i>	ʾ	ל	<i>Lamed</i>	<i>l (line)</i>	l
ב	<i>Bet</i>	b (boat)	b	מ	<i>Mem</i>	m (men)	m
ג	<i>Gimmel</i>	g (gull)	g	נ	<i>Nun</i>	n (nun)	n
ד	<i>Dalet</i>	d (din)	d	ס	<i>Samex</i>	s (sun)	s
ה	<i>Heh</i>	h (house)	h	ע	<i>Ayin</i>	<i>Guttural stop</i>	ʿ
ו	<i>Waw</i>	v (vote)	w	פ	<i>Peh</i>	p (pin)	p
ז	<i>Zayin</i>	z (zoo)	z	צ	<i>Tsadeh</i>	ts (bats)	ṣ
ח	<i>Chet</i>	ch (Bach)	ḥ	ק	<i>Qoph</i>	k (kill)	q
ט	<i>Tet</i>	t (tea)	ṭ	ר	<i>Resh</i>	r (run)	r
י	<i>Yod</i>	y (yes)	y	ש	<i>Shin</i>	sh (shot)	š
כ	<i>Kaph</i>	k (kill)	k	שׁ	<i>Sin</i>	s (sun)	ś
				ת	<i>Tav</i>	t (tea)	t

Notes on consonants

- The Hebrew letters that we read today are not in fact the original letters used to write the Hebrew language. Letters used today were adopted from the Aramaic language, during the exile. Although the Aramaic script was largely adopted, certain groups still occasionally used the ancient script, and

we can still see its use among the Hebrew scrolls found at Qumran. Before the exile, still visible in ancient inscriptions such as the silver amulet at Ketef Hinnom, the Hebrew alphabet looked like this

										
kaf k	yod y	tet t	het h	zayin z	waw w	he h	dalet d	gimel g	beyt b	'alef ,
										
taw t	šin š	reš r	qop q	šade š	pe p	'ayin ,	samek s	nun n	mem m	lamed l

- The Hebrew letters do not join, except in the Modern Hebrew script that you are not expected to learn.
- The transliteration symbols, in the right-hand columns are used to represent uniquely each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There should be one transliteration symbol for each Hebrew character. This marks a point of deviance between this course and several other Hebrew grammars. It is important that for all your transliteration work that you only use the symbols listed above.
- There are no capitals in Biblical Hebrew. In the next lesson, however, we learn about alternative forms that some of the letters adopt
- The consonant א should not be confused with the English vowel “A”. Though it may occasionally quiesce (become silent) at the end of certain words (e.g. אֵלֶּךָ), it bears a consonantal value. *Aleph* represents a guttural stop, the sound of the glottis opening when pronouncing “apple.” Because we do not have the equivalent in English, a replacement symbol is used.
- Do not confuse the symbol for the *aleph* [ʔ] with that of the *ayin* [ʕ].
- Six Hebrew consonants (א ב ג ד ה ו) appear above with a dot inside of them. This dot is called a weak *dagesh*, and the six letters are called BeGaD KeFaT letters. We will find out more about them in the next lesson. For the time being, you need to be aware of this group of letters and the name of the collection. The exercises in this first lesson preserve this dot in each appearance of the letters. This situation is somewhat artificial, and we shall adapt this rule as the weeks progress
- Of the 22 consonants, three sometimes represent vowels on certain occasions (ה ו י) in same way English consonants sometimes double up as vowels. Think, for example, about the letter “y”. When it appears in the word “yellow” it serves as a consonant, but when we see it in “sky” it serves as a vowel. The same type of thing happens in the Hebrew Language too. The *heh*, *nun*, and *yod*, even though they appear here as consonants, also have a vocalic value (act as vowels)
- You will need to pay strict attention to the letter ו *waw* in this course. It should always be transliterated with the letter “w” in English, **and never** “v.” However, even though it is transliterated with “w” we still pronounce it like a “V” in “vase.” This represents one instance in which the transliteration symbol differs from the pronunciation
- פ within Sephardic reading tradition, and most probably historically, was pronounced with a deeper guttural sound than the א. Today, in Modern Hebrew, and when you are reading, there should not be any difference in pronouncing the two.
- ק is traditionally a guttural sound that is rolled at the back of the throat. Even though you will not be pronouncing it traditionally, it is important for you to remember
- ש and שׁ are variants of the same letter, the diacritic point determines its pronunciation, whether it is an [s] sound or an [sh] sound
- In addition to functioning as consonants, the 22 letters of the alphabet have numeric values, and are often used as numbers
- Remember that the Hebrew language is read from right to left (and not left to right like English)

Homework Exercises

Notes on Homework

- When studying Hebrew, it is usually best to take a slow approach if possible. This means, in an ideal world, you should try to dedicate 30 minutes per day for 5 or 6 days a week. Breaking up your study time this way, ensures maximum retention with regards to memorizing vocabulary, grammar, and letters. Failing this, if you can only block out one day for homework, then it is wise to still allocate 10-15 minutes each day to memorize vocabulary.
- Remember, the homework exercises are only part of your weekly assignments. Every week, without fail, you should be reviewing vocabulary and grammar. Many students fail to succeed because they only dedicate 1-2 hours a week to the exercises. If you chose to study like this, you are likely to fail the class. Additional time must be spent reviewing the previous week's work, looking ahead, learning vocabulary, and practicing pronunciation
- There is an oral exam at the end of the semester. Students who wait until a week before this exam, and only practice reading just before the exam usually fail. Each week, preferably every day, you should spend some time reading Hebrew if you wish to be a fluent reader. There is no reason why a student cannot be a relatively fluent reader after one semester.

- 1) Reading horizontally from right to left only, try to locate, and circle the following words on the adjacent grid. Be careful, some of the letters are similar in form¹

אלפ	צדי
בית	שינ
יוד	שינ
גון	ממ
תו	טית
ריש	חית
עין	זין
דלת	פא
וו	גימל

ש	י	נ	א	ח	נ	ל	מ	ל	ק	ג	א	ת	ט	י	ת
ב	ר	נ	א	ל	א	פ	ל	א	פ	ב	א	ו	נ	ק	ק
ז	ד	ק	ה	י	ל	פ	מ	ל	ל	ד	א	ה	ב	פ	ו
ב	ק	ר	י	ש	ל	ב	ל	א	א	מ	ר	פ	א	ט	פ
ד	פ	ז	ת	נ	י	ו	ד	ל	ח	ז	ק	ג	ה	י	ע
מ	ב	ג	מ	ג	ע	ל	י	ר	ה	א	צ	ד	י	ו	ו
ו	ב	ג	ק	ל	ל	ה	ו	א	א	ל	ר	א	ק	ר	נ
ד	ל	ת	ק	ט	ת	ז	ס	א	ח	ת	ע	ק	ד	ט	ב
ד	ד	ל	ס	ב	ל	ח	י	ת	א	ב	י	ת	ת	ח	ס
ק	ה	ד	ת	ו	ג	ל	ש	ח	ג	א	ל	ק	ג	ר	ו
מ	ק	א	ח	נ	ע	ק	מ	מ	ל	ו	ש	א	מ	נ	נ
ז	ג	י	מ	ל	ב	י	ת	ב	ח	מ	ש	ז	ע	י	נ
ל	ו	ר	ח	ט	ע	ב	ת	ח	ט	ל	ג	ת	ט	ט	ת
ב	ר	ה	ת	י	ק	ל	ה	ע	ש	ת	ו	ז	ו	ל	ה
ז	י	נ	נ	ו	נ	א	ת	ו	ל	א	ב	ק	ל	ע	ע
ב	ק	ק	ב	ת	ע	ב	ק	ט	י	ז	ל	ש	י	נ	נ

¹ Do not get too attached to the letters in this exercise. We have not yet learned final forms and the weak dagesh, so the exercises for the first week compensate for this deficiency.

2) Draw a line between the Hebrew proper name and the English equivalent. You will need to deduce some of the words

Judah	ישראל	Tamar	יוסף
Jacob	משה	Esau	פנענ
Israel	יהודה	Levi	חזקיה
Philistine	יהושע	Rachel	שרה
Shadrach	אדם	Hezekiah	נבוכדנאצר
Jerusalem	אהרונ	Saul	תמר
Abraham	יעקב	Joseph	עשו
Adam	ירושלם	Canaan	שאול
Moses	פלשתי	Solomon	רחל
Pharaoh	אברהם	Nebuchadnezzar	לוי
Aaron	שדרך	Leah	שלמה
Joshua	פרעה	Sarah	לאה

- 3) Practice writing Hebrew letters. Write ten of each letter, the first has been done for you. Pay attention to where the top and the bottom of each letter sits.

א א

ב ב note the tail

ג ג

ד ד note that this end stick out

ה ה note the gap here

ו ו

ז ז

ח ח no gap

ט ט

י י it floats

כ כ

Above the mid point line

note short
tail

- note the space



9



ク

..... Below
the line



No bit sticking out

∴ No bit
Sticking out

ז

ש

ת

note how these extend

- 4) A few Hebrew letters look remarkably similar in Hebrew and can easily be confused. Practice identifying similar letters from the text below. Mark every instance of the following letters as indicated²

ח mark with a circle

ה mark with a yellow highlighter

ר mark with a square

ד place a triangle above them (whether there is a dot inside or not)

ב place a circle above them (whether there is a dot inside or not)

כ place a vertical line above it (whether there is a dot inside or not)

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: ²וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוֹ וָבֹהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי

תְּהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: ³וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אֹר: ⁴וַיֵּרָא

אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיִּבְדֵּל ⁵אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: ⁵וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹר

יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד: ⁶וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹכַ

הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם:

- 5) You must learn how to pronounce each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and know its name. This means, when completed, that you must be able to see the Hebrew letter, and without looking at a transliteration, be able to pronounce the sound of that letter, and be able to name it. By far, the most effective way of achieving this goal is via flash cards. Write out 22 flashcards with a Hebrew letter on one side and the pronunciation on the other, along with the name of the letter. Then, looking at each letter, try to recall its name and pronunciation. It is best to spend about 10 minutes a day, for the first 2 weeks of the course, learning these letters.

² One instance of each has been done for you, please complete the rest.

Transliteration is the process through which Hebrew letters are transposed to Latin (English) letters. To carry out this process you need to work from the right of the Hebrew word, but begin writing the English letters from the left. As an example, the transliteration of the Hebrew word שלום is šlwm. For the final product, we still read the English from left to right and the Hebrew from right to left. For this transliteration exercise, use the reference sheet in this pack (page 2) to transliterate the following Hebrew words.

6) Transliterate these words into English characters

שמעון šm^ʿwn

אמר

אדוני

אלהים

שלום

עדן

פתרוס

שמות

בראשית

דוד

יהורם

7) Reconstruct the Hebrew words from these transliteration symbols

śrh שרה

šlwm

kdwš

h^ʿyr

mšpṭ

tpwḥ

qr^ʾ

šmymh

hspr

yśw^ʿ

ʾnšym