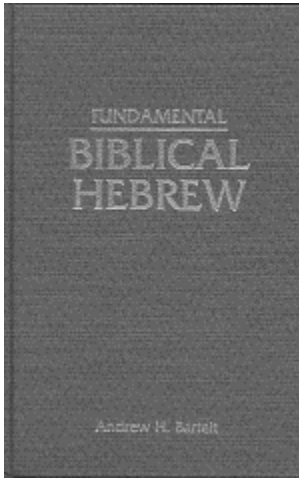


RBL 07/13/2000



Bartelt, Andrew H.

Fundamental Biblical Hebrew

Saint Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000. Pp. xii + 276, Cloth, \$26.99, ISBN 0570042658.

Robin Gallaher Branch
School of Theology & Missions, Oral Roberts University
Tulsa, OK 74171

Andrew H. Bartelt has written a concise, thorough textbook for biblical Hebrew. *Fundamental Biblical Hebrew* reflects its name, for the book presents a well-organized introduction to the richness of the language. Its goal is to enable the student to begin reading the biblical text with competence and assurance. Geared to the adult learner, *Fundamental Biblical Hebrew* provides a step-by-step introductory study of the language.

Bartelt, professor of Old Testament Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, outlines the concepts crucial to the study of biblical Hebrew in a well-written and easily understood form. Although sound knowledge of English grammar is helpful in the study of any foreign language, Bartelt presents the grammar information applicable to Hebrew with workable definitions and in an easy-to-find format. Bartelt explains as he goes.

While the 24 chapters vary in length, the book is teacher friendly because, as Bartelt notes, “instructors can easily adjust to the needs of a class, including multiple presentations on single chapters as needed” (p. viii). In his preface, Bartelt states the book’s goals (pp. vii-ix). A consistent principle emerges from the beginning: the chapters tend to treat a specific grammatical topic in a complete manner; for example, “the definite article is covered in one chapter, presented in logical order from the regular to the irregular features,” he writes (p. viii).

This review was published by RBL © 2000. This review was published by RBL © 2000 by the Society of Biblical Literature. For more information on obtaining a subscription to RBL, please visit <http://www.bookreviews.org/subscribe.asp>. Literature. For more information on obtaining a subscription to RBL, please visit <http://www.bookreviews.org/subscribe.asp>.

Instructors will find Bartelt's presentation of verb forms helpful. It begins with the finite tenses—and not with the participle. This is more in keeping with English language usage and enables an early understanding of the common sentence structure of Hebrew. Bartelt employs traditional terminology for Hebrew verbs, Qal, Piel, Hiphil, etc., but also introduces the student to their general Semitic descriptors, G, D, H, etc. The text presets the Qal *binyan* form fully (as it should be because it comprises almost 70 percent of the verb form in the Hebrew). Bartelt writes that the presentations in each chapter “are structured to move from the regular to the irregular, from the known to the unknown” (p. viii).

A likely criticism of the book is that it contains a smaller vocabulary than other competing texts. Bartelt writes he selected his vocabulary (nicely formatted in an eight-page glossary) on the basis of frequency of use. He explains his choice of selection as reducing “the burden of rote memorization of vocabulary, arguably the most difficult aspect of learning Hebrew, especially for the adult learner” (p. viii).

The book emphasizes drills and vocalization of the printed words from Chapter 1 on. His sentences in his exercises reflect the “biblical style and idiom while meeting the learning objectives of each chapter,” he writes (p. ix).

A strength of Bartelet's book is its tendency to explain a concept in a sentence form and then put it in a box, list, or graph for a visual presentation. For example, after explaining the three forms of imperatives—the jussive, imperative, and cohortative—he puts the information in summary form in two columns (p. 125).

Each lesson contains a new concept, drills, exercises, examples, and sentences. The exercises in the chapters reflect the chapter's content; each chapter's text contains the answers to the exercises or logical deductions from the material presented for the answers. Before each chapter's exercises, he provides a helpful chapter summary.

The book introduces grammar in an orderly way. The text in each chapter provides definitions and examples immediately thereafter. For instance, Bartelt breaks down prepositions to three types: independent words like *after*; the proclitic or semi-detached like *to* or *on*; and the prefixed like *in* or *to* (p. 23).

Bartelt stresses vocalization. He explains the important Rule of the *Shewa* with numerous examples (pp. 24-26).

Bartelet introduces verb morphology (long thought to be the worst part of Hebrew for adult learners) with this cheery observation: “The verb system of Hebrew is, in terms of morphology, relatively simple” (p. 31). He states that tenses are a misnomer and emphasizes his preference for the term “aspect” (p. 31). But he allows the Western model

of past and future to stand—in a broad fashion—for the Hebrew “aspect” of perfect and imperfect (p. 31).

Another strength of the book is his stress on pronunciation throughout. Visual learners and those that memorize easily alike are encouraged to pronounce and to differentiate between, for example, 2fs and 2fm. In the perfect of the 2fs, the accent falls on the last syllable of the root (p. 33).

Lessons begin with definitions. For example, the lesson on participles begins with the definition that a participle is usually a verbal adjective and as such must agree with a noun in terms of number and gender (p. 106).

The book’s typeset facilitates learning, for it includes much white space. Students can easily pencil in their notes and answers to the exercises in the book itself. A supplemental exercise workbook accompanies the text. The workbook also provides larger versions of the handy verb and noun paradigms from the textbook’s appendices.

Bartelt ends the book with a chapter explaining the Masoretic accents. He runs through the basic internal textual markings that enable a student to read the text aloud and know where the accents are placed and when sentences end. He explains the regular, defective, and plene spellings in the Masoretic text as well as the scribal markings called *ketib* and *qere*, what is written and what is read respectively. He closes the chapter with a power tool for effective biblical translation and enjoyment: a discussion of the *waw* conjunctive and *waw* disjunctive (pp. 229-230).