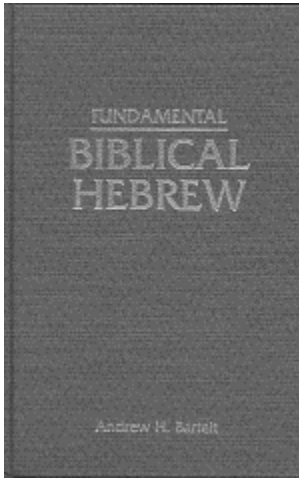


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Bartelt, Andrew H.

Fundamental Biblical Hebrew

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

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Here at the turn of the third millennium C.E., teaching grammars for beginning Hebrew students are not exactly in short supply. New introductory grammars from several presses have appeared to compete with older volumes. In order to unseat old standards and rise above other newcomers, an introductory Hebrew grammar must prove itself distinctly superior in some fashion. On the whole, Andrew Bartelt's *Fundamental Biblical Hebrew* fails to meet this challenge. Some of the book's pedagogical strategies are attractive, but other features may actually discourage its use.

The chief strength and distinction of *Fundamental Biblical Hebrew* is its early introduction of verb morphology. The conjugation of the perfect in strong roots is introduced in the fourth of the volume's twenty-four chapters, with weak roots and various irregularities discussed in chapter five. The imperfect is treated next, with the *waw*-consecutive construction the focus in the eighth chapter (although the title of chapter 8 embarrassingly leaves the *i* out of *wayyiqtol*). By placing verb morphology near the beginning of his presentation, Bartelt quickly moves students to the ability to read actual biblical sentences. This ability is psychologically important. Discovering that they can actually open up a Hebrew Bible and read at least parts of some sentences halfway through the first semester can energize students who are struggling with the demanding process of learning biblical Hebrew.

However, Bartelt does not capitalize on this feature of his text, for by his own admission (p. 7) he does not draw the exercises from actual biblical texts. Bartelt's introductory claim that "Students will be engaged in the actual biblical text already in chapter one" (p. viii) turns out to refer only to pronouncing the words of Deuteronomy 5:1, which students are then called upon to translate in chapter 8. Thereafter, no exercises are marked as actual biblical texts. Bartelt indicates that the "translational exercises are carefully written to teach biblical style and idiom" (p. ix). However, the appearance in the exercises of phrases and forms are not in fact attested in the Hebrew Bible may be misleading. For example, one exercise has students translate *nehallelah 'et-shem-yhwh*, in which *nehallelah* is presumably to be parsed as the Piel imperfect first common plural of *hll* with a cohortative *heh*, thus yielding the translation "Let us praise the name of YHWH." Though this phrase "sounds biblical," it is not; *hll* is never attested in the biblical corpus in the Piel imperfect first common plural.

Several typographical irregularities beset the volume as well. According to a chart given in the first chapter, Bartelt intends to represent the simple vocal *shewa* with a superscripted epsilon topped by a breve accent. Bartelt does not explain why he idiosyncratically chooses an epsilon rather than the more commonly employed lower-case *e*. Presumably, he wishes to distinguish the vocal *shewa* from *hateph-seghol* in transliteration, but students who learn to transcribe *shewa* in this way may be confused when they encounter more common transliteration schemes later. Moreover, the transliteration scheme is not followed consistently; sometimes the epsilon lacks the breve accent, and sometimes the epsilon is not superscripted. A similar inconsistency obtains in Bartelt's attempts to show the positions of Hebrew consonants without using any actual root; sometimes he uses *xxx* to represent the three radicals, but sometimes a multiplication symbol appears instead of an *x*. In another departure from the usual practice, Bartelt uses the sequence *person-number-gender* rather than the more common *person-gender-number*. Thus *hayah* is for Bartelt "3sm," not "3ms." There seems to be no good reason to do this, and for several reasons (notably interpreting paradigm charts) the placement of the grammatical number between person and gender may actually prove a bit confusing.

Make no mistake: students can certainly learn Hebrew using Bartelt's *Fundamental Biblical Hebrew*. There do not, however, seem to be any compelling reasons for choosing *Fundamental Biblical Hebrew* over the other introductory grammars available (aside from its early introduction of the Qal perfect), and there are several disincentives to its use. On the whole, teachers of first-year Hebrew are probably better served by other basic grammars.