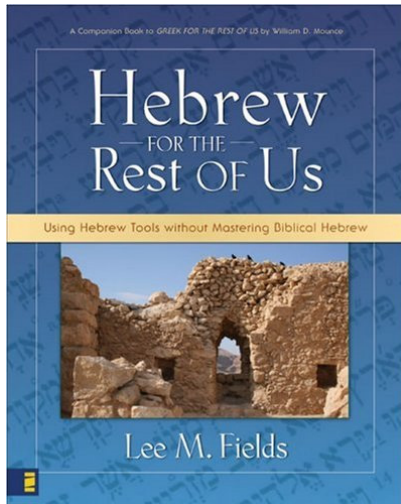


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Fields, Lee M.

Hebrew for the Rest of Us: Using Hebrew Tools without Mastering Biblical Hebrew

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. Pp. xvi + 281. Paper. \$29.99. ISBN 0310277094.

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1. General

There is a commonly held and inherited tradition among students that the learning of the biblical languages is notoriously difficult and hard, that, if it can be dispensed with, then it should be. That said, it must be the hope of the publishers that this work may serve as a catalyst to bringing down that barrier and opening up the biblical languages, in this case Hebrew, to all. Yet it must be stressed that this is not the main thrust of this work. Its main purpose is to cause all who study this work to be encouraged to biblical study at a deeper and more meaningful level. Thus, when encountering this work this primary aim must be kept in mind.

2. Particular

The book itself is divided into six weeks of work, which are as follows:

- Week 1: Getting to Know You—Consonants and the History of Hebrew
- Week 2: Getting to Know You All About You—Vowels and How We Got the O.T.
- Week 3: Roots, Clauses, and Function Words
- Week 4: Nominals
- Week 5: Verbals
- Week 6: A Method to our Madness

When we examine these sections in detail, we find that these sections contain much additional information and charts from which serious language students will profit greatly. The first of these that it seems pertinent to draw attention to is the chart that shows how to draw and understand the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The only other similar language tool that has been produced in recent years is that by J. D. Martin in his revision of Davidson's Hebrew grammar (*Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar* [Edinburgh, 1993]). Also contained within week 1 is a helpful discussion on the history of the Hebrew language, a consultation of which is helpful, since it places the literature of Qumran within its historical context. Week 2 begins with a helpful study of the Hebrew vowel system based on the root דבר. This discussion is one that will repay its study, since all beginners of Hebrew are usually quite baffled by the complexities of the Hebrew vowel system. In this context it may be noted that the vowel system of Arabic is far simpler. The explanation that Fields has provided is aided by some useful charts that graphically illustrate in a way that mere words cannot the way this system works in practice. This is then followed by a very full discussion on canon, text, and versions. This is aided by some very helpful charts that illustrate, for example, "The Formation of our Bible"; "Textual Families of the Old Testament"; "Textual Criticism and Inspiration"; and "Overview of the Translation Process."

With the beginning of week 3 we begin to get to the heart of the matter with a chapter on Hebrew word roots. This is begun by the provision of a glossary that provides information on the terms used in parsing a sentence. In the course of this discussion about the Hebrew trilateral root, a chart is provided that shows the number of words that have been built from the Hebrew root לקח. This, in my view, is a very helpful provision in this work. This is followed by another chart that shows Hebrew roots and verb formation. Again this is a very helpful feature of this work. This is followed by another chart that details a number of words with bi- and quadri-literal roots. At this point the work becomes more practical by a discussion of the use of *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). This is followed by another practical discussion on the use of an interlinear Bible. While this may seem to be a very oversimplified or uncritical approach for many of us, it should be remembered that this work is intended to deepen the task of personal and corporate Bible study, and if the result is that this causes students of the Bible to engage with the text of the Hebrew Bible for the first time, then in my view it has accomplished a lot. I have spent a lot of time in this review analyzing the contents of the first three weeks' work, because it seemed to me important to establish the methodology of the author in this work. As can be gathered from the comments I have already made, this is an extremely practical work that will direct its readers to an understanding of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, although in no sense can it be called a grammar, since it leaves a lot of grammatical work unsaid.

When we turn to the work of week 6, the approach becomes an essentially practical one. The first chapter in this section is entitled “What Do You Mean? Hebrew Word Studies.” In this chapter the author seeks to lay the groundwork of how to perform such a word study. The steps he defines are: (1) identifying the word; (2) determine the range of meaning; (3) the meaning of the word in the target text. He concludes this very interesting section by defining a number of word study pitfalls, a section that should be read and studied by every interpreter of scripture of whatever position in life. The second chapter in this section is again a very helpful one: “Tools of the Trade: Books in Paper and Electronic Form.” The bibliography of this chapter is divided into the following sections: “Computer Bibles”; “Bibliographies”; “Basic Introductions to Old Testament Studies”; “Old Testament Literature”; “Interlinear Bibles and Specialty Bibles”; “Concordances”; “Parsing Tools”; “Word Study Books and Tools.” For the purposes of this review, it should be noted that this is an annotated bibliography that draws attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the works to which it refers.

3. Conclusion

From what has been already said, it should be clear that this is a work that emanates from a conservative Old Testament scholar, although this does not mean that other students of different persuasions cannot learn from it. The bibliography draws mainly but not exclusively on the works of conservative scholars. The main feature of this work that I have warmed to is the practical application of the lessons of Hebrew grammar that it teaches in its various sections. Because of this feature, I would have no difficulty in recommending this work to first-year students of the Hebrew text. Additionally, there are concluding sections to most chapters that direct the readers to more advanced applications of what has been taught in the respective chapters; once again, this is a feature that is worthy of commendation.

From a work that is so practical in its orientation, it would have been good to have seen a chapter on how to find a Hebrew verb or noun in such a work as BDB or *HALOT*. Similarly, it would have been equally good to have taken a well-known verse or series of verses from the text of the Old Testament and show students how to handle that text. Bearing in mind the main thrust of this work and its primary aim of deepening personal Bible study, this is a work that all can benefit from, and it can also act as a catalyst when future elementary grammars of Biblical Hebrew are written.