

Reference Books on Biblical Hebrew and the Hebrew Bible

Compiled by Murray Salisbury

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This is not an exhaustive bibliography, but an annotated short list of recommendations intended primarily for those doing individual study -- not only for beginners, but also for more advanced self-learners.

Prices are approximate, for purchase in the US, and dated May 1997.

This list is made available without copyright to enhance the study of the Hebrew language and of the Hebrew Scriptures. Comments, corrections, criticisms, and additions will be welcomed. Send them to <murray.salisbury@sil.org>.

CATEGORIES:

Most categories are subdivided into "Beginners" and "Advanced" with * for recommended and ** for highly recommended.

1. Grammars
2. Parsing Guides
3. Lexicons
4. Concordances
5. Key Word Studies and Theological Dictionaries
6. Narrative Issues
7. Poetry Issues
8. Lexicology and other Linguistic Issues
9. Background of the Hebrew Bible
10. Textual Issues

1. Grammars

Beginner:

Kelley, Page H. Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar. 1992. Pp. xiv+453. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Leominster, England: Fowler Wright Books. (\$30)

Pedagogically superior to many other grammars, but it tends to blur certain grammatical issues (such as the difference between weqatal and waw + qatal). It is well-organized and teaches grammar inductively and progressively while drawing all of its many examples and exercises from Scripture. (Uses modern Sephardic pronunciation of the Hebrew.) Suitable for self-learning.

**Lambdin, T. O. Introduction to Biblical Hebrew. 1971. Pp. 376. (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons; London: Darton, Longman & Todd. (\$67)

Takes a modern linguistic approach. Widely used and often regarded as the best basic grammar available. If you are teaching yourself, then supplement Lambdin with its Key by Williamson (below). Although there are other grammars that are specifically designed for self teaching, many of them have areas of weakness in terms of accuracy or adequate coverage. (The British edition is much reduced in size making the vowel points difficult to read.)

**Williamson, Hugh G. M. Annotated Key to Lambdin's Introduction to Biblical Hebrew. 1987. Pp. 208. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press; USA distr., Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. (\$21)

A useful supplement to Lambdin, particularly for those using Lambdin independently. Where Lambdin is pedagogically weak for self-learning, Williamson's annotations explain the points more fully.

*Mansoor, Menahem. Biblical Hebrew Step by Step. Vol. I, 2nd ed., 1980. Pp. 253; Vol. II, 3rd ed., 1984. Pp. 178. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker. (\$18)

Printed readings are from Genesis with notes and study guides. Uses contemporary methods and can be studied independently. To be used with Key to Biblical Hebrew Step by Step (2 vols.) and two cassettes for pronunciation (Sephardic pronunciation, as in Israel). (\$10)

Seow, C. L. A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew. 1987. Pp. xii+308. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press; London: S. P. C. K. (\$30)

Some of its terminology could be confusing for those going on to use more advanced grammars. Examples and exercises were chosen from every book of the OT and according to frequencies of vocabulary and grammatical forms.. Complemented by Hamilton, below.

Hamilton, Jeffries M., and Jeffrey S. Rogers. A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew Handbook. 1989. Pp. iv+104. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. (\$20)

An integrated workbook for Seow's grammar, providing answer keys and a study guide.

LaSor, William S. Handbook of Biblical Hebrew: An Inductive Approach Based on the Hebrew Text of Esther. 1978. 3 vols. (Pp. 195, 283, 18). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. (\$35)

The text of Esther (vol. 3) is keyed to the grammar; also introduces textual criticism. Method avoids artificial exercises; no translation from English to Hebrew. Modern Sephardic pronunciation. Needs perseverance if studied independently. (Note: Esther, being a post-exilic book, is hardly prototypical BH, though it does mimic the language of Genesis to a considerable extent.)

Hebrew—Learn as You Read. 1984. 2 vols. Tunbridge Wells, England: SEAN-UK

A very basic course to get you started on your own. Contains a self-instructional workbook of ten lessons, a reading book, a cassette and six revision charts. Lessons are based on Gen. 1:1–2:3. Available in UK from SEAN-UK, Allen Gardiner House, Pembury Rd., Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN2 3QU. Also from SEAN International, Casilla 561, Viña del Mar, Chile.

For Biblical Aramaic:

Johns, Alger F. A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic

No further details. I have not seen it, but I've heard that it is more user-friendly for beginners than Rosenthal (below).

Advanced:

*Gesenius, Wilhelm and E. Kautzsch, eds. Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. 2nd ed. rev. from the 28th German ed. and trans. by A. E. Cowley. 1910. Pp. 598. Oxford & New York: Oxford Univ. Press. (\$34)

The standard large scale work in English. Abbreviated as GK or GKC.

Jouion, Paul and T. Muraoka. A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew. Vol. I: Part One: Orthography and Phonetics. Part Two: Morphology. Pp. xlv+352. Vol. II. Part Three: Syntax; Paradigms and Indices. (Subsidia Biblica. Vols. 14/I-II) Trans. from the French. 1993. Rome: Biblical Institute Press; distr. in the USA by Loyola University Press, Chicago, IL. (\$53)

This classic Hebrew grammar is now available in English, translated and updated by T. Muraoka from contemporary research in Hebrew and other Semitic languages. A good alternative to GKC (above).

**Waltke, Bruce K. and M. O'Connor. An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax. 1990. Pp. xiv+765. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns (\$45)

User friendly. Designed for reference and for classroom or self-guided instruction beyond the first year. Modern linguistic approach. Each point is illustrated with a number biblical examples in Hebrew and English. Helpful indexes. A useful supplement to GKC or Jouon/Muraoka (but does not replace them). In my opinion Williams' Hebrew Syntax has been largely superseded by Waltke and O'Connor.

Williams, Ronald J. Hebrew Syntax: An Outline. 2nd ed. 1976. Pp.122. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press (\$15)

A concise supplement using a linguistic approach. Now largely superseded by Waltke & O'Connor. Scripture and Subject indexes.

For Biblical Aramaic:

Rosenthal, Franz. A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic. 1983. Pp.119. Wiesbaden, W. Germany: Harrassowitz.

Originally published in 1961, it is in the less friendly style of older grammars. A glossary not only serves as a dictionary of BA but also as an index of BA words referred to in the grammar. Owners of earlier editions will find a Scripture index by G H Wilson (1979) in the Journal of Semitic Studies 24:21-24.

2. Parsing Guides

*In the past, I have neither used nor advocated the use of parsing guides and analytical lexicons. However, since this list has been compiled with independent learners primarily in mind, the following tools may be useful as temporary aids. If you are a beginner, then you will want to read Hebrew as much as you can. (The best way to learn to read is to read and read and read!) The following books will help you to get into reading the Hebrew Bible without having to look everything up. The more you read, the less you will need them later on. **Start with Ruth, Joshua, Judges (skipping chapter 5), Genesis, Samuel and Kings. Read one Psalm and one or two Proverbs several times over each week.***

Beginner:

Beall, Todd S. and William A. Banks and Colin Smith, eds. Old Testament Parsing Guide. Vol. I: Genesis to Esther. 1986. Pp. ix+390. Vol. II: Job to Malachi. 1990. Pp. xii+299. (Chicago: Moody Press)
Provides verse by verse parsing in biblical order for all the verbs in the OT. Keyed to BDB.

Davidson, Benjamin, ed. The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon. 2nd ed. 1850. (Repr. 1981) Pp. 784. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pubs.)

Lists every grammatical form of the OT in alphabetical order, parsing it and giving the root and a gloss. Cannot be relied upon for accuracy in the more difficult cases.

Owens, John Joseph. Analytical Key to the Old Testament. 1990-93. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House. (\$219, or \$60 per volume)

A verse by verse grammatical analysis of the words and phrases of the Hebrew Bible (BHS text) in the word order of the text, translated into English, and keyed to the Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. For insoluble text-critical problems a variant reading may be provided; also references to Gesenius/Kautzsch Hebrew Grammar as needed.

3. Lexicons

Beginner:

Brown, Francis, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon. 1907. (repr. with additions below). Pp. 1127. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pubs.)

The New BDB -- unfortunately, it does not have the 1952 corrections, but it adds (1) coding to Strong's Concordance; (2) a 58p. index by M. A. Robinson reducing the difficulty that arises from BDB's primary arrangement by roots (and saving the need to get Einspahr, below).

**Holladay, William L., ed. A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. 1971. Pp. 425. (Leiden: E.J. Brill; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. (\$35)

Useful for quick reference and for beginners. It is an abridged English translation of the 3rd ed. of KBL (Koehler/Baumgartner's lexicon in German) as far as the letter samekh and of the 2nd ed. for the remainder. It leaves out cognate language etymologies, bibliographic references, conjectural emendations, and most of the Scripture citations found in KBL.

Einspahr, Bruce, ed. Index to the Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon. Rev. ed. 1977. Pp. 456. Chicago: Moody Press. (\$37)

Arranged verse by verse in the biblical order with page and section references to BDB, making the information in the lexicon quickly accessible to users who have a minimal knowledge of Hebrew.

Advanced:

*Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic. Corrected ed. 1952. Pp. 1126. Oxford & New York: Oxford Univ. Press. (\$35)

Abbreviated as BDB. This is the standard Hebrew lexicon; though dated, still arguably the best. Arranged by roots rather than alphabetically, so beginners will find Einspahr's companion Index (above) helpful -- or try the New BDB:

4. Concordances

For word-studies, you will want to do your own investigations rather than relying exclusively on the kinds of books given in section 5. Nowadays, the most helpful tool for this is a good computer program. (I use BibleWorks for Windows 3.5, though a number of others are also available.) For quick reference, use a concordance:

Beginner:

Wigram, George V., ed. The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance. 1983. Pp. 1424. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pubs. (\$40)

The original 1843 edition with corrections. Arranged alphabetically by the Hebrew or Aramaic word with citations in English (KJV). Each word coded both to Strong's Concordance and to the BDB Lexicon. Easier to use than the following, if Hebrew knowledge is minimal.

Advanced:

**Even-Shoshan, Abraham, ed. A New Concordance of the Old Testament, with an Introduction and Key by J. H. Sailhamer. 1984. Pp. 38+1242. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker (\$90)

References are in Hebrew only. If your Hebrew is fluent enough then this is the most useful concordance for doing word studies. Innovative in format and features. Unlike Mandelkern (below), it includes word counts, related words (synonyms), common phrases, etc. and with fully vocalized contexts. Words are listed alphabetically, not by roots, except for verbs. Introduction explains method fully. The most common words have only the references cited. Uses the text of the Koren Bible. (This is an American edition of A New Concordance to the Torah, Neviyim, Ukhethuvim Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher Pub., which adds an English introductory guide to its use.)

*Mandelkern, Solomon, ed. Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraicae atque Chaldaicae. 9th ed. 1971. Pp. 1565. (Tel Aviv and New York: Schocken Pubs.) (\$95)

The standard Hebrew concordance before Even-Shoshan (above). Exhaustive. Arranged by roots. Word listings are in pointed Hebrew, but contexts are unpointed. Definitions are in Latin.

5. Key Word Studies and Theological Dictionaries

Beginner:

*Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. 1980. 2 vols. Pp. xvii+1124. Chicago: Moody Press. (\$70)

Beginners will find these two volumes more usable than the much larger and more technical Botterweck (below). Arranged by Hebrew root, but an index codes it to Strong's Concordance.

Vine, William E., et al., eds. An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words. 1984. Pp. 524, 1324. (Nashville: Nelson. (\$18)

The Hebrew part does not have the same caliber as Vine's original Greek dictionary. It combines Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the OT ed. by M. Unger and W. White, Jr. (1980). with Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words ed. by Bruce (1952). For beginners, it gives easy access to the Hebrew or Greek by way of the alphabetized English translations.

Wilson, William, ed. New Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies. Rev. ed. 1986. Pp. 584. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Pub. (\$35)

Dated, with surprising omissions and semantic groupings. A reprint of the 1870 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan). With the addition of coding both to Strong's Concordance and to the Theological Wordbook of the OT (above), it becomes both a KJV concordance tied to the Hebrew originals and a Hebrew word study.

Advanced:

**Botterweck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament. Trans. from the German. 1978- . 15 vols. projected. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; distr. in U.K. by SCM, London. (\$275 so far, or \$42 each)

Similar in scale to Kittel on the NT, but more careful in separating theological concepts from word meanings. Very thorough. Examines each Hebrew root (with cognates) in the historical and lexical context of the ancient Semitic world, followed by the biblical usages. Available through volume 7.

6. Narrative Issues

Beginner:

**Longacre, Robert and Shin Ja J. Hwang, "A textlinguistic approach to the Biblical Hebrew Narrative of Jonah" In: Bergen, Robert D., ed. Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics. (below) 1994. Pp. 336-358.

A concise and densely packed overview of Robert Longacre's (grammar at discourse-level) approach to the analysis of Hebrew narratives. A solidly linguistic approach.

Advanced:

Alter, Robert. The Art of Biblical Narrative. 1981. Pp. xii+195. New York: Basic Books; London: George Allen & Unwin. (\$13)

A literary approach. Reveals the significance of the varied techniques, and especially, the subtleties of OT narrative. Illustrates how careful attention to form can open new insights into the depth and the ambiguities of human character. Index includes Scripture references.

*Bar-Efrat, Shimon. Narrative Art in the Bible. Trans. from the 1984 Hebrew edition. JSOT Supplement Series., 70; Bible and Literature Series, 17 1989. Pp. 295. (\$15) (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press)

An enlightening and entertaining introduction to the techniques of a "close" reading of the narrative portions of Scripture. Emphasizes methods, structures, and forms as a foundation for meaning with a wealth of illustrations, chiefly from Genesis and Samuel. Scripture and Subject indexes.

**Bergen, Robert D., ed. Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics. 1994. Pp. 560. Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics; distributed by Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, IN. (\$40)

A collection of twenty two essays selected from those presented at the Seminar on Discourse Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew sponsored by the Summer Institute of Linguistics at Dallas, TX on May 31-June 11, 1993. They present textlinguistic approaches to Hebrew verb forms, to Hebrew narrative and non-narrative texts, to Massoretic accents, and similar issues. Each essay is headed by an abstract.

7. Poetry Issues

Beginner:

**Bratcher, R.G. and W.D. Reyrburn. 1991. "The Poetry of the Psalms" in A Handbook on Psalms. New York: UBS. pp. 3-9. (\$30)

This introduction offers a very good summary of some of the main features of BH poetry.

Advanced:

Alter, Robert. The Art of Biblical Poetry. 1985. Pp. xii+228. New York: Basic Books. (\$15)

Develops the varying incremental elements (dynamics) that enhance the effectiveness in meaning and impact of basic semantic parallelism. Refines by applying in the context of the main genres of biblical poetry as a basis for the reader's exegesis. Revolutionary. Numerous illustrations. Author's translations. Indexes: General; Scripture.

Berlin, Adele. The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism. 1985. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. (\$10)

**Watson, Wilfred G. E. Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques. 1984. Pp. xx+455.

Sheffield, England: JSOT Press; USA distr., Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. (\$40)

Thorough. Extensive indexes including Scripture texts. Good bibliographies.

8. Lexicology and other Linguistic Issues

Barr, James. Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament. Repr., 1987. Pp. 436. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns. (\$28)

Argues for a more moderate use of data from cognate languages in view of our limited knowledge of comparative philology. 1st ed. (1968) repr. in UK by SCM Press, London.

Bodine, W. (ed.) 1992 Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns. (\$37)

Essays on the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, discourse analysis, comparative linguistics, and graphemics of BH. Bibliography. Author and Scripture indexes.

Muraoka, T. (ed.) 1995 The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew. Louvain: Peeters Press.

Papers on important aspects of BH semantics and lexicography. Most were presented at a symposium in Leiden held to further establish principles for the work on a new computer database called "Network on the Semantics of Ancient Hebrew". Worth a look -- note, in particular, Hurvitz's article on semantic change (pages 1-10) and Muraoka's seven principles for using the ancient versions (page 30).

Wolff, Hans Walter. The Anthropology of the Old Testament. 1974. Pp. 304. London: SCM Press; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. (\$20)

Discusses terms relating to man's life activities (both personal and social) and terms for soul, spirit, flesh, heart, etc. Indexes: Hebrew Words; Subjects; Scripture texts.

Greenspahn, Frederick E. Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of the Phenomenon and its Treatment Since Antiquity with Special Reference to Verbal Forms. (Society of Biblical Literature.

Dissertation Series) 1984. Pp. xiii+260. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press. (\$16)

Surveys the way hapax legomena have been handled by 19th and 20th century scholarship. Detailed study of 138 "absolute" hapax legomena verbs. Seeks to show that, though frequently emended, their context gives enough clues to make sense of them as they are. Index and glossary.

9. Background of the Hebrew Bible

Bright, John. The History of Israel. 3rd ed. 1981. Pp. 511; 16 maps. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press; London: SCM Press. (\$36)

A classic work, thorough and fair; moderate in critical approach; careful to note divergent views. The centrality of the covenant in Israel's history and faith receives special attention. Notes relevant archaeological data. Excellent colored maps. Indexes: Subject; Scripture texts.

*Dillard, Raymond B. and Tremper Longman, III. An Introduction to the Old Testament. 1994. Pp. 473. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. (\$25)

An excellent evangelical introduction based on the canonical text. Limited to "special introduction" covering for each book, with some variation, bibliography, historical background, literary analysis, and theological message and relation to the NT. Makes a strong, unique, and very contemporary contribution of hermeneutical significance vis à vis the revelatory significance of each book. Indexes: Scripture; Name; Subject.

**LaSor, William S., David Allan Hubbard, and Frederick W. Bush. Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form and Background of the Old Testament. 1982. Pp. xiii+696. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. (\$35)

One of the best; includes attention to ancient literary conventions and historical, geographical, and cultural settings; covers content and critical assessments. Does not ignore problems, literary, historical, or ethical, or resort to forced harmonizations. Conservative, but never doctrinaire. Incomparable for overall attention to every aspect. Indexes: Subject, Author, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic.

Mazar, Amihai. Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000–586 B. C. E. 1990. Pp. xxx+572. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. (\$25)

An up-to-date, authoritative survey of archaeology's contribution to the history of the land of Israel from Neolithic through Iron Age. Fills in details of Israel's outside relations, political, commercial, and cultural. Illustrated with black and white photos and drawings. Indexes: Scripture texts, General.

10. Textual Issues:

**BHS = Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. 1967/77. Stuttgart: UBS (\$45)

Beginner:

*Barrick, W. D. "Current Trends and Tensions in Old Testament Textual Criticism." The Bible Translator 35/3 (1984)

**Waltke, Bruce K. "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament" in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 1, pp. 211–230. 1979. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. (\$35)

A usefully brief introduction to a complex subject. Offers a critical description and history of the various textual witnesses while evaluating their relative usefulness; high regard for MT. Look elsewhere for guidance on methodology.

Brotzman, Ellis R. Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction. 1994. Pp. 208. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House. (\$11)

Covers ancient writing, OT transmission, ancient versions, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Describes BHS format, Massoretic notation, and apparatus. Briefly introduces principles and illustrates them with a textual commentary on Ruth. Appendix: An English Key to BHS (the first part of Hans P. Rüger's An English Key to the Latin Words, Abbreviations, and Symbols...

Advanced:

**Tov, Emanuel. Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible. 1992. Pp. xl+456. 30 plates. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press; Assen/Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum. (\$42)

A cautious approach by an excellent scholar and teacher. Covers every aspect of the subject and gives an evaluation of major critical editions with an elucidation of their sigla. Numerous illustrations. A good check on commentators' text-critical notes, especially their conjectural emendations. Indexes: Ancient Sources (Scripture, biblical texts from Qumran); Subjects.

*Würthwein, Ernst. The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica. 2nd English ed. Trans. from the 5th German ed. by Erroll F. Rhodes. 1995. Pp. xiv+293. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub.; London: SCM. (\$20)

Systematically evaluates the various textual witnesses. This second edition not only has a new translator but it also includes a number of helpful additions: a chapter on the theological significance of textual criticism, extra plates, an updated bibliography, an invaluable bibliographic essay ("Resources for OT Text Criticism" by Philip Stine), and a List of Sigla showing in parallel columns the symbols used in both BHS and BHK. Indexes: Authors; Subjects; Scriptures.

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