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**Rahel Halabé**

***Hinneh: Biblical Hebrew the Practical Way***

Revised edition

Jerusalem: Mages, 2017. Pp. xi + 500, 295, 130. Paper.  
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With so many introductory Hebrew grammars now available, instructors can generally find a textbook for their first-year Hebrew courses that matches their own pedagogical approach. No introductory grammar will work well for every instructor. *Hinneh: Biblical Hebrew the Practical Way* is an excellent choice for instructors looking for an incremental introduction to the grammar of Biblical Hebrew with graded translation exercises that exposes students to authentic Biblical Hebrew from the start and emphasizes recognition of forms in context.

*Hinneh* is divided into three volumes. The first volume contains forty-six lessons, starting with lessons 1-25 covering basic morphological and syntactical elements that do not involve a verb, followed by lessons 26-46 treating the *qal* prefix (*qatal*) and suffix (*yiqtol*) forms. The second volume introduces the infinitives, imperatives, participles, and the remaining stems, or *binyanim*, in twenty-three lessons. The third volume offers a “Tool Box,” with various lists and charts to be used in conjunction with the explanations and exercises found in the first two volumes. Each volume is paperback but solidly put together, and each book lies open on a desk relatively well. The fact that *Hinneh* spans three volumes may be seen as a plus or minus: on the one hand, the student loses the convenience of a single volume; on the other hand, given how much material is presented, one can see the rationale for dividing the grammar portion into two portable volumes, and having the Tool Box as a separate volume allows the student to use it side by side with the grammar and exercises.

The first lesson of volume 1 assumes that students can read Hebrew letters with vowels. Furthermore, comparisons are sometimes made with modern Hebrew, and there are conversation exercises in the first twenty-four chapters that make use of Modern Hebrew. This makes *Hinneh* ideally suited for students with at least rudimentary background in Modern Hebrew. For students without such background, instructional materials for learning to read Hebrew letters and vowels can be found on the website accompanying the textbook in a section called “Aleph Bet the Practical Way—Ten Hebrew Reading Lessons.” If the instructor is comfortable working with this, it should be no problem for students. The website itself contains useful advice for teaching with *Hinneh*. Even when the conversation exercises employ a Modern Hebrew idiom, they nevertheless reinforce biblical Hebrew morphology and add an additional dimension to the learning process for those who wish to devote class time to such activities. Some instructors will very much appreciate this aspect of *Hinneh*, whereas others may find it unnecessary or distracting.

Chapters typically begin with a concise overview of the grammatical topic under consideration. Especially in the first half of the book, a number of related topics can be treated in a single chapter; for example, chapter 7 discusses demonstrative pronouns, the definite article and related issues, *dagesh forte*, and expressions for “today, tonight, this year, this time.” Still, the overall impression is that grammatical elements are broken down into manageable units. As noted above, most early chapters include a “morning conversation” or “simple conversation,” ideally for use in class. In line with the initial chapter overview, individual grammatical elements are explained in nontechnical language, with plentiful examples taken from biblical texts. The biblical examples are usually short, directing the student’s attention to the grammatical feature in view not only through translation but often through font size or bold type. A welcome feature of this grammar is the inclusion of multiple translation options where appropriate. In addition to the grammatical explanations and examples, most chapters have other sections, such as charts displaying essential forms, “Reading Notes,” or sections called “Do Not Confuse!” that remind the student to distinguish between distinct elements with similar appearance. At the conclusion of each chapter there are two to three pages of exercises consisting of excerpts from biblical texts exhibiting the chapter’s grammatical features. Students are expected to recognize the correct forms, translate the texts, and sometimes identify the different elements that make up a word (prefix, root, suffix, etc.), with the help of the lesson, the Tool Box (vol. 3), and a lexicon (*Hinneh* recommends W. Holladay, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1988 and provides instructions on how to read the entries). An answer key for each chapter’s exercises is found at the end of volumes 1 and 2.

Volume 3 contains the following components: parsing charts for nouns, prepositions, and verbs, which students can fill in as they analyze specific words; information on Hebrew

letters and vowels; lists of frequently occurring nouns and verbs in various forms; charts showing possessive suffixes and pronouns; flow charts and other creative presentations of topics such as the verbal stems, adjectives (descriptive or predicate), and prefix and suffix verbal forms in relation to tense and mood; a glossary listing frequently occurring adjectives, prepositions, and numbers; and verb paradigms with notable features highlighted.

*Hinneh* is a carefully designed teaching grammar with numerous merits. A few of its pedagogical tendencies, however, might not be well suited for some instructors. I mention a few points that may be of interest. First, *Hinneh* presents students with a considerable amount of authentic Biblical Hebrew from the beginning. This is certainly a plus. If there is a downside, it is that certain linguistic features encountered in the exercises will be beyond the student's present ability to understand. *Hinneh* will work best for instructors who are comfortable with or want gradual exposure to certain elements of Hebrew grammar even before these have been explained. Second, chapters do not include lists of vocabulary to memorize. Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the "frequently occurring" words in volume 3, but the primary way students build vocabulary is by encountering words in context. Third, *Hinneh* does not emphasize memorizing paradigms, although it does encourage students to memorize certain key paradigms, such as the qal prefix forms of שמר and שלח. Numerous paradigms and charts are provided, however, so the instructor could choose to require more memorizing; alternately, since the exercises do not require rote memorization, the instructor could choose not to require this at all. Fourth, the influence of Modern Hebrew grammar can sometimes be perceived; for example, when introducing the prefix form of the verb, it is stated that the subject pronoun (e.g., אתה, אני) is not usually mentioned for first- and second-person verbs, but for third-person verbs "the subject pronoun in such cases is mentioned for the third person" (1:246). Stated in this way, this seems more appropriate to Modern than Biblical Hebrew. It should also be noted that verb paradigms start with the first-person (first, second, third) rather than with the third-person (קטל) ground form.

A tendency to see Biblical Hebrew through a modern lens is perhaps noticeable in *Hinneh*'s lack of substantive treatment of clause-level syntax in narrative. Verbal forms are primarily described as isolated units in their relationship to time ("before now," "now," or beyond now") and mood ("real" or "irreal," e.g., 1:307–8). Within this framework, *Hinneh* does a satisfactory job of describing the various time and mood concepts that may be expressed by a given verb form (e.g., וקטל, יקטל, etc.). Nevertheless, the broader syntactical rules that guide how clauses are constructed and verbs are used in narrative are not well explained. As for subject and verb word order, we are told simply that the Hebrew verb may appear either before or after the subject (1:247). As for the "past," its main function is described merely as pointing to the past (1:258), without

reference to its role in carrying forward past narrative and without describing the functions of “off-line” clauses. To combine with all its strengths, *Hinneh* would benefit from adding a discussion of how clauses function in narrative and what role this plays in determining how a clause begins and what verb forms are employed (see, e.g., B. Webster, *The Cambridge Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 2009, 263–70; and J. Cook and R. Holmstedt, *Beginning Biblical Hebrew*, 2013, 100, 120, 66–67, 114–15).

Even on these points, however, an instructor could readily supply the needed explanations in class. Moreover, Halabé regularly reminds students to pay attention to the context in analyzing individual forms, which points in the right direction. The strengths of this textbook are its logical organization, straightforward explanations, relevant and copious biblical examples, useful charts and illustrations, and interesting exercises employing biblical texts aimed at recognition and translation skills. *Hinneh: Biblical Hebrew the Practical Way* deserves consideration as a possible adoption for class, and for some instructors it may well become the textbook of choice.