

**HINNEH: BIBLICAL HEBREW THE PRACTICAL WAY** by Rahel Halabé. Revised Edition. Magnes. 2017.

The New Revised Edition of Rahel Halabé's *Hinneh: Biblical Hebrew the Practical Way* is an update of her introductory grammar, which was previously reviewed in this journal by Jeremy Smoak.<sup>1</sup> This update of the original has improved upon the previous edition in some significant ways, not least of which is the addition of a color-coded e-book format that greatly increases the utility of the book's third volume. On the other hand, some of the criticisms of the previous edition still stand, and *Hinneh* by itself may not be the ideal choice for all instructors and students. The book is largely successful as an introduction to the basics of Biblical Hebrew grammar with a goal of promoting quick acquisition of reading knowledge in beginning students. However, Halabé's simplistic presentation of some grammatical topics may require supplementation in order to prepare students for more advanced study of Biblical Hebrew.

The contents of *Hinneh* remain mostly unchanged from the previous edition. Volume 1 introduces students first to the verbless clause (lesson 1), allowing them to begin reading Biblical Hebrew sentences immediately. The volume then covers nouns and adjectives (lessons 2–14), prepositions (lessons 15–20), declension of plural nouns (lessons 21–22), numbers and demonstratives (23–25), and the basic patterns of the finite verb (lessons 26–46). The only significant change to this volume is that the previous edition's lesson 3 has been divided into the new lessons 2, 4, and 5. The primary advantage of this change is that this material is now delivered in more easily absorbable pieces for students as well as better paced for lesson planning. Volume 2 remains unchanged in its contents and ordering and covers the Qal infinitive (lessons 1–4), Qal imperative (lessons 5–6), Qal participle (lessons 7–10), the Hiph'il (lessons 11–15), Piel (lessons 16–18), Hithpael (lessons 19–20), and Niphal (lessons 21–23). New example verses have been selected for the material in both volumes, and the author now provides multiple translations for some of the verses to helpfully demonstrate that literary passages may be interpreted in multiple ways.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Smoak. 2012. Review of *Hinneh: Biblical Hebrew the Practical Way* by Rahel Halabe. *Hebrew Higher Education* 14: 217–19.

Volume 3 of *Hinneh* consists of a “Tool Box,” which includes noun declension and verb parsing charts as well as lists of frequently occurring vocabulary. An online edition of the book or downloadable e-book is also available that includes an “e-Tool Box.” This online edition is accessible on the Magnes Press website with purchase and the creation of a user account. If the potential user of the book wishes to access it offline, she must first create an Adobe account, then download the correct software for viewing the e-book, and finally download the e-book itself. This process is relatively simple but may require some additional explanation if instructors decide to use the e-book for their classes. The “e-Tool Box” provided in the online edition of the book or downloaded e-book presents the exact same material as Volume 3 but with color-coding in the vocabulary lists. This is especially helpful for the lists of verbs, as irregular forms such as weak verbs or נ"פ verbs are apparent at a glance. It should be noted that the legend for the color codes is still present in the print edition but not the colors, so this may confuse users of the work who are not aware of the online edition of the book.

The stated goal of *Hinneh* is to provide students with “what is deemed necessary information for the introductory stage, postponing minute linguistic details for later, should they wish to continue beyond this level” (Vol. 1 p. i). This approach has its merits as the textbook’s minimal explanations allow students to begin engaging with Biblical Hebrew immediately in each lesson. However, the author’s self-described “simplistic” explanations will certainly require supplementation should students desire to advance beyond basic reading comprehension and workable translation skills. This is best illustrated by the author’s approach to the Biblical Hebrew verb. The author reduces the principle parts of the verb to the prefix form, suffix form, infinitive, imperative, and participle. Notably, forms such as the *waw*-consecutive, preterit, jussive, and cohortative are simply collapsed into the so-called prefix form. Contrary to Smoak’s prior criticism of *Hinneh*, the author introduces the term *waw*-past to describe the *waw* that precedes the *waw*-consecutive, which she does not label as a separate form at all but merely treats as part of the prefix form. This simplified presentation will certainly make the material

easier for beginning students to absorb. However, it may also leave students who wish to continue to advanced study at a disadvantage.

Similarly, the author's approach to translating Biblical Hebrew verbs has significant strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, the author's advocacy for context and genre sensitive translations (Vol. 1 p. 272) is well-taken and should certainly be emphasized to beginning students. The author also helpfully problematizes the application of tense to Biblical Hebrew verbs by pointing out repeatedly that both the prefix and suffix form can be used to describe past, present, and future action. However, the textbook nonetheless makes use of a tense-oriented approach in that the main question asked in the diagrams provided to analyze verbs is "where is it on the timeline?" Students are thus led to privilege an assignation of tense in their translations even if tense is not matched to a particular verbal form. In contrast, aspect is very sparsely addressed as a category for analyzing Biblical Hebrew verbs. This approach may allow students to proceed more quickly into producing workable translations, but they will again be left at a distinct disadvantage in pursuing further study. Ultimately, instructors must decide whether they will supplement this approach with more rigorous analyses of the verbal forms based on the needs and goals of their students.

On the practical side, the exercises of the New Revised Edition appear to have been expanded in some cases and are no longer as limited as Smoak criticized the first edition's for being. Admittedly, some lessons (e.g. vol. 1 lesson 16) still provide a limited amount of only one type of exercise that will require supplementation depending on the needs of each instructor's students. However, some lessons (e.g. vol. 1 lesson 17) provide several different types of exercises and so many of them that some instructors may prefer not to assign them all. As was criticized in the previous edition, the vocabulary for each lesson is still not clearly organized at the beginning or end of the lessons themselves. This problem is somewhat assuaged by the provision of several glossaries for the lessons in volume 3.

As suggested in its title, *Hinneh: Biblical Hebrew the Practical Way* perhaps emphasizes practicality over theoretical completeness. As such, it is successful at providing tools to equip students to read and translate Biblical

Hebrew almost immediately. Its simplified presentation will likely be easily digestible for beginning students. The tools provided in Volume 3 should be of great value to students as well, especially as color-coded in the e-Tool Box. On the other hand, some explanations of grammatical concepts are so simplified that they may leave students at a disadvantage should they proceed to more advanced study of the language. Depending on the specific goals of each instructor and her students, *Hinneh* may function best when supplemented with a more deductive grammar as a comparative reference, such as C. L. Seow's *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (1995) or Jo Ann Hackett's *A Basic Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (2010). As a practical introduction for students whose primary goal is to read the biblical text with basic competence, however, *Hinneh* is generally successful.

*Timothy Hogue*  
UCLA