BOOK REVIEW

Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi. *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax: Second Edition.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018. xvi + 252 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-107-43496-7. $32.99.

At the heart of all effective interpretation of the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament is the need to accurately understand the Bible's syntax, that is, to study the way words, phrases, clauses, and sentences relate to one another in order to create meaning. Regrettably, there is a dearth of clear, accessible, and up-to-date resources that can bridge the gap between the beginning 'grammar' books and the more advanced reference grammars—such as those by Waltke and O'Connor, Joün and Muraoka, Gesenius, Kautzsch, and Cowley, and van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze. Enter *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (GBHS) by Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, now in its second edition.

Effective exegesis requires more than merely being able to discern elementary Hebrew phonology, morphology, and vocabulary. In the words of Arnold and Choi, "achieving a deep-level reading requires an understanding of syntactical relationships, a topic that beginning grammars simply cannot cover in detail" (1). Though it is not intended to replace the standard reference grammars (such as those mentioned above), *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* includes extensive references to such works, including ample footnotes.

In the words of the authors, the purpose of GBHS is "simply to bridge the gap, as best as we can, between our students and the best of current research on Biblical Hebrew syntax" (xv). Notably, the authors also state, with respect to some of the grammars noted above, that "through interaction with these and other sources of scholarship, we feel that we have, at several points,

introduced innovations in our explanations of Biblical Hebrew syntax in an attempt to refine the way we read and interpret the Bible today" (xvi).

With respect to its basic structure and outline, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* divides Biblical Hebrew syntax and morphology into four main parts. The first three sections of GBHS cover the key categories of individual words: (1) 'nouns,' (2) 'verbs,' and (3) 'particles.' The fourth section moves beyond phrase-level phenomena and considers the larger relationships of clauses and sentences (nominal and verbal clauses, subordinate clauses, and additional sentence types).

Nearly fifteen years have passed since the first edition of this volume, and the improvements and additions to the second edition are significant. It is fortunate that the authors have chosen to retain many of the same basic labels and headings of the first edition, thereby facilitating an easier point of entry into the discipline itself and maintaining continuity with the majority of entry-level and more advanced grammars. The basic structure, outline, and paragraph numbering of the two volumes also remain the same as does as the inclusion of two main indices (scripture and subject), two clear appendices (A—Stem Chart and B—Expanded Stem Chart), and a thoroughly helpful ten-page glossary. The bibliography in the second edition of GBHS has more than doubled in size. As a side note, section 5.2.14 on disjunctive clauses has been removed.

The more substantial changes come from the tremendous amount of increased discussion of almost every category in the book, both in the footnotes and in the main body of text. This includes a new three-page section on the relative particles, a one-page addition to the subject of determination (category–associative), and two new pages on additional derived stems (such as the Hishtaphel stem). Each of the four main sections of text, 'nouns,' 'verbs,' 'particles,' and 'clauses and sentences,' has an average of more than ten additional footnotes. Thus, there are more than fifty new footnotes in total, some of which extend for several sentences or even whole paragraphs in length. This is not to mention the bolstering of many of the already existing footnotes—even the main body of GBHS has been thoroughly

updated and many revisions throughout the volume have been made to improve clarity.

One of the key changes involves terminology. While the first edition of *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* used labels such as "imperfect" or "perfect" when discussing the verbal system, the second edition uses the terms *yiqtol* form/prefix conjugation, or *qatal* form/suffix conjugation instead. Other examples like this abound. For instance, with respect to nouns, Arnold and Choi have further explained the marked difference between form and function concerning the terms nominative, genitive, and accusative, and note that though "some authorities believe we should abandon these grammatical labels altogether (especially 'nominative') when describing BH syntax" their objective is

> to identify and describe the *functions* of the noun. Because the nouns in BH function syntactically in the same distinct 'cases' as its parent language, it is still helpful to distinguish three case *functions* in BH using the terminology *nominative*, *genitive*, and *accusative*. We will introduce other designations for these functions where appropriate to assist the advanced student . . . if the reader remembers that we are describing the *syntactical* functions of these nouns rather than their grammatical morphemes, we believe the traditional terminology is more helpful (7–8, all emphases original).

Concerning the nominal clause, Arnold and Choi write "we are using 'nominal clause' narrowly defined to refer to clauses without verbs, as so as interchangeable with 'verbless clause' or 'nonverbal clause.' Terminology is a debated topic related to this subject" (177). Mention could also be made of the increased specificity concerning word order, the primary function of the Niphal (as medio-passive independent of any original function that was reflexive), and the particles.

From a technical standpoint, some readers of GBHS may be disappointed that this volume does not do more than merely provide a guide to biblical Hebrew syntax. That is to say, it is no substitute for the larger grammars, especially, perhaps, the second edition of BHRG noted above. However, the effective use of biblical illustrations combined with ample white space, a clear, easy-to-use format, copious footnotes and other references, not

to mention the most up-to-date content that is available for this genre of book, makes *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* by far the most accessible introduction currently in print to students of biblical Hebrew syntax. Its primary readers will be intermediate students of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and, one hopes, all serious expositors and teachers of Scripture.

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