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BOOK REVIEW

Miles V. Van Pelt and Gary D. Pratico. *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew: A Guide to Reading the Hebrew Bible*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. xvii + 263 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-3100-9335-0. \$29.99.

Students of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (hereafter HB/OT) can often be at an impasse as to what they ought to do next upon having learned the basics of biblical Hebrew. Without appropriate reinforcement of the sundry patterns and principles of morphology, grammar, and syntax that were taught in beginning Hebrew, many valuable lessons can be lost. Enter *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew: A Guide to Reading the Hebrew Bible* by Miles V. Van Pelt and Gary D. Pratico, now in its second edition.

The primary goals of this book are:

(1) to review and reinforce basic Hebrew grammar; (2) to introduce students to issues of intermediate grammar; (3) to familiarize students with normative Hebrew syntax through significant exposure to narrative and poetic texts; and (4) to provide students with a measure of encouragement as they build their confidence in the handling of the Hebrew Bible (ix).

Unequivocally, Pratico and Van Pelt succeed in accomplishing their overarching goal(s) and intended purpose(s).

To what degree, however, does the second edition of this volume differ from the first, and in what capacity do Pratico and Van Pelt utilize and/or leverage the most recent lexical, grammatical, and linguistic resources of the last thirteen years since the first issuing of this text? Prior to offering a delineation of these matters and a full-scale review, it is prudent to provide a general orientation to *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew*.

Aside from the introduction and some other preliminary material (such as a comparison of the English and HB/OT

arrangements), *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew* contains thirty lessons, i.e., there are thirty different Hebrew texts outlined in it: thirteen from the ‘Law,’ eleven from the ‘Prophets,’ and six from the ‘Writings.’ This amounts to 202 verses, 4585 words for translation, and 622 verbs to parse.

Not counting the Book of the Twelve (of which, somewhat strangely, only the book of Joel makes an appearance), the only other books of the HB/OT that are not represented include Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, and 1 Chronicles. Although one may quibble that there are no differences in the actual selection of lessons between the first and second editions of *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew*, Pratico and Van Pelt are to be commended on their fine selection of verses as they do indeed represent “some of the most important biblical texts . . . from the perspective of biblical history, theology, and exegesis” (xii). The pedagogical sensitivity concerning the graded component of this graded reader is also a boon as Pratico and Van Pelt have “pitched things just right” for most students.

The layout and presentation of the text, as a whole, is quite pleasing and very user-friendly. There is ample space throughout the volume with generous margins and appropriate line spacing. Alongside this, the pages are opaque enough to prevent most bleed-throughs from occurring. One notes though, that the pages are not perforated nor are they three-hole punched for use in binder rings. Regarding the actual biblical text of *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew*, the authors have chosen not to include the Masoretic accents that appear with the Hebrew text of *BHS*. Although some may, perhaps, disapprove of this decision, given the purpose of the book itself (see above) and the intended audience of the volume as a whole (students who have completed their first year of Hebrew language study or those whose skills have languished over time), it is persuasive to argue that the “benefits outweigh the liabilities” (xiii). With respect to pausal spelling and all *Kethiv* and *Qere* spellings, Pratico and Van Pelt provide sufficient explanations for these phenomena and a sufficient number of references.

Concerning the differences between the first and second

editions of *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew*, only some relatively modest changes occur. To begin with, the most noteworthy modification includes updating all of the references within *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew* that pertain to its companion grammar volume, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew* (also by Van Pelt and Pratico), to its most current (third) edition (2019). Other changes include updating the fonts, rendering the divine name as “Yahweh,” and adding a second appendix, i.e., a lexicon.

This lexicon contains all 642 Hebrew words (excluding proper names) that occur fifty or more times in the HB/OT. Its contents were derived from the second edition of *The Vocabulary Guide to Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic* (Miles V. Van Pelt and Gary D. Pratico. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019). One also notes that for ease of reference and maximum efficiency, this lexicon also corresponds to the second edition of *Old Testament Hebrew Vocabulary Cards* (Miles V. Van Pelt and Gary D. Pratico. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019). Pratico and Van Pelt are to be commended in this regard for creating a unified collection of resources for all of their Hebrew students.

It is unfortunate, however, that although the authors state that they have “revised many of the textual notes appearing in the grammatical commentary” (xi), the actual changes are somewhat lackluster in their nature. That is to say, a brief perusal seems to indicate that though some minor changes do indeed occur with respect to certain entries (see, for example, Gen 1:1; 1:5; 26:2) they are mostly typographical rather than grammatical (cf. 2 Chr 1:10). To be specific, even as the bibliography and abbreviations page make explicit that Pratico and Van Pelt seem to be aware of the second edition of *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Christo H. J. van der Merwe et al. New York: T. & T. Clark, 2017), all of the actual references to this specific text (*BHRG*) within *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew* actually remain in correspondence to the first edition rather than the second.

This is, perhaps, most recognizable in Pratico and Van Pelt’s discussion of Exod 3:1–12 (v. 1 specifically) with respect to the preposition’s capacity to “designate compass direction (to the west side of the wilderness)” (40). To put it differently, though the authors make reference to *BHRG* §39.2.1c in their reference

section, one will search in vain in *BHRG*² for comments concerning this particular phenomenon. In addition, Pratico and Van Pelt also provide an incorrect reference to *BHRG* in their discussion of Exod 3:3 where *BHRG* §21.5.1 is cited but the proper (2nd ed.) reference is *BHRG* §21.5.3.

Alongside this, although the list of abbreviations and bibliography do not make explicit that the authors actually refer to the second edition of Arnold and Choi's *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), there are, unfortunately, certain page number discrepancies that can occur between these two editions (see pp. 45 and 100 of *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew* for the clearest examples). To be specific, *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew* refers to pg. 199 of Arnold-Choi (first edition) but in the second edition the reference(s) in both accounts would be pg. 213.

One also notes that though the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* by David J. A. Clines is now entering into its second edition (of certain volumes), no mention is made of it throughout this work (see, for example, pp. 80, 135, and 176 where Clines's dictionary could have, perhaps, most supplemented Pratico and Van Pelt's discussion). In addition to this, there is no mention or citation(s) of the available volumes of *BHQ*.

Some minor typographical errata also occur within the volume. For instance, on p. 245 (line six), the word "identify" is misspelled as "idenfity" and on p. 167 (Isa 43:1, first entry, last line), the text states: "and 'this is what Yahweh says'" (NIV) although both the 1984 NIV and the 2011 NIV actually use "the LORD." Likewise, p. 174 demonstrates a similar issue with respect to the NIV and the use of the name Yahweh. Though these things are, perhaps, due to the editorial decision to explicitly use the name Yahweh, it remains incorrect regarding the actual citation of the NIV.

A more substantial critique, however, of *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew*, concerns the persistent usage of outdated and linguistically inaccurate language. Using the designation 'perfect with waw consecutive' on p. 55 serves as a clear example. Though Pratico and Van Pelt refer to both Arnold-Choi §3.5.2 and *BHRG* §21.3, each of these grammars (in their second

editions) distinctly cease to employ such language; Arnold-Choi, in fact, state explicitly that the more linguistically correct form is *wəqātal*.

Alongside this, specifically concerning הנה, Van Pelt and Pratico classify this term as an interjection (see, for example, p. 182) though it does not really fit into this class. To quote van der Merwe et al.,

As opposed to interjections and most ordinary adverbs, it can take a pronominal suffix and, as opposed to ordinary adverbs, it may have scope over a clause or multiple clauses. In fact, it always precedes the clause upon which it has a bearing. Semantically it also differs from the class modal adverbs . . . it does involve the speaker in the content of the clause, but it does not necessarily refer to his or her opinion on the degree of probability of the events or state of affairs (*BHRG* §40.22.1).

To summarize, despite the (not insignificant) dearth of similar resources currently available and despite the remarkable benefits that Pratico and Van Pelt have provided to all beginner-intermediate students of the HB/OT with the original publication of *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew*, the infelicities of the second edition in particular make it something of a challenge to wholly commend. One can only hope that further reprintings might be able to correct some of these matters so that all serious expositors and teachers of Scripture whose Hebrew skills might need a refresher can benefit as much as possible from Van Pelt's and Pratico's notable work.

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