

[MJTM 12 (2010–2011)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Miles V. Van Pelt. *English Grammar to Ace Biblical Hebrew*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. 106 pp. Pbk. ISBN 0310318319.

While it may seem a reasonable expectation that seminary students come into an introductory Hebrew class knowing the basics of English grammar, sadly this is often not the case. While native English speakers have mastered the language in many ways, frequently they only know the grammar of their own language at the intuitive level. In my own teaching I have found that most students (at both graduate and undergraduate levels) who come into my introductory Hebrew class need a bit of a refresher in English grammar in order to grasp Hebrew grammar. This is where the recent book *English Grammar to Ace Biblical Hebrew* by Miles V. Van Pelt can help. As the title clearly indicates, this little book is written to students who are beginning the study of Biblical Hebrew (or those who plan to do so in the near future). In the introduction the author also notes that the book may be particularly helpful for students who are “not native speakers” of English but are studying Hebrew “in an English-speaking context” (12). The aim of the book is to make the study of Hebrew easier by introducing students to the basics of English grammar and showing the similarities and differences between the two languages. The book is designed to be used in tandem with the Hebrew grammar, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew* (which the author co-wrote with Gary D. Pratico) and contains many cross references (chapters and page numbers often included) to that grammar throughout. However, the book would also be useful for those who will be using another grammar to learn Biblical Hebrew.

The first half of the book (chs. 1–7) deals with nominals and

the second (chs. 8–14) with verbal systems. Each chapter begins with a short (and often humorous) introduction, followed by a brief look at one facet of English grammar, then by a corresponding component from Hebrew grammar. Though setting out to give a “very basic introduction to English grammar” (12), the book really functions simply to show points of contact between English and Hebrew grammar, which will hopefully aid beginning Hebrew students. The book is very user friendly, providing a brief orientation to grammatical concepts like prepositions, different types of adjectives (attributive, predicative, and substantive), etc. Each chapter concludes with exercises that not only allow the student to put their new knowledge into practice but also prepare students for formal Hebrew instruction, as most Hebrew classes and grammars require students to do similar exercises (albeit exercises concerning Hebrew words and sentences rather than English ones). As well, the book concludes with a helpful glossary that could not only aid students in working through this book, but also serve as a handy reference for future study.

The book is an easy read and is written quite light-heartedly with frequent humorous anecdotes, consistently facetious titles (e.g., ch. 7 is entitled “Pronouns: Grammatical Stunt Doubles”) and many puns or wordplays. While I found the pervasive humor entertaining, one wonders whether some of the attempts at humor (e.g., ch. 3 “Nouns: Name it, and Claim it”; ch. 4 “The, And, of: Are You Kidding Me?”) could prove confusing to students for whom English is a second language (which would be unfortunate given the intended audience). That being said, the book is written in an engaging and interesting style that should appeal to a fairly broad audience.

In sum, this is a useful little book that could prove helpful for many students beginning Hebrew language study. Given that many seminary students lack traditional education in English grammar and struggle with grammatical concepts, this book is a welcome addition to a Hebrew student’s arsenal. By providing categories through which beginners can think grammatically and also by highlighting various points of contact between English and Hebrew grammar *English Grammar to Ace Biblical Hebrew*

VAN PELT *English Grammar to Ace Biblical Hebrew*

may assist students in more easily grasping the basics of Hebrew grammar. As well, many of the illustrations Van Pelt uses to compare Hebrew and English grammar could serve as a resource for beginning instructors of Biblical Hebrew for class lectures. While the book is too basic for those who have already studied introductory Hebrew and unnecessary for students who are confident in English grammar, I would recommend it to students who are struggling with understanding basic grammatical concepts in introductory Hebrew or to those who desire to get a head start on Biblical Hebrew before formal study begins.

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