BOOK REVIEW

Miles V. Van Pelt and Gary D. Pratico. *Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary in Context: Building Competency with Words Occurring 50 Times or More.* Zondervan Language Basics. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. xi + 132 pp. ISBN 978-0-310-09847-8. $16.99.

Aside from the basic necessity of mastering the fundamentals of grammar/syntax and the like, there are few things that the beginning (or advanced) student of biblical Hebrew requires more than cultivating a high degree of proficiency in vocabulary acquisition and retention. Although there is no shortage of volumes that pertain to this subject, as a whole, the distinguishing feature of *Biblical Hebrew* is its unique emphasis on strengthening and reinforcing one's vocabulary by helping students learn words that occur fifty times or more within the context of the actual Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (hereafter HB/OT). That is to say, unlike many other books on Hebrew vocabulary that tend to offer various word-lists (often by frequency) or, perhaps, clusters of different word groups (usually arranged according to semantic domains), *Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary in Context* collates into 195 verses and/or verse fragments all 642 words of the HB/OT that occur 50 times or more (excluding proper names), thus enabling the reader to make connections between a words inflected and lexical form and its (potentially) dynamic range of meaning.

It is of interest to note that once one has mastered all of the 642 words contained in this volume (in context), one will have access to "approximately *90 percent* of the Old Testament in the original language" (xi, italics original).

Biblical Hebrew is divided into two primary sections. The first contextual vocabulary list functions much like a workbook. Each (pointed) Hebrew text (#1–195) is accompanied by a

'wooden' English translation. Lined space is also provided so that there is sufficient room to parse verbs, gloss words, identify syntactical constructions, and/or comment on morphology. Words that appear less than fifty times are glossed and all proper names are identified with gray text. One notes that the Tetragrammaton is rendered as "Yahweh" throughout the volume.

The second section of the book provides the same biblical verses (in the same order, with the same numbering) as the first section, but with minimal room for notes and no translation. In this section, the student is encouraged to practice sight reading without supplements—i.e., without recourse to grammars, lexicons, and/or translation(s). As Pratico and Van Pelt state: "The ultimate purpose and design of this resource is to facilitate a student's ability to sight-read all 195 texts that appear in the contextual vocabulary lists" (x).

Of all the books of the HB/OT, the only ones that are not represented within this brief volume are Song of Songs, Ezra, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Incontrovertibly, Pratico and Van Pelt are to be commended for their inclusion of such a wide diversity of canonical texts, and their intentional inclusion of texts with unique or specific vocabulary terms (such as Eccl 4:7 or Ps 3:9). That being said, one might quibble concerning the conspicuous absence of Song of Songs due to the heavy concentration of the (rather unique) term דּוֹד "beloved, uncle" (NB: the term itself has 61 occurrences in the HB/OT, 39 times of which appear in Song of Songs).

Aside from a thorough Scripture index, arranged according to the traditional HB/OT ordering (versification differences between the Hebrew and English are marked by square brackets), *Biblical Hebrew* also includes a Hebrew-English lexicon. The contents of this lexicon are derived from Pratico and Van Pelt's *Vocabulary Guide to Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic* (2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019) and are also keyed to their *Old Testament Hebrew Vocabulary Cards* (2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019). It is a boon to users that this lexicon often contains important statistical information (see pp. 98, 101, 102, 103, 104, 116, 117, and 122) and, at times, certain special grammatical information (such as the particulars of an assimilated

nun, for instance, or how a certain word might be inflected within a specific corpus, such as the Pentateuch). It even includes unique metaphorical usages. Most welcome, also, is the fact that the lexicon distinguishes between each of the different Hebrew stems with respect to meaning. In this way, it is free from the all-too-common exegetical fallacies (such as the "root fallacy" or "basic meaning fallacy") that often plague language studies.

Somewhat surprisingly, however, though the lexicon does contain many standard abbreviations for Hebrew stems (Q, Ni, Pi, Pu, Hi, Hith, Hoph,) and parts of speech (adj, prep, conj, etc.), there is no general or specific list of abbreviations. Although this is unlikely to cause many users much grief, there were a few abbreviations that might cause the uninitiated to scratch their heads without having recourse to another grammatical aid. Further assistance regarding collocations would also have proved helpful in some cases.

In sum, *Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary in Context* is an excellent addition to the ever-growing library of Hebrew language-study vocabulary books. Its unique format makes it especially amicable to self-study, while teachers will also appreciate the opportunity to create

> . . . vocabulary quizzes that depart from the traditional presentation of a simple lexical form requiring a generic translation from a student. Because the lists are numbered [1-195], instructors can assign texts and quiz from appropriate blocks of material that suit the particular needs of various classroom contexts and environments (x).

Its primary users are likely beginner/intermediate Hebrew students in Bible colleges, seminaries, Christian university colleges, and, one hopes, the studious pastor. Highly recommended!

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