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The T&T Clark Hebrew Primer

A.A. Macintosh & C.L. Engle

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For Revision and Consolidation

A.A. Macintosh
&
C.L. Engle

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Preface

The primer is, as its title suggests, designed to facilitate revision and consolidation for those who are following, or who have followed, the standard courses of instruction in elementary Hebrew, as also for those who, after an interval of neglect, wish to revive their knowledge of the language and their ability to read the Hebrew Bible.

The need for such a primer has become apparent to A.A.M. who has taught elementary Hebrew in the University of Cambridge for some forty years. It is apparent also to C.L.E. who, when charged with teaching the language for the first time, found herself reaching for just such a complementary teaching aid. It is hoped, then, that the primer will be of use to students as they follow their own particular courses of instruction and as they revise for examinations. In this connection it is important to note that the work is not allied to a particular teaching grammar but, rather, is designed to complement any and all such grammars. It is essentially a companion to the teaching grammars which seeks to give an additional perspective to their contents.

Most modern teaching grammars tend to submit the material to their readers with minimal exposition of a number of the fundamental principles which may be said to govern the language. It has become unfashionable, for example, to use descriptions familiar from the classical languages, such as declensions and conjugations. Indeed, it is noticeable that contemporary students, quite unfamiliar with such terms, show resistance to adopting them. The primer seeks in a gentle way to redress this tendency by rehearsing a number of the fundamental principles. Examples include the a/e vowel shift so typical of Hebrew, and categories of nouns (*sic* in this work) which, once grasped, have extended relevance to the entire verbal system.

A vocabulary consisting of words most frequently in use in the Hebrew Bible has been supplied. To particular words information ('gossip') has been added in order both to aid memory and to indicate connections in various aspects of Hebrew and its Semitic context. This includes some references to the modern spoken form of the language in Israel, now so vigorously successful. Such pieces of information undoubtedly arouse interest and consequent facility in learning.

The primer has been described by a colleague as 'a poor man's Gesenius Kautzsch'. If it is such, we shall be well pleased. It is, however, important to note that it is not fully comprehensive, and that not everything which could have been (or indeed, perhaps, in some cases should have been) included has been. The aim has been to review what would seem to be absolutely essential—what can speedily and in a manageable way be digested in revision and consolidation, and is also free from modern linguistic jargon.

We are immensely grateful to our colleagues H.G.M. Williamson and R.P. Gordon for their kindness in reading drafts of the work. Any mistakes and infelicities that survive are those of the authors and emphatically not at all those of the learned Professors. We wish also to thank Emily Brown for technical assistance, and Michelle Hunt for valuable suggestions.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge our indebtedness to A.B. Davidson's *An Introductory Hebrew Grammar*, first published by T. & T. Clark in 1874, and to the edition revised by Mauchline in 1962. We wish to thank Dominic Mattos of Bloomsbury T&T Clark, who graciously supported the idea of the primer. The work of Duncan Burns, our Senior Copy-Editor, has been exemplary, and we are deeply grateful to him for his patience and perseverance in bringing the work to completion.

A.A.M. C.L.E.

Introduction

Vowel Signs

Vowel signs used in this Primer are listed in English for convenience as follows:

Patach	short a	◌ָ
Seghol	short e	◌ֶ
Hireq	short i	◌ִ
Qibbutz	short u	◌ֻ
Qametz-Hatuph	short o	◌ָ
Qametz	long a	◌ָ
Tsere	long e as in (s)ay	◌ֵ
Shureq	long u	וּ
Holem	long o	◌ֹ
Shewa	Indistinct vowel	◌ְ

The *hatephs*, or composite, directional *shewas* are: ◌ֲ ◌ֳ ◌ֱ ("o" direction). These each denote a sound leaning in the direction of the corresponding short vowel. The terms are used interchangeably throughout this Primer.

Pure long vowels are: ◌ֵי and ◌ֶי as in "see" and "they", respectively
וֹ and וּ as in "mow" and "rule", respectively

An illustration of Hebrew "a" vowels, using the vowel sounds of the English word "dance":

American = d*a*nce "ă" as in "cat"; equivalent to Hebrew *patach*
British = d*ah*nce "ah" as in "father"; equivalent to Hebrew *qametz*
French = d*a*nse "aw" as in "awning, awesome", or "daughter"; equivalent to Hebrew *qametz-hatuph*; cf., also, the English pronunciation of "bottle"