Syllabus for Old Testament 5302
HISTORICAL HEBREW GRAMMAR
Richard A. Taylor
Fall 2020

“L’hébreu n’est pas une langue difficile, mais simplement une langue où l’on trouve quelques difficultés.”
—Henri Fleisch

Catalog Description

“An inductive and deductive study of biblical Hebrew from the perspective of its historical development within the Semitic family of languages.” The syllabus for OT5302 Historical Hebrew Grammar corresponds to the syllabus for the PhD course OT8102 Historical Hebrew Grammar. ThM students registered for OT5302 follow the same course of instruction as students in OT8102, but they are exempt from German and French reading requirements. 3 semester hours.

Aims and Objectives of the Course

As a result of this course, the diligent student should be able to do the following things.

1. Trace the main developments in the history of the Hebrew language through its various stages, from the earliest usage for which there is extant evidence up to the present time. Our primary interest in this course is biblical Hebrew. However, biblical Hebrew is best understood in relation to the other phases of this language, especially those that immediately precede and follow it chronologically. Even within biblical Hebrew there is evidence of significant linguistic transition and development. An understanding of linguistic features found in the various stages of the Hebrew language will be useful to students doing research on any portion of the Hebrew Bible. Our approach will be both diachronic, stressing the development and evolution of the morphological forms that we find in the Hebrew Bible, and synchronic, emphasizing the characteristics of biblical Hebrew as distinct from those of other stages of the language.

2. Articulate the distinguishing features of morphology for verbs, verbals, and nouns, not only in terms of the historical development of the Hebrew forms but also in terms of their relationship to similar forms for other Semitic languages. Here our primary focus will be on the evolution of the Hebrew forms more so than on the forms found in other Semitic languages. Although this course draws on many matters of comparative Semitic linguistics, it is not a course in comparative Semitics as such. The discipline of comparative Semitic grammar gives more or less equal weight to the data of all of the Semitic languages, while the discipline of historical Hebrew grammar puts greater stress on the development of Hebrew in particular and its relationship to the other Semitic languages.

3. Translate representative texts from various stages of the Hebrew language and account for their distinctive morphological and syntactical features as compared to biblical Hebrew. For this purpose we will deal inductively and directly with selected samples of the linguistic evidence that illustrate stages in the linguistic development of ancient Hebrew.

Students who are pursuing the PhD in Old Testament studies should keep in mind that one of the
five comprehensive examinations to be taken upon the completion of their course work is an examination over historical Hebrew grammar. In anticipation of this comprehensive examination, one of the objectives of this course is to lay a solid foundation in matters pertaining to the historical development of the Hebrew language. Thorough preparation for this course will prove to be advantageous at the later stages of the Old Testament doctoral program.

Requirements for the Course

1. Assigned reading (10%). Students should complete the reading of the assigned texts and supplementary readings in accord with the schedule presented below. Although time will not permit equal coverage of all this material in class, the readings will nonetheless provide important and necessary background for the classroom discussions. In particular, the material on morphology is very important for the purposes of this course; other areas, such as phonology or syntax, play an important but less central role in this regard. A grasp of the historical development of the Hebrew forms, especially for the verb and the noun, is essential for our present goals. Students will be asked to report weekly on the completion of the reading assignments.

2. Translation assignments (20%). Students should translate the assigned Hebrew texts and be prepared to discuss and interact with their linguistic data. This includes being able to vocalize and parse the Hebrew forms that appear, as well as noting distinguishing features in their orthography, morphology, and syntax. In this way students will begin to form first-hand opinions about the various stages of the Hebrew language as represented by these texts. Once we have completed our class discussion of each of these assignments, please turn in your written work for that text, including corrections and/or annotations made during the class discussion.

3. Written exercises on morphology (20%). There will be eight take–home written assignments. These assignments will deal with the morphological development of various Hebrew forms covered in the assigned readings and class discussions. These exercises provide an opportunity for further reflection on selected issues of historical Hebrew grammar. They should be completed and returned to the instructor at the following class.

4. Examinations (40%). Two examinations of equal weight (20%) will be given during the semester. These examinations focus on various aspects of morphology and history of the Hebrew language. Further details about how to prepare for the examinations will be provided in class.

5. Book review (10%). All students will read the following work: Ian Young and Robert Rezetko, with the assistance of Martin Ehrensvärd, An Introduction to Approaches and Problems, vol. 1 of Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts, Bible World, ed. Philip R. Davies and James G. Crossley (London: Equinox, 2008). Since this assignment presupposes a familiarity with the major issues of historical Hebrew grammar, it will be best to save work on it for the latter part of the course. Each student will lead a class discussion and critical evaluation of a specific portion of this book according to a schedule to be worked out in class.

Student Assistance

I may normally be reached during working hours in my office at Todd Academic Center 201E. Appointments may be scheduled directly with me or through the secretary in the Old Testament
office on the second floor of Todd Academic Center. My e-mail address is as follows: rtaylor@dts.edu. I may also be reached by telephone at the following number: 214.887.5316 (office).

Course Extension Policy

The Seminary does not permit course extensions except in the most extenuating of unforeseen circumstances. It is therefore mandatory that all work for this course be completed as scheduled. Please review the specifics of the no-extension policy as published by the Registrar’s office. This institutional policy will be strictly enforced in all courses.

Course Supplemental Information

Dallas Theological Seminary does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the operation of any of its programs and activities. To avoid discrimination the student is responsible for informing the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities and the course instructor of any disabling condition that will require modifications.

Grading Scale

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Grading Scale

The following works are required reading for the course.


The following works are helpful, although they are not required for this course.


**Class Schedule**

This course will meet once a week on Thursdays from 7:45–10:25 a.m. in CAC 208.

**August 26**

1. Topics for discussion: introduction to the course; origins of the alphabet; the paleo-Hebrew script; classification of Semitic languages; relationship of Hebrew to other Semitic languages.


**September 2**

1. Topics for discussion: linguistic features of Canaanite dialects; historical origins of the Hebrew language.


3. Translate ascriptions of ownership found on various arrowheads, bowls, seals, ostraca (see handout); translate and study the Gezer calendar (Gibson, *Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, 1–4).

**September 9**

1. Topics for discussion: law of attenuation; Barth–Ginsberg law; Philippi’s law.

2. Read the following: Blau, *Phonology and Morphology*, 32–62 (intro-
duction); Garr, “The Dialectal Continuum of Syria-Palestine,” 205–40.
3. Translate and study the first third of the Mesha inscription (Gibson, Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, 71–83).

September 16
1. Topics for discussion: morphology of the verb (qal); history of stress.
2. Read the following: Blau, Phonology and Morphology, 63–71 (phonetics) and 72–95 (phonology); Joüon–Muraoka, Grammar, 113–37 (morphology of the verb, qal); Sáenz-Badillos, History, 50–75 (“Pre–exilic Hebrew”); Blau, Grammar of Biblical Hebrew, 30–37 (“History of Stress”); GKC, 114–36 (strong verb, qal).
3. Translate and study the second third of the Mesha inscription.
4. Turn in written exercise 1.

September 23
1. Topic for discussion: morphology of the verb (the derived stems).
2. Read the following: Blau, Phonology and Morphology, 96–127 (phonology); Joüon–Muraoka, Grammar, 138–58 (derived stems).
3. Translate and study the final third of the Mesha inscription.
4. Turn in written exercise 2.

September 30
1. Topic for discussion: morphology of the noun.
3. Translate and study the Siloam tunnel inscription (Gibson, Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, 21–23).
4. Turn in written exercise 3.

October 7
1. Topic for discussion: morphology of the noun, continued.
2. Read the following: Blau, Phonology and Morphology, 156–86 (morphology: pronouns); Bauer–Leander, Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache, 448–506; GKC, 239–86 (noun).
3. Translate and study the Yavneh-yam inscription (Gibson, Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, 26–30) and Tell Arad inscriptions C and D (Gibson, Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, 49–54).
4. Turn in written exercise 4.

October 14
Mid–term exam.
October 21

1. Topic for discussion: selected issues of aspect and tense.
4. Turn in written exercise 5.

October 28

3. Translate and study 1QIsaa 40:1–11 (see handout).
4. Turn in written exercise 6.

November 4

1. Topic for discussion: selected bibliographical matters.
3. Translate and study 4QFlorilegium (see handout).
4. Turn in written exercise 7.

November 11

1. Topic for discussion: linguistic features of Samaritan Hebrew.
3. Translate and study Genesis 1:1–2:7 in the Samaritan Pentateuch (see handout).
4. Turn in written exercise 8.

November 16-20  Reading week. No classes.

November 23-27  Thanksgiving recess. No classes.

December 2

1. Topic for discussion: linguistic features of Qumran and rabbinic Hebrew.

3. Translate from the Mishnah Soḥah 9.15; <Abot 3.17; Pesa‘îm 10.5; *Berakot* 1.5 (see handout).

December 9

1. Topic for discussion: linguistic features of medieval and modern Hebrew; selected bibliographical matters.


3. Be prepared to discuss Young and Rezetko’s *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts*.

December 14-18

Final examinations.

Revised 2/17/20 - CD