

Syllabus for Old Testament 5325
BIBLICAL ARAMAIC
Richard A. Taylor
Fall 2020

“Angels . . . do not understand Aramaic.”
(*b. Soṭah* 33a; *b. Shabbat* 12b)

Catalog Description

“A study of the basic principles of phonology, morphology, and syntax of Biblical Aramaic. Translation and analysis of the Aramaic portions of Ezra and Daniel are accompanied by discussion of the relevance of Aramaic studies to Old and New Testament research.” *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. Articulate the general historical development of the Aramaic language in its various dialects. Biblical Aramaic is but one of a number of attested forms of this northwest Semitic language. In addition to studying this particular phase of Aramaic, we will also attempt to position Biblical Aramaic in relation to forms of this language that were in use before and after it. The Aramaic language has had a long history, having been in continuous use for about three thousand years.
2. Provide basic glosses for the common vocabulary of Biblical Aramaic. Biblical texts written in Aramaic have a limited vocabulary consisting of about 650 words (excluding proper names), a good portion of which is cognate to Biblical Hebrew vocabulary. We will seek to gain familiarity with this vocabulary at least to the point of recognizing it in the biblical context.
3. Recognize and accurately interpret the major features of the grammar and syntax of Biblical Aramaic. For this purpose, we will assume a working knowledge of Biblical Hebrew. As a sister language within the family of northwest Semitic languages, Aramaic has much in common with Hebrew in terms of its phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. With that framework in mind, we will be able to survey rather quickly the main grammatical features of Biblical Aramaic that set it off from Biblical Hebrew. In studying the grammatical forms of Aramaic, students should give special attention to the strong verb as presented in the paradigms of the textbook. In many ways, the verb is the key to learning this language.
4. Translate with a reasonable degree of confidence the Aramaic portions of the Old Testament. Although there is not a lot of Aramaic in the Old Testament, a working knowledge of this language is essential to the exegesis of certain Old Testament books. The relevant passages are as follows: Genesis 31:47 (a couple of Aramaic words); Jeremiah 10:11 (one Aramaic sentence); Ezra 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26; Daniel 2:4b–7:28. The acquisition of this skill will provide students with an ability to handle exegetically those portions of Ezra and Daniel written in this language. By having studied Aramaic in this course, and by having already studied Greek and Hebrew in other courses in the Seminary curriculum, students will have laid a solid foundation for life-long study of the Bible in all three of its original languages. This is a very significant achievement.

5. Know where to go to find help with problems that surface in the study of Biblical Aramaic. In this course we will develop familiarity with selected portions of primary and secondary scholarly literature dealing with Biblical Aramaic. Students will become aware of significant contributions to this field of study, whether in the form of grammars, lexica, monographs, essays, or journal articles. Awareness of this bibliographical information will provide a framework for future research in the area of Biblical Aramaic. Some attention will also be given to the current status of Aramaic scholarship as it touches on biblical study and to significant Aramaic research projects that are presently underway.

Requirements for the Course

1. Reading. Students should carefully study the course textbook in accord with the class schedule presented below. Try to master the grammatical information as it is presented chapter-by-chapter in the textbook and learn the new Aramaic vocabulary presented there as well. In addition to the grammar, there will also be a limited amount of additional reading for the course.

2. Homework exercises (20%). There will be written exercises to complete and turn in from most chapters in the textbook. These exercises will not be graded as such. Instead, we will go over them in class, and students will make the necessary corrections or improvements on their work. But the assigned exercises must be done. Failure to complete them in a timely manner will have a negative impact on the grade for the course. Turn in your translations of the exercises and the biblical passages as we complete our discussion of the material.

Students should work carefully through the biblical texts in keeping with the schedule presented below. Toward the end of the semester we will work through some short samples of other types of Aramaic literature, although time will not permit us to do much more than single out these areas for future study. Preparation for class will involve prior translation of these texts along with study of the vocabulary, grammar, morphology, and syntax that they present.

Class discussions will follow an inductive and participatory approach with regard to the Biblical Aramaic texts. As is true with any ancient language, it is through working with the literature (as opposed to grammatical study alone) that one actually learns the language. Our goal is not simply to translate Biblical Aramaic texts (many translations are readily available), but to understand how the language is working.

3. Quizzes (20%). There will be a total of seven vocabulary quizzes given in accord with the class schedule presented below. Two of the quizzes are cumulative, one covering chapters 1–9 in Van Pelt’s grammar and the other covering chapters 10–17. These quizzes will be brief and will be corrected immediately in class. Any quiz that is missed for an excused absence may be made up, but this must be done within one week from the time that the quiz was given. It is the student’s responsibility to make timely arrangements for any makeup work that might be necessary.

4. Examinations (60%). There will be three examinations during the course, each of equal weight (20%). These examinations will require a good grasp of the grammar and syntax of Biblical Aramaic and an ability to read the biblical texts that are covered by the exams. The exams will emphasize translation, parsing, and syntax.

PhD Students

Students who take this course for doctoral credit will prepare a research paper of about twenty pages addressing the following question: *Why are the books of Ezra and Daniel bilingual?* This paper should be well researched and should evaluate the evidence used in support of the main explanations that have been set forth by scholars as to why these biblical books were written in both Hebrew and Aramaic. After interaction with the various options, the paper should draw a conclusion that seems best to handle the data. With regard to form and format, the presentation of the paper should follow the guidelines of the latest edition of Turabian and the DTS supplement to Turabian. For bibliographical help with this assignment, please contact me.

Attendance

Regular class attendance is important for achieving the objectives of this course. You are allowed only four absences during the semester. If you choose not to attend class regularly you will not receive credit for this course. Excessive absenteeism will result in a reduction of the final grade (see *Student Handbook*, p. 8).

Student Assistance

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

Course Extension Policy

Course extensions are not permitted by the Seminary, except in the most extenuating of circumstances. 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

A+	99–100	B+	91–93	C+	83–85	D+	75–77
A	96–98	B	88–90	C	80–82	D	72–74
A–	94–95	B–	86–87	C–	78–79	D–	70–71

Texts

For an introduction to Aramaic grammar, we will use the following work:

Van Pelt, Miles V. *Basics of Biblical Aramaic: Complete Grammar, Lexicon, and Annotated Text*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

For a critical biblical text, we will use the following edition:

Elliger, K., and W. Rudolf, eds. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1977.

For an Aramaic lexicon, we will use either (or both) of the following works:

Koehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner, eds. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm. Translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Vogt, Ernst, ed. *A Lexicon of Biblical Aramaic, Clarified by Ancient Documents*. Translated and revised by J. A. Fitzmyer. Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2011.

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

Kline, Jonathan G., ed. *Keep Up Your Biblical Aramaic in Two Minutes a Day: 365 Selections for Easy Review*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017.

Muraoka, Takamitsu. *A Biblical Aramaic Reader, with an Outline Grammar*. Leuven: Peeters, 2015.

Vance, Donald R., George Athas, Yael Avrahami, and Jonathan G. Kline, eds. *Biblical Aramaic: A Reader and Handbook*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016.

Class Schedule This class will meet on Tuesdays at 7:45–10:25 a.m. in Campbell Academic Center 207.

- August 25 (1) Orientation to the course; discussion of phases and dialects of Aramaic. Study Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Phases of the Aramaic Language,” in *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 57–84.
- (2) Study *BBA*, 1–3 (alphabet; vowels; syllabification). Turn in exercise 2.16. Familiarize yourself with the Aramaic grammars described in my annotated bibliography. *Vocabulary quiz 1 (chapters 1–3)*
- September 1 (1) Study *BBA*, 4–6 (absolute state; determined state; construct state). Turn in exercise 6.9. Familiarize yourself with the Aramaic lexicons described in my annotated bibliography. *Vocabulary quiz 2 (chapters 4–6)*.
- (2) Study *BBA*, 7–9 (conjunctions and prepositions; pronominal suffixes; pronouns). Turn in exercise 7.12 (odd numbers only); 8.10 (odd numbers only); 9.10 (odd numbers only). *Vocabulary quiz 3 (chapters 7–9)*.
- September 8 (1) Study *BBA*, 10–12 (adjectives and numbers; adverbs and particles; introduction to Aramaic verbs). Turn in exercises 10.7 (odd numbers only); 11.7 (odd numbers only). *Vocabulary quiz 4 (chapters 10–12)*.

- (2) Study *BBA*, 13–15 (Peal perfect; Peal imperfect; Peal imperative). Turn in exercises 13.11 (odd numbers only); 14.11 (odd numbers only); 15.11 (odd numbers only). *Vocabulary quiz 5 (chapters 13–15)*.
- September 15 (1) Study *BBA*, 16–18 (Peal infinitive construct; Peal participle; the Peil, Hithpeel, and Ithpeel stems). Turn in exercises 16.11 (odd numbers only); 17.16 (odd numbers only); 18.9 (odd numbers only). *Vocabulary quiz 6 (chapters 16–17)*.
(2) Study *BBA*, 19–20 (the Pael stem; the Hithpaal and Ithpaal stems). Turn in exercises 19.8 (odd numbers only); 20.7 (odd numbers only). *Cumulative vocabulary quiz 7 (chapters 1–9)*.
- September 22 (1) Study *BBA*, 21–22 (the Haphel stem; the Aphel, Shapel, and Hophal stems). Turn in exercises 21.8 (odd numbers only); 22.8 (odd numbers only). *Cumulative vocabulary quiz 7 (chapters 10–17)*.
(2) Exam: *BBA*, 1–22.
- September 29 (1) Translate and study Daniel 2:4–13.
(2) Translate and study Daniel 2:14–24.
- October 6 (1) Translate and study Daniel 2:25–36.
(2) Translate and study Daniel 2:37–49.
- October 13 (1) Translate and study Daniel 3:1–12.
(2) Translate and study Daniel 3:13–23.
- October 20 (1) Translate and study Daniel 3:24–33.
(2) Translate and study Daniel 4:1–9. *Take-home exam*.
- October 27 (1) Translate and study Daniel 4:10–19.
(2) Translate and study Daniel 4:20–34.
- November 3 (1) Translate and study Daniel 5:1–12.
(2) Translate and study Daniel 5:13–29.
- November 10 (1) Translate and study Daniel 5:30–6:10.
(2) Translate and study Daniel 6:11–29.
- November 16–20 Reading week. No classes.
- November 23–27 Thanksgiving recess. No classes.
- December 1 (1) Translate and study Daniel 7:1–14. Turn in your paper on the bilingualism

of Ezra and Daniel (if applicable).

(2) Translate and study Daniel 7:15–28.

December 8

(1) Translate and study the Tell–Dan inscription (to be handed out in class).

(2) Translate and study 4QOrNab, i.e., the Prayer of Nabonidus (to be handed out in class). Familiarize yourself with the items on Aramaic and New Testament studies described in my annotated bibliography.

December 14–17 Final Examinations.