

Course Specification:

Biblical Hebrew Reading Fluency

A Self-Directed Study Program

Duration:	9-12 months (1.5-2 hours daily)
Level:	Complete beginner to intermediate
Goal:	Functional reading fluency with lexical aids

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Fundamental Principles

Following the Modern Autodidact System, this course employs:

1. **Broad to narrow study** – Beginning with alphabet and basic grammar, progressing to specific biblical texts and genres
2. **The centrality of curiosity** – Following personal interest in specific biblical books or themes to maintain motivation
3. **Emphasis on reading practice** – Priority on actual Hebrew text engagement over theoretical grammar study

Phase 1: Foundation & Curiosity Check

Weeks 1-6

Step 1: Initial Interest Validation

Read 2-3 beginner-friendly books:

- *Biblical Hebrew: A Compact Guide* by Miles Van Pelt
- *Reading Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Textbook* by Karl V. Kutz & Rebekah L. Josberger
- *The First Hebrew Primer* by Simon, Resnikoff & Motzkin (first few chapters)

Purpose: Confirm genuine interest before major time investment. These books provide taste of the language while building basic alphabet recognition.

Expected outcome: Can recognize Hebrew alphabet, understand direction of reading (right-to-left), grasp basic concept of Hebrew verbal system.

Phase 2: Systematic Foundation Building

Weeks 7-24

Step 2: Core Introductory Course

Primary textbook course (choose one):

- *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* by Gary D. Pratico & Miles V. Van Pelt (with accompanying workbook)
- *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* by Thomas O. Lambdin
- Aleph with Beth video series (free on YouTube) – comprehensive beginner course

Study approach:

- Complete 3-4 chapters/lessons per week
- Daily vocabulary memorization (10-15 words)
- Complete all workbook exercises
- Use flashcard apps (Anki, Quizlet) for vocabulary retention

Supplementary materials:

- Biblical Hebrew reading tutorials on YouTube
- Hebrew alphabet songs and pronunciation guides
- *Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary by Conceptual Categories* by J. David Pleins & Jonathan Homrighausen

Note-taking strategy:

Maintain dedicated Hebrew notebook with three sections: (1) Grammar rules and paradigms, (2) Vocabulary lists organized by semantic fields, (3) Translation practice and notes on challenging passages

Step 3: Subdiscipline Exploration

Weeks 25-36

Take 3-4 focused mini-courses on key topics:

Course A: Hebrew Verbal System Deep Dive

- Study resource: *A Handbook to Biblical Hebrew* by Joshua Blau (verb chapters)
- Practice: Identify and parse 100+ verbs from various biblical texts
- Create personal verb paradigm charts for reference

Course B: Hebrew Syntax & Sentence Structure

- Study resource: *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* by Bruce K. Waltke & M. O'Connor (selected chapters)
- Alternative: *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Syntax* by Miles V. Van Pelt (more accessible)
- Practice: Diagram 20-30 biblical sentences of increasing complexity

Course C: Biblical Poetry & Narrative Styles

- Study resource: *How Biblical Languages Work* by Peter J. Gentry & Stephen J. Wellum
- Focus on differences between narrative, poetic, and prophetic texts
- Read sample passages from Psalms, Genesis, and Isaiah

Course D: Reading Unpointed Hebrew

- Study resource: Articles on reading Hebrew without vowel points
- Practice: Gradually reduce dependence on vowel markings
- Goal: Begin recognizing word patterns without vowel points

Phase 3: Canonical Text Immersion

Months 10-12

Step 4: Study 4+ Canonical Texts in Hebrew

Select from these options based on interest:

Easier narrative texts (start here):

- Ruth (simple, beautiful narrative)
- Jonah (short, engaging story)
- Genesis 1-11 (creation and early history)
- Selected narratives from 1 Samuel (David story)

Intermediate texts:

- Genesis 22-50 (patriarchal narratives)
- Exodus 1-15 (liberation narrative and poetry)
- Psalms 1, 23, 121, 150 (beloved psalms)

More challenging texts:

- Isaiah 40-55 (prophetic poetry)
- Job 1-3 (wisdom literature)
- Ecclesiastes (philosophical Hebrew)

Study approach for each text:

4. Read Hebrew text without translation (first pass)
5. Work through with lexicon and grammar reference
6. Compare with 2-3 English translations
7. Read scholarly commentary on difficult passages
8. Memorize key verses in Hebrew
9. Record insights in commonplace book

Step 5: Learn Reading Techniques

Study these metalearning resources:

- *How to Read the Bible as Literature* by Leland Ryken
- *Reading Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Textbook* – methodology chapters
- Articles on "Reading Hebrew for Comprehension vs. Translation"
- *The Hebrew Teacher's Handbook* by Vardit Ringvald

Key techniques to develop:

- Chunk reading (phrases rather than word-by-word)
- Pattern recognition for common constructions
- Listening to Hebrew audio (even if pronunciation isn't perfect)
- Reading aloud for fluency development
- Sight vocabulary building (instant recognition of top 500 words)

Phase 4: Application & Continuation

Ongoing

Step 6: Create Content & Projects

Select one or more projects:

Writing projects:

- Blog reviewing your Hebrew learning journey
- Substack where you share weekly Hebrew word studies
- Translation journal with personal commentary on passages
- Hebrew reading log tracking books completed

Video/audio projects:

- YouTube channel reading Hebrew passages and explaining grammar
- Podcast discussing Hebrew insights from weekly Torah portions
- Record yourself reading Hebrew passages to track fluency improvement

Community projects:

- Find or create a Biblical Hebrew reading group (online or local)
- Weekly conversation practice with language partner
- Participate in Hebrew reading challenges (#HebrewReading on social media)

Step 7: Follow Curiosity & Narrow Focus

Potential next directions:

Topical reading plans:

- "Psalms of Lament" – read 10-15 lament psalms in Hebrew
- "Wisdom Literature" – focused study of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes
- "Messianic Prophecies" – Isaiah, Micah, Zechariah passages
- "Torah Narrative Arc" – read through Genesis-Deuteronomy selectively

Explore related subdisciplines:

- Aramaic portions of Daniel and Ezra
- Modern Hebrew (see how biblical foundation transfers)
- Ancient Near Eastern history (context for biblical texts)
- Septuagint studies (Hebrew and Greek comparison)

Deepen specific areas:

- *Biblical Hebrew Syntax* by Christo van der Merwe
- Text criticism and manuscript studies
- Hebrew poetry analysis (parallelism, meter, literary devices)
- Dead Sea Scrolls Hebrew variants

Learning Resources Summary

Essential Tools

- **Lexicons:** BDB (free online), HALOT (comprehensive)
- **Interlinear Hebrew-English Bible** (training wheels for early reading)
- **Bible software:** Accordance, Logos, or BibleWorks
- **Free resources:** Blue Letter Bible, Mechon Mamre, Sefaria

Recommended Grammar References

- Pratico & Van Pelt (most accessible)
- Lambdin (traditional academic)
- Kelley's *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar*
- Van Pelt's *Biblical Hebrew: A Compact Guide* (quick reference)

Vocabulary Building

- Flashcard apps with pre-made Biblical Hebrew decks
- *A Reader's Hebrew Bible* (vocabulary helps on each page)
- Frequency-based vocabulary lists (learn most common words first)

Community Resources

- Biblical Hebrew forums (Reddit r/AncientHebrew, r/BiblicalLanguages)
- Daily Dose of Hebrew (online community)
- Biblical language conferences and webinars
- Local synagogue or church Hebrew study groups

Expected Outcomes

By completion of this course, you will:

- Read and comprehend biblical Hebrew narratives with lexical aids
- Recognize and parse common Hebrew verbal and nominal forms
- Possess vocabulary of 500-800 most frequent biblical words
- Engage intelligently with Hebrew text discussions
- Use scholarly Hebrew resources effectively
- Notice translation nuances between Hebrew and English
- Continue independent Hebrew reading with growing confidence

You will NOT be:

- A seminary-level Hebrew scholar (that requires years more study)
- Able to read without lexicon/dictionary (even experts use these)
- Fluent in modern conversational Hebrew (different skill set)

You WILL have:

- Direct access to Hebrew scriptures in original language
- Foundation for continued growth and specialization
- Deep satisfaction from personal intellectual achievement
- Enhanced biblical understanding through linguistic insight
- Membership in community of Hebrew readers across millennia

Motivation Maintenance

Personal reasons to sustain your study:

- **Spiritual connection:** Direct encounter with sacred text in original language
- **Intellectual satisfaction:** Mastering challenging ancient language
- **Translation insights:** Discovering what English versions miss or interpret
- **Historical connection:** Reading words written 2,000-3,000 years ago
- **Unique skill:** Relatively rare ability that commands respect
- **Scholarly access:** Ability to engage with academic biblical scholarship
- **Lifetime project:** Always more to learn and explore

Remember: Biblical Hebrew is finite corpus (~8,000 unique words), making complete reading of entire Hebrew Bible an achievable long-term goal. Unlike modern languages, the "completion point" is definable and reachable.

Final Encouragement

This course represents significant undertaking, but one entirely achievable through consistent daily effort. Thousands of autodidacts have successfully learned Biblical Hebrew outside formal academic settings. The democratization of learning resources—online courses, digital lexicons, community forums—makes this golden age for independent Hebrew study.

Your motivation may differ from others (spiritual, intellectual, professional), but all who persist discover profound satisfaction in reading ancient texts in their original language. When you first read Genesis 1:1 or Psalm 23 in Hebrew without aids, you'll experience breakthrough moment that makes entire journey worthwhile.

Start today. Begin with aleph. Trust the process.