

Introductory Lessons in Aramaic: Introduction

Introduction

The following pages are intended for any individual who is interested in learning the basics of Biblical Aramaic. It is based on lessons I created for an introductory class in Aramaic at the University of Michigan, where I teach. It should be considered a work in progress.

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Although there are many grammars that provide an introduction to Biblical Aramaic, only one of these purports to be an introduction that presumes no prior knowledge of another Semitic language. This grammar, Franz Rosenthal's *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, is useful, especially for the graduate student. However, Rosenthal's grammar depends too much on a reader being familiar with technical phonological and grammatical principles to serve as a helpful introduction to the student or reader who has little familiarity with other languages, especially Semitic languages. (For example, within the first 10 pages of the grammar proper, there are several references to "spirantization," though no description of what this is.) Furthermore, Rosenthal's grammar does not include any exercises. Those grammars that do include exercises for students all presume that the student has a prior knowledge of Biblical Hebrew (see, for example, Andrew E. Steinmann's *Fundamental Biblical Aramaic*, Frederick E. Greenspahn's *An Introduction to Aramaic*, and Alger F. Johns's *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*).

I have tried to render the sometimes obscure descriptions as comprehensible as possible to readers with little experience with grammar and linguistics. For this reason, the explanations may seem redundant for those with a knowledge of linguistics and/or other languages. This is especially true for the descriptions of the pronunciation of Aramaic. It is hoped that after having gone through the following lessons, the student will, should he or she so desire, move on to more sophisticated grammars, like Rosenthal's, or linguistic summaries like Stuart Creason's in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*.

One other caveat: the last several lessons rely on the student to learn vocabulary on his or her own, by reading passages and looking up words in the glossary. This mimics the situation that one will be faced with when sitting down with the Bible and an Aramaic dictionary.

Abbreviations

For Perfect and Imperfect Verbal Forms

3ms third person masculine singular

3fs third person feminine singular

2ms second person masculine singular

2fs second person feminine singular

1cs first person common singular

3mp third person masculine plural

3fp third person feminine plural

2mp second person masculine plural

2fp second person feminine plural

1cp first person common plural

For Imperatives and Participles

m.s. masculine singular

f.s. feminine singular

m.p. masculine plural

f.p. feminine plural

For Nouns

sing. singular

pl. plural

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