

Welcome to Biblical Aramaic

Hebrew mastery is a prerequisite for this course. If you have not had Hebrew you are presently in the wrong class room.

Introduction

“Jewish Literary Aramaic,”¹ referred to by most as Biblical Aramaic, is the most neglected of the Biblical languages.

This class introduces the basic grammar and vocabulary needed to translate the O.T. sections which are in Aramaic:

Gen. 31:47 (two words)

Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26

Daniel 2:4b-7:28

Jeremiah 10:11

Isaiah 14:4 speaks of the golden city **נִזְרָה** “golden” from Aramaic **דָּהָב**

בָּר son, equal sign (8x in Aramaic) *This word occurs 3 times in Hebrew. . .*

- *Ps 2:12 speaking to gentile kings.*

- *Prov 31:2 perhaps a gentile wife of Solomon speaking to him.*

Esther 1:5, 7:7, 8 **בֵּיתָן** “house” may be Aramaic from the ending.

Dan 12:13 Aramaic ending on “days”

- 269 verses (However, take any 269 verses of the N.T. and no one would throw them away.)
- Just over 700 Aramaic words occurring just over 7,000 times.
- Over 100 occurrences of Kethiv/Quere.

Goals

1. To know God better through the reading of the Aramaic portions of His WORD.
2. To master the basic Aramaic Grammar.
3. To memorize a basic Aramaic vocabulary for the Old Testament (there are only 648 words total). Many words (perhaps half of the total words by my count) are similar to Hebrew words you already know making them easier to master.
4. To translate the entire Hebrew and Aramaic texts, or the entire books, of Daniel and Ezra.

¹ There was also Palestinian Aramaic and Egyptian Aramaic.

Books/Texts Required

- to be announced! The planned text is to be written by our staff. The assignments schedule listed below is for *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, by Alger Johns
- Hebrew/Aramaic O.T. Text

Class Format

As always with language courses at CIB plan on at least half of the class time to be spent in translation. We will begin reading through the Hebrew and Aramaic text with the first class. You must submit a translation of ALL Aramaic sections (Gen. 31:47, Ezra 4:8-6:18, 7:12-26, Daniel 2:4b-7:28, Jeremiah 10:11). The Hebrew passages will be read both in and outside of class, however, no translation of Hebrew passages is to be submitted.

Grading

Vocabulary is a major part of the grading. Please be ready to test each week on any basic paradigms, vocabulary, or Aramaic verses you have been working on.

Recommended

A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic, by Alger Johns The book is in some need of tidying up but acceptable. Lots of grammatical and linguistic background, but again too much is scattered throughout the book. Exercises are provided; an independent answer key is available.

A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic: An Annotated Answer Key to Alger John's, by James N. Jumper This includes both answer key and notes on the text. Very helpful.

Basics of Biblical Aramaic, by Miles V. Van Pelt Good exercises are provided as well as a complete Aramaic-English Lexicon in the end.

A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic, by Franz Rosenthal A rough & difficult to understand text by may have value to assign background reading. This text should be used in conjunction with another Aramaic grammar.

An Introduction to Aramaic, by Frederick E. Greenspan Also introduces extra-Biblical Aramaic; e.g. Dead Sea Scrolls and Targumim

Class Schedule & Additional Lesson Notes

Below is the schedule and notes for each lesson pointing out select items. N.B. If you cannot find a word simply turn to the glossary/lexicon in the back of the grammar.

Date _____ Week/Assignment #1

Introduction of Aramaic Course

Read Hebrew Sections leading up to the Aramaic sections in Daniel (1:1-2:4a) and Ezra (1:1-4:7).

Date _____ Week/Assignment #2

INTRODUCTION Memorize vocab list on p. 4 (its common so should present no problem)

CHAPTER 1 Do only the first part of the Exercise (consonant changes). Skip the phonetics. Don't get bogged down here trying to learn all of these rules. Just study the basic differences.

CHAPTER 2 In the exercises, #4 the verb ירע translates "he knows, knew, etc." Plurals like שם and אב sometimes adds a ה. #8 כמה is never used in questions, only in statements. #11 note the dual. #12 בנה is "he built." So also we have 2 uses of ל; the first is the direct marker, the second is an "ethical dative" or "dative of benefit," i.e. it is "for" someone or something. The king builds what we would call an "aviary." #13 הוּא is "it" not "he." Note also that בר is either "son or field." In Genesis 27:27 Isaac blessed his SON as a FIELD blessed by Yahveh, so the ideas are associated. Context determines. תחרת is also idiomatic for "in the grass."

CHAPTER 3 Master the personal pronouns and suffixes on nouns. This is also a great part of the vocabulary. In the exercises, #1 רמה is "he threw." #2 do not confuse the ה with being feminine. It is not a mater but a consonant which can mean either "he" or "she." #3 Here הוא is functioning as a copula or as the article for בר. #5 עבר is a noun not a verb. Note that שמיא is dual. #7 "Judahites" would be the more accurate rendering. #11 You will have to play with בר for a little bit to figure this out.

Date _____ Week/Assignment #3

CHAPTER 4 Note section 2, the second paragraph on Dan. 4:32 (35.) The word מוא means literally "to smite" or "to slap." The expression בירה מוא is used to this day for children. In the exercises, #1 הוא can be a copula or a demonstrative "that." #6 ה- is the interrogative. #8 יתב means "to sit" or "to dwell." #10 Aramaic numbers don't care about gender accommodation. Also be careful with אל.

CHAPTER 5 Aramaic is much freer in syntax or word order than is Hebrew. You will need to remember this for this lesson. Exercises, #1 Without a context any time value will do. #4 כ can express agency, means, or time. #7 There are two ways to translate this. #8 על translates toward, over, against, etc.

CHAPTER 6 Like Hebrew the tenses allow for multiple time values. Aramaic infinitives 82 out of 83 occurrences it appears with a prefixed preposition (ל 76 times, כ 4 times, כ 2 times, על 1 time). In the exercise, #4 חיל can translate "army" or "strength." Translate it both ways and see what you find. #5 At the end you have both spellings of the postpositive article (ה & א). #9 אנשא is a singular being used collectively.

Date _____ **Week/Assignment #4**

CHAPTER 7 Do not memorize the list of irregular forms. Rather note the changes and any "whys?" Exercises, #3 We could translate this several ways, including "a myriad of myriads worshiped." #8 Wheat is in the field, while "wheats" (plural) denotes harvested. Like Hebrew עץ "tree" becomes "firewood" עצים in the plural. #9 תב is not "pure." Quality is in view however. #10 There are two possible ideas concerning "grew strong" in . . . or . . . by means of."

CHAPTER 8 Its important to keep in mind that different forms are going to begin to look alike. Use the context to assist you. Exercises, #1 רב remember that has an irregular plural. #6 In many languages "one" translates "a, an, or one" (German, English, etc.) which are all from the Scottish "ane" which means "one." However, it simply isn't clear that the word doesn't mean "single" as opposed to multiple visions. Gold, diamonds, etc. can be of good quality; even while still in the ground. Pure is normally "fired" or "sifted." Quality not purity.

CHAPTER 9 Exercises, #2 שלים is Peil, Perfect, 3ms though it looks like the Peal passive participle. #3 You have a Kethib-Quere in the form רהורמנר which only occurs in Daniel 2:9. It is רמנ , a Hithpeel, "to agree, decide." What happened? ר is a sibilant and metathesis took place along with the phonetic change of ת to ר. You don't need to know all of that, just work with it. Again in להשתכלה, "to consider," there is metathesis of the sibilant ש with the ת prefix. #7 The expression בעבר נהרה is literally the "Trans-River" province, used in Ezra 4:10, 11, 16. The river then is the Euphrates. #9 There has been a metathesis of the ש and ת in תשתבק.

Date _____ **Week/Assignment #5**

CHAPTER 10 You do not need to memorize paradigm after paradigm. Rather, work on the basic identifying characteristics of each. Exercises, #1 כלא is "as/like not" rather than "all the." #2 Remember that the imperfect can translate as an imperative without unique imperative forms. Also note that independent personal pronouns may function as direct objects without being attached to a direct object marker as in Hebrew. #3 Careful here, "with them" also looks like "their people." The difference is the vowel under the ע. #9 "A 3mp verb with an indefinite subject is often BA shorthand for the passive voice ('Grass will be fed to you like oxen')." Jumper, p. 42. #12 Note the root שכה "to be found."

CHAPTER 11 Don't get overwhelmed here. Just read the chapter and note what he is saying. Exercises, #4 the ית- ending of the infinitive is a standard change before the pronominal suffix is affixed to the infinitive. קרייה #5 in the LXX is plural; perhaps making this an irregular for for a collective plural. Samaria is a dual. There were two Samaritans . . . The city, and the country (it was a capital city). #6 ליהוד מדינתא, literally "to Judah the Province." #9 Note the conclusion about the gods because of their location.

CHAPTER 12 Exercises, #2 Note that he raised himself up before he raised the gods up. #5 We have here what is called "chiastic concord." That is, the numbers 3-10 modify a noun (like Hebrew) they are usually the opposite gender. #Ezra 4:9 We seem to have a doublet of verse 8.

Date _____ Week/Assignment #6

CHAPTER 13 Exercises, #3 חיות is literally "the living thing," and is probably a collective expression. Be careful with ברא which is the article א with בר. תטלל is actually an APHEL, Imperfect, 3fs. #5 The expression כל אלין can go with the first verb or with the second series of verbs. #6 אשתוממ "be appalled" H-/Ithpoel, Perfect, 3ms, from שם. Ezra 4:10 Note that Samaria is dual.

CHAPTER 14 Exercises, #1 The "seasons and laws," may be two different items of placed together, "the decreed seasons" which in Israel was the feasts. עליונין is plural. #2 רי is functioning as an indefinite relative pronoun "whoever." #3 A difficult syntax, literally, "was distressed my spirit, I Daniel." #5 The expression תשתני, may have the sense of "violated." Ezra 4:13 The meaning of אפתמ is unsure. Some see it as an adverb and others as a noun.

CHAPTER 15 Exercises, #1 מורא (Aphel, Participle) is from ירה, "to praise." #2 Who is "walking about?" Daniel or the king? Only context can help. #3 Note the change from the root of סלק to להנסקה. The ל disappears and is

compensated by the addition of the ך. The second occurrence of the word doubles the ם. #6 The -א is an apparent prosthetic. Is the construct of materials here speaking of what the gods are made of, or that which the gods rule over? Ezra 4:15 The subject is presumably the king. Note that Jerusalem has always been a problem since its inception.

Date _____ **Week/Assignment #7**

CHAPTER 16 Ezra 4:16-23 V. 16 Note the metathesis of ש and ת in ישתכללוך. לקבל means "before" or "in front of;" with hnd it means "because of this," "therefore," or "accordingly." V. 17 In Biblical Aramaic we have על used where we would expect אל. But Biblical Hebrew also uses אל used where we would expect על. We don't know why (similar sound, influence of Aramaic on Hebrew, etc.). V. 18 "Interpreted and read," is missing the expected -ו and the why is unknown. Some say it may have dropped out, others that another word might have been there (asyndeton - the juxtaposition of two verbs without -ו). V. 20 The Participle מתייהב is singular though there are three taxes mentioned. A collective idea. V. 21 Normally the infinitive (here לבטלא) ends with ה, here we find א. V. 22 "Why" in the LXX is μηποτε. V, 23 "By force and might," is hendiadys (Greek for "one through two."), where one idea is expressed by two terms.

CHAPTER 17 Ezra 4:24-5:11 V. 4:24 Does רי refer to בית translating "which," or to אלהא translating "who?" Only context can help here.

Ezra 5:1-11 V. 1 אליהון "over them" can refer either to the prophets or the Jews. V. 3 for בה ומנא see Johns III. 4. E. Note that with אתא "come," the subject is plural, the verb is singular. This is done also in Hebrew. The מ is absent from לבנא. This pre-formative on the Peal infinitive occurs only here and in Ezra 5:13 on the same verb again. אשנא is discussed among scholars with some uncertainty. It may refer, according to James N. Jumber, to the wood material used in the building vessels and the building. So he translates it "to complete [the preparation of] this material" (p. 74). V. 4 אמרנא is a Peal, Perfect, 1cp. But to whom does the "we-" part of the verb refer? To Tattenai and his companions? The narrative has been in the third person in the previous verse. If "we-" refers to the Jews the problem is with כננא "thus," which always introduces direct speech in BA. The LXX translates εἰποσσαν "they said." אנן is used as the copula. V. 8 "The great temple of God," or "the temple of the great God." גלל means "to roll." This may tell us how they moved large stones. Many Akkadian and Aramaic texts

use this word with reference to worked stones. **אספרנא** has the suggested meanings of "thoroughly, eagerly or progressing." **מצלה** refers either to the temple or the workers, and the term has been suggested to be an infinitive. V. 11 **לממר** is Peal, Infinitive of **ממר**.

CHAPTER 18 "One does not need to have an ironclad grasp on noun types to learn Aramaic or Hebrew. Nonetheless, recognizing these patterns is incredibly helpful, especially for those students who plan to study more Semitic languages." (James N. Jumper, p. 84)

In the passage that follows, it should be noted that the decree of Cyrus telling the nations to return to their lands and the assisting of the Persians in rebuilding their temples is well confirmed. The Cyrus Decree was unearthed some time ago and may be viewed in any competent Bible Encyclopedia. It is not known if individual decrees were given for Israel, the other nations, or simply a generic proclamation that all peoples could return.

Ezra 5:12-17 V. 13 **לבנא** is a Peal, Infinitive though it lacks a **מ**. **רנה** can modify **אלהא** ("this God") or **בית**. The grammar is ambiguous. V. 14 Lit. "to Sheshbazzar was his name." V. 15 Here is an example where the Kethib (**אלה**) is given the Qere **אל**. What is strange is that the demonstrative **אל** does not appear in the corpus of BA. So what was "written" is what should be "read." V. 17 **תב** has as many variations as **תוב** in Hebrew.

Ezra 6:1-3 V. 2 **הר** is functioning as the indefinite article. Note the metathesis of **השתכח**. The subject is feminine, but Aramaic will evidently allow this when the subject follows the verb. V. 13 **מסרבלין** is a Saphel, Participle, mp from **יבל**. There is not agreement on the origin of this word. Akkadian "*wabalum*" would translate "laid." If "*zabalum*" it will translate "preserved."

Date _____ **Week/Assignment #8**

CHAPTER 19 Ezra 6:4-11 V. 4 **הר** is literally "new," while the LXX reads "one." But the translation "a row of new wood/timber" (as apposed to old wood/timber) makes good sense. V. 5 **יהך** is Peal, Imperfect, 3ms of **הלך** "to go." There have been suggestions that the text should be amended to make agree with **יהתיבון**. However, James N. Jumper notes, "It seems that **יהך** and **יהתיבון** are in parallel, yet they do not agree in number. Most likely **יהך** begins a new clause, and there is no need to restore **כלא** ("everything"), as the notes in BHS suggest." (p. 86) The fact is that singular verbs may have a distributive idea. So also the masculine singular pronominal suffix **ה-**, though there is a plurality of vessels. V. 6 The king seems to recognize what is going on here with the powers

across the river. V. 7 The twice occurring ל is a direct object marker. Note that the "elders" or "old ones" are singled out again in v. 8. The elders here may in fact be the small Jewish government which has been set up when they returned. Even today we speak of "the city fathers" when describing our own city officials. V.9 בני here is seems to be used distributively. It would be consistent to say "sons of . . . sons of . . . sons of." Remember that חטנין is plural (lit. "wheats") denoting harvested wheat; not the natural wheat of the field (compare the Hebrew עץ "tree, forest" with plural עצים "firewood, lumber."). V. 11 יתמהא (from מהא "to strike") may imply the perpetrator is to be flogged while upon the stake.

CHAPTER 20 Ezra 6:12-18 V. 12 With להשניה is it the temple or the decree which is not to be changed? V. 13 לקבל is normally the idea of "before, facing, opposite." By extension "just as." Notice the different vowels on the two occurrences of טעם. It seems that the Masoretes wanted a distinction between the command of God and the command of a king. Or was it simply superstition? V. 15 Note the chiasmic concord of numbers here is lacking (i.e. feminine form numbers with masculine nouns and masculine numbers with feminine nouns). Here the noun and the number are both feminine. V. 16 "Israelites" may describe the list that follows or be part of the list itself. V. 17 When numbers precede the noun they modify, the noun is singular. When numbers follow the noun they modify the noun is plural. "Two hundred" (מאתיים) is a dual form. וצפרי עויין is literally the "he goats of the goats." The root צפר means to "jump, skip, or prance." "Offering" is not in the text so that it literally reads "He goats as sin for all Israel, twelve, according to the number." All sin offerings were goats and the goat literally "became sin," an expression used by Paul, and which also affirms how the sacrifices should be read. There were 11 sin offerings in Israel (all goats), 11 goat skin tapestries over the Tabernacle, etc. Here there is a sacrifice "of sin" for each tribe. V. 21 Each man separated himself from sin; but separation from sin follows the offering of the sin; i.e. the goat.

Date _____ Week/Assignment #9

(Translate the following sections)

Ezra 6:19-7:11 return to Hebrew. Note that it records Temple sacrifices by genuine Jewish Priests and the Passover celebration with unleavened bread. Things distinctly Jewish and things not mentioned in the Aramaic passages of Scripture.

Ezra 7:12-26

Ezra 7:27-end of the book. The text permanently returns to Hebrew.

Date _____ Week/Assignment #10
(Translate any remaining texts in Daniel)