119 MINISTRIES

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Learning Biblical Hebrew
Lesson 11

Welcome back to Learn Biblical Hebrew with 119 Ministries! This is lesson 11.

It's finally time to translate our first Bible verse from Hebrew to English! Everything we've learned so far will be put to use right here. So, let's get right into it.



Here is our verse in Hebrew. Let's read the whole thing first, and then take it one word at a time.

Bereshit Bara Elohim Et Hashamayim V'et Ha'arets

Let's start by taking a closer look at the first word.



This is pronounced Bereshit. We haven't learned this word yet, but there are a couple of things you might notice right away.

First, this word starts with a Bet, and there is a Sh'vah underneath the Bet. So, you might guess that this Bet at the beginning is actually the Bet prefix that means in or with.

That is, in fact, exactly what that is. So this word starts with a Bet prefix.



The word that his Bet is attached to, then, is Reshit. You might notice that this word starts with Resh, Aleph, Shin, which is how the word Rosh is spelled.

We learned the word Rosh a number of lessons ago, and it means head. This word, Reshit, is related to the word Rosh. Rosh means head, or first, and Reshit means beginning or best.



So, with our Bet prefix at the start of this word, we might translate this something like in beginning, or but we'll take a look at the rest of the sentence before we decide exactly how to translate this word.

Here is our second word. This is pronounced Bara.



We haven't learned this word yet either. Bara is a verb, and it means created. So, here we've found the verb for our sentence. Now we just need to find the subject and object.



Here is our third word. This is pronounced Elohim. This is a word we've already learned; it means god.



Our fourth word is Et. Et, you'll recall, doesn't have a translation; instead, what it tells us is that the very next word is the object of our sentence. The verb for this sentence is Bara, which means created, so whatever word comes after this Et is the thing or person that is being created here.



Our fifth word is Hashamayim.

The first thing to notice is that this word starts with a Hey, and there is a Patach under the Hey, and this is in fact the Hey prefix, which means the. The word that the Hey is attached to is Shamayim. This is a word that we learned a few lessons back; Shamayim means sky or heaven.



So, all together, we can translate this word the sky.

Also, since this word comes after Et, this is the object of our sentence; so the sky is the thing in the sentence that is being created.



Our sixth word is V'et. The Vav at the beginning is the Vav prefix, so it means and. The rest of the word is Et. So, this is telling us that there are two objects in this sentence, because there are two Et's. Hashamayim was one object, and whatever word comes after this Et is a second object.



This is our seventh word, pronounced Ha'arets. Notice that this word starts with a Hey, and there is a Qamets under the Hey, and the very next letter is an Aleph.

If you remember our rule about the Hey prefix: the Hey will have a Patach underneath it, unless the Hey appears before an Aleph, Ayin, or Resh. In this case, the Hey appears before an Aleph. So, this Hey at the beginning is the Hey prefix, which means the. The rest of the word would be Arets, which looks a lot like another word we've learned.



Erets is a word that means land, and this word Arets is actually the exact same word. Remember when I said that sometimes when you add a prefix to a word, the vowels inside that word will change? that's what is happening here. So, even though the first vowel is different, this is still the exact same word.



So, now that we've looked at each individual word, let's put this sentence together. Bereshit means something like in beginning, Bara is our verb, it means created. Elohim means god.

Et tells us that the next word is the object of the sentence, and that next word is Hashamayim, which means the sky. So, if we connect that to our verb, we know that this is telling us that something created the sky.

Next word is V'et, so we now have two objects, and that second object is the next word, Ha'arets, which means the land.

So, we know from Bara, Et Hashamyim V'et Ha'arets, that this sentence is saying that something created the sky and the land. So what is it that created the sky and the land? What is the subject of this sentence? We have two nouns to choose from, Bereshit and Elohim.



However, one of these words is actually a prepositional phrase, so it cannot be the subject of this sentence. Bereshit starts with the Bet prefix, so it cannot be the subject of this sentence. So, that leaves only one choice to be the subject, and that is Elohim. So Elohim, god, is the subject; the thing that created the sky and the land, and Bereshit means in beginning. So this entire sentence would read:



In beginning God created the sky and the land.

Now, this sentence is of course from the book of Genesis, which in Hebrew is called Bereshit. This is Genesis chapter 1 verse 1. Most Biblical translations read something like,

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. This is a little different from what we translated. First of all, our translation said “In beginning”, and usually you will see “in the beginning.” This is because it’s very awkward in English to not include the word “the” here. We could say “In a beginning,” and that would technically be correct, but it still reads very awkwardly, so most translations will use the word “the” instead to make things flow better.

Also, instead of the words sky and land, many translations will use “heaven and earth;” these two translations are basically equivalent, because heaven means sky and earth means land. The reason I prefer to use the word “land” here, is because in modern times we tend to think of the word Earth in its astronomical context; we think of Earth as the third planet from the Sun, but what Erets really means is the ground underneath your feet. So, even if you were to go to another planet, whatever ground you walked on would still be called Erets—it would still be called land. So I personally like to use the word “land” in this translation because it’s more consistent with the way the word Erets is normally used in the Scriptures.

Now that we’ve translated our very first verse, there are two comments that I want to make about this. First, I hope you’re encouraged, and that you see that you can pick up the Hebrew language for yourself and put it to use. In just eleven lessons, you’ve gone from knowing nothing at all about the language to translating a verse from the Bible. We’ve only begun to scratch the surface of the language, and I’ve omitted many, many details in order to get us this far this fast, but I hope you see where you can end up by putting in some effort.

My second comment is that I hope you see some of the difficulties one can encounter when translating a bible verse. The very first word, Bereshit, is difficult to translate. It doesn’t have a Hey attached to it, so it shouldn’t read “in the beginning,” but on the other hand, if this doesn’t mean “in the beginning,” then what does it mean? If we translate it, in a beginning, then is that implying that there was more than one beginning? Is that what this verse is trying to say? It’s a tricky thing to figure out how to interpret this correctly.

Also, back when the King James translation was made, people would use the word earth to refer to soil or ground, but today, that term is more often used to refer to the planet, so is it better for us to stick with the traditional translation, or to use a word that reflects modern English better? These are all difficult choices that a translator has to make, and there isn't always a clear, correct answer. This is a big reason why there are different translations of the Bible, and this is why it's very important to know as much as you possibly can about the language you are translating from when you make a translation. Now that you've gotten this far in your Hebrew education, I hope you are encouraged and confident that you can continue to learn the language and put it to use, but I also hope that you are humble, and that you understand that you are not a Hebrew expert, and not yet ready to argue with scholars and translators.

[SLIDE 23]

That concludes our lesson. The notes for this lesson can be found in the link in the description below. Shalom, and I hope you've been blessed by this introduction to the Hebrew language.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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