

Hebrew 101

BEREANDASHBOARDTRAINING

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

PSALM 119:105

berean-dashboard.pages.dev

Ed Smith · Smith For Christ

1 Why learn any Hebrew at all

What this document is for, and what it is not

You do not need to master Hebrew to study the Old Testament well. You need enough Hebrew to ask better questions — and that amount is smaller than you think.

Almost the whole Old Testament was written in Hebrew, with a few chapters of Daniel and Ezra in its cousin Aramaic. Every English translation you own is a set of careful decisions about that Hebrew, and most of those decisions are excellent. But a translation has to pick one English word where the Hebrew had one word with five shades, and it cannot show you that the word in verse 3 is the same word as in verse 17. That is the layer this document opens: not fluency — **familiarity**. Enough to recognize the alphabet, follow a root through a chapter, and hear the text read in its own voice.

The Berean Dashboard was built so that none of this requires typing or memorizing tables. Every Hebrew word in the app carries its pronunciation underneath, every word is a tap away from its dictionary entry, and every verse has a ► button that reads it aloud. This document gives you the map; the app does the walking with you.

How to use this document

Read it once straight through without trying to remember anything. Then open the Dashboard to Genesis 1, put this beside it, and go section by section. Section 7 walks Genesis 1:1 word by word; section 8 shows exactly which buttons to press; section 9 hands you to the best free video teachers on the internet.

2 The alphabet at a glance

Twenty-two letters, right to left, and why you can always sound it

Hebrew reads **right to left**. The alphabet has **22 letters**, and all of them are consonants — the vowels are the little dots and dashes above, below and inside the letters, added in the early Middle Ages by scribes called the Masoretes so the traditional pronunciation would never be lost. The text the Dashboard shows you, the **Westminster Leningrad Codex (WLC)**, carries those vowel points.

Five letters change shape when they end a word (kaf, mem, nun, pe, tsadi) — same letter, different costume. And several letters make sounds English writes with two: *sh* in ש (shin), the throaty *ch* of “Bach” in כ (chet) and often כ (khaf), and the guttural stops א (alef) and ע (ayin) that are more breath than sound.

Here is the whole alphabet, with the name and the sound of each letter:

א alef	silent — a glottal stop, the catch in “uh-oh”
ב bet	b (or v without its dot)
ג gimel	g as in gift
ד dalet	d
ה he	h — also the prefix that means “the”
ו vav	v — also the prefix that means “and”
ז zayin	z
ח chet	ch as in Bach
ט tet	t
י yod	y — the smallest letter, the “jot” of Matthew 5:18
כ kaf	k (or kh without its dot); final form ך
ל lamed	l — also the prefix “to”
מ mem	m; final form ם
נ nun	n; final form ן
ס samekh	s
ע ayin	silent guttural — deeper than alef
פ pe	p (or f without its dot); final form ף
צ tsadi	ts as in cats; final form ץ
ק qof	k, from the back of the throat
ר resh	r

שׁ shin / שׂ sin	sh with the dot upper-right; s with it upper-left
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ט tav	t
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Do not memorize this table tonight. The Dashboard prints the pronunciation under every single word, so you can read along from day one and let the letters become familiar the way faces do — by seeing them often, not by drilling them.

3 Roots: how Hebrew words are family

Three consonants carry the idea; everything else dresses it

Here is the single most useful fact about Hebrew: almost every word grows from a **three-consonant root**. The root carries the core idea, and prefixes, suffixes and vowel changes turn that idea into a verb, a noun, a title, a place.

Take the root שׁמַר — *sh-m-r* — “to guard, keep, watch.” From those three letters Scripture builds:

<i>shamar</i>	he kept, he guarded — “The LORD bless you and keep you” (Numbers 6:24)
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<i>shomer</i>	a keeper, a watchman — “Am I my brother’s keeper ?” (Genesis 4:9)
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<i>mishmeret</i>	a charge, a watch — the duty the priests kept in the tabernacle
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<i>shimmurim</i>	a night of vigil — Exodus 12:42, the night of the LORD’s watching
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When you do a word study in the Dashboard — tap a Hebrew word, read its entry, then search for it — you are really tracing a root, and the payoff is seeing a whole family of verses light up as one conversation. The English reader sees “keep,” “guard,” “watch,” “observe” and misses that they were all שׁמַר holding hands.

4 How Hebrew verbs think

Aspect, not tense — and the stems that turn a verb up or down

English verbs tell you *when*: past, present, future. Hebrew verbs mostly tell you *what shape the action has*: **complete** (the perfect) or **still unfolding** (the imperfect). Context supplies the when. That is why translators sometimes differ on whether a psalm says “the LORD reigned,” “reigns,” or “will reign” — the Hebrew form is comfortable holding all three, and the psalmist may have meant the bigness of exactly that.

Hebrew also runs its verbs through patterns called **stems**, which the lexicon will name for you. Three are worth recognizing: **Qal**, the simple form (“he broke”); **Piel**, often intensive (“he shattered”); and **Hiphil**, causative (“he caused to break”). When the Dashboard’s dictionary entry says Hiphil, it is telling you somebody is *making* something happen.

A caution worth more than a rule

A little Hebrew is a wonderful servant and a terrible master. Never build a doctrine on one verb form — the scholars who wrote your translations knew these forms better than any of us and still chose the English they chose. Use the original to **slow down and notice**, not to overrule.

5 Small words that carry weight

Prefixes, suffixes, and the little chains that hold verses together

Hebrew glues its little words onto the front of big ones. One letter at the head of a word is often a whole English word:

ה ha-	the — <i>ha'arets</i> , “the earth”
ו ve-	and — the most common word in the Bible; whole chapters march on it
ב be-	in, with — <i>bereshit</i> , “in the beginning”
ל le-	to, for
כ ke-	like, as
מ mi-	from

Endings do the possessives: *-i* my, *-kha* your, *-o* his, *-enu* our. So אלהינו *Eloheinu* is “our God” in one word — you hear it in the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4.

And Hebrew shows possession by leaning nouns together in a **construct chain**: *devar-YHWH*, “the word of the LORD”; *beit-lechem*, “house of bread” — Bethlehem. When two nouns in your English are joined by “of,” the Hebrew underneath is usually two words standing shoulder to shoulder.

6 The names of God

What is underneath “God” and “the LORD” in your English Bible

Your English Old Testament uses two main spellings for God, and they are not interchangeable — they are translating different Hebrew words:

יהוה YHWH	The personal, covenant name God gave to Moses (Exodus 3). English Bibles print it as the LORD in small capitals. Jewish readers say <i>Adonai</i> in its place out of reverence; its likely pronunciation is <i>Yahweh</i> .
אלהים Elohim	The general word for God — majestic, plural in form, singular in use. Printed simply as God .
אֲדֹנָי Adonai	My Lord, the Master. Printed as Lord in ordinary letters.
אל שׁדַּי El Shaddai	God Almighty — the name of the Genesis promises (Genesis 17:1).

This is one of the fastest wins Hebrew gives you: in the Dashboard, tap the word under “LORD” or “God” in any verse and you will see instantly which name is there. Psalm 19 turns on this — the heavens declare *El*, but the law belongs to *YHWH*. The psalmist chose; now you can see him choosing.

7 Genesis 1:1, word by word

Seven words — you can read the Bible's first verse today

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

bereshit bara Elohim et hashamayim ve'et ha'arets

בְּרֵאשִׁית <i>bereshit</i>	"In the beginning" — the prefix <i>be-</i> (in) plus <i>reshit</i> (beginning, first). One word where English needs three.
בָּרָא <i>bara</i>	"created." In the whole Bible this verb only ever has God as its subject — <i>bara</i> is creation only God does.
אֱלֹהִים <i>Elohim</i>	"God" — section 6's majestic plural, with a singular verb. One God, plural of majesty.
אֶת <i>et</i>	Untranslatable — a little arrow that points at the object of the verb. Your English Bible rightly leaves it invisible.
הַשָּׁמַיִם <i>hashamayim</i>	"the heavens" — <i>ha-</i> (the) + <i>shamayim</i> , a word that is always plural, like "skies."
וְאֶת <i>ve'et</i>	"and" + the pointer again — Hebrew politely marks the second object too.
הָאָרֶץ <i>ha'arets</i>	"the earth." You already know this word: <i>erets Yisrael</i> , the land of Israel.

Everything in this document is in that verse: the prefixes (sections 5), the name of God (section 6), a verb whose form matters (section 4), and words you will now recognize for the rest of your life. Read it right to left, out loud, with the transliteration under each word — and then let the Dashboard read it to you in Hebrew.

8 Doing all of this in the Dashboard

The buttons, in the order you will press them

Open the text	Go to berean-dashboard.pages.dev , pick Genesis 1. The Hebrew column (headed HEBREW · WLC) sits beside your English, transliteration under every word.
Hear a verse	Tap the small ► beside any Hebrew verse, or ► Hebrew in the column header to hear the chapter. ■ stops.
Slow it down	Lexicon tab → the Speed slider (start around 0.4×) and the Pause slider, which puts silence between words so each one has room to land.
Hear real Hebrew	Tick Speak the Hebrew / Greek instead and a tapped word is spoken in the native voice, not just sounded out in English.
Study a word	Tap any word in the Hebrew column — its dictionary entry (Brown-Driver-Briggs) opens in the Lexicon tab, with the root, the stem, and everywhere it points.
Follow the numbers	The small blue H -numbers in tagged translations are Strong's numbers — H7225 is <i>reshit</i> . Type one into the Lexicon lookup box any time.
Keep what you find	Dictate what you noticed into your Observation notes — the microphone is on the notes toolbar — and mark the recurring word in color so you can watch it repeat.

9 The teachers on video

The most-loved free Hebrew courses on the internet

Nobody learns a language from a document, including this one. These are the video teachers this app happily stands beside — all free:

Aleph with Beth

The most popular Biblical Hebrew course on YouTube, and the gentlest: taught entirely IN Hebrew, the way a child learns, with pictures and patience and no grammar tables until you are ready. Free forever, by design. Start with lesson 1 and let it carry you.

<https://www.youtube.com/c/AlephwithBeth>

Free Biblical Hebrew Course — Introduction

The front door to Aleph with Beth — watch this ten-minute introduction first and you will know whether their way of teaching fits you. (It fits almost everyone.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Kxj7JIHIM>

Daily Dose of Hebrew

A two-minute video every day, walking through the Hebrew Bible a verse at a time. Perfect once you know the alphabet: small, daily, sustainable — the same shape as inductive study itself.

<https://dailydoseofhebrew.com>

How to pair the videos with the Dashboard

After each Aleph with Beth lesson, open the Dashboard and **find that lesson's letters and words in real verses**.

The videos give you the sound and the story; the Dashboard gives you the sacred text where they live. Twenty minutes of video, ten minutes of tracing it in Scripture — that rhythm will beat any cram session ever invented.

10 A gentle path for your first month

Four weeks, no memorizing, all of it out loud

Week 1	Letters. Watch the first Aleph with Beth lessons. In the Dashboard, look at Genesis 1 in Hebrew and just find letters you recognize — like finding faces in a crowd.
Week 2	Sounds. Tap ► on Genesis 1:1–5 daily with the Pause slider up high. Read the transliterations along with the voice. Let your ears lead your eyes.
Week 3	One root. Take שָׁמַר (section 3) or a word from your current study; tap it, read its BDB entry, search it, and watch its family gather across the Old Testament.
Week 4	Genesis 1:1 by heart — in Hebrew, out loud, all seven words. You will never again read “In the beginning” without hearing <i>bereshit</i> under it.

The goal was never fluency. The goal is that the Old Testament stops being a translation of a book about someone else’s God and becomes the very words your God had written down — words you can now touch, sound out, and trace. *Sh’ma Yisrael* — hear, O Israel. Hearing was always the way in.

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