

Data for Decisions.

A Survey on Biblical Language Training and the Future of Pastoral Education

(Abstract)

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In 2010, David J. A. Clines asked the question “Teaching Biblical Languages: Time for a Rethink?”.¹ In his essay he outlined various areas in which teachers of Biblical languages should start to reassess their understanding of teaching and learning biblical languages, including premises, method(s), and desired outcomes. Asking Cline’s question in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary has direct implications for developing a profile for the future Seventh-day Adventist pastor.

Furthermore, in light of the advent of Biblical Language Software (BLS)² in the last years, Rahel Halabe (2008) suggests ancient language curriculum developers, “before resorting to [information technologies’] tempting array of tools, should first contemplate the reasons, the objectives, and the ways in which every ancient language should be taught.”³

The Biblical Languages Pedagogy Committee (BLPC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (SDATS) was formed in fall 2014 in order to do exactly that: reflecting on biblical language training in the SDATS in order to better meet to the educational needs of its students in the area of biblical language training.

As of spring 2016, the BLPC was not aware of any qualitative or quantitative research that has been carried out in order to get a better understanding of the function of biblical Languages within the ministry of Seminary graduates. Such an understanding, however, is crucial, if the specific Adventist theological education wants to satisfy its claims that Scripture should be the sole foundation of faith and practice for minister and member.

For that reason, a survey was conducted in spring 2016 that aimed at gathering first-hand data from Seminary alumni (starting with 1970) on how they evaluate their own Biblical language competence, usage, and its relevance for their church-related service. As part of the research, the graduates’ Seminary experience was surveyed. The majority of questions were related to a) prior language learning, b) Hebrew, c) Greek, d) language learning and the Seminary, e) after graduation, f) future, and g) Biblical languages in theological education and pastoral ministry.

The intention was to learn from the survey results and make suggestions and decisions that improve the overall experience and efficiency of biblical language teaching at the Seminary. The data generated from the survey is still being carefully analyzed by the BLPC and informs discussions as well as suggestions regarding biblical language instruction.

The presentation at the AHSRA-Conference aims at giving an overview of the survey results, as well as proposing conclusions that can be drawn from them.

¹ David J. A. Clines, “Teaching the Biblical Languages: Time for a Rethink?,” in *Foster Biblical Scholarship: Essays in Honor of Kent Harold Richards* (ed. Frank Ritzel Ames and Charles William Miller; Society of Biblical Literature, Biblical Scholarship in North America, 24; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), pp. 161-168.

² Leading Bible software is offered by Logos, Accordance, Bible Works, et al.

³ Rahel Halabe, “Ancient Languages are Still Around, But Do We Really Know How to Teach Them?,” *SBL Forum*, n.p. [cited Feb 2008]. Online:<http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=756> [accessed 9/19/2017, 3.39pm EST].

Short abstract for final printed program

Opening the Hebrew Bible for sermon preparation? Doing Greek word studies in order to answer a question of a church member? What do Adventist pastors do with the Biblical Hebrew and Greek they learned at the Seminary? And how did they experience their language training in the first place?

A 2016-survey among Seminary alumni (beginning with the class of 1970) asked specific questions regarding prior language knowledge, the Seminary experience as well as the current and future usage of the Biblical languages. The results were nothing less than surprising... and will have concrete implications for the language instruction of future Adventist pastors and teachers at the SDATS.