

Beginning Hebrew Grammar II

Syllabus

“Immortal God! how blessed, glorious and golden the age in which you live. For in it a language is being made available to you. It is being offered, or rather is offering itself willingly to you and is lying on the doorstep. In fact, it is already in the house...In only one month it can be learned from a very experienced man who is really outstanding in this field. In the past, our predecessors were extremely anxious to acquire this language, and so pursued it at very great costs, as if it were vanishing from the whole world.”

Robert Wakefield, 1524¹

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Biblical Hebrew refers to the literary language of the vast majority of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. With its first written examples possibly appearing in the tenth century B.C., Hebrew became the primary spoken and written language of the ancient Israelites and Jews for approximately 800 years (from ca. 1000 B.C. until ca. 200 B.C.). Biblical Hebrew was then preserved by faithful and learned Jewish scribes for several hundred years, at which point the Hebrew Bible became more-or-less codified by the Masoretes, a group of scholars whose job it was to maintain the biblical textual tradition through copying for liturgical and scholarly purposes. Because the biblical texts were written over the course of hundreds of years, the Hebrew Bible does not contain one absolute form of Hebrew but different *forms* of Hebrew. In fact, the Hebrew Bible can be said to contain two major forms of Hebrew: Pre-exilic Hebrew (prior to 586 B.C.) and Post-exilic Hebrew (after 586 B.C.). In spite of various differences in areas such as vocabulary, grammatical features, and syntax, the two forms are similar enough that they can be taught as essentially one language. Pre-exilic Hebrew, also called Classical or Standard Biblical Hebrew, is the primary focus of this course. Additionally, biblical Hebrew may also be categorized by genre; mainly prose and poetry. While the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax learned in this course is applicable to both prose and poetry, this course will focus primarily on reading biblical Hebrew prose. Thus, this course is the first of a two-part sequence that provides students with the ability to read any Standard Biblical Hebrew prose with the aid of a lexicon. This course introduces basic and intermediate aspects of biblical Hebrew phonology, morphology, grammar, and syntax. To borrow a phrase, the ultimate goal of this course is that students “*read with comprehension and translate with accuracy.*”

This course will be taught using both inductive and deductive approaches. In this context, learning inductively means that we will, almost immediately, begin by reading small portions of the Hebrew Bible and learning Hebrew based upon what is presented in each lesson’s main passage. The selected passages will set the agenda for each class session’s lessons. The elements of Hebrew presented in class will be reinforced through repetition in the subsequent in-class and homework

¹ Robert Wakefield, *On the Three Languages* (G. Lloyd Jones, ed. and trans.; Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1989), 79. Robert Wakefield was the first lecturer of Hebrew in England.

exercises. However, whereas repetition is the mother of all learning, memorization is its wet-nurse. Therefore, as in more deductive approaches, students *will* memorize vocabulary and select paradigms throughout the course. Because of the nature of this course, and the nature of language learning in general, it is critical that students take good notes, complete all assignments, and persistently study.

RELEVANCE FOR MINISTRY:

The Old Testament/Hebrew Bible was written more than two thousand years ago, in different languages (ancient Hebrew and Aramaic), and in a significantly different culture than our own. In order to effectively understand the Bible, its message, and the worldview of its authors, modern day ministers and scholars must be able to approach and study the text in its original languages (whether Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek). This course will provide students with foundational skills for the lifelong study of the Old Testament in Hebrew, without having to rely on modern translations.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Students successfully completing this two-quarter course will have demonstrated that they are able to do the following: (1) read aloud from the Hebrew Bible; (2) write legibly in a standard Hebrew script; (3) recognize and use high frequency vocabulary of biblical Hebrew; (4) identify basic word forms, grammatical structures, and syntax; (5) translate short passages from the Hebrew Bible using a standard lexicon and other tools.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an appendix, containing the Biblical Aramaic*. Hendrickson, 1996 [original date, 1906]. ISBN: 978-1565632066, Pub. Price \$34.95.

Elliger, K., and W. Rudolph. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. Compact Edition*. 5th ed. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006. ISBN: 978-1598561630, Pub. Price \$69.95. *Do not purchase until after the course begins.

Seow, C. L. *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*. Rev. ed. Abingdon, 1995. ISBN: 978-0687157860, Pub. Price \$40.00.

Vance, Donald R. *A Hebrew Reader For Ruth*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2003. ISBN: 978-1-56563-740-5, Pub. Price \$17.00

RECOMMENDED READING:

Hamilton, Jeffries M., Jeffrey S. Rogers, and C. L. Seow. *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew: Handbook : Answer Keys and Study Guide*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989. ISBN: 978-0687156856

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT: To pass this course, students must demonstrate mastery of the course material by achieving an overall, combined, passing grade of 70%. Students' grades will be calculated based on the assignments outlined below.

1. *In-class participation and attendance (20%)*. Language learning is a holistic experience. Students must interact and participate in class in order to engage parts of the brain that are not engaged while simply studying alone. We will create an open atmosphere where each student is comfortable enough

to contribute, and to humbly fail and succeed while struggling alongside fellow students to learn an ancient foreign language. Students will be expected to read aloud in class, provide translations, answer and ask questions, and participate in in-class exercises. **If a student misses more than two classes, he/she fails the course.**

2. *Vocabulary quizzes (20%)*. Each week students will memorize select Hebrew words for the purpose of developing a working memory of the most common Hebrew words by the end of the two-unit sequence. Memorizing vocabulary is a necessary step in language learning, and vocabulary memorization will be stressed throughout both terms. Vocabulary quizzes will be cumulative, so it is necessary for students to continually review previously learned words. *For further discussion concerning the importance of vocabulary memorization and memorization techniques, refer to the handout at the end of the syllabus entitled, "Why and How We Should Memorize."

3. *Daily homework assignments (20%)*. Each class students will be given various homework assignments related to the current lesson. These assignments will include translations; word studies; dictionary and concordance searches, and other such tasks to increase students' knowledge and abilities. These homework assignments will be reviewed at the beginning of each class and will be handed in after the class ends.

4. *Ruth Translations and Midterm (20%)*. Throughout both terms students will be quizzed on various aspects of Hebrew grammar: prepositions, suffixes, select verb paradigms, etc. By memorizing various critical aspects of Hebrew grammar, students will develop an ability to quickly recognize forms they encounter during translation. Students must remember that memorization is not done for the sake of memorization, but to internalize important aspects of the language for immediate recognition. A midterm evaluation will be given near the midpoint of the quarter to assess student learning and help to evaluate the pace of the course.

5. *Final Exam (20%)*: The term will conclude with a cumulative in-class final exam that will require translating with the aid of a lexicon unseen passages from the Hebrew Bible.

GRADES: Grades will be calculated each term in the following manner:

A	94-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-93	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	F	0-69
B-	80-82		

COURSE FORMAT: Each class period will vary slightly in its overall format and organization depending upon the lesson, point during the course, and student needs. However, the following elements will be routine parts of each class period:

1. *Interactive exercises*: As a class, we will participate in various exercises to build our knowledge of and abilities in biblical Hebrew. These exercises will include songs, basic conversations, role-playing, recitation, reading and translating. The goal is to engage as many learning styles as possible and make learning biblical Hebrew enjoyable.

2. *Review of previous assignments*: We will briefly discuss the homework assignment given in the previous class period, answer any questions students may have, and ensure that each student has a grasp of the previous topics and assignments.

4. *Introduction of new concepts*: Each class period I will introduce new grammatical concepts, with reference to the course textbook, to further students' knowledge. Other lecture topics may include (but are not limited to): exegetical significance, meanings of important words, how to use various exegetical tools. Homework assignments will be based upon the concepts discussed in class.

5. *Application of new concepts*: As a class, we will apply the newly learned concepts using various methods.

6. *Discussion of expectations for next class period*: At the end of each class, I will cover exactly what will be expected for the next class period (assignments, upcoming quizzes, etc.). This ensures that there are no excuses when it comes to forgotten homework, misunderstood instructions, etc.

COURSE SCHEDULE: This course schedule is tentative and may be adapted to meet student needs throughout the course.

Week 1

Mon, Jan 6th

Fall Qtr Final Exam review

Grammar Review

Finish Gen 22

Wed, Jan 8th

Comprehensive vocab quiz

Qal perfect (qatal) guttural and weak verbs (Lesson XIV, pp. 160-165)

Review Qal perfect (qatal) (Lesson XIII, pp. 145-151)

**Ruth 1:1-4 (A Hebrew Reader for Ruth)

Week 2

Mon, Jan 13th

Introduction to the Piel stem and Piel perfect and Piel participle (Lesson XV, pp. 173-177)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 1:5-8 (A Hebrew Reader for Ruth)

Wed, Jan 15th

Introduction to the Hiphil stem and
Hiphil perfect and participle

(Lesson XVI, pp. 181-189)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 1:9-12

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Week 3

Mon, Jan 20th Martin Luther King Jr. Day. NO CLASS

Web class – Introduction to the Niphal stem
and Niphal perfect (video lecture)

(Lesson XXVI, pts 1-4, pp. 288-292)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 1:13-16

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Wed, Jan 22nd

Perfect with object suffixes

(Lesson XVII, pp. 193-200)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 1:17-20

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Week 4

Mon, Jan 27th

Qal imperfect (*yiqtol*) weak verbs

(Lesson XIX, 214-220)

Review Qal imperfect (*yiqtol*)

(Lesson XVIII, pp. 205-208)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 1:21-22; 2:1-2

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Wed, Jan 29th

Yiqtol vs. wayyiqtol

(Lesson XX, pp. 225-232)

Numerals

(Lesson XXIV, pp. 268-272)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 2:3-6

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Week 5

Mon, Feb 3rd

Midterm evaluation (2 hour) covering the perfect verb in Qal, Niphal, Piel, and Hiphil Stems, and 1st Qtr material.

Wed, Feb 5th

Volitives (Qal Jussives and Cohortatives)

(Lesson XVIII, pp. 208-210)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 2:7-11

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Week 6

Mon, Feb 10th

Volitives (Qal Imperatives)

(Lesson XXI, pp. 235-244)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 2:12-16

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Wed, Feb 12th

Imperfect with object suffixes

(Lesson XXII, pp. 247-249)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 2:17-21

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Week 7

Mon, Feb 17th

Infinitives (absolute and construct)

(Lesson XXII, pp. 249-252 and XXIII, pp. 255-260)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 2:22-23; 3:1-3

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Wed, Feb 19th

Piel imperfect, imperative, infinitive

(Lesson XXIV, pp. 264-267)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 3:4-8

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Week 8

Mon, Feb 24th

Hiphil imperfect, volitives, infinitives

(Lesson XXV, pp. 275-283)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 3:9-13

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Wed, Feb 26th

Niphal imperfect, imperative, infinitives,

Participle

(Lesson XXVI, pp. 292-295)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 3:14-18

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Week 9

Mon, Mar 3rd

Hitpa'el Stem

(Lesson XXVII, pp. 298-303)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 4:1-5

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Wed, Mar 6th

Passive forms

(Lessons XXIX, pp. 320-324)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 4:6-10

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Week 10

Mon, Mar 10th

Geminates and hollows

(Lessons XXVIII, pp. 308-317 and XXX, pp. 328-331)

*Vocab Quiz

**Ruth 4:11-22

(*A Hebrew Reader for Ruth*)

Wed, Mar 12th – Final Exam Review

Final Exam: Wed, Mar 19th

8. **Additional Assignments:** In addition to the above listed lessons, daily translation homework, and quizzes, the following assignments will be given to students at various points throughout the terms.

1. *Concordance word study:* This assignment will introduce students to the use of a concordance and will require students to find particular words in the concordance, note number of occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, note possible phrases in which the word occurs as identified by the concordance, and conduct a brief word-study based on the word's usage throughout the Hebrew Bible. The concordance used will be: Abraham Even-Shoshan, ed., *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: "Kiryat Sefer" Publishing House, 1997). This exercise will build from the BDB exercise.

2. *Theological word study:* Building off of the BDB exercise and the concordance word study, students will learn how to use a theological dictionary/lexicon by conducting word studies of particular words. Students will analyze and summarize the entries in the theological lexicons/dictionaries and will also note the following: Etymology, usage of the word in extra biblical Hebrew sources and cognate languages, distribution of the word in the Hebrew Bible, phrases and idioms, and significant theological issues concerning the word. Students may refer to the following:

- a. G. J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 Vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-2006.
- b. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. 3 Vols. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997.
- c. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 Vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.

3. *BHS exercise:* Because BHS has yet to be replaced by any of the critical Bible projects, BHS is still the most important textual of the Hebrew Bible. It is critical that beginning students become familiar

with the features of BHS. This exercise will familiarize students with the Hebrew names of biblical books; the order of the Hebrew canon; the most important sigla, symbols, and abbreviations; the features of a page of Hebrew text; and how to read footnotes and the most relevant Masora.

My "Ten Words" of Learning Hebrew²

1. Be Persistent and Do Not Give Up. Language learning can be challenging, particularly for today's American students who usually do not receive a Classical education and who do not begin learning another language until late in life. Times will come when you will want to give up; do not! If you must take a break from studying, then take a break. However, determine in your heart and mind that you will figure it out, you will memorize the word, you will translate that passage.
2. Read Aloud and Read Often. From the very beginning practice vocalizing the Hebrew text. Read aloud so often that you begin to sound natural. In my brief experience, those who could vocalize the text well did the best; those who could not vocalize the text, did poorly.
3. Work on comprehending and translating without reference to an English translation. Do not begin your translation exercise by opening your English Bible. Work only by using the Hebrew text, your bank of knowledge, and a lexicon. Only once you have fully worked through the assignment should you consider referring to a published translation to check and *possibly* correct your work. Even then, do not just simply take the published translation as your own. If your translation differs from the published translation, determine why they are different. Figure out what it is you have done differently. If you struggled with the passage, go back to your work with the goal of understanding the Hebrew.
4. Practice Writing Hebrew. Just as it is important to vocalize the text, it is important to write the Hebrew assignment and vocabulary words out. Language learning involves more than just the sense of sight. Auditory and tactile engagement will only increase your understanding of Hebrew and aid in your ability to remember.
5. Study with a Buddy. Often another person will recognize or comprehend something when you do not, and vice versa. Learning a language is often best done in small groups (too many people becomes distracting) in which each member is focused and dedicated. Work together to explain the assignment.
6. Do Not Cram! Study daily and study consistently. A language cannot be learned over night. Because language learning can be challenging, often more challenging than the topics from other classes, study during the time of the day when your brain is most active and alert. Waiting until late at night, when you're extremely tired, will not aid you in remembering concepts. Additionally, it is best to study in short periods of 25-30 minutes rather than studying for longer periods (an hour or more). Study more than once a day if need be. Study without distractions. Study without music, t.v., and other sounds that will normally draw your attention away.

² Adapted from and inspired by Charles D. Isbell, "The Hebrew Teacher: Guru, Drill Instructor, or Role Model?" pp. 11-13. Cited 9 August 2012. Online: <http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/isbell.pdf>.

7. Find your motivation. Each student has a different reason for studying Hebrew, but do not consider learning Hebrew simply a “check in the box.” Language learning is expensive; in terms of time, energy, and money. You sell yourself short by learning only to pass or simply to fulfill a requirement. Find a motivation which helps you to push past the difficult and frustrating times. Find a reason to be passionate about learning Hebrew—perhaps you’ll even begin to simply love learning Hebrew.

8. Study Hard Early On. As we say in the Marine Corps, “The more you sweat in training, the less you’ll bleed in war.” In the context of language learning the battles are fought during the times of frustration, when the Hebrew does not seem to make sense, during exams, and when you finish the course and you’re on your own with the Hebrew Bible. The more you invest early on to memorize vocabulary and learn the basic fundamentals of Hebrew, the greater success you will have in the long-run.

9. Language Learning is a Lifetime Activity. When you finish this course, you will not be an expert in biblical Hebrew. You will still struggle with some biblical passages. You’ll forget things you once learned. Have a long-term goal for learning Hebrew, such as being able to read through the Psalms without needing a lexicon in five or ten years. Or, reading through the Hebrew Bible by the time you retire. Learning a language is perishable skill, and it is something that you must continually invest in or you’ll eventually lose all you’ve put into it.

10. You are responsible for your own learning. Do not fall behind quietly and do not suffer in silence. If you have a question, others probably have the same question. Do not blame the text book, the teacher, or any other tool for your failure to invest the proper amount of time and energy into your homework. Learning Hebrew can be so time intensive, and important, that you may want to consider taking no other classes at the same time. Nothing says you must take multiple courses at once. Take responsibility for learning as much as you can and mastering the material.

Why and How We Should Memorize

Memorizing is painful. Memorizing is not fun. There is no reason to sugar-coat the fact that memorizing words and grammatical features is perhaps the most difficult aspect of learning Hebrew. Memorizing takes a significant amount of time; it could take hours to memorize a list of twenty-five words, only to forget half of them by the next day. Thus, memorizing does not seem to provide the most “bang for its buck,” so to say. The immediate cost-gain of memorizing does not seem profitable. However, like many long-term investments, memorizing has significant upfront costs with limited short-term gains, but considerable long-term profits. The temptation to memorize little and think that it will be easier to simply refer to the lexicon may seem appealing, but is a disastrous mindset. Dr. David W. Baker, Professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Ashland Theological Seminary, relates the story of one Hebrew professor who did not make his students memorize any vocabulary. This delighted and excited the students at first; however, they ultimately realized that they ended up doing much more work in the long-run by having to consistently look up words.³ By not memorizing and not putting in the time and effort up front, students were ultimately set up for failure and frustration. I would wager that few, if any, of those students ever looked at Hebrew again much beyond that course.

If memorization is so difficult and expensive in terms of time and effort what are its benefits? First, memorizing words and important grammatical features builds a memory bank which provides immediate access. The brain works millions of times faster than you can open a lexicon and find the appropriate entry. It could take up to a minute or more to find a word in a lexicon, but it takes nanoseconds to recognize and recall a word once memorized. Thus, second, memorizing speeds up your overall reading and translation ability. Third, memorization increases overall reading comprehension. Fourth, memorization—not cramming—provides long-term retention (obviously) and ensures that the skill of reading Hebrew remains with you for years to come. Memorizing vocabulary and important grammatical features is one of the keys to success in learning Hebrew.

The problem with memorization is that most people do not know how to memorize. Some students make vocabulary cards, some students write word lists, some students simply use the word lists as they are printed in the text book. Often students attempt to memorize all the words at once, continually scanning through their word list or vocabulary cards from beginning to end. Often in one sitting, the night before a quiz. These techniques are the ingredients for the recipe of disaster. To provide you with the best possible chance at remembering words and grammatical features, here are a few tips:

1. Write and read aloud everything you want to memorize. If you are using flash-cards, write your own. Purchasing the pre-printed flash-cards is tempting, and easy. However, easy usually does not mean

³ This has been related to me in person, but can also be found in David W. Baker, “Studying the Original Texts: Effective Learning and Teaching Biblical Hebrew,” in *Making the Old Testament Live*, ed. Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 168, n. 14.

effective. Since language learning involves all the senses, you should write down all the words and grammatical features you are trying to memorize and read them aloud as you memorize.

2. The magic number is $7(\pm 2)$. The human brain is limited by what cognitive psychologists call “channel capacity.” This is the amount of single-unit information (like single-digit numbers) the short-term memory can retain at one time. The limit is about seven, give or take two depending on the person.⁴ Consider how difficult it is to remember telephone numbers including the area code. Other factors, such as multiple syllables in words, reduce the number of items the short-term memory can retain.⁵ One recent study, published in *Hebrew Higher Education*, shows that breaking down wordlists into groups of 5-9 is much more effective than trying to memorize vocabulary all at once.⁶ However, an effective technique for increasing one’s short-term storage capacity is “chunking.” Chunking refers to grouping items together, and this is most effective when items are grouped together in 3s or 4s. Again, consider how telephone numbers are chunked: xxx-xxx-xxxx.⁷ Based upon these limitations of short-term memory, I have found it most effective to memorize words in groups of three. I call my technique the 3x3 technique. Only memorize three words at a time. Continue going through them until you can recall them flawlessly three consecutive times. Put those words aside and then memorize three more words in the same fashion. Once you have memorized those three words, then review all six. Memorize three more words, add them to the previous six, and review all nine. Continue this pattern until you have 9, 12, 15, 18, and finally 21 words memorized. I find that I can learn 21 words fairly quickly this way. This, however, involves chunking (in a way). It is detrimental, however, to attempt to chunk more than 4 words together, and it is ineffective to attempt to memorize more than 7 words at a time.

3. Mnemonic devices can be helpful, only when they are simple. Some students, textbooks, and flashcards create mnemonic devices that are so complicated that it takes significantly more mental energy to memorize the mnemonic device than it does to simply memorize the word rote. Ensure that any mnemonic device you use relates in some way to the word you are trying to memorize. If your mnemonic device becomes a short story, discard it and just memorize the word rote.

4. Repetition, repetition, repetition. It takes several hours of uninterrupted practice for new motor skills to shift from short-term to long-term memory.⁸ I imagine that language learning and memorization is similar. Doing more than one thing at one time will effectively negate your ability to remember vocabulary words. Furthermore, you must consistently review those words to ensure they “stick.” Review words several times a day. Often, walking or riding an exercise bike (a stationary one) aids in learning and memorization (the brain is a muscle!). However, do not do complicated tasks

⁴ George A. Miller, “The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information,” *Psychological Review* 101 (1994): 348. The study was conducted in 1955, but reprinted in 1994.

⁵ Derek Jones, “The 7 ± 2 Urban Legend,” MISRA C Conference 2002, p. 3. Cited 9 August 2012. Online: <http://www.knosof.co.uk/cbook/misart.pdf>.

⁶ Jeremy P. Thompson, “Word-list Size and Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary Learning,” *Hebrew Higher Education* 14 (2012): 47-61.

⁷ Jones, “The 7 ± 2 Urban Legend,” pp. 4-5. See also Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009), 89-90.

⁸ John J. Ratey, *A User’s Guide to the Brain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 178-179.

(like driving) while trying to memorize something...you'll do both poorly, and possibly to your own detriment.