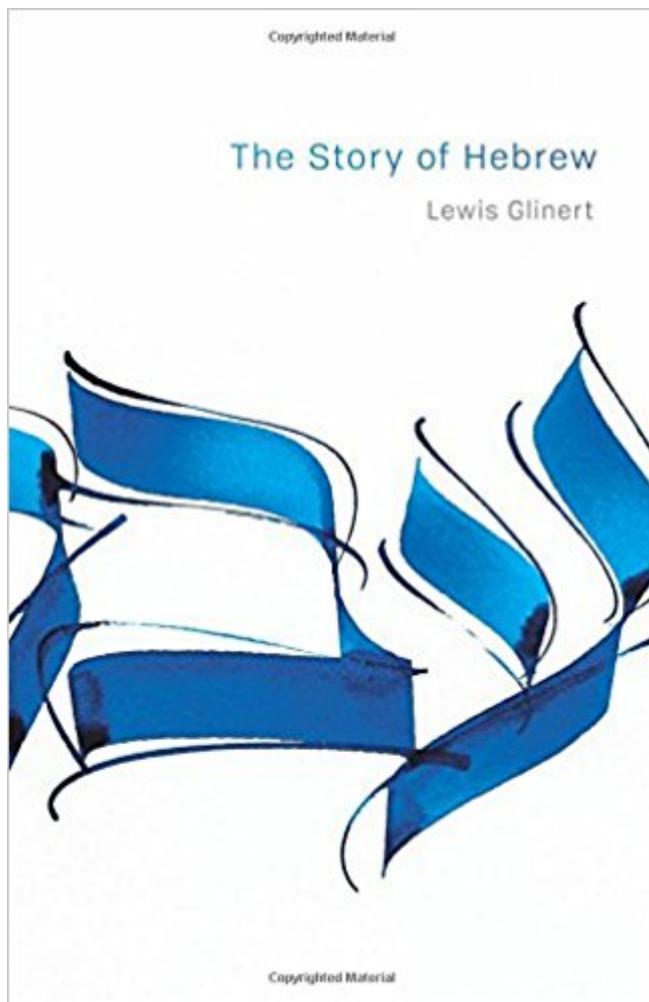


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# The Story Of Hebrew (Library Of Jewish Ideas)



## Synopsis

A unique history of the Hebrew language from biblical times to the modern Jewish state. This book explores the extraordinary hold that Hebrew has had on Jews and Christians, who have invested it with a symbolic power far beyond that of any other language in history. Preserved by the Jews across two millennia, Hebrew endured long after it ceased to be a mother tongue, resulting in one of the most intense textual cultures ever known. It was a bridge to Greek and Arab science. It unlocked the biblical sources for Jerome and the Reformation. Kabbalists and humanists sought philosophical truth in it, and Colonial Americans used it to shape their own Israelite political identity. Today, it is the first language of millions of Israelis. The Story of Hebrew takes readers from the opening verses of Genesis— which seemingly describe the creation of Hebrew itself—to the reincarnation of Hebrew as the everyday language of the Jewish state. Lewis Glinert explains the uses and meanings of Hebrew in ancient Israel and its role as a medium for wisdom and prayer. He describes the early rabbis' preservation of Hebrew following the Babylonian exile, the challenges posed by Arabic, and the prolific use of Hebrew in Diaspora art, spirituality, and science. Glinert looks at the conflicted relationship Christians had with Hebrew from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation, the language's fatal rivalry with Yiddish, the dreamers and schemers that made modern Hebrew a reality, and how a lost pre-Holocaust textual ethos is being renewed today by Orthodox Jews. A major work of scholarship, The Story of Hebrew is an unforgettable account of what one language has meant to those possessing it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The most ambitious attempt since William Chomsky's groundbreaking 1957 study, Hebrew: The Eternal Language, Mr. Glinert's biography of Hebrew succeeds in representing the language not just as a vehicle of communication but as a crucible of national cohesion. To read [this book] is to appreciate Hebrew as the grammar of a dynamic dialogue between the claims of the ever-changing present and the imperatives of the past."--Benjamin Balint, *Wall Street Journal*"An insightful, entertaining, and essential guide to the origins and evolution of the Hebrew language. . . . This is a must-read for students of language and Jewish history."--Publishers Weekly"Glinert brings the Hebrew story to life with such a wealth of intriguing cultural detail in so astonishingly few pages of lively, engaging exposition that his account is must reading for all who revel in the history and elasticity of languages."--Ray Olson, *Booklist* (starred review)"Elegant. . . . The Story of Hebrew covers a great deal of ground in a readable style, studded with stories and quotations that make clear how astonishing it is that out of the fossil DNA of this sacred language, a new creation has arisen."--David Wolpe, *Weekly Standard*"The Story of Hebrew . . . is enormously rewarding for those wishing to familiarize themselves with the evolution both of the Hebrew language and attitudes toward it. . . . Glinert is an excellent tour guide. Many of the book's most compelling stories are those that help explain how, during the nearly two millennia during which it had generally ceased to be a spoken language, Hebrew continued to be central to the lives of Jews."--Howard Freedman, *J Weekly*"Valuable. . . . Glinert has written a scholarly book designed for and accessible to the layman. In a brief 250 pages he succinctly and convincingly demonstrates that through the centuries Hebrew was more living than dead."--David Isaac, *Washington Free Beacon*"The Story of Hebrew is a scholarly, engaging history of the language. . . . Richly detailed and wholly fascinating. Glinert is an engaging storyteller, always lucid, wry and accessible."--Jonathan Kirsch, *Jewish Journal*"A major work of scholarship, *The Story of Hebrew* is an unforgettable account of what one language has meant to those possessing it."--*Israel News Online*"Witty and learned. . . . I thought that I was well versed in the history of Hebrew, but there was hardly a page in this book on which I didn't learn something new. And Glinert is a pleasure to spend time with; his authorial voice in *The Story of Hebrew* reminds me of those famous BBC radio talks given by enormously erudite Oxbridge dons: authoritative, amusing, and crystal clear."--Alan Mintz, *Jewish Review of Books*"In this meticulously researched but highly readable work of scholarship by Glinert, the Dartmouth professor tells not just a history of the Jewish language but, indeed, its story. From the opening lines of *Genesis* to its modern Israeli incarnation, Hebrew has packed more symbolic power than almost any other tongue. . . . An entertaining

account that should also serve as a fundamental text for any student of language or Jewish history."--Victor Wishna, Jewish Telegraphic Agency"This book is a gem. . . . The Story of Hebrew is a superb book, meticulously researched and beautifully written. . . . Read this marvelous study."--Curt Leviant, Jewish Independent"Glinert tells a lively story that informs the reader about uses and misuses of the language, along with a social and cultural history of the Jewish people."--John C. Endres, America"Notwithstanding its academic credibility and that of its author, The Story of Hebrew . . . makes thrilling reading for the non-specialist. The felicitous narrative of Lewis Glinert, with its clarity and lack of abstruse language or jargon, ensures that a lay reader with an interest in Hebrew will find much to gain from this fascinating study."--Gila Wertheimer, Chicago Jewish Star"Lewis Glinert takes the reader on a journey through time and geography, science and philosophy, politics and spirituality, in order to open our eyes to the wonderfully complex world that is the Hebrew language. . . . A fascinating study that reads easily and wears its scholarship lightly. . . . Now once again a spoken language, Hebrew continues to embody our cultural heritage and distinctiveness, forming the ways we see the world. This book opens the window for us to see how, in its many facets, it does just that."--Rabbi Sylvia Rothschild, The Jewish Chronicle"The Story of Hebrew does not require even a rusty knowledge of the language. Glinert's writing is compelling for anyone who has some background in the Jewish scriptures and the history of the people who preserved the holy tongue--from ancient Israel to diaspora Judaism and back to Israel again in recent decades. Glinert also explores the role of Hebrew in the Christian imagination, including the way the language shaped American colonial life."--Christian Century"[Glinert] walks his readers through 3,000 years of Jewish history to show the shifting attitudes that Jews (and sometimes Christians) had toward the Hebrew language. . . . [He] narrates clearly and with good humour."--Martin Lockshin, Canadian Jewish News"One of the more brilliant insights in his analysis is to recognize that the fight over Hebrewâ"â,cs future is not merely a matter of language, but also one of cultural philosophy."--Marina N. Bolotnikova, Forward

"In this incandescent narrative of an ever-renewing tongue, masterful linguist Lewis Glinert traces how Hebrew, however severely displaced from its native ground, has continued through centuries of tribulation to nurture its heritage. Elegantly luring us from one intellectual movement to the next, he arrives at history's most moving culmination: the language of the Book returning at last to the everyday voices of little children."--Cynthia Ozick, author of *Critics, Monsters, Fanatics, and Other Literary Essays*"An absolutely fascinating storyâ"â about the history of Jewish culture, the power of language, and the enduring meaning of Hebrew for Jews and non-Jews alike. Written with

command, grace, and charm, this is a marvelous and utterly engaging work."--Barry W. Holtz, Theodore and Florence Baumritter Professor of Jewish Education, Jewish Theological Seminary"Superb. The Story of Hebrew is a wonderful book--elegantly written, meticulously researched, and exciting to read. A magnificent study."--Curt Leviant, author of the novels *King of Yiddish* and *Kafka's Son*"Masterfully written. Glinert's in-depth account of the sociolinguistic, historical, and cultural aspects of Hebrew is entirely new. A significant contribution to the field."--Aharon Maman, Bialik Professor of Hebrew Language, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Lewis Glinert is correct to assert in his *The Story of Hebrew* that a book like this has not been written since the 1950s. William Chomsky's *Hebrew: The Eternal Language*, 1957, is well out of date; *A History of the Hebrew Language* by Angel Sáenz-Badillos, 1996, is written in a style that leans more toward the expert in the field of linguistics (it is also a translation from Spanish, and the section dealing with modern, or Israeli Hebrew, is positively anemic). *In the Beginning: A Short History of the Hebrew Language* by Joel Hoffman, 2006, is an accomplished book, but spends just as much time on the theory of language and writing in general as it does on the specifics of Hebrew. Fact is, it is difficult to write a book about the entire span of a 3000 year language history. But Glinert has done an admirable job. He focuses on particular eras and important individuals to explore how Hebrew began, expanded, slumbered, and was reawakened as a spoken language. There are two chapters on the impact of Hebrew--"On the Christian Imagination" and although interesting, I wonder if the author would have best spent precious pages elsewhere, as Christian investigations into Hebrew, by and large, seldom interested Jews, especially in the time period he explores. With that said, this is a fascinating book, and long in coming. The history of Hebrew is singularly fascinating. An ancient language, it was at once literary (biblical Hebrew), spoken (rabbinical Hebrew) and a language of poetry, letters, and religious study. When it once again became a spoken language in the late nineteenth century, Hebrew entered the world of European nationalism, forming a cohesive bond in a land of immigrants. In the process, it expanded and modernized, developed modern literary forms and informal, spoken modes of speech. For fans of language study, this book has about all areas of interest; we are lucky to have this work.

An interesting and stimulating read. It was a bit less scholarly in some of its analyses or assumptions, but well worth the engagement.

It doesn't matter what faith you follow, you cannot understand the complexities of the Bible without understanding the complexities of its written word. Easy to read and fascinating.

This seems like a recondite subject, but this is a very lucidly written book that is very illuminating. I found the pages dealing with the revival of Hebrew as a vibrant language particularly interesting.

VERY interesting book. Lots of historical information -- and written in excellent, clear fashion. Highly recommended for anyone who wants the "big picture" of the social, political and cultural vicissitudes of the Hebrew language over the millenia. Not for pedants, but rather for the interested layperson.

Magnificent book. Superbly written and a pleasure to read. In addition to learning about the development of Hebrew, you can actually appreciate Jewish history from an entirely different and helpful perspective.

A wealth of fascinating facts, many little known. The style of writing is a bit difficult to digest, but the interesting material more than makes up for that shortcoming.

This is a stellar book--learned and analytically sharp but also eminently readable and, in fact, engaging. Among its many strengths is the attention it pays to the vast development of Hebrew between the time it ceased to be a spoken language in the period of the Roman Empire and the time it was revived as late in the nineteenth century. Another is the insight the volume provides into the larger history of the Jews and Judaism alike. Highly recommended!

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