USING AND ENJOYING

BIBLICAL GREEK

READING THE NEW TESTAMENT WITH FLUENCY AND DEVOTION

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To the faculty, staff, students, board, alums, and friends of
Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, Pennsylvania

Contents

Preface

This book is primarily a response to requests over the years from former students to help them get back into Greek. While writing this book, I have had in mind the vast number of folks who have taken Greek and fallen by the wayside, as well as those who have kept up their Greek and want to go deeper. Accordingly, along with review of the basic data, I have tried to offer ways for students to go much further with Greek than they often manage and thereby to discover for themselves its joys and benefits. My rallying cry is "Work toward fluency one passage at a time!" While fluency requires time and effort, there does not need to be a delay in the gratification that comes from studying Greek.

Individual Use

This book can be used by individuals and small groups (meeting either locally or online) to review the basic data and explore some favorite passages. For me, such exploration includes historical-grammatical exegesis as well as approaches practiced in the ancient church. In chapter 6 I offer an introduction to meditating on the text using both modern and ancient approaches. For those using the book on their own, I suggest reading chapters 1 and 5 and then beginning to read a favorite text, applying the knowledge gained from these chapters. The sections on basic data and mapping can be skimmed initially and then reviewed as needed. Chapter 4 on sentence structure will probably be of particular help, since this topic is seldom covered in detail in basic Greek

courses. Chapter 6 (meditation) and appendix 5 (verbal analysis) offer ways to reflect more deeply on a passage and can be added in at any point.

Course Use

Much of the material in this book was developed in teaching fairly ordinary courses in basic Greek and Greek exegesis. I have also offered advanced courses based specifically on the approaches to fluency and meditation presented in this book. Since most schools do not have room in their curriculum for a special, advanced course, this book can easily serve as a supplemental text in an existing course to further enrich and challenge students.

In particular, the material on learning vocabulary nicely supplements basic Greek methods, and the discussion on sentence patterns would add material lacking in most methods. The approach to morphology varies with different methods. Thus the material in chapter 3 would probably be difficult to use in conjunction with a basic Greek text, but I have found it works well in an exegesis course for reviewing some of the basic patterns and deepening students' ability to recognize forms in a passage. Many exegesis courses include work on sentence mapping (also called "sentence flows," "phrasing," and other terms), so the chapter and appendix on mapping could be used for that section of a course. The approach to mapping offered here has a number of particular virtues. It (1) is simpler than some other methods, (2) does not require special symbols beyond those readily available in most fonts, (3) enables one to see the original Greek order, and (4) works well in both Greek and English. The list of labels provided in appendix 2 may also be useful in the exegetical analysis associated with sentence mapping.

Most important, chapter 5, on developing familiarity and fluency, could easily supplement any method used in either basic or advanced Greek courses. The guidelines I provide can be practiced right from the outset of a person's study of Greek and continued thereafter.[1]

Additional Resources

Additional suggestions and material for the use of this book by individuals and in courses are available at the website for this book. Further resources are also provided, including a list of vocabulary used in the GNT 30 times or more, parsing practice exercises based on the approach in chapter 3, and short videos that introduce the material on parsing and mapping, material

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1. I am preparing a book for beginners based on the approaches offered in this book, a "prequel," as it were.

that can be very dense in written form! In chapter 3 I claim that all the patterns needed for parsing the vast majority of forms can fit on a single sheet of paper (8.5 x 11 in.) without microscopic print. For proof, see the website.

Acknowledgments

I am thankful for those who taught me Greek, my colleagues in teaching Greek (those I know personally and those known only through their writings), and all the Greek students I have taught, beginning at Gordon-Conwell in 1973 and especially at Trinity School for Ministry since 1983. Since 2009 I have led an online Greek Reading Circle composed of people who have lost their Greek and want to regain it or who have retained it and want to go further with it—the very sort of folks this book is for. I value the encouragement and input I have received from those in the GRC. I am grateful to James Ernest for his encouragement and expertise in shepherding this book along, as he did my earlier book, *A Patristic Greek Reader*. I am also grateful to Wells Turner and the other editors and designers at Baker who saw the book through the production process and added to its clarity, accuracy, and attractiveness. I appreciate the feedback from two anonymous readers who enabled me to improve the book considerably. One of these readers suggested that I include discussion of verbal aspect, which I was happy to do since this has been a keen interest since I read an article by K. L. McKay in 1972.[2]

I am thankful for the support of my wife, Margaret; our son Seth; and our son Chad and his wife, Jessica, both of whom majored in ancient languages in college and encouraged me in this project. Chad also helped me make appendix 5 more intelligible. Our grandchildren Leah, Miriam, Samuel, and Ruth added much support in their own wonderful and life-giving ways.

Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

(2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3)

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2. K. L. McKay, "Syntax in Exegesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972): 39–57. Available online (see bibliography).

ABBREVIATIONS

⬛	indicates a core pattern
a./act.	active
Abbott-Smith	G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*
acc.	accusative
adv.	adverb
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*
aor.	aorist
app.	appendix
BDAG	Frederick William Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*
BDF	Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*
cf.	*confer*, compare
CGEL	Frederick William Danker, with Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
chap(s).	chapter(s)
conj.	conjunction
dat.	dative
dir. obj(s).	direct object(s)
ERV	English Revised Version (1885)
esp.	especially

ESV	English Standard Version (2011)
fem.	feminine
fr.	from
Funk	Robert W. Funk, *A Beginning-Intermediate Grammar of Hellenistic Greek*
fut.	future
gen.	genitive
GNT	Greek New Testament
impf.	imperfect
impv.	imperative
ind.	indicative
inf.	infinitive
LS	Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*
LSJ	Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement
LXX	Septuagint
m./mid.	middle
masc.	masculine
MT	Masoretic Text
NA[27]	Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed.
NA[28]	Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed.
NABRE	New American Bible, Revised Edition (2010)
neg.	negative
NET	The NET Bible
NETS	*A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright
neut.	neuter
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NLT	New Living Translation (2007)
nom.	nominative
NPNF[2]	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2
opt.	optative
p./pass.	passive
pf.	perfect
pl.	plural
plpf.	pluperfect
prep.	preposition
pres.	present
ptc.	participle

rel.	relative
SBLGNT	*The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*
sg.	singular
subj.	subject
subjn.	subjunctive
TLG	*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*
UBS	United Bible Societies
UBS[4]	*The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (United Bible Societies)
voc.	vocative
w.	with
Wallace	Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*
Young	Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*

INTRODUCTION

A knowledge of the basics of Greek opens to you the greatest mental and spiritual adventure, the most edifying study. With Greek you have unique access to some of the world's greatest literature and, most significantly, the power and beauty of God's Scriptures, the very oracles of God (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ, Rom. 3:2).[1]

The question "Why study Greek?" was raised some years ago in an internet discussion group devoted to Greek. The six reasons given by a woman who had studied Greek in a class at her church sum it up very nicely:

> 1. I love the language. I did not anticipate this when I started it. 2. I do get nuances out of the text that I don't get in English. 3. Reading from the Greek slows me down and makes me think. 4. I now know enough to recognize faulty arguments made by other speakers. 5. I find reading from the Greek more moving. I was gripped by reading the Passion passages in the Gospels, something I don't think I get from reading English. 6. I am a resource for the Bible study I am in. I don't answer a question every week, but there's an interpretation

1. I am applying this expression to the entire Bible, though Paul, of course, would not be including the New Testament. Most likely he is referring to "the OT as a whole with special reference, perhaps, to the promises" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 182).

question I can answer, or get the answer to, with some frequency. Sometimes it's as simple as whether "you" is in the singular or plural.[2]

Would that all students of Greek had such an experience! I want to help you engage Greek texts in ways that will bring such benefits. In this introduction I will give you an overview of what I have in mind.

"Before we sip the Scriptures, we should guzzle them." This is great advice for how all Christians should approach the Scriptures. Augustine spends most of his time in *On Christian Doctrine* explaining how to interpret Scripture, and his first step is to "read them all and become familiar with their contents" (II.12 [chap. 8]). He encourages believers "to read them so as to commit them to memory, or at least so as not to remain wholly ignorant of them" (II.14 [chap. 9]).

Such extensive reading is all the more important for teachers and preachers. I remember Harold John Ockenga, when he was president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, saying that before he began to preach through a book of the Bible he read it forty times. He guzzled the book before sipping individual passages and preaching them to others.

In this book I want to encourage you to guzzle and sip the text in Greek. The methods I share in this book for gaining an ability to engage the text in these ways are neither complex nor difficult. You can use these two approaches right from the outset in basic Greek and then continue them throughout your life. It certainly takes time to become fluent, but there are ways to move toward fluency that are very enjoyable and valuable. I will not focus on exegesis,[3] though these approaches complement exegetical study of texts and can deepen your ability to do exegesis. As we will see, fluency and meditation have their own values.

Fluency

Reading extensively, guzzling, requires some level of fluency in reading a text in Greek. Fluency is often understood as the ability to read, write, and speak a language with a high level of accuracy and without stumbling over words, forms, or constructions. Rosetta Stone language courses, for example, are designed for such fluency.[4] An ability to speak and write Greek

2. Karen Pitts, message on the online discussion forum *B-Greek* (see bibliography), posted December 14, 1999.

3. There are many good guides to exegesis. See in particular, Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002). For a brief review or overview, see David Alan Black, *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry: A Practical Guide for Students and Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

4. Rosetta Stone does not have courses in Biblical Greek and Hebrew, but Randall Buth has produced material for fluency in speaking and writing as well as reading Biblical Greek and Hebrew as part of immersion courses. See his Biblical Language Center (see bibliography).

is certainly a deeper level of familiarity with the language than just the ability to read. But fluency in reading can be a goal in itself that produces great rewards.[5]

In discussions of learning to read a second language, fluency is often "a relatively undefined, informal concept,"[6] but William Grabe highlights four elements.[7] A person who reads fluently is able to process the signals in a text rapidly, accurately, and automatically, that is, without needing to stop and analyze the form, function, or meaning of a word or expression. Such fluency also includes the ability to recognize the rhythmical flow of the structural units of a passage.[8] Reading in this way, however, does not mean that there are no pauses, even for those reading their native language.

> Fluency does not describe a stage in which a reader is able to decode *all* words instantly; rather, we become fluent word by word. Studies in which the eye movements of readers are tracked have shown that a skilled reader pauses at between 50 and 80 percent of the words in a text. He needs to fixate on the words, essentially to scan them in, but does so very, very quickly because the words—their spelling patterns and pronunciations—are well known to him.[9]

Some discussions of reading a second language "separate *fluency* from *accuracy*; that is, fluency comes at the expense of accuracy, and accuracy comes at the expense of fluency."[10] In this case, fluent reading does not include attending to all the details, but rather getting the main ideas of the text and something of how they are developed.

Such rapid reading is a valuable exercise. C. S. Lewis describes the large sections of Homer his tutor assigned him to read each day and commented, "He appeared at this stage to value speed more than absolute accuracy. The great gain was that I very soon became able to understand a great deal without (even mentally) translating it; I was beginning to think in Greek."[11]

This rapid reading is one of the key practices for gaining fluency. But as you are learning a language, it is also important to practice reading with

5. Learning to read in a second language is a field of study in itself. See, e.g., William Grabe, *Reading in a Second Language: Moving from Theory to Practice*, Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

6. Ibid., 292.

7. Ibid., 290–93.

8. Grabe refers to this ability as "recognition of prosodic phrasing" (ibid., 292).

9. Sally Shaywitz, *Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 105.

10. Grabe, *Reading*, 292 (emphasis original).

11. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), 140–41.

attention to the details.[12] As Grabe notes, "Getting the language right, even if tentatively, should be the precursor of fluency development."[13] Commenting on a child learning their native language, Shaywitz says, "To acquire a new word for his vocabulary, a child must scrutinize the inner details of the word and not gloss over it."[14] So along with rapid reading there is this more careful reading.

The analogy with learning to play a musical instrument is often used. For many instruments, you need to learn some music theory and practice scales and work on various exercises in order to become accomplished and play smoothly and freely, even improvising. Common advice when practicing a scale or a piece is that you begin slowly enough to make few, if any, mistakes. The mantra is "practice does not make perfect; practice makes permanent." So you should begin slowly in order to lay a solid foundation. Then speed and interpretation come with familiarity with the basics. Once some competence is gained, it is good to include times of pushing yourself to play more quickly than is comfortable. Similarly, once the basics of Greek are in place, you should continue to read carefully but also practice reading fast. Such reading will probably include some mistakes and less clarity in understanding the passage, but it helps you learn to process the data more quickly and will highlight areas that need further work.

In chapter 5 I will discuss strategies and resources for practicing both rapid reading and careful reading. The more time you have for reading, the faster you will gain comfort and fluency in the language, of course. *But even if you have limited time you can make progress by focusing on one sentence at a time and one passage at a time.* Approaching Greek in this way means you are able to enjoy and benefit from amazing texts immediately, even as you build your knowledge and skill to become increasingly fluent in the language. *"How to become fluent one passage at a time" is a major focus in this book.*

Unfortunately, most students of Biblical Greek, in my experience, view even this limited sort of fluency as a goal far beyond their reach. Indeed, they often view this goal as not only impossible for them but also unnecessary since their focus will be on the exegesis of short passages. The multitude of excellent resources available for help with exegesis may seem to make the knowledge

12. See the helpful discussion in Constantine R. Campbell, *Keep Your Greek: Strategies for Busy People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), chap. 6. He emphasizes that such rapid reading should be done in conjunction with slow and careful reading, which he then discusses in chap. 7.

13. Grabe, *Reading*, 292. He says, "Guessing words from context represents an important independent word-learning strategy over time" (276), but it is not a good learning exercise, since "the outcomes of guessing to learn new words is far from accurate and consistent, particularly for readers with weak vocabulary knowledge who cannot use the lexical context to make a reasonable guess" (73).

14. Shaywitz, *Overcoming*, 106.

of Greek unnecessary, beyond perhaps knowing the alphabet and a few rudiments of the language needed for following the discussion in these resources.

Such a limited view of Greek's value may be part of the reason many students of Biblical Greek lose much of what they learn in Greek courses. One recent study of the use of Greek among a group of pastors found that the majority of them do not consult the Greek text directly for sermon preparation.[15] Rather, they draw upon their training in Greek to help with word studies and in the use of good reference material. Thus, instead of engaging the text in Greek themselves, they engage the English text and make use of resources to explore particular details in the Greek. Use of Greek on this level is helpful but misses much of what the language has to offer through more in-depth exegesis, as well as through meditation and fluency. Perhaps this group of pastors is unusual, but rumor has it that many people who learn basic Greek let their Greek go.[16]

The good news is that familiarity with particular bodies of literature is not beyond the reach of anyone who is able to learn basic Greek. It does not require an extraordinary investment of time, nor do you have to wait for years before enjoying the benefits of this more limited sort of fluency.

Note that such reading is not the same as translation. Reading is gathering the content of a passage straight from the Greek, without turning it into English. C. S. Lewis has an apt description of the difference:

> Those in whom the Greek word lives only while they are hunting for it in the lexicon, and who then substitute the English word for it, are not reading the Greek at all; they are only solving a puzzle. The very formula, "*Naus* [ναῦς] means a ship," is wrong. *Naus* and *ship* both mean a thing, they do not mean one another. Behind *Naus*, as behind *navis* or *naca*,[17] we want to have a picture of a dark, slender mass with sail or oars, climbing the ridges, with no officious English word intruding.[18]

Learning to read Greek in this way enables you to feel at home in the text and sets you free to explore a wide selection of passages, as well as return to well-known passages repeatedly to discover new insights. A. T. Robertson, in the preface to his 1,500-page Greek grammar, noted, "I have never gone to the Greek New Testament without receiving fresh illumination on some point. . . .

15. Richard G. Herbster, "Integrating Biblical Language Study and Homiletical Preparation" (DMin thesis, Trinity School for Ministry, 2013).

16. In 1930 A. T. Robertson could say, "It is a sad fact that many ministers, laymen, and women, who took courses in Greek at college, university, or seminary, have allowed the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches to choke off the Greek that they once knew" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament* [Nashville: Broadman, 1930], 1:viii).

17. Latin terms for a ship and a small boat.

18. Lewis, *Surprised*, 141.

Each student has the joy of discovery as the Greek opens its beauties to his mind and to his soul."[19] Elsewhere he says, "Three of the most gifted ministers of my acquaintance make it a rule to read the Greek Testament through once a year."[20] I remember Ockenga telling us of coming home from preaching one Sunday and relaxing by reading through Paul's Letter to Titus in Greek. I do not know how well Ockenga knew Greek, but there is joy and refreshment that come with familiarity, even if we are fluent in only a few texts.

Meditation

Along with reading portions of text you also can benefit greatly from engaging specific passages in depth through meditation. By meditation I mean repeating a passage over and over, listening to its sounds and reflecting on its details. This "sipping" exercise enables you to become intimately connected to the text so that, in a sense, you come to inhabit it and it becomes a living voice within you. Such reading of sacred texts is part of many religions, and, as we will see, professors of Classics sometimes recommend such an approach to passages from Greek and Latin authors. Meditation on God's word, referred to in the Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 6:4–7; Pss. 1:2; 119) and developed in later Judaism, has played a key role throughout the life of the church.

Within the Christian context, meditation is a prayerful engagement of the biblical text in order to hear the living word of God in the context of Christ.[21] In the Western church it is often referred to as *lectio divina*, and it is part of a larger picture of how the text communicates to us and how we should receive it. The relation of these ancient perspectives and practices to modern grammatical-historical exegesis can be understood in more than one way. In chapter 6 I will offer several approaches to such meditation. Engaging the text in this way enables it to have a transformative influence in our lives.

Four Key Features of Greek

In chapters 5 and 6 we will look at key practices for both fluency and meditation. Obviously both of these exercises require a knowledge of the basic features of the language. So in chapters 2–4 I will offer a discussion of the main elements of Greek. If you are currently studying Greek, some of this

19. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), xx.
20. A. T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 21.
21. The word *meditation* can refer either to some form of mental engagement or to practices that focus on silence. I will discuss both forms of meditation in chap. 6.

material may be a helpful supplement to what you are learning in your course. If you have been away from Greek for a while and are trying to get back to it, then these chapters will help you do so.

Building vocabulary and learning morphology, that is, knowledge of forms for parsing, are two of the key features of Greek covered by all basic Greek courses. The approaches to this material in chapters 2 and 3 can supplement most Greek courses, and, as just noted, be used for personal work after completing basic Greek.

A third key feature is grammar or syntax, that is, topics such as how the cases function, the use of the definite article, the participle, and the infinitive. Most basic courses and grammars introduce the key features, and there are several intermediate grammars to cover the further details.[22] I will not offer a review of this material, apart from mentioning a few of the most essential basics in chapter 5 and briefly introducing some of the current discussion of Greek verbs in appendix 5.

The fourth feature of Greek is not always taught very thoroughly in basic courses, namely, the ability to receive the message of a passage as it comes in Greek order. Too often Greek is approached more like a puzzle to be solved than a language to be read. If we only learn to approach a sentence by looking first for the verb and then the subject (or vice versa), we are unlikely to become comfortable in the language. Fortunately, basic courses introduce some of the elements of Greek structure necessary for fluency, and I will build on those elements in chapter 4. As you develop fluency, you will have to continue to puzzle for a while, but you can do it in such a way that you increasingly move beyond the need to do so.

Invitation

This book offers resources for you whether you are currently learning basic Greek or already know it—or even if you learned it years ago and would like to revive it. While my focus is primarily on the Greek New Testament, the material presented here applies to all ancient Greek literature. So whatever your interest in Greek and whichever texts in ancient Greek you want to focus on, I invite you to journey down this path to solidifying your knowledge of Greek and discovering its joys and benefits.[23]

22. See, e.g., Funk; Wallace; and Young.
23. I encourage you to share the journey with another person or a small group, since this provides motivation and encouragement as well as help with sorting out difficulties in passages you read together.