

BOOK REVIEW

Reading the Gospel of St. Mark in Greek: A Beginning. By Norbert H. O. DUCKWITZ. Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 2011. Pp. xxi + 333. Paper, \$19.00 ISBN 978-0-86516-776-6.

This latest reader for intermediate students of Greek will serve a niche in the 21st century, although it is fundamentally a throwback to much older textbooks.

Anyone who has seen the author's previous reader on the Gospel of St. John¹ will find this offering familiar. The book comprises four components: an introduction (xiii–xxi) which surveys the Greek alphabet, pronunciation, and the structure of Greek nouns and verbs; the text of the Gospel of Mark (1–257), with vocabulary and plentiful notes below the text on each page; a reference grammar (258–308); and full vocabulary section (309–33). This arrangement repeats that of the John reader, and, indeed, the introduction and grammatical appendix are identical to those in the earlier one.

A brief preface explains the genesis and intended learning strategy of the book. Duckwitz developed both the John and Mark readers at Brigham Young University to enable students to read a substantial amount of the New Testament in Greek at the beginning and intermediate levels. Such a goal can at first seem as if he is providing a “reading approach” in contrast to a “grammar approach,” but such a categorization misrepresents his method, for Duckwitz intends students to build their comprehension of the text using quite traditional building blocks. Every few lines of text (no page reaches even ten lines of text) are followed by vocabulary entries, detailed information about the morphology and syntax, and some exegesis.

Insofar as Duckwitz's goal is to have all the information students need at hand in a single volume, so that they do not have to consult a lexicon or grammar separately, his presentation is successful, valuable, and sure to be treasured by novice readers, who tend to approach large swaths of Greek text with trepidation.

¹ Norbert H. O. Duckwitz, *Reading the Gospel of St. John in Greek: A Beginning* (New York: Caratzas, 2002), ISBN 978-089241-584-3.

Although unstated, Duckwitz seems to have constructed his reader in opposition to textbooks like William Mounce's *Basics of Biblical Greek*, the textbook used most widely for introducing students to Biblical Greek.² No one would deny the virtues of Mounce's materials: precision of detail and clarity of presentation. The knock on Mounce comes with syntax and comprehension, or rather the near absence of them. Despite the presence of short passages and brief examples of exegesis, Mounce's book is dominated by phonology and morphology. Students can thus legitimately feel that they come to master an extraordinary amount of detail and still walk away with only a tender feeling for a simple Greek sentence or clause. Duckwitz's readers are a welcome counterbalance.

Teachers and students should nevertheless be aware of blemishes and missed opportunities in the current volume. In the setting of the Greek text, stray spaces all too often split words, which can easily confuse novice readers who might think the two parts are separate words (e.g., on p. 28, Mk 1:34, ἡδαισαν is split across lines as ἡ and δαισαν, with no hyphen). The wealth of information provided in the notes on each page will be a substantial part of the book's appeal, but sometimes Duckwitz and his editors seem to lose track of what they are saying (e.g., on p. 32, twice in a long paragraph comes the note that the verb governs the genitive), and there are errors (e.g., on p. 18, ὀλίγον is an accusative of duration, so the detailed explanation of it as a cognate accusative will confuse inexperienced readers).

Furthermore, while Duckwitz understandably wants to retain the features of his previous reader, he misses opportunities to capitalize on advances in Greek pedagogy over the last decade. Vocabulary is one such area. Duckwitz is to be commended for providing a vocabulary section for each page, but his strategy could be improved. At first, the vocabulary is complete for every word, and then lemmas drop out after about ten appearances. For those reading the entire Gospel continuously, this arrangement has benefits, but it can be counterproductive for those who read only selections. Moreover, there is no list of high-frequency words (a list of all the words occurring ten times or more would make sense, given Duckwitz's approach). The bar for the pedagogical deployment of vocabulary has been raised since Duckwitz completed his John reader. For example, Mounce's beginning Greek book purposefully builds a student's high-frequency vocabulary comprising roughly 80% of the New Testament, and chapters even

² William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), ISBN 978-0310-287681.

give a student's statistical progress toward this goal. Two complete intermediate readers of the entire New Testament now provide vocabulary with the text for all lemmas which occur fewer than thirty times in the corpus, along with occasional parsing information.³

Likewise, the phonological, morphological (parsing) and syntactical information eases from very full to less detailed, but Duckwitz never explains the arc to this pattern. For teachers, then, it is not clear how to guide and prioritize grammatical topics. Finally, the piling of information makes finding any given *datum* a challenge. The vocabulary entries are given in their own section, so why not analogous sections for the phonology, morphology, syntax and exegesis? In an age of digital layout, this is a reasonable expectation, but these pages have the look of a dense 19th-century schoolbook.

Overall, however, there are many positives that recommend this book. It does make an entire Gospel compact, accessible and affordable. For the price and the comprehensive annotation, there is nothing better for a course devoted to, at least in part, introducing readers to extended reading in the New Testament. It is thus a very welcome addition to the growing set of excellent intermediate readers for Greek.

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³ Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, *A Reader's Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), ISBN 978-0310-273783; and Barclay M. Newman, *The UBS Greek New Testament: A Reader's Edition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), ISBN 978-1598562859.