

Learn To Read the Greek New Testament. Ward Powers. Third edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Sydney: Anzea/Exeter: Paternoster, 1982, 336 pp., \$19.95.

It is sometimes said that almost every teacher of elementary Greek dreams of writing his or her own introductory textbook, and that is why there are so many of them around. This fresh entry is one of the better ones. Its slant is its attempt to teach Greek by relying on principles that arise out of modern linguistics and (so far as practicable) the habits of language acquisition we all used in learning to speak our mother tongue. The books that have adopted this approach so far have been guilty of spending too much time on linguistics and not enough on Greek. This one avoids that trap (though the appendices, designed to be used primarily at the intermediate level, are studded with a fair bit of linguistics terminology not learned by most former generations of students—e.g., “lexals,” “allomorphs” and “morph slots,” all carefully defined).

The Powers method (as the book rather self-consciously calls it) means that the author tries to bring the student to rapid understanding of a certain “framework” of Greek, using examples from the Greek NT, while avoiding undue emphasis on rote learning. The student then proceeds immediately to the next “framework.” Powers’ aim is to introduce the student to the entire “framework” of NT Greek as quickly as possible, and then to go back and flesh it out with systematic learning of paradigms and the like at the “intermediate” level (which in this book is sketched in as lessons that bring together the appendices, readings from the Greek NT, and the systematic study of Zerwick’s *Biblical Greek*).

The book is clearly printed and well laid out, but I confess that I still have some reservations. In my experience almost any method of teaching Greek—from rather classical methods to programmed instruction on a computer—works well provided the teacher is enthusiastic and competent, and each method seems to work better with some students than with others. Powers intends this book to be either a classroom text (he includes 24 pages of “Basic Principles for Teachers Using This Book”) or as a “teach yourself” book, and doubtless the latter accounts in part for the work’s persistent verbosity.

The fundamental questions of approach are difficult to assess. Powers himself recognizes that learning to read a dead language cannot be exactly like learning one’s mother tongue, but the obvious discontinuities between the two raise questions in my mind about the wisdom of Powers’ “framework” approach. He covers the entire “framework” in only nine lessons. But this means that lesson 2, for instance, has nine subsections as follows: The Greek Sentence; Forms for Noun, Pronoun and Adjective; The Article; Paradigms of the Article and Second Declension; Inflections of Adjectives and Pronouns; Prepositions; The Verb; Paradigm of the Present Indicative Active; Word Order. No teacher of Greek tries to teach all there is to know about, say, prepositions the first time around, but there is at least something to be said for going a shade more slowly and learning the material a little more thoroughly at each step, since the adult mind learning a dead language can integrate and grasp paradigms that an infant learning a live language must pick up over a much longer period of time by observation and repetition. Moreover the “intermediate” level includes a great deal of work normally learned at the elementary level. Zerwick’s text is of course competent, but it is in some respects an eclectic volume that cannot be compared, so far as comprehensiveness is concerned, with, say, Brooks and Winbery, much of whose “intermediate” material would be excluded by the Powers method.

Powers tells us that after comparing more traditional methods and his own approach in the crucible of the classroom he judges that the latter produces better results: better retention, understanding, enthusiasm and so forth. Of course that is not a scientific sample: The better results may spring in part from his own enthusiasm for his approach. My equally subjective assessment is that I have gained better results than I formerly did by reverting to even more archaic methods. Although I introduce some linguistics material as I go along and bring in examples from the Greek NT as soon as possible, I require not only an early and consistent amount of memory work (complete with class drills and chants) but also

Greek composition and extensive translation of English into Greek. Hard work of this sort does wonders not only for an understanding of the language but for retention. The chief difficulty of course is that it is not geared for a "teach yourself" setting (especially Greek composition).

This is not to depreciate Powers' fine volume. He has come as close as anyone to convincing me to tack in a different direction. In classroom work, however, the quality of the teacher is more determinative of results than the quality of the text. And as for private study, only time will tell if this work introduces more students to the thoughtful reading of the Greek NT than, say, Wenham's *Elements* or Machen's *New Testament Greek*.

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