

Some Book Recommendations

This list gives some pointers toward textbooks, grammars, vocabulary helps and readers that I can recommend as useful for early or intermediate learners of Koine who want to get to the point of actually being able to read the GNT for themselves. There may be good resources that are not on this list because I haven't looked at them personally. Other well-known resources may be left off because I know them and can't honestly recommend them—so this is a very personal list. Some, as noted, are out of print, but I've checked to ascertain that secondhand copies are available either on Amazon or Abebooks.

Beginning Texts

One of the few instructional books for Koine that I would call an actual textbook (that is, not just a reference grammar plus vocabulary lists and a few exercises) is John Dobson's *Learn New Testament Greek*. If you know no Greek at all and want to learn to read the GNT, this would be my top recommendation. (For more about it, see [What If I don't know Greek?](#))

After Dobson, I'd recommend either Colwell and Tune's *A Beginner's Reader-Grammar of New Testament Greek* or one of Norbert Duckwitz' guides to the gospels—or both!

Ernest Cadman Colwell and Ernest W. Tune, *A Beginner's Reader-Grammar of New Testament Greek*.

Despite its title, this does not teach grammar in any depth. After a 36-page overview of grammar, it presents 6 pages of 'exercises'—short paragraphs of very simple Greek. After that comes the Reader, 35 pages of simplified Greek, divided into sections of a couple of pages each. Little of this is lifted straight from the GNT. It uses the same vocabulary and recounts familiar events or sayings of Jesus, but not in the precise words of the NT. Some shriek in horror at the idea of 'made-up Greek' (in a way I suspect they don't object to 'the made-up English in *The Cat in the Hat*'). 'Made-up Greek' has two advantages for the learner. First, the syntax is simplified and the vocabulary limited, so the learner can read good chunks of continuous text without too much of a strain. This provides excellent practice for learning to read Greek fluently, without puzzling everything out word by word. Second, because the text isn't exactly the same as that of the NT, you'll be less likely to slip into merely remembering the English.

Colwell and Tune doesn't have an available key, as far as I know, which might seem frustrating if you're learning on your own. Nevertheless, the Greek should for the most part be easily manageable if you've worked through (or are working through) a basic text like Dobson. You could use Colwell to get lots of practice in reading simple Greek, without worrying whether you're translating every last word or phrase correctly. By the time you've read through it (and I'd suggest going through it a couple of times), you'll find the actual GNT much easier and once you start on that, you can get plenty of feedback on your accuracy of that by checking interlinears and translations.

Norbert H. O. Duckwitz, *Reading the Gospel of [. . .] in Greek*.

Duckwitz has three volumes on the Gospels, for each of the canonical four other than Luke, all published by Bolchazy-Carducci publishers. You can usually find them on Amazon, but if not, you can order from the Bolchazy-Carducci website.

These are based on a similar premise as Colwell and Tune: after a brief overview of grammar, you dive straight into text. The difference is that in the case of Duckwitz, this is the actual text of one of the Gospels. I'd recommend, as with Colwell, that you use these books after you've done a fair chunk of a beginner's book, but both Colwell & Tune and Duckwitz say that they taught their texts for years with only a week or so of the grammar presented in their books and then plunging straight into text and that students had no problem. I have no reason to doubt their word, but I'm not confident this would work for folk teaching themselves. You could always try it, though, if you're inclined!

The vast majority of Duckwitz's texts are the text of the relevant gospel with hefty footnotes glossing vocabulary and explaining grammar. He glosses words ten times before expecting the learner will have absorbed them. If you haven't learnt a particular word by that point, there's a complete glossary at the back you can consult. If you've worked through most of an introductory text, even a self-teacher could start on one of the Duckwitz volumes.

One of the advantages of Duckwitz is that because he's a Classicist by training, his notes attend to matters of style and rhetoric as well as straight grammar and it's good to start thinking about these issues early on. There is no denominational bias in his notes that I could see and he seems to have a knowledge of C1 religious life and customs that has been informed by NT scholarship.

I can't vouch for the volume on Mark (I don't own it, though there's no reason to doubt its quality, given the others) but for the new learner of NT Greek, these are volumes well worth acquiring and working through, more than once. I only wish Duckwitz had got around to producing one on Luke.

Vocabulary Helps

There are a number of books and other aids (flashcards and so on) for NT Greek. Most of them are either gimmicky or overkill. The one I recommend is an oldie-but-goodie: Bruce Metzger's *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*. It's a small paperback, which means it's (a) cheap and (b) portable. It lists all the words occurring in the GNT ten times or more, grouped by frequency (and in an index at the back). It also groups words by root, so you can see relationships among words. Metzger also gives lots of English derivations for Greek words. These may help you learn the Greek, but some are pretty esoteric—however the rarer words will surely expand your English vocabulary. There are newer and more expansive works of this kind, but there's no need to pay extra for those. If you learnt all the words in Metzger, you'd have an excellent base for reading the GNT for what these days probably amounts to the price of a fancy coffee.

Reference Grammars

My top recommendations in this category are both by the same person, David Alan Black. For early to intermediate learners, his *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* is the clearest and most accessible reference grammar I know of. It doesn't purport to be exhaustive, but it is actually pretty comprehensive. Black's explanations are clear and it's

easy to find what you need. It is a grammar-vocabulary-plus-a-few-exercises text, which is why I think it's mistitled, but as an adjunct to one of the texts above, it would be a great help. The other text is Black's *It's Greek to Me*, an intermediate grammar. It's much less intimidating than most of what's billed as 'intermediate' but it can take you from knowing endings (morphology) through to most of the syntax you need to know, unless you're doing doctoral work in NT. Like the beginner text, this one has exercises with a key and it's worth working through those, not as a substitute for reading the GNT, but to hone your grasp of particular points. *It's Greek to Me* packs a lot of information into an inexpensive paperback. If you want to acquire one of the hefty intermediate-advanced grammars, you won't have wasted money by starting with Black and most people who aren't aspiring to be professional scholars will find all they need in the paperback.

Both of these (though especially the second) show a sense of humour that some might not like. I find Black's corny puns lighten up a subject that can often seem daunting, boring or both, but this obviously a matter of personal taste.

Guides to the Greek Text

In addition to the resources that cover the whole NT, there are three series of guides that go into greater depth, taking a single book at a time, focusing on the Greek text and primarily concerned with that, rather than lengthy scholarly disputes over exegesis. (The other two are the Zondervan Exegetical Guides to the New Testament and the Baylor University Handbooks on the Greek Text). Both the latter two series have a fairly heavy Evangelical bias, which means that some of the claims about the Greek are very much contestable.

The third is the Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. All series (this applies to commentary series in spades) will be uneven: some volumes will be better than others. I don't own the entire EGGNT series (in any case, it's not complete yet), but I have worked through the volume on Hebrews and can attest to what a marvellous help it is.

Hebrews is generally thought to be the hardest NT book to read in Greek. The problem isn't just that its Greek is more polished than most of the other NT books; it's that its argument is complex. Read Hebrews in English once through and you'll find yourself having to work hard to grasp the argument in all its complexity, complete with a very rich texture of allusions to the LXX. If it's not straightforward in English, it's not going to be any easier in Greek.

That's precisely why you should read Hebrews: it's so theologically rich. To read it in Greek, just about anyone who isn't a NT scholar is going to need help—probably a lot of help. Enter Dana Harris. Her volume in the EGGNT series is a model of just the right amount of thoroughness and clarity, combined with a good sense for what's likely to trip a reader up. She has to follow the general model of the series: the usual general introduction to the books a whole, a list of recommended reading and then the slow slog through the Greek text.

Each section of the text in the EGGNT consists in a verse or verses of the Greek, followed by an explanation of its interpretative issues, mostly lexical and grammatical but also text critical where necessary. The treatment of each chunk of text is rounded out with an extensive bibliography, relevant to just this portion of text, and homiletical suggestions.

I'm really baffled by the latter: no self-respecting preacher should need someone else to provide a sermon outline. The bibliographies are also a bit puzzling: they are so crammed full of books and journal articles that could be found only in a good university or seminary library that it's hard to see how they would be of much help to anyone who doesn't have access to such libraries. But the homiletical suggestions and bibliographies on each section are, at worst, merely superfluous to the needs of most readers.

The core of the books in this series is the verse-by-verse, word-by-word explication of the Greek and this Harris does wonderfully well. One feature of her volume is that she supplies her own translation of each segment of text. This means you don't have to keep running to a Bible to get a sense of the meaning of the text under discussion and you're always clear on where she comes out with respect to the interpretation (not all volumes in the EGGNT do this).

Aside from the convenience of having her translation right there on the page as she discusses the linguistic issues, her discussion is clear and well-informed by numerous commentators and sources. The reader comes away knowing what the linguistic issues are and how they would affect interpretation but also why Harris suggests the solutions she does. In this, she differs from contributors to some other series of this kind, who sometimes briefly list a variety of ways the Greek could be taken and then simply assert one of them is correct without really explaining why they think this one is right.

Harris also largely sticks to analysing the Greek, rather than choosing an interpretation of the text that fits with the theological preferences of a particular group. Or to put it more straightforwardly: she doesn't read the Greek text through the tinted lens of a denominational platform (the Zondervan guides are very denominationally-biased; if their theology matches your own, this might not bother you, but at the very least, you should be aware that the Greek doesn't necessarily lead to the conclusions they claim it does.)

Harris gives a superb guide to the Greek text of what is perhaps the hardest book of the GNT and one of the most theologically rich. It's not just worth acquiring: it's worth working through several times. Highly recommended.

Literary and Rhetorical

For help with appreciating the rhetorical and literary devices of the GNT, you might consult *The Literary Study Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Philip Graham Ryken. (Crossway 2007). The notes contain a wealth of informative material, including a glossary which is effectively a guide to what one might look for in the Biblical text (though the glossary does not include *inclusio!*). It's not specifically oriented to the original languages, but it can help you to understand issues in the writing of the Greek that you'd likely otherwise miss. The English version is that of the ESV, which I deem one of the worst modern translations, but you can get the notes by themselves on the Olive Tree app.