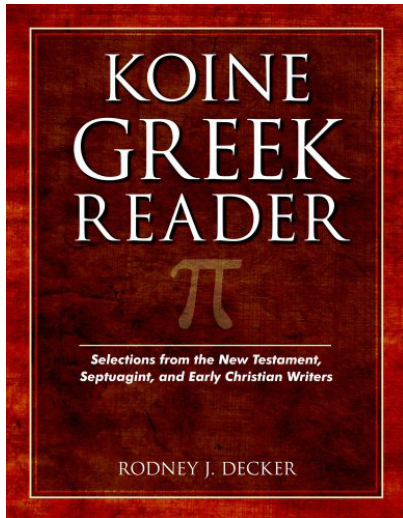


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Decker, Rodney J.

Koine Greek Reader: Selections from the New Testament, Septuagint, and Early Christian Writers

Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007. Pp. 310. Paper. \$25.99. ISBN 0825424429.

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Amidst a move away from the Greek New Testament text and the increasing use of electronic auxiliary tools for interpreting the New Testament, *Koine Greek Reader: Selections from the New Testament, Septuagint, and Christian Writers* sees the light of day. For various reasons, the publication of this book is a positive step for New Testament Greek students.

The first one is that it fills a unique gap. This book takes one back to the roots of Koine Greek, that is, the Septuagint as well as the Koine Greek of the early Christian writers. Further, it has extensive discussions on various Koine Greek phenomena. In this respect, the compilation of the book is unique. For too long, New Testament Greek was approached either through classical Greek or solely from the New Testament. These approaches ignored the immediate Koine contexts on offer. The consequence was that Bible students sometimes knew more about Homer and Sophocles than the New Testament. The New Testament “alone” approach undeniably leads to an impoverished view of Koine Greek. Decker, however, with this book has a well-balanced, inclusive approach toward Koine Greek.

The second reason why this book should be seen positively is the prominence that Decker gives to reading and explaining the Greek text. He does not believe in short cuts and a superficial understanding of the Greek language but advocates hard work, such as the

learning and maintenance of the Greek language and memorization of vocabulary and paradigms. This is surely a contrast to different types of contemporary “help tools,” such as computer programs and even the use of an interlinear Greek text. This last mentioned approach can only lead to the lowering of standards and an artificial mastering of the Greek text. However, this is not the case with Decker’s *Koine Greek Reader*. His in-depth knowledge of Koine Greek often surfaces. He enjoys asking readers some challenging questions (e.g., v. 25, p. 27), but he then cites a reference where the answer can be found.

Another profitable point in the book is Decker’s discussion of the different dictionaries for the Greek New Testament in appendix A, “Using BAGD” (245–62). Quite often Greek professors tell their students to use dictionaries (e.g., Liddell and Scott, Louw and Nida, Thayer’s) without first critiquing them. Decker has a good discussion on the various dictionaries and states clearly the reasons for choosing BAGD. Interestingly, he has a heading “Reading/Deciphering BAGD” (249) that may lead to the assumption that BAGD requires a special skill, which in my opinion it does.

The other appendices also add to the value of this book. I found appendix C, “Participle Use Flow Chart,” where Decker uses case to define different participles, most interesting. The introduction to the different chapters as well as the preface is enlightening and should not be skipped.

When a new book such as this is published, the questions from a pedagogical point of view are: How should it be used, and by whom should it be used? The problem is that this book is so thorough that students might only learn a little by their own endeavors. What I mean here is that it is almost like a “question book” with all the answers inside. This means that it might not facilitate the self-learning and self-exploring of Koine Greek texts. “Self-learning” and especially “self-exploring” are accentuated here. In this sense the book might best be used for “unprepared reading” purposes. The other alternative is that only the lecturer may have the text and gradually lead the students through the different passages. Having said all this, Decker has his own suggestion on how this book should be used in “Using This Material” (16–17).

A few minor points of criticism also need to be mentioned. The first is the single-letter parsing abbreviations that Decker borrowed from GRAMCORD (22). At first these different letters are quite confusing. Is it really so much more trouble to write the different tenses, moods, voices, and so forth in full? The second point of criticism is his openly “evangelical approach.” Too many times this surfaces (e.g., 41), especially in his critique of Thayer (248). Together with this goes the fact that he sometimes offers dogmatically loaded texts such as “The Early Creeds” and “Didache 7–9” on baptism. Perhaps a more balanced approach would have been better; for example, reading some

apocryphal, Septuagintal Koine Greek texts such as Ben Sira, Judith, Susanna, and even the Additions to Esther are equally challenging to students.

In the end, the book has far more positives than negatives. The *Koine Greek Reader* should be used as a handbook wherever Koine Greek is taught.