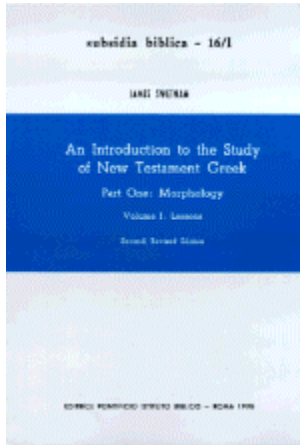


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Swetnam, James

***An Introduction to the Study of New Testament Greek:
Part One: Morphology. Volume 1: Lessons. Volume 2:
Key, Lists, Paradigms and Indices***

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Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1998. Pp. xxxiv + 464
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No introductory grammar can please all the people all of the time; each will have different aims, different audiences, and different linguistic principles in mind. Swetnam, in this corrected second edition of his student introduction to New Testament Greek, acknowledges the problems of ever writing a satisfactory textbook, and recognises that the “mode of presentation in this grammar will undoubtedly be accused of explanatory over-kill” (p. 3). It is, therefore, prudent in a review to present what a grammar aims to be, rather than bemoaning what it is not. Swetnam’s intended readers are those working on their own, and he makes no apologies, therefore, for including as much detail as possible, although introducing the main forms before discussing exceptions or irregularities. He is aware that learning Greek is not easy, even if it can be simplified, and that a thorough grounding in the grammar is essential for reading the New Testament text.

The principles upon which this grammar is founded are that of both deductive and inductive learning methods. Each of the first 67 of the 100 lessons presents a grammatical point or points, with an explanation of the terms and the paradigms (i.e. deductive), and concludes with a vocabulary list and exercises (Greek into English translation sentences, a few English into Greek sentences, and finally a Greek passage selected from the New Testament). The Greek passages selected for reading and translation are from Mark’s Gospel, and this inductive reading approach is continued in lessons 68 and following, by which time the grammar has been completed and the lessons are devoted to reading further passages from Mark’s Gospel and passages from John’s Gospel, introduced by

discussions of “fundamental” syntax. By the end of the book the student will have thereby read through all of the Gospels of Mark and John. This is an important aspect of the *Introduction*, allowing an easy transition from the grammatical study to reading texts, and giving experience of the reading of continuous discourse rather than the more usual artificial sentences of many grammars. The concluding lessons that guide the reader through some additional passages is similar to a traditional chrestomathy, but to include it within the *Introduction* is important for the student who is working by his or herself. Other beneficial features include the introduction of all vocabulary occurring twelve times or more in the New Testament in the course of the work, and a depiction, with the presentation of the alphabet, of how to write the letters by hand. The second volume contains a key to the exercises, which it is hoped students will use judiciously, paradigms and indices.

Although the reading passages provide good experience, and the “fundamental” syntactical points are introduced, a Part Two is intended for the full presentation of syntax. This is perhaps to be regretted. The importance of syntax in language acquisition should warrant greater attention being paid to it in introductory grammars, even if in this case it would have resulted in a much longer *Introduction* (one which might already be too long for some tastes). One wonders how many students will progress from Part One to the intended Part Two.

There are some minor features that might trouble teachers using this grammar. In the paradigms the accusative is given last (i.e. the noun declension is in the order Nom, Gen, Dat, Acc), in contrast to most grammars. The conjugations of εἰμί is given before λύω, which recognises the importance of the verb εἰμί, but when one is trying to present the meaning of the tenses and moods it might have been helpful to present the simpler verb first. To be presented with the future of εἰμί and having to learn that (lesson 8), rather than first learning that for most futures all that is required is an infixed *sigma*, seems unnecessarily complicated. It will also come as a surprise to some that the subjunctive of εἰμί/ is given as early as lesson 5, and the rare optative in lesson 6. The translation of English into Greek is always a moot point, and although it is an artificial exercise this reviewer welcomes its presence as a useful learning method. It can always be omitted by teachers, although a student working on his or her own will not know that. Although every attempt has been made to explain each grammatical point, some students may occasionally be left puzzled. How many students nowadays will know what a substantive is (pp. 13, 15), or will understand what it means to say that a ἰν “indicates contingency” (p. 115)? A printing error on pages 277 and 279 of this reviewer’s copy truncates the pages, rendering page 279 illegible.

Despite these minor cautionary comments, this grammar has an advantage over many competitors in including as much as possible. It would serve as an excellent book for classroom use, where the teacher can present the grammar in his or her own way, but

refer the student to the relevant sections for further discussion. The price is perhaps a little more than most students would wish to spend, but the *Introduction* does cover much ground. An appendix, for example, on verbal aspect indicates areas of grammatical debate that many a grammar avoids, probably to the detriment of the student (although the discussion in the Appendix of the “semantic identity” given to a verb by its “root” is linguistically misleading). The quantity of information is perhaps daunting for students working by themselves, but it leaves the student in no doubt that there is much more to be learnt about the Greek language than what is provided in an introductory grammar. It would have been helpful, therefore, to have indicated at the end whither students might turn for more detailed grammatical information once they have learnt the introductory grammar, other than, of course, to the author’s eagerly awaited volume on syntax.