

BOOK REVIEW

Jerry L. Sumney, *Philippians: A Greek Student's Intermediate Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007). xxiv + 161 pp. Pbk. US\$14.95.

Jerry L. Sumney's *Philippians* is an intermediate reader intended primarily for students who have completed their first year of Greek grammar and wish to develop their knowledge of New Testament Greek and Greek exegesis. Sumney is professor of Biblical Studies at Lexington Theological Seminary in Kentucky, and has previously published *Identifying Paul's Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* (1990), *Theology and Ethics in Paul and his Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish* (co-editor, 1996), *Servants of Satan, False Brothers, and Other Opponents of Paul* (1999), *Preaching Apocalyptic Texts* (co-authored, 1999) and *Paul and Pathos* (co-edited, 2001).

In a very brief introduction Sumney discusses the provenance of *Philippians*, its integrity, its purpose, and finally the textual issues at hand. The remainder of the book divides the text of *Philippians* into eight sections: Epistolary Greeting, 1.1-2; Thanksgiving and Prayer, 1.3-11; Report of Paul's Circumstances with Related Examples to Imitate and to Avoid, 1.12-26; Exhortations to Conform Community Life to the Example of Christ, 1.27-2.18; Contrasting Examples of Responses to the Gospel, 2.19-3.16; Application of the Examples of Living in Accord with the Gospel with Explicit Exhortations, 3.17-4.9; Paul's Thanksgiving to the *Philippians* for their Gift to him, 4.10-20; and Epistolary Closing, 4.21-23. At the end of the book, Sumney provides an 'Overview of the Syntactical Structure of the New Testament', where he briefly touches upon central and elementary grammatical structures with illustrating examples. There is also a 'Glossary of Other Terms and Constructions' where explanations of central terms are given. Finally, under the heading 'Resources for Further Study', there is a list including some helpful tools.

At the beginning of each section, the Greek text is given with a translation suggested by the author. Next, the Greek text is divided into logical syntactical units, which are analysed with comments. Although there are quite a few moments when Sumney excels and gives helpful insights regarding the interpretation of morphological ambiguities and instances of complex syntax, his analyses are at times rather wooden, seemingly resulting from the division—indeed, fragmentation—into units of text that are too small (sometimes only one or two words). The lack of an explicit and holistic perspective frequently leads the reader through unnecessary discussions concerning possible (and impossible) ways of understanding and translating the text. Recent discoveries in discourse theory (as in the standard works of Louw [1973]; Nida [1983]; Brown and Yule [1983]; Cotterell and Turner [1989]; Porter and Reed [1999]) demonstrate that a thorough analysis of the interplay of the elements of the text on different levels (word, phrase, clause, sentence, pericope, larger context) is essential for a proper understanding of the text. This consideration seems to be entirely missing from Sumney's analysis. Even though Sumney uses a verse-by-verse approach, he could have included a discourse analysis at the end of each section.

In the course of analysis, grammatical terms relevant to the text at hand are introduced in inserts giving explanations and illustrative examples. The richness of terminology provides the student with a wide range of grammatical tools that could prove helpful. Sumney brings up text critical issues and discusses the validity of alternative readings, amply highlighting alternative translational solutions, though sometimes he arrives at unlikely conclusions. Sumney comments especially on theologically significant passages, such as the christological hymn in Phil. 2. Here he discusses grammatical issues of great significance for the crafting of theology. One example is the interpretation of ὑπάρχων in Phil. 2.6, whether it should be understood concessively or causatively. Not wanting to interfere with a sensitive text, he wisely opts for the use of the progressive aspect in his translation of this verse. He accounts for the discussion about the semantic content of μορφή in relation to Aristotelian thought, within Hellenism and Gnosticism etc. Sumney also deals with the meaning of the important expression ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων, where the meaning of ὁμοίωμα is widely debated. Finally, Sumney deals with lexicography and accounts for the difficulties of understanding and translating rare words and the many

hapax legomena in Philippians. A bibliography for further study concludes each chapter.

One major problem that severely qualifies Sumney's contribution to our understanding of this letter is his failure to include developments in Greek linguistics in the course of the last thirty years. Writers such as K.L. McKay (*Greek Grammar for Students: a Concise Grammar of Classical Attic with Special Reference to Aspect in the Verb*, 1974), Buist M. Fanning (*Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 1990), and especially Stanley E. Porter (*Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament: with Reference to Tense and Mood*, 1989) have successfully criticised the traditional temporal framework that dominated the view of the Greek verb for hundreds of years. Traditionally, the Greek tenses have been related to temporality. It has long been recognised that non-indicative tenses grammaticalise aspect by means of the morphology of the Greek verb, but according to Porter's thesis the Greek tenses do not grammaticalized time at all. Instead the Greek tenses—or rather, aspects—express the writer's reasoned subjective view of the verbal action. The implications of this theory are naturally far-reaching for anyone who wants to deal seriously with New Testament exegesis. The weakness of Sumney's contribution is that it does not take into account these recent developments. Instead, Sumney argues from the perspective of the traditional temporal framework in Greek grammar. His book would have been an excellent contribution thirty years ago. Although it has its merits, it is simply not up-to-date.

Concerning the concluding list with resources for further study, it is surprising that such well-known tools as Fritz Rienecker's *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (1982/1998) and Max Zerwick's *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (1974/1981) are not included. Fairly recently published tools that deal with Greek grammar from a modern linguistic point of view, such as Porter's *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (1999), are also missing. As to the literature on which Sumney himself depends, it is striking that he does not make use of so important a book as *A Discourse Analysis of Philippians: Method and Rhetoric in the Debate over Literary Integrity* (1997) by Jeffrey T. Reed.

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