

BOOK REVIEW

Mark House, ed. *Compact Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008. 192 pp. Hdbk. US\$24.95. ISBN 1598563252.

According to its preface, the *Compact Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament* is a revision of Alexander Souter’s 1916 *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, the third and final installment in what was commonly called the ‘tiny trilogy’. This trilogy also included a popular edition of the Greek New Testament (1910) and a guide to the canon and text of the New Testament (1913). Because of its useful and concise definitions of every word in the New Testament, Souter’s lexicon became one of the most used tools by students of Hellenistic Greek at the turn of the century. One of Souter’s main motivations in providing a Greek dictionary of this type for scholars and clergy was to create an affordable compact tool. He tried to lay out a full, yet brief, range of meaning for each of the words found in the New Testament, without weighing down his work with extensive morphological detail.

When Alexander Souter created his lexicon he expressed his appreciation for J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan’s *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources*. This work was used as the foundation of Souter’s lexicon, although he took steps not to follow the work of his colleagues slavishly.

The *Compact Greek–English Lexicon* has several new features that set it apart from Souter’s original. These features include: (1) fronted English glosses with expanded grammatical and etymological information; (2) updated glosses to remain current with contemporary English uses; (3) new Greek words added due to New Testament textual discoveries made since Souter’s time; and (4) a list of abbreviations.

For a compact lexicon, this volume is excellent. It is a small, but not pocket size, lexicon that can easily be carried around and used to

translate the gamut of New Testament texts. The construction of the book is solid. The binding and cover appear to be very durable, which is ideal for extensive use. The Greek font is easy to read and the italicized English glosses make finding definitions simple.

For a compact lexicon, the lengthy discussions of prepositions, such as *κατά* and *πρός*, are extremely helpful. Further, the inclusion of common principal parts, such as *εἰπεῖν* (though more could be included), make translating with just this lexicon manageable. Also, House does not always follow other scholars in thinking that a Greek word's meaning is derived from its etymology. For instance, under the entry for *ἀπόστολος*, the English gloss provided is 'a messenger, an envoy, a delegate', and not the often found 'sent one', which is wrongly thought to express an idea identical to that of the cognate verb's 'I send away'.

Although there are many reasons to commend House's new lexicon, there are a few areas of concern. As alluded to above, at least once House falls into the trap of defining a word as the sum of its parts. The classic example, also found here, is thinking that *μονογενής* means 'only begotten'. The argument is something like this: since *μονογενής* is derived from *μόνος* ('only') and *γεννάω* ('beget'), it must mean 'only begotten'. In response to this line of thinking, two points need to be made. First, even if *μονογενής* is derived from *μόνος* and *γεννάω*, it does not follow that it means 'only begotten', because, as James Barr has shown, words are not the sum of their parts. The meaning of a word is derived from its usage in a given context and not (always) etymologically. Secondly, it is debatable that the *-γενής* in *μονογενής* is derived from *γεννάω*. Some scholars, such as those represented by BDAG, insist that it is derived from *γένος* ('kind'). For these reasons, it seems better to understand *μονογενής* as 'unique' or 'one of a kind'. It should be noted that House is simply following Souter on this definition. But in a contemporary lexicon, the gloss should be updated in order to make the reader aware of the current debate surrounding the exact semantic range of this word.

Another example of House not being sensitive to contemporary (or even pre-Enlightenment) debates over lexical meaning is found with the word *δικαίω*. The gloss given for this verb is 'I make righteous, I defend the cause of, I acquit, justify; hence I regard as righteous' (p. 50). Without giving any specific uses in the New Testament, House, once again following Souter, asserts that *δικαίω* means, 'to make

righteous’ and not ‘to render a favorable verdict’ (BDAG). That is, some New Testament scholars would argue that δικαιοῶ means, ‘to declare righteous’. Whatever the correct understanding of δικαιοῶ may be, the fact that House gives no indication of the debate or specific New Testament uses for his gloss of this verb is troublesome. This may be an example of House (and Souter) theologizing and not doing lexical work.

The entry for δικαιοῶ illustrates another concern with this lexicon—the vast majority of entries do not have New Testament references. Words are not to be considered in isolation from their context. It is important to point readers to different uses of each word so they can examine the way they are used in their context. For example, the Greek word θεόπνευστος is used only once in the New Testament (2 Tim. 3.16), but House does not indicate this. This textual reference is vital information as a reader attempts to identify the way this Greek word is to be understood.

Another issue worth discussion is the definition for ἀγαπάω. The gloss provided is ‘I love’, with this qualifier: ‘never of love between the sexes, but nearly always of the love of God or Christ to us, and of our love to Him and to our fellow creatures, as inspired by His love for us’. At the outset it needs to be noted that this qualifier is self-contradictory. How can this kind of love never be between the sexes, but exemplify our love for fellow creatures? Surely the opposite sex falls into the category of ‘fellow creatures’. In addition, this qualifier misses the fact that in Col. 3.19, Paul instructs husbands, ‘ἀγαπάτε your wives’, which is a clear reference to love between the sexes. It seems that House is working under the common misconception that ἀγαπάω and φιλέω are distinct types of love that do not overlap in their semantic domains (or have a very small overlap). In the entry for φιλέω the gloss is ‘I love, of friendship (contrast with ἔραμαι [of passion] and ἀγαπάω [of reverential love])’, which is more indication that the author is trying to drive a hard wedge between these two Greek words.

The Greek of the New Testament was not a special language used in isolation from the rest of the world, once referred to as ‘Holy Spirit Greek’. Rather, it was the language of the people. This means that a better understanding of the words found in the New Testament could be gained by looking at extra-biblical uses, since those employing the words in the New Testament text were in some part shaped by the

common use of Hellenistic Greek. However, there is no indication in this lexicon that extra-biblical uses were examined. This may have been done to keep the lexicon short and compact. Nevertheless, it should be brought to the reader's attention.

Even with these difficulties, this lexicon is one that any student of the New Testament should own if they want a small, compact and portable lexicon. The concerns pointed out above are not enough to minimize the worth of this volume. The fact still remains that the *Compact Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament* will aid on some level both scholars and students of the Greek New Testament and should be in the library of anyone who wants to understand the original language of the New Testament better.

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