

# Book Reviews

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*The Lost Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon, Volume 1.* Nashville: B&H, 2017. Edited by Christian George. 400 pages. \$59.99

Charles Spurgeon once accused a student of plagiarizing one of his own sermons. During the inquisition, the student confessed to using Charles Simeon's outline. In the moment of conflict, Spurgeon recalled that he also had lifted his sermon outline from the great preacher. Similarly, preachers from his day until now have benefitted (and borrowed) from the sermons of Charles Spurgeon. His use of metaphor combined with his ability to coin a phrase leaves few who can stand in his company. But how did the preacher become so masterful at his craft?

In *The Lost Sermons of Charles Spurgeon*, editor Christian George provides valuable answers to this question as he introduces the reader to the young preacher's earliest sermons. As Assistant Professor of Historical Theology and Curator of the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, George is uniquely qualified to spearhead this work of supplying the church with these sermons. George's work is not merely academic, but proof of a deep interest in the life and labor of the famed preacher.

The sourcebook for this work is a handwritten notebook filled with the outlines that Spurgeon used while preaching. In cooperation with Spurgeon College, this series of sermons will survey nine notebooks, amassing a total of 400 sermons and filling 1,127 handwritten journal pages, all with the aim of fueling continued Spurgeon scholarship. The first edition contains seventy-six sermons. The title of the book hints that these sermons were "lost," but they were indeed never lost, simply—unpublished. Spurgeon disclosed in his autobiography his hope to publish these volumes, but other ministry endeavors combined with ailing health did not allow for its completion. This initial collection of sermons is a welcome addition to the renaissance of Spurgeon research as it displays the early ministerial development of the Prince of Preachers.

Part one of the book contains introductory matter, including a supportive timeline overlay of Spurgeon's life along with contextual entries. George offers a colorful description of the Victorian era that provides the necessary historical setting to understand the sermons. Additionally, George addresses

the congruencies and disparities between Spurgeon and his time. The section concludes with a detailed analysis of the sermons, surveying word count, percentages of texts used from specific testaments and books, as well as a word cloud of topical frequency.

Part two of the book consists of the heart of this work: outlines of the first seventy-six sermons preached by Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon calls these outlines “skeletons,” and on the title page of his journal confesses they are “only skeletons without the Holy Spirit” (60). The layout of the book includes a high-resolution facsimile of the original manuscript on the left page, with an exact rendering in type on the facing page. This inclusion of both old and new creates a wonderful presentation that allows the reader to get as close to the writing of Spurgeon as possible, with the benefit of an organized outline also readily available.

This volume’s strength is its detailing of Spurgeon’s early development as a preacher as well as George’s careful examination and commentary on each sermon outline. The sermon outlines show the preacher growing in his grasp of Scripture and his concern for doctrine while consistently maintaining the crux of his preaching: the free grace offered in the gospel of Christ. The manuscripts reveal a young preacher demonstrating strong conviction and intentionality aimed at the glory of God and the joy of the listener. The outlines include reference to the many times Spurgeon “uses the brains of other men” in his homiletical process. George outperforms the role of editor in cross-references to other sermons and presentation of related works to help his reader attain a full understanding of Spurgeon. George shows how Spurgeon consulted the work of John Gill, George Whitefield, and Charles Simeon to help build out sermon content, as well as how his vocabulary grew from the hymnody of John Newton, Isaac Watts, and others. These editorial notes aid readers feeling overwhelmed at the content Spurgeon created.

Some may propose a weakness regarding the source material of the first volume of *The Lost Sermons of Charles Spurgeon*: Spurgeon’s methodology of preaching a single disconnected verse at a time. This may appear to uncover a church led by Spurgeon which did not hear the “whole counsel of God.” However, analysis of this volume reveals Spurgeon’s incredible distribution as forty-four percent of his sermons originated from the Old Testament, and fifty-five percent from the New Testament. Further analysis shows that twenty-four percent of his Old Testament sermons were from the Psalms, a book

dear to his heart as evidenced by his later work, the *Treasury of David*. This specific critique must acknowledge its survey of a brief window of the preacher's tenure; certainly these books of Scripture were addressed in future sermons.

*The Lost Sermons of Charles Spurgeon* will certainly prove to be a treasure to the church and a help to preachers. While many look at Spurgeon's mountain of published work and sense comparative diminution, this collection of sermons helps preachers and writers see the cumulative effect of the regular discipline of faithfully communicating truth. On some cold Saturday night in the study of the preacher, surely one of these "skeletons" will serve to frame the thoughts and warm the heart of the pastor, thereby completing the joy of the editor, who aims to guide readers not just *to* Spurgeon, but *through* Spurgeon to Jesus Christ (xxiii).

Matthew Boswell

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*Greek for Everyone: Introductory Greek for Bible Study and Application*. By A. Chadwick Thornhill. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016, 272 pp. \$24.99, paperback.

A. Chadwick Thornhill received his Ph.D. from Liberty University. He serves at Liberty's School of Divinity as the chair of theological studies where he is an assistant professor of apologetics and biblical studies. He is the author of *The Chosen People: Election, Paul and Second Temple Judaism* (IVP, 2015), and has taught beginning Greek at Liberty since 2007.

Dr. Thornhill says that his goals in writing *Greek for Everyone* were to lay "a foundation for those who lack formal training in the biblical language to gain insights from the original language of the New Testament," and to provide "an exegetical framework to help guide the way in which those insights are developed" (214–215). The book begins in chapter 1 by teaching the student how to pronounce Greek letters and words (he prefers a reconstructed first century pronunciation rather than Erasmian). In chapter 2 he discusses word meanings and semantic range, as well as how language is structured into levels of meaning such as words, groups of words, sentences, and pericopes, with the highest level being the whole discourse. In chapter 3 he defines grammatical units such as phrases, clauses, and sentences, and then shows

the functional meaning of the major conjunctions. Then in chapter 4 he introduces his readers to some of the tools they will need to study the text, such as interlinear Bibles, lexicons, and parsing tools.

Chapters 5–13 contain the bulk of the book’s grammatical information. Chapter 5 explains the grammatical information communicated by verbs and nominals, such as tense, aspect, mood, case, and so on. Chapters 6–7 discuss the main functions of the cases, and chapter 8 discusses the main uses of the article, pronouns, adjectives, and prepositions. Chapters 9–13 deal with verbs and verbals, including indicative mood verbs (chapter 9), imperatives (chapter 10), subjunctives (chapter 11), infinitives (chapter 12), and participles (chapter 13). For each of the chapters dealing with verbal forms, he discusses the main uses of the various tenses (especially highlighting the importance of verbal aspect) and the significance of the verbal form under consideration (e.g., subjunctive mood, participle, etc.).

Chapters 14–18 contain practical information on the use of Greek in Bible study, in addition to addressing other hermeneutical issues. Chapter 14 explains how to trace the flow of thought by attention to matters of coordination and subordination and word order, and introduces the reader to some of the basic concepts related to discourse analysis and how to block diagram passages of Scripture. Chapter 15 explains how to compare English translations, including a very concise introduction to textual criticism and an introduction to the translation issues that often result in differences among the various translations. Chapter 16 discusses various contexts (historical, social, cultural, literary, intertextual, and canonical) that should impact how we interpret Scripture. Chapter 17 provides a discussion of word studies, including an explanation of several common mistakes (e.g., etymological fallacy, word-concept confusion), and a few helpful theoretical categories (e.g., synonymy, synchronic linguistics). It helpfully includes specific instruction on how to do word studies in the form of three basic steps: (1) selecting a significant word, (2) examining the lexical data using critical lexicons, and (3) making a judgment about which possible meaning is most contextually appropriate. The book concludes in chapter 18 with various topics related to the interpretive process such as the proper attitudes that interpreters must have when approaching Scripture, some recommended resources (such as background resources and commentaries), and some guidance in how to apply the biblical text to the modern context.

Thornhill knows that this text will not actually teach people to read Greek.

His goals for the reader who completes this book are modest: “We have the ability to understand some grammatical frameworks and interact with good exegetical commentaries and essays. We even have some ability to evaluate those resources. We have not, however, developed proficiency with the language” (213). In light of these goals, the book does not teach the *forms* of the language, but the *meaning* conveyed by the grammar. So in chapter 7, for example, while he gives examples of words in the genitive and dative cases, he is focused on the most important *meanings* of the genitive and dative cases rather than their morphology. In place of teaching readers the forms of the language, he gives them the following method for identifying grammatical information: (1) “identifying a particular word in our interlinear text,” (2) “identifying its meaning through a lexical tool,” (3) “finding its grammatical information through an analytical lexicon or parsing tool,” and (4) “studying its grammatical force through scholarly works such as commentaries, books, and journal articles” (44). Readers should probably know this up front so that their expectations are framed accordingly.

This approach to teaching Greek certainly has a place. Despite the fact that every Christian or Christian teacher who interacts with the NT in a serious way will encounter issues related to the original language, it is undoubtedly true that not every Christian or Christian teacher will have the opportunity to *learn* Greek. Given this approach, Thornhill’s presentation includes a number of beneficial components.

First, the approach is above all practical, and in light of the intended goal of helping the reader use the knowledge to engage the text, it strikes its target. For example, Thornhill shows the reader a clear method for how to study the grammar without knowing the forms (see above), and follows it throughout the book. He also provides instruction on many of the major tasks that students and teachers of Scripture will actually use when sitting in their study with their Greek NT, such as how to do word studies (chapter 17), how to track the main argument and flow of thought (chapter 14), and how to compare English translations (chapter 15). Ironically, this kind of explicit teaching in methods and skills is often lacking in more traditional grammars that are more rigorous in their treatment of issues of syntax and morphology.

Second, he emphasizes the structures larger than the word or clause level. In contrast with many beginning grammars which are almost exclusively focused on grammar at the word and clause level and seem to address the

larger structures of the language only in passing, Thornhill makes this a prominent part of his book. For example, in chapter 2 he frames the study of Greek in terms of all of the levels of meaning, which in this reviewer's opinion is a very helpful move, as it provides a context in which the discussions of verbal and nominal grammar can be placed. Another way that he helpfully pushes the reader above the word and clause level is in teaching the conjunctions based on their function rather than simply providing translational equivalents (25–26). Finally, after the bulk of his grammatical discussion, he caps off his grammatical treatment by instructing readers how to distinguish independent from dependent clauses for the sake of determining the main idea of biblical texts.

However, while the scope of the book and the emphasis on skills and methods are excellently done, the book has a few weaknesses. First of all, some of the grammatical discussions either lack clarity or have inconsistencies. One example of this is his discussion on verbal aspect. On p. 37, where he introduces verbal aspect, he says that imperfective aspect “views the action in progress, or from an up-close perspective.” Later, in his chapter on the indicative, he describes imperfective aspect as “an up-close perspective” (74 and 76), but when he puts the tenses and aspects into chart form at the end of the chapter, he describes imperfective as “in progress” (85). This is confusing because it treats “up-close” and “in progress” as synonymous ways of describing aspect, which they are not (though they might complement each other).

This is compounded by his description of “perfective” aspect (which is his name for the aspect that is expressed by the Greek perfect tense). In one place he describes this aspect as expressing “a *completed action* or a *state* that is given additional focus” (81, emphasis his), while in another place he describes it as expressing “up close” action (85). This leaves the reader wondering why perfective aspect is described in different ways in different sections of the book, and whether “up-close” action is indicated by imperfective aspect, perfective aspect, or both. (Should the reader then consult another source to gain clarity regarding what kind of action perfective aspect indicates, they will likely there find that it is the aspect of the aorist tense and give up!)

Another example of inconsistency is how he handles participial clauses. In chapter 3 (“Phrases, Clauses, and Conjunctions”), he defines a clause as “a group of words containing a subject and predicate in which the predicate contains a finite verb” (23). He continues: “Thus the major difference between

a clause and a phrase is that clauses contain a verb that can create a complete thought, while phrases, though they may contain verbals (i.e., participles and infinitives), do not contain a finite verb” (ibid.). However, on p. 121, where he discusses dependent clauses, he says there “are four main kinds of dependent clauses in Greek: *relative, infinitival, participial, and subordinate conjunction*” (emphasis his). Here and elsewhere the reader is left confused over contradictory or unclear definitions of grammatical details.

A final area that could use some improvement (though this is more of a minor criticism) is the focus of the book. Both the title and the subtitle lead the reader to expect that the content of the book will revolve around the topic of Greek language and its use in Bible study and application. However, the author includes some sections that are more properly hermeneutical and not directly connected to Greek. One example is chapter 15 (“Bridging the Contexts”), where the author includes a concise summary of Second Temple history and numerous other details that are important but not related to the use of Greek. The author’s stated intention to help readers apply what they have learned in their study of the Greek text could be achieved more effectively by limiting the discussion of hermeneutical issues to those topics that are directly related to the use of the Greek language in interpretation. Other helpful information could be placed in an appendix or dealt with in a separate volume in which they could receive adequate attention.

In sum, Thornhill has given us a handy introduction to Greek for those who have not learned the language. Despite some of its shortcomings, those who are responsible to teach in the church and yet for whatever reason legitimately cannot take an actual course in Greek could have their exegetical skills sharpened through the use of this book. Though, as Thornhill himself acknowledges, readers will not actually have proficiency with the language, nevertheless they will be better equipped to use the resources that are available to them. In addition, it could be profitably used by students who are about to take a course in Greek at the Bible college or seminary level. Having worked through this book in advance, one would have a much better grasp on the concepts involved in the study of Greek and be much less likely to get lost as they work through the details of the language in a college-level course.

Noah W. Kelley

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC