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BOOK REVIEW

Gregory R. Lanier and William A. Ross. *A Book-by-Book Guide to Septuagint Vocabulary*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019. vi + 268 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-68307-196-9. \$17.70.

It has been a significant boon to most Hebrew Bible/Old Testament scholars, as well as those studying Hellenistic Greek, early Judaism and Christianity, and the New Testament, that sustained academic interest in the Septuagint—the Old Greek translation of Hebrew Scripture (the LXX)—has been on the rise in recent decades. Regrettably, however, despite a slew of notably impressive and quite important works published in the last few years until the release of Gregory R. Lanier and William A. Ross’s *A Book-by-Book Guide to Septuagint Vocabulary*, there existed no generally accessible book to help “students and scholars acquire competency in Septuagint-specific vocabulary . . . This volume aims to fill the void” (1). To be clear, Lanier and Ross maintain (1):

While the Greek Old Testament (including the Apocrypha/Deuterocanon) at first feels familiar to anyone who has studied Hellenistic Greek or the Greek New Testament, the diversity in literary style and expansive range of vocabulary across the corpus present major challenges to anyone seeking to acquire a broad but detailed familiarity. Our aim is not to replace full lexicons. Rather, we aim to provide a convenient way for students to obtain proficiency with both general and book-specific Septuagint vocabulary for their personal, scholarly, or ministry purposes.

The core of *A Book-by-Book Guide to Septuagint Vocabulary* consists of twenty-eight chapters devoted to vocabulary for specific books or groups of books. For example, the Book of the Twelve, the Jeremiah corpus (including Baruch, Lamentations, and the Epistle of Jeremiah), 1 and 2 Esdras (Ezra–Nehemiah), and the Daniel corpus (OG and Θ, including Additions) are treat-

ed in one chapter just like he treated both Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs and Ruth/Esther in one same chapter respectively. In each chapter, vocabulary words are arranged according to frequency, from highest to lowest, “as found *in that given book/section of the Septuagint*. This allows the user to focus on the most important words (by frequency of appearance) in a given portion of the Septuagint” (1–2; emphasis original). In other words, the goal is for users to obtain proficiency in the vocabulary of the LXX in a way that is both efficient (hence the emphasis on frequency) and targeted (hence the focus on books or groups of books) so as to enable them to “get up the curve” of reading competency (3). To further facilitate one’s ease in learning vocabulary, the authors state (2):

These sorted lists . . . have been segmented into word lists consisting of fifteen words each (arranged alphabetically), which we judged to be the most manageable size for study and review. The header of each list provides the range of frequency covered by that list within the given book/section of the Septuagint: for instance, the first fifteen-word list in Genesis gives the range “81 to 25x.”

Concerning “getting up the curve,” obtaining a certain level of reading competency for one book may require mastering far more words than what would be required for obtaining the same level of competency for another book. Interestingly, 1–2 Chronicles (i.e., 1–2 Paralipomena) have the simplest vocabulary while 2 Maccabees has the most varied (3). In this way (4; emphasis original):

Though 1–2 Chronicles is over three times the length of 2 Maccabees, the reader is required to memorize *over three times* the number of individual words for 2 Maccabees in order to reach the same 90 % level of cumulative word occurrences as for 1–2 Chronicles . . . Put differently, to enable the user to attain the same level of reading competency for each of these books/sections of the Septuagint, the vocabulary set for 2 Maccabees needs to be triple the size of that for 1–2 Chronicles, even though the simple word counts of each book are precisely the reverse.

The textual base for this book is the Rahlfs–Hanhart edition, including the so-called “double texts” for Judges, the Daniel corpus, Tobit, and portions of Joshua (4). Judiciously, though, the

authors depart from the ordering of the books in Rahlfs–Hanhart (1). All entries consist of the lexical form of the word followed by at least one English gloss. Lanier and Ross are to be commended that while their glosses are “only generalized English translation equivalents and not full definitions or descriptions of a word’s entire semantic range,” they have also “tailored the glosses at points to reflect the meaning a word has in a given book/section of the Septuagint if this differs from what the word means elsewhere” (5).

An especially unique (but welcome) feature to *A Book-by-Book Guide to Septuagint Vocabulary* is three general lists: (1) “Greek New Testament Refresher” (9–18); specifically, this list consists of about 300 words that appear more than fifty times in the Greek New Testament *and* one or more times in the LXX; (2) “High-Frequency Septuagint Vocabulary” (19–22); 120 words occurring with high frequency (more than 100 times) in the LXX but with only moderate frequency (thirty to forty-nine times) in the Greek New Testament; (3) “Common Septuagint Proper Nouns” (23–24), which is a consolidated list of the eighty most frequent names of people and places.

There is much to commend in this slightly hefty but not unwieldy volume. Linguistically speaking, Lanier and Ross’s work leverage the best of both Septuagint and other lexicons while remaining free from the fallacies which plague far too many exegetical works and other language studies (such as the “root fallacy” or “basic meaning fallacy”). While some might quibble with the absence of the renowned 1989 work of Louw and Nida (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*), it is likely that its inclusion would only have made the most marginal of differences, if any.

Typographically, *A Book-by-Book Guide to Septuagint Vocabulary* is quite well done. There is good use of white space with ample margins. The effective use of bold face type, shading, italics, special spacing, and the like is also much appreciated. All accents and letters are clear, and the font size is adequate. One minor thing, however, is that, although this may not be a problem to some, I find it inconvenient that the book does not lie flat open.

To critique, despite the immense benefits this volume offers and the tremendous help that the authors have provided individuals with in their difficult journey of mastering LXX vocabulary, the actual process of memorization remains rather laborious and tedious at times. Would that there was an accompanying website where individuals could pool their resources and present their own mnemonics/memory-aiding devices to assist them. This oversight is somewhat unfortunate.

Such infelicities aside, *A Book-by-Book Guide to Septuagint Vocabulary* is an “ideal resource for the person who want to build up his or her vocabulary through bite-sized frequency lists in order to engage any particular Septuagint book as a close reader” (back cover). Its unique format makes it especially friendly for those looking to self-study, while many educators may also appreciate the volume’s unique book-by-book approach for teaching exegesis courses.

I would certainly recommend this book to intermediate/advanced language students in Bible colleges, Christian university colleges, seminaries, and perhaps, one can hope, the studious pastor. Highly recommended!

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