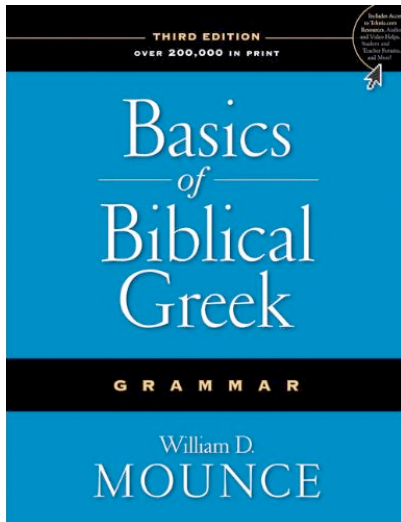


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Mounce, William D.

Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar

3rd edition

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When it comes to learning New Testament Greek, William “Bill” Mounce provides the student with the total package. Besides his *Basics of Biblical Greek* grammar, now in its third edition, he has also given us the third edition of the *Basics of Biblical Greek Workbook*, the set of *Basics of Biblical Greek Vocabulary Cards*, his Teknia website (<http://www.learnbiblicalgreek.com/>), the *Basics of Biblical Greek Vocabulary* audio CD, *A Graded Reader of Biblical Greek*, his own unique *Analytical Greek Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, and the invaluable *The Morphology of Biblical Greek*. And then there are the assorted interlinear Greek/English New Testaments he has edited.

Mounce is the vice president of Educational Development at BibleGateway.com and the president of Biblical Training. He has also been a pastor and a professor of New Testament and director of the Greek program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. *Basics of Biblical Greek* is used in universities and seminaries around the world. With over 200,000 copies of the first two editions in print, it is the most popular introduction to biblical Greek on the market.

Basics of Biblical Greek is unique among introductory Greek grammars in its approach and presentation, especially when it comes to the vocabulary. New vocabulary words are introduced at the end of the chapters instead of the beginning. Some previously learned words are sometimes listed as well. All words occurring fifty or more times in the Greek New Testament are introduced. This accounts for about 80 percent of the total New

Testament word count. Mounce not only lists the frequency of each vocabulary word; he includes figures at the end of each chapter for total number of words learned to date, the total number of word occurrences in the chapter and to date, and what percentage of the total number of words in the Greek New Testament has been learned. A handful of words are also introduced that occur fewer than fifty times, but always with a note about their significance. A lexicon is also provided in the appendix that lists all words appearing ten or more times in the Greek New Testament. All words in the lexicon are keyed to Mounce's *The Morphology of Biblical Greek*. The result of the well-planned method of introducing vocabulary is an introductory Greek grammar with one of the best vocabulary presentations on the market.

There are many other unique features of *Basics of Biblical Greek* that are worth noting. Exegetical insights written by various New Testament scholars demonstrating the significance of the grammar in the chapter are provided at the beginning of the chapters. Chapters begin with overviews and end with summaries. Many chapters have numerous explanatory footnotes and a section on advanced information. Every chapter is divided into numbered sections. Each chapter in which it is relevant contains a discussion of English grammar and comparisons between English and Greek. Mounce states in his preface that he "is not overly concerned with brevity." This approach allows him to discuss concepts in more depth than the typical introductory Greek grammar. The relation between verbal aspect and tense is explained in the introduction to verbs. The middle voice is properly described as expressing self-interest. Mounce's treatment of participles is especially noteworthy if for no other reason than it is spread out over five chapters. The attention to detail without being tedious is evident even in the chapters on the alphabet. Gone are the arcane accent rules that students are generally introduced to as soon as they learn the alphabet. The accent rules are limited to just the basics, and they appear under the advanced information section, as do the capital letters. Instead of the typical overemphasis on accents, a much more beneficial section on syllabification rules is provided. In addition to the aforementioned lexicon, the appendix contains numerous charts, lists, and paradigms, including the principal parts ("tense forms") of all verbs introduced in the vocabularies.

There is a wealth of resources available to supplement the text at Mounce's Teknia website: lectures, quizzes, PowerPoints, overheads, study guides, Greek fonts, teacher and student forums, answer keys, and vocabulary learning software.

The most notable of Mounce's innovations is the introduction of verbs only after nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and prepositions have been learned. This, he says, is because "it is more natural to learn nouns first" and because he "found that excessive switching between nouns and verbs was one of the most confusing aspects to teaching Greek" (xvi).

This means that verbs are not formally introduced until chapter 15 of the book. However, for those teachers who prefer to introduce verbs sooner, Mounce provides a second track to follow that introduces some verbs (the present and imperfect systems of regular and contract verbs) *after* adjectives and *before* third-declension nouns, personal pronouns, demonstratives, and relative pronouns.

Absent from *Basics of Biblical Greek* are translation exercises. Although some chapters have a section on translation procedure, the exercises themselves are in a separate volume, the *Basics of Biblical Greek Workbook* (Zondervan, 2009), which is about half the size of the grammar book. One reason for the workbook's thickness is that it must accommodate the two-track system of verb introduction. Each of the workbook chapters generally begins with a parsing activity, followed by a warm-up using short phrases, translation of ten verses from the New Testament, and then translation of ten additional sentences taken from the Septuagint, apostolic fathers, or "a variety of sources, including my imagination" (xii). This is usually followed by a summary covering new grammar learned inductively in the exercises and verse references to the biblical translation exercises.

Mounce aims to teach Greek using the best of the inductive and deductive approaches, as he explains with regard to his method: "It is deductive in how it initially teaches the material, and inductive in how it fine-tunes the learning process" (x). He utilizes advances in current linguistics, but only "to make learning Greek easier" (xiv). Mounce tries throughout the book to encourage students, showing them "not only what they should learn but why" (xiv). Although much memorization is involved in learning any language, students should like the fact that rote memorization has been kept to a minimum, while teachers should appreciate that nothing essential has been sacrificed to achieve that goal.

Although the second edition (2003) of *Basics of Biblical Greek* is basically a "fine-tuning" of the first (1993), this third edition, even though it follows the same basic format as the previous editions, is noticeably different.

The greatest difference is in the physical size of the book. Instead of being a manageable 6½ x 9½ in size, the book is now a somewhat intimidating 8.5 x 11. The extra width, which appears in the form of wide outside margins, is used for the text only in the appendixes. Elsewhere—when it is used—it is the domain of a cartoon character introduced in this edition called the Professor. Five different incarnations of the Professor are used depending on what feature or helpful tidbit of information he is introducing. The Professor appears not only next to the chapter overviews and summaries (used only from chapter 3 forward, not "every chapter" [xiii]), but also the new section called "Halftime Review," which has been added to *some* of the chapters (6–11, 17–21, 23, 25, 27–28, 30–32). I emphasize *some* because the book's back cover maintains (but only there with the

hyphenated “half-time review”) that these new sections have been added to “every chapter.” More times than not, though, the extra margin space only serves as an overlap area for something that mostly appears within the confines of the text margins. The Professor also introduces a lined section in the margin on a page at the end of most chapters called “Workbook Summary.” This is to “write down what you learned in the Workbook.” This new feature does not appear in chapters 1–5, 15, and 26, even though it is stated on “The Professor” page (xiii) that it will appear “at the end of every chapter.” Although the outside margins are vacant on 145 pages and only partially utilized most of the rest of the time, Mounce does say that he will be adding “more of the Professor between printings” as he discovers “additional things that are fun to learn.” In their defense, the wide margins *are* a good place for students (and reviewers) to take notes.

Another major change in this edition is its use of two colors to make the presentation more attractive. Looking back at the two previous editions, I would say that the color (actually different shades of blue) definitely enhances the presentation.

In addition to the regular chapter overviews, there are new overviews of groups of (somewhat) related chapters: 5–9 (nouns, prepositions, adjectives), 10–14 (third declension, pronouns), 15–20 (verb basics, present and future tenses), 21–25 (imperfect, aorist, and perfect tenses), 26–30 (participles), 31–36 (subjunctive, infinitive, imperative, μ verbs). Some chapters (6, 7, 9, 16, 19, 21, 22, 25, 27) now end with an exegesis section that “expands on the basic grammar of the chapter and enables students to see that grammar makes a difference in exegesis” (xv).

The last chapter, formerly numbered 35, has been split into two chapters to make it easier to learn μ verbs (if such a thing is possible). However, the new last chapter still opens with a reference to the previous chapter in which the student “learned the essentials of μ verbs and how the rules apply to μ verbs with a stem vowel of omicron ($\delta\acute{\iota}\delta\omega\mu\iota$) in the active indicative.” Because of the split, however, the previous chapter now contains no such thing.

The appendixes in the third edition have been expanded, the table of contents for the appendixes (added in the second edition) has been corrected, and the appendixes are better organized into sections. The indication in the lexicon of which chapter in the book a word was introduced in has been restored after being removed from the second edition.

A new edition of any book is always a prime time to correct any errata that appeared in the previous edition(s). I was pleased to see that one minor typo that lingered in the second edition on what is now page 42 has now been corrected. However, other minor errors that still linger from the first and second editions include the reference to exegetical

insights appearing “at the beginning of every chapter” (xvi) when they do not appear in chapters 1–3, 5, and 26, and the reference to a master verb chart appearing “at the end of each chapter on verbs” (136), when no such chart appears in chapters 17, 34, and 36 (formerly 35).

There are also some more substantial errors found in the first two editions or the second edition alone that yet remain in the third. The list of verbs learned thus far at the end of chapter 20, which was added to the second edition, still omits *ajpokrivnomai* and *dei`* and still includes four of the eleven verbs that are actually introduced in that chapter. Also added to chapter 20 in the second edition, and still appearing in the third, is a list of verbs that undergo stem changes “up through the vocabulary in this chapter.” The problem with this list is that *bavllw* is not introduced until chapter 22.

The irregular verbs *ἀποκρίνομαι* and *δεῖ* still lack a note explaining why their future forms have no sigma. Further, the reference in the note for *πίνω* to 20.24, which was rendered incorrect by changes in the second edition, has yet to be changed.

The note at the end of the vocabulary in chapter 17 still says that “of contract verbs occurring fifty times or more in the New Testament,” there are only four alpha contracts. Yet, in addition to the four alpha contract verbs listed, *ζάω* is introduced in chapter 19 and *ὀράω* in chapter 20, making a total of six.

The verb *σπείρω* is still missing from the list in the appendix of the principal parts of verbs (“Tense Forms of Verbs Occurring Fifty Times or More in the New Testament”). But two verbs that occur fewer than fifty times and are not introduced in the book (*κρατέω* and *ὀφείλω*) are still wrongly included. Then there is the discrepancy in the number of verbs in the list. The first edition said there were ninety verbs when there were only eighty-nine. But after the missing *πέμπω* was added in the second edition, the verb count was wrongly increased to ninety-one when there were now only ninety. This discrepancy remains in the third edition. The correct number, which can be obtained by adding *σπείρω* and removing *κρατέω* and *ὀφείλω*, would be eighty-nine, which matches the number of verbs introduced in the vocabularies that occur at least fifty times.

Another numerical discrepancy concerns the total number of vocabulary words introduced in the book. Although the first edition correctly says 319 in both chapter 4 (when the first vocabulary words are introduced) and in the last chapter (when the last vocabulary words are introduced), the second and third editions end up in the last chapter with a total of 320 words. This is because the phrase *εἰ μή*, which was not included in the word count in the first edition, was moved from chapter 11 to 10 in the second edition

and then included in the word count without updating the figure of 319 in chapter 4. The third edition simply repeats this oversight.

The introduction to the vocabulary in chapter 4 informs the student that he or she will be asked “to learn six more words that occur less than fifty times,” yet the list of words occurring fifty or more times in the appendix records only five words that meet this criterion because οὗ is still incorrectly listed as appearing fifty-four times in the New Testament instead of twenty-four times. There also remain some other word-frequency errors that will be discussed below.

A new edition of a book is also a place where new errors can be introduced. This is unfortunately the case in this third edition of *Basics of Biblical Greek*.

The reference to verb forms being “underlined” in the introduction to the list of the principal parts of verbs occurring at least fifty times in the New Testament should now say “highlighted,” as should the similar reference on page 164. They were underlined in the first two editions.

There is a footnote to the discussion of the vocabulary in chapter 4 that reads: “If a vocabulary word does not have its frequency listed after it, that word is not included in the frequency counting.” This statement applies to five words: εἶπεν, ἦν, ἀπεκρίθη, μου, and ἔφη. But in the third edition, εἶπεν, ἦν, and μου now have their frequency listed after them like the regular vocabulary words. Further, although there is a note with εἶπεν that says its frequency is not included in the running totals, ἦν and μου have no such note.

The detailed verb paradigms in the appendix for the indicative, subjunctive, imperative, infinitive, and participle contain section numbers following their centered headings (and in the page footers) that refer the reader to Mounce’s *The Morphology of Biblical Greek*. The problem is that the note to that effect appearing in the first two editions (“The section numbers following the centered headings refer to the relevant sections in *MBG*”) has been removed. Someone exposed to only the third edition of *Basics of Biblical Greek* would have no idea what the numbers refer to. Another thing that has strangely been removed is the reference to Attic reduplication in the index. And speaking of the index, although an entry for “reflexive pronoun” has been added to the third edition, the main page number for reflexive pronouns (111) is not listed.

The word *appendix* is missing from the page footers on the odd pages from 395 to 419, excepting page 415. Conversely, there is a reference on page 172 to a column in 20.16 that does not exist.

The verb ἄρχω in the first and second editions is now listed as the deponent ἄρχομαι (209). It is understandable that the verb φοβέω is listed in all three editions as the deponent φοβέομαι, since it never occurs in the active in the New Testament, yet this is not true of ἄρχω, as Mounce acknowledges in an awkward note: “two times it functions as a non-deponent.”

Beginning in the third edition, the principal parts of verbs that appear in the New Testament are listed underneath all verbs as they are introduced with a note when this first happens in chapter 16 that the author “will explain what the forms mean in later chapters.” The problem is that when a particular stem does not appear in the New Testament, a dash is used as a placeholder—but not explained until three chapters later.

The number of word occurrences in chapter 10 is given as 5,151 when it is actually 4,874. Likewise, the number 2,176 in chapter 12 should be 2,175, and the number 3,571 in chapter 14 should be 3,572. These mistakes naturally render inaccurate the total number of word occurrences to date in these and all subsequent chapters.

The word-frequency counts in the third edition of *Basics of Biblical Greek* are still painfully inconsistent. There are three sources of these counts in the book: the vocabularies, the list of words occurring at least fifty times, and the lexicon. The first edition was plagued by numerous incorrect word frequencies in the lexicon. There were 106 frequency changes in the lexicon between the first and second editions, but only two changes in the vocabulary frequencies (ὅστις and οὗ) and one change in the word list frequencies (ὅστις). Although the frequency of these two words was also changed in the lexicon in the second edition, the new figures were different from those in the vocabulary. There are only ten frequency changes in the lexicon and twelve in the word list between the second and third editions, but twenty-eight changes in the vocabulary frequencies. Not all of these frequency changes in the third edition are correct; for example, the frequency of βλέπω in all three places in the first and second editions has been changed from 133 to 132 and that of δείκνυμι from thirty-three to thirty. No Greek lexicon, concordance, or dictionary in my possession agrees with these new figures. Even worse, there exist numerous frequency inconsistencies between the vocabularies, the word list, and the lexicon in the third edition. There are twenty variations in frequency in between the word list and the lexicon, nineteen variations between the lexicon and the vocabularies, and eighteen variations between the word list and the vocabularies. The words ἐάν, εὐθύς, ὅστις, τίς, and τις are given three different frequency counts. The word οὗ, which has a frequency of fifty-four in the word list but twenty-four in the vocabulary and lexicon, has a note in the vocabulary that says it occurs twenty-seven times.

These errors and shortcomings notwithstanding, Mounce clearly has a superior product. *Basics of Biblical Greek* is innovative, comprehensive, and student-friendly. I see only two areas that could use improvement: the vocabulary in general and the presentation of verbs in particular.

As mentioned previously, the vocabulary has been well planned. However, I would like to point out four areas that need attention. First, there is a tremendous variation in the number of vocabulary words introduced. No words are introduced in chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 15, 26, and 35. The range is a low of two words introduced in chapters 31–33 and a high of twenty-six words in chapter 4. There are only three words introduced in chapters 25 and 33 and five words in chapter 29. This is clearly too uneven a presentation of words.

Second, there are five forms of words introduced as vocabulary words but not included in the frequency count (*ἀπεκρίθη*, *εἶπεν*, *ἔφη*, *ἦν*, and *μου*); however, there are two forms of words that are included (*ἡμεῖς* and *ὕμεῖς*). This is inconsistent.

Third, as mentioned previously, there are six vocabulary words in the book that occur fewer than fifty times in the New Testament. The justification for including one of these (*δείκνυμι*) is “so the paradigms can be complete.” But if this is so, then certainly the words *ἐμαντοῦ* and *σεαυτοῦ* should have been introduced with *ἐαυτοῦ*, just as *ἡμέτερος*, *σός*, and *ὕμέτερος* should have been introduced with *ἐμός*.

Fourth, the fifteen extra vocabulary words presented in chapter 35 include *ἰλαστήριον*, which occurs only two times in the New Testament. It would definitely be more profitable for the student to learn any one of numerous other words than a word that only occurs twice.

Now, regarding deficiencies in the presentation of verbs, five things need to be rectified. The first thing that is apparent is the introduction of verbs in chapter 7 (*εἶπεν*), chapter 8 (*εἰμί*, *ἦν*, and *λέγω*), and chapter 9 (*ἀπεκρίθη*) when the whole plan of the book is to defer the introduction of verbs until *after* all the nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and prepositions have been learned. Perhaps the delay in the introduction of verbs is untenable after all?

Second, Mounce has a unique way of presenting the principal parts of verbs that can be confusing. If a verb occurs in the imperfect tense in the New Testament, the imperfect form is included (in parentheses) with the principal parts in place of the present so “you will always know what the augmented form looks like” (186). However, if a verb does not appear in the imperfect, it only has five principal parts. This means that some verbs have five principal parts while others have six. This is confusing, especially when Mounce says

in the first chapter where verbs are introduced that “at first you should pronounce each verb with each of its six possible personal endings” (136).

Third, although compound verbs are first explained in chapter 20, there are two compound verbs introduced in chapter 18. Compounding this is the introduction of three compound verbs (*ἀποκρίνομαι*, *συνάγω*, and *ἐκβάλλω*) before their simple form.

Fourth, some irregular verbs are introduced too early. Verbs are introduced as vocabulary words in chapters 16–25, 27–29, 32–34, and 36. The irregular verbs *ἀκούω* and *ἔχω* are among the first verbs introduced in chapter 16, the irregular contract verb *καλέω* is included in the initial chapter on contract verbs (ch. 17), *οἶδα* appears in chapter 17 instead of chapter 25 on the perfect tense, the highly irregular verbs *ἔρχομαι* and *συνάγω* are included in chapter 18, and the irregular liquid verbs *ἐκβάλλω* and *ἐγείρω* are introduced in the initial chapter on liquid verbs (ch. 20). However, the perfectly regular verbs *πέμπω* (ch. 29), *ἀπλούω* (ch. 33), and *ὑπάρχω* (ch. 34) do not appear until the later verb chapters.

Fifth, the treatment of liquid verbs in particular has a few problems. Although liquid verbs are not formally introduced until chapter 20, the liquid verb *ἀποκρίνομαι* appears in chapter 18. All of the regular liquid verbs are introduced in chapter 20 except for *σπείρω*, which, for some unknown reason, shows up in chapter 28. Then there is the list of liquid verbs in the appendix. Of the eighteen verbs listed, six are not liquid verbs at all. The last two verbs are out of order. The liquid verb *σπείρω* is omitted as it is in the list of verbs with their principal parts. The word *ἐκβάλλω* has all of its principal parts listed just as it does in the lists in the appendix of second aorist verbs and verbs with their principal parts. This implies that all of its tense stems are used in the New Testament. Yet, the vocabulary and lexicon indicate that the fourth and fifth principal parts of *ἐκβάλλω* do not occur in the New Testament. But in the list in the appendix of words occurring fifty times or more, *ἐκβάλλω* is missing the fourth, fifth, and second principal part. All six of these are actually wrong: the future form *ἐκβαλῶ* does not occur, the form *ἐκβεβλήκει*, a pluperfect active, occurs once in Mark 16:9, and no perfect passive forms (the fifth principal part) occur at all. All of the correct forms are listed in the body of Mounce’s lexicon, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*; however, all six of the principal parts are wrongly listed in the appendix.

The errors in and shortcomings of the third edition of *Basics of Biblical Greek* do not detract from the overall excellent presentation of the book. Most of the errors could be corrected in another printing without any major displacements of the text. At the very least, all of the frequency counts need to be corrected and/or made uniform. Reordering the vocabulary would be more complicated. The changes made to the vocabularies in the

second and third editions were modest: in the second edition, ten vocabulary words were moved and three forms of εἰμί were removed; in the third edition, the only vocabulary changes are the result of the splitting of the last chapter in two, as I have already mentioned. The necessary enhancements to the vocabulary in the third edition would be much more substantial and would have to wait until a new edition.

One reason changes to the vocabulary would be so invasive is because of the numerous changes that would have to be made in the exercises in the companion workbook. This brings up the question of whether the workbook is required. Although it is possible to use the text without the workbook, this would entail a tremendous amount of work for the instructor who would be so brave. I have not checked the workbook for errors, but I did notice an ominous sign on the second page, where the first item listed under “Also by William D. Mounce” should be *Basics of Biblical Greek*, not *Basics of Biblical Greek Workbook*. Because the workbook is so essential, I see one reason unrelated to the content why some might hesitate to use the grammar/workbook combination: the over \$70 cost for the pair. All this being said, anyone not using Mounce’s grammar to teach introductory Greek should certainly be using it to supplement his or her own presentation.