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# READING KOINE GREEK

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AN INTRODUCTION  
AND INTEGRATED WORKBOOK

RODNEY J. DECKER

  
**BakerAcademic**  
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## To my Greek teachers

Robert J. Williams

William E. Arp

†Kenneth I. Brown

W. Edward Glenny



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One other prof deserves mention. Though he was not one of my language teachers, Dr. Richard Engle was one of the chief reasons why I persevered in Greek. He came to the classroom after ten years of pastoral ministry. In his theology and Bible classes, I saw a blend of the biblical languages, theology, and ministry, which convinced me that if I was serious about Scripture, I had to be serious about the biblical languages. Dick’s example guided my attempt at a similar integration for the dozen years I spent in the pastorate and is the vision that I now try to communicate to my students who aspire to pastoral ministry.

My other academic and linguistic debts are in printed form. No one can ever catalog (or even remember) the wide-ranging influence of the books and articles, lectures and sermons, that have shaped their thinking. From that constellation two deserve mention in the context of this book. Moisés Silva’s *God, Language and Scripture* transformed my understanding of and approach to the biblical languages. I read it when it was first published, my last year in the pastorate. My beginning attempts to teach Greek the following fall were quite different from what they would otherwise have been. It is a relatively slender volume, but some “things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise” (Prov. 30:24 NIV). The other is the work of D. A. Carson. Whether with his explicitly linguistic works on exegesis and accents or his deft handling of Scripture in his commentaries, he has modeled a capable and responsible approach to the text. The method of these two scholars is what I have come to describe as *grammatical minimalism*

in contrast to a maximal, “golden nuggets” approach. That is, the most appropriate way to handle the interpretation of an ancient text (or a modern one, for that matter) is to place the least weight on the individual grammatical pieces and the greatest weight on statements in their context.

My students, too many to list, deserve my thanks. I have learned a great deal about Greek from answering the questions of hundreds of students over the years. A special thanks to those students in the last few years who spotted errata, clumsy explanations, and missing pieces as this book took shape for publication. My teaching assistant (TA) and PhD student Mark Mills has been exceptionally helpful in revising, clarifying, and proofing the manuscript. Dan Fabricatore has given valuable help and feedback while teaching my online Greek course with this material for a number of years and was my TA when he was a PhD student. Another of my former doctoral students, Neal Cushman of Northland International University, facilitated the use of this book in manuscript form for the past three years as a pilot project. The feedback that I have received from Bryan Blazosky and his TAs at Northland has helped shape the structure of the book and shown me where other instructors may not understand how or why I have done certain things. Rodney Whitacre, Stephen Carlson, Moisés Silva, Jay Smith, and Bill Combs read all or significant parts of the manuscript at various stages and provided many helpful suggestions and comments. Carl Conrad has been generous with his help over the years as we have corresponded about a great many of the grammatical matters included in this book. Any deficiencies, errors, or peculiarities that remain are certainly not due to the abundance of help that I have received; I accept the responsibility for such matters.

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The map in the introduction is based on an outline map created by Joy A. Miller of Five J's (<http://fivejs.com>) and is used by permission. The "Greek Alphabet Song" in chapter 1 was written by Ben McGrew and is used with his permission; the score was converted to digital form by Alex Morris from the handwritten original. The illustrations in chapter 9 and at the end of chapter 23 were drawn by Levi Schooley and Cynthia Taylor respectively.

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- Figure 15.1  $\text{P}^{21}$  (POxy 1227), Robert C. Horn Papyri Collection, Trexler Library, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania

*Soli Deo gloria*

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# PREFACE

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This text is titled *Reading Koine Greek*, in part to indicate that it covers not just NT Greek but also the wider range of Bible-related Greek, especially the Septuagint (LXX) and to some extent the Pseudepigrapha and the Apostolic Fathers. The Greek of all these texts is very similar. Before you plunge in, either as a student or as a teacher, it is worth taking the time to orient yourself to the task before you and how this book is designed to help you accomplish your goals.

## Why Learn Koine Greek?

Students will encounter the textbook (and Koine Greek) for a variety of reasons. Some will enroll in a Greek class because it is required in their major. Others will take such a class because it fits their schedule—and they might be curious about Greek. Others will be classics majors who are interested in the ancient world; they may have already studied Classical Greek or Latin, or this might be their first exposure to one of the classical languages. Some may be linguistics students or language majors seeking to add another language to their comparative stock. Still others will be religion or ministry students (either undergraduate, graduate, or seminary) who are interested in the Koine corpus covered by this textbook due to their interest in the content of such writings (i.e., primarily the Septuagint and New Testament but perhaps also the Pseudepigrapha or Apostolic Fathers). Some in this group may approach these texts as repositories of ancient religious thought and nothing more. Others will view the NT and LXX as canonical texts containing divine revelation.<sup>1</sup> Any of these interests (and variations of them) may be well served by studying Koine Greek with this textbook.

1. Most (but not all) Christians do not accept the LXX as “canonical Scripture,” but it is an extremely important early translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the first such translation of the entire Hebrew Bible in any language) that all Christians acknowledge. The LXX is also a major form of those Scriptures used by Jesus, the apostles, and the early church.

You deserve to know that I write as a Christian who accepts Scripture as an authoritative text. I teach in a theological seminary where the primary goal is to prepare students for pastoral ministry in churches that acknowledge the authority of Scripture. I have not, however, made this a theology book. It is first and foremost a language textbook. At times you may notice (or think you do!) my theological perspective. Although I would be pleased if all of you shared my perspective, I realize that will not be the case—even other Christians would surely disagree with some of my theological understanding, though I would be surprised if such matters were conspicuous in this book. I will be quite content if this book helps you learn to read a significant body of literature. You will need to come to your own conclusions as to the significance of that literature’s content. In learning Koine Greek, you will be gaining the ability to interact with important texts firsthand. No longer will you be totally dependent on secondhand or thirdhand translations and commentaries. Direct access to such literary works is a crucial ability, whether you seek to understand some of these texts as authoritative divine revelation that you will then proclaim to a congregation, or whether your goal is an accurate understanding of the ancient world. The scholarship essential for either of these goals mandates that you be able to read the relevant primary source materials.

## A Word to Students

Why include the LXX in a book like this? Don’t most introductory textbooks intended to teach Koine Greek focus on only the NT? Yes, they do. There is, however, value in reading a wider corpus in your initial study. There is value in reading the LXX (as well as the Pseudepigrapha and the Apostolic Fathers) in Greek for the content of these other texts, even if your primary interest is in the NT. The broader scope provided by the additional texts helps you understand the thought world in which the NT was written. Likewise, if you read only the NT, you can easily end up with a fragmented view of Koine Greek as a language, since you will have isolated it from the cultural context in which the language was used.

There is a key pedagogical value as well: you are probably not as familiar with these other Koine texts outside the NT and do not have passages from them memorized, as you may for parts of the NT. That means that you have to be able to actually read the text, not just figure out enough to know what the verse is supposed to say. You will discover that the initial examples in each section are almost always from the NT, with material from other texts appearing later. If your teacher decides to use only the NT examples (and there is adequate material to do just that), you can later return to the other examples as a means of extending your abilities.

The workbook sections of this text (all the two-column examples) have been deliberately designed in parallel columns so that you can use a piece of paper to cover the right-hand column where English equivalents are given. Do *not* just read the right-hand column! Study the Greek text carefully in light of the previous discussion. See how much you can figure out from the left-hand column before

removing the paper to reveal the right-hand column. If you make a habit of doing this, you will learn the relevant principles more quickly. The blank space to the right in some sections is not intended as a place to write an English translation (though some teachers may want you to do that). Rather it is where you ought to make notes or jot questions about the meaning of the Greek text. Producing an English translation is not the primary goal; the goal is rather understanding the Greek text and how it communicates meaning. Sections in which I have given a parallel English translation are intended to help you identify the construction or grammatical form involved despite the fact that you may not recognize all the other forms or the vocabulary in the text cited.

The pronunciation of Greek in its various historical stages is debated by scholars. Several proposals have been made. This textbook provides two choices. One is a form of what is called Erasmian pronunciation. This is usually selected for its pedagogical value, not for historical purposes. Some form of Erasmian pronunciation is fairly standard in academic circles. It is *not* what Greek sounded like in the Koine of the first century, but it has the pedagogical advantage of distinguishing vowel sounds, many of which have similar pronunciations in other systems. Some people think Modern Greek pronunciation should be used to teach Greek, but that is anachronistic and certainly not accurate, though it may be closer to Koine than Erasmian. Others have proposed what is probably a fairly accurate reconstruction of first-century Koine. One of the better-known proposals is Randall Buth's "Reconstructed Koine" (for further information on this system, including audio material, see <http://www.biblicallanguagecenter.com>). That would be a better option than the modern system, and your teacher may prefer that you use it. If so, see the alternate pronunciation given in chapter 1 along with whatever supplemental materials your teacher may provide.

For students learning to read Koine Greek for academic or ministry purposes, pronunciation is mostly (but not entirely) a convenience. Personally I use a traditional Erasmian system, freely acknowledging that it is not an accurate

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Danker's *Concise Lexicon (CL)* is a standard reference tool assumed to be used in conjunction with this textbook, though the book can be used with either an unabridged lexicon such as BDAG or with other smaller lexicons. *A lexicon is essential for using this textbook.*<sup>a</sup>

Although a glossary appears as an appendix of this textbook, it is not intended to take the place of a standard lexicon. It lists only assigned vocabulary words, but one major purpose of a lexicon is to enable the user to understand the use of words not so assigned. As such, Danker's *Concise Lexicon* is an ideal choice, since it is more affordable than BDAG (the standard reference work) and also includes actual definitions of Greek words. Most other lexicons give only selected glosses—brief examples of ways in which a Greek word might be translated into English in some contexts—but that is only a partial step toward understanding the meaning of a Greek word in a particular context.

Words from non-NT texts that do not appear in *CL* may be identified from the parallel English text (when given) or from brief notes immediately below each such reference.

The use of a Greek NT or a printed LXX text is not required to use the textbook, since all Greek texts are cited as necessary. Many teachers, however, will require at least a Greek NT at some point in the curriculum. In my own teaching I do so for the second half of the book. Your teacher will tell you what their requirements are and which printed edition is preferred.

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<sup>a</sup>If a current lexicon such as *CL* is not economically feasible, the best lexicon freely available online in pdf form is Abbott-Smith's *Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*. It is old (1936) but serviceable; it does not, however, provide definitions for Greek words, only translation glosses.

representation of exactly what Jesus and Paul sounded like when they spoke Greek. If you were learning to *speak* Greek (either Koine or modern), then pronunciation would obviously be far more important.

## A Word to Teachers

More depends on the teacher than on the textbook when teaching an ancient language. Good teachers can accomplish their purpose with just about any textbook, but a good textbook certainly helps. I think you will find that this one offers some advantages over other choices that are available, but in the end, it will come down to your making the language come alive for your students.<sup>2</sup>

There has been a fair bit of discussion in recent years about how Koine Greek ought to be taught. Since I am stretching some traditional models, let me sketch for you the way it has been done, how some propose that it ought to be done, and where my approach falls among those models. The traditional approach (by which I refer to the typical approaches used in the twentieth century, though it runs back into the nineteenth century and earlier as well) has been very deductive: a set of charts giving grammatical forms to be memorized, some brief explanations of them, a list of vocabulary to memorize, and then a set of exercises. This final section typically consisted of “made up” Greek sentences intended to be simplified examples of what the student knew to that point. As a result, there were many sentences of this sort: “the angels chased the demons down the road”—not exactly the sort of Greek that you will read in real texts such as the NT or LXX. There also were frequently English-to-Greek exercises (of similar syntactical profundity) that resulted in students producing very mechanical Greek quite unlike what any native Greek speaker would have thought to say. When students had mastered such a textbook, they could read the examples given, but they had read little real Greek. That made a Greek NT or a LXX a puzzling experience.

In the second half of the twentieth century, one of the key developments that has impacted both the study and teaching of Greek is the rise of modern linguistics.<sup>3</sup> Several introductory Greek grammars have appropriated some features from this study. The first was Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament*, an insightful text but too complicated for the average student (and the average teacher too).

One outcome of this linguistic study has been a push in some circles for the use of second-language learning techniques, that is, to teach Koine Greek the way modern languages are taught—which has also been part of linguistic study. The goal then becomes oral fluency. There are certainly some advantages of this approach. If Greek could be taught as a spoken language, and if it reached the level of oral comprehension, then there would be greater facility in dealing with

2. For several helpful discussions of matters related to teaching Greek, see Porter and O’Donnell, *Linguist as Pedagogue*.

3. This is far too large a subject for me to summarize here. For a superb introduction to this study and its relevance for biblical studies in both Testaments, see Silva, *God, Language and Scripture*.

written texts as well. A drawback of this approach is that it requires a total-immersion environment to reach a level adequate for a realistic payoff. Those who could afford (both time and money) to learn in such a setting would certainly benefit. If they could then figure out how to maintain that skill level when they return to a normal environment, this could even have long-term benefit. That, of course, is the rub. Since most students learning Greek do so in college, university, or seminary, there are some obvious limitations in terms of environment and curriculum. An oral-fluency approach requires far more instruction hours than is possible in the curricular offerings of most colleges and seminaries. Unless a program is designed to be a major in Koine Greek alone, I do not think it is possible to provide sufficient instruction to reach the level of oral fluency within the limits of an undergraduate major or a seminary MDiv intended for ministry preparation. Were an oral approach attempted within the usual majors where Greek has traditionally been taught, such an approach might produce a level of proficiency seen in a year or two of a modern language in high school or college—with about as much retained use several years later.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of approaches to teaching and learning Greek are those who advocate the use of technology. Now, I have no objection to an appropriate use of technology—I use a fair bit of it in my own teaching.<sup>4</sup> But adapting various technologies is not what some have in mind. Rather they propose that since we have such powerful Bible study software programs available that identify and parse everything in the text, we ought to be teaching students how to use this software and explaining what the various bits of information mean. Once again, I can hardly object to the use of the major Bible study programs. This grammar would have been impossible without extensive use of such software. Students do need to learn to make effective use of such tools. The question, however, is whether the most appropriate goal is to teach software for accessing information about Greek *or* to teach Greek, which may be studied with software tools. I have concluded that the better approach is to teach Greek first. Apart from a working knowledge of the language, there will not be an adequate framework for properly understanding the bits of information provided by software—and no ability to interact with the Greek text apart from the software. There will be a constant temptation toward an unjustified grammatical maximalism, a “golden nuggets” approach to the text that does not reflect sensitivity to how the text as a whole communicates meaning. There is considerable difference between having access to large quantities of data and having knowledge.

As a result, this grammar has more in common with the traditional approach than with other methods. It does, however, attempt to benefit from linguistic study. I have also adopted a more inductive, reading-based approach in which the student is reading real Greek from the very beginning rather than chasing demons down the grammatical road. This is not a purely inductive approach, but it embeds inductive elements in a deductive framework that introduces material progressively. Rather than a separate workbook, this text includes numerous

4. See my essay “Adapting Technology to Teach Koine Greek,” in Porter and O’Donnell, *Linguist as Pedagogue*, 25–42.

examples in each section of each chapter with various degrees of explanation provided in a graduated fashion.<sup>5</sup> Each chapter ends with an extended passage of real Greek text.

These features mean that this book may seem larger than some other introductory texts, since it is in essence two volumes in one: textbook and workbook/reader. You should not feel obligated to discuss in the classroom all the material in every chapter. Chapter 6 is a good example; it is long, but you can safely omit some large sections of it and leave the rest for reference when it is needed later. The abundant examples are intended to provide students with adequate material to explore the language after they leave your classroom. I do not emphasize translation as such (though there will inevitably be some of that), but I try to enable students to understand meaning—and *how* that meaning is communicated grammatically in the text.

Another reason for the somewhat larger size of this grammar is that more intermediate Greek material has been included than is sometimes customary for introductory texts. That material is typically in the notes or in separate sections titled “Advanced Information for Reference”; this can be skipped when teaching at the introductory level. The reason it is provided is simple: I have found that students repeatedly and habitually turn to their first-year grammar in later years when they need help with a perplexity in a text. Though the answer might in many cases be found in the more advanced grammars, having some introduction in the first book for which they reach has its advantages, especially if the question concerns not just a syntactical issue but is related to the forms of the language (often not included in intermediate or advanced texts).

The examples and texts included are drawn primarily from the NT and LXX, though with some scattered examples from other Koine texts. The title, *Reading Koine Greek*, is not intended to suggest that it encompasses all Koine texts. It is rather focused on two of the major Koine corpuses related to the Bible. In the example sections that have a parallel English translation, there will often be words or forms that the student has not yet learned. Many of these are not glossed, either because they can be identified easily enough with a lexicon (e.g., the nominative form of a third-declension word) or because the English parallel makes it obvious what they must be. In other words, the student can usually figure out what it says even if they do not understand why certain forms are spelled the way they are. That is not a problem, and you need not think that you must explain every detail. So long as they can understand the construction in question, that is sufficient. Students will pick up a great deal of Greek without realizing it by reading these examples, so that when they later meet a particular construction it will already seem familiar to them.

5. Some of the examples have been slightly simplified by omitting various constituents of the sentence, whether modifiers, unnecessary phrases, and so on. Some sentence-initial conjunctions have been omitted as well, especially *καί* in narrative text. Punctuation and some accents may vary slightly from published texts as a result of these omissions, most of which have *not* been marked with ellipses. None of these changes are textual judgments; they are strictly pedagogical, to enable students to focus on the elements they know or are learning. Interpreting any of these texts should always be based on full, credible editions of the work in question, read in context.

Vocabulary assignments are included in almost every chapter in fifteen-word groups, a total of 465 words. The selection initially favors NT usage, though LXX frequency is increasingly weighted toward the end of the book. I have not given simply a list of English glosses—a traditional approach that, I think, tends to give students a false confidence of what words “mean.” Instead I have provided definitions along with the glosses. These definitions are not intended to be original lexical contributions or to represent fully a word’s semantic field. (For that, an unabridged lexicon is needed.) I have highlighted the major and most frequent uses based on NT usage, though with an eye on LXX data as well. I have prepared these definitions on the basis of the standard lexicons, particularly those that provide actual definitions: BDAG, Danker’s more recent *CL*, Louw and Nida’s pioneering work in this area (*LN*), and for the LXX, Muraoka’s lexicon (*MLS*).<sup>6</sup> At times I have tried to simplify definitions; other times I have incorporated phraseology that appears in one (and sometimes several) of these lexicons. Occasionally I have used a definition as it stands in one of them. My intention is not that students memorize these definitions (heaven forbid!) but that they read the definitions carefully as they learn the vocabulary.

A note regarding frequency figures: At a number of places in this book, including the vocabulary lists, figures are given for the frequency of particular words, grammatical forms, or constructions as found in the NT or the LXX (and occasionally other Koine literature). These are not intended as exact statistics upon which specific conclusions can be based. Their purpose is rather to give students some idea of how often they will see these phenomena. The figures used (which are sometimes rounded) are based on the tagging in the various text modules in Accordance.<sup>7</sup> Since there are sometimes multiple editions (especially of the NT) available as well as minor changes in later editions of these texts, the numbers may not match exactly what you find by doing a similar search, whether in Accordance or in one of the other Bible programs. The figures given, however, should be sufficiently reliable for their intended purpose.

You will soon discover that this book is written primarily for the student’s benefit. I have in mind students who are not at a given moment seated in your classroom and who do not have a teacher or teaching assistant present. It is in these homework settings that a textbook is most needed. In the classroom a bare-bones book with little explanation may suffice since it will be supplemented by the teacher’s art. The challenge is to provide the help needed when the teacher is

6. From time to time I have also used other lexicons, such as Abbott-Smith, Liddell and Scott, and for the LXX, Lust, Eynikel, and Hauspie (*LEH*) as well as Chamberlain’s recent work *Greek of the Septuagint*.

7. The current version of Accordance, a superb Bible software package from Oak Tree Software, is v. 10.4 (2014). I have used nearly every version almost from the program’s inception; consequently there might be minor discrepancies due to differing versions of the search software or the underlying databases. Such differences are insignificant for pedagogical purposes. Originally I used the GNT module, which was the Accordance implementation of the GRAMCORD tagged NT, the most recent version of which was v. 3.6 (2001). More recently I have used the GNT-T, a tagged NT text based on NA<sup>27</sup> developed by William Mounce and Rex Koivisto (2003; the current version is v. 4.0, 2009), as well as NA27-T (v. 1.0, 2009) and UBS4-T (v. 1.0, 2011), both of which use the same Mounce/Koivisto tagging.

not present to explain or answer questions. This perspective is also true of online courses, where the teacher is one step removed from student access. Though not primarily intended for independent study, the additional explanation may prove useful in that setting as well.

The student focus also accounts for the inclusion of English grammar discussions in many chapters. This is not because Greek is to be understood on the basis of English, but it is to enable students to understand the categories that are employed in describing Greek. Some of these features are nearly identical between the two languages (e.g., grammatical number), but others have significant differences or involve altogether new categories that do not even exist in English (e.g., the middle voice). This enables students to learn by comparing and contrasting the two language systems, relating new material to similar or contrasting elements in their own language.

A word on inclusive language: In areas of English where there has been significant and long-term change in the use of gender language, I have generally used language that reflects contemporary usage. An area where this is more complicated in a first-year grammar is the translation of Greek examples. Where a Greek sentence is best understood as referring to both men and women, I have tried to reflect that in the parallel English translation. But to avoid confusing the beginning student, I have refrained from gender-inclusive translations where it would have required rearranging or rewording the text. In such cases, I have used more formal equivalents and also generic *he* when there were no easy alternatives. This is most noticeable in the early lessons; as the lessons progress, I gradually introduce more alternatives, including singular *they*. But even in later lessons, some examples simply required too much “adjustment” for the translation to be helpful to a first-year student. In my own classes, I discuss the issues involved in gender language fairly extensively with my second-year students, but it is too much to address directly in a primer. You are welcome to depart from the translations I have provided as your own preferences dictate.

Other emphases not commonly found in traditional textbooks include a focus on the aspectual value and function of the Greek verb, the incorporation of current study of the voice system (e.g., the traditional, Latin-based system of dependency is not found here), and lexical semantics. Although there is not complete agreement on some of these issues, there is a general consensus that we now have a more accurate understanding of the language in several key areas. I have indicated my conclusions on such matters but have also attempted to indicate some of the unresolved questions so that teachers can adapt my presentation to fit their own emphases and conclusions. I have not included documentation for many such discussions (the bibliography is voluminous), but occasionally I note a key book or article.

More information on these and related subjects is provided in the Teacher’s Packet that supplements this textbook. That resource also provides numerous other teaching materials that you can adapt for your own use in the classroom. See the textbook website, <http://www.bakeracademic.com/readingkoinegreek>, or contact the publisher for further information about this resource.



# ABBREVIATIONS

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## Symbols

- \* When prefixed to a Greek word/form, it identifies a root form
- ▶ Indicates either a sequence of words in a particular order *or* a Greek word/form derived from another
- ◀ Points to a preceding word modified (i.e., a head word) *or* a sequence of words in a particular order
- ! When following a parenthetical translation gloss, marks an imperative-mood verb (i.e., a command)
- × “times” (indicates how frequently a word or form occurs, e.g., 72×)
- ≠ not, is not the same as

## General and Bibliographic

- adj. adjective
- adv. adverb
- alt. alternate
- app. appendix
- aug. augment
- BDAG Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- ca. *circa*, approximately
- CEB Common English Bible
- cf. *confer*, compare
- chap. chapter
- CL Danker, F. W., with K. Krug. *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- conj. conjunction

ctr.	contrast (as a verb)
c.v.	connecting vowel
dbl.	double
decl.	declension
d.o.	direct object
ed.	editor, edition, edited by
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
Eng.	English (often when a verse reference differs from MT and/or LXX)
ESV	English Standard Version
fig.	figure
f.m.	form marker (also known as tense suffix/morpheme)
gend.	gender
GNT	Good News Translation
GTJ	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
GW	<i>GOD'S WORD</i> Translation
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
interj.	interjection
interrog.	interrogative
i.o.	indirect object
ISV	International Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
LEH	Lust, J., E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i> . Rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003.
LN	Louw, J. P., and E. A. Nida. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains</i> . 2nd ed. 2 vols. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989.
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. S. Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with rev. supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.
LXX	Septuagint or Old Greek (not differentiated in this book)
MBG	Mounce, W. D. <i>The Morphology of Biblical Greek</i> . Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
MHT	Moulton, J. H., W. F. Howard, and N. Turner. <i>A Grammar of New Testament Greek</i> . 4 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908–76.
MLS	Muraoka, T. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i> . Louvain: Peeters, 2009.
M-M	Moulton, J. H., and G. Milligan. <i>Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament</i> . 1930. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.
MT	Masoretic Text (often when a verse reference differs from English and/or LXX)
NA	Nestle, E., B. and K. Aland, et al. <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . 28th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NET	The NET Bible (New English Translation)
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint

NIV	New International Version
NJB	The New Jerusalem Bible
NLT	New Living Translation (2nd ed.)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
orig.	original, originally
p(p).	page(s)
p.e.	personal ending
PG	Patrologia graeca, edited by J.-P. Migne, 162 vols. Paris, 1857–86.
PGM	<i>Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> . Edited by K. Preisendanz. 3 vols. Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1928–41.
prep.	preposition
pron.	pronoun
REB	Revised English Bible
redup.	reduplication
RSV	Revised Standard Version
subst.	substantival, substantive
s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> (“under the word”), refers to a specific entry in a lexicon under the word that follows the abbreviation
UBS	Aland, B., et al. <i>The Greek New Testament</i> . 4th rev. ed. New York: United Bible Societies, 1994.
v(v).	verse(s), version
v.l.	<i>varia lectio</i> (“variant reading,” i.e., a textual variant)
vs.	versus

## Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	Song	Song of Songs/Solomon
Exod.	Exodus	Isa.	Isaiah
Lev.	Leviticus	Jer.	Jeremiah
Num.	Numbers	Lam.	Lamentations
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Ezek.	Ezekiel
Josh.	Joshua	Dan.	Daniel
Judg.	Judges	Hosea	Hosea
Ruth	Ruth	Joel	Joel
1–2 Sam.	1–2 Samuel	Amos	Amos
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kings	Obad.	Obadiah
1–2 Chron.	1–2 Chronicles	Jon.	Jonah
Ezra	Ezra	Mic.	Micah
Neh.	Nehemiah	Nah.	Nahum
Esther	Esther	Hab.	Habakkuk
Job	Job	Zeph.	Zephaniah
Ps(s).	Psalms	Hagg.	Haggai
Prov.	Proverbs	Zech.	Zechariah
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Mal.	Malachi

## New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	1–2 Thess.	1–2 Thessalonians
Mark	Mark	1–2 Tim.	1–2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philem.	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb.	Hebrews
Rom.	Romans	James	James
1–2 Cor.	1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Pet.	1–2 Peter
Gal.	Galatians	1–3 John	1–3 John
Eph.	Ephesians	Jude	Jude
Phil.	Philippians	Rev.	Revelation
Col.	Colossians		

## Old Testament Apocrypha and Septuagint

Bar.	Baruch
1–2 Esd.	1–2 Esdras (2 Esdras = Ezra, Nehemiah)
Jdt.	Judith
1–4 Kgdms.	1–4 Kingdoms (= 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings)
Let. Jer.	Letter of Jeremiah (= Baruch 6)
1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees
Sir.	Sirach
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

## Apostolic Fathers

<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Barnabas</i>
<i>1–2 Clem.</i>	<i>1–2 Clement</i>
<i>Did.</i>	<i>Didache</i>
<i>Herm. Sim.</i>	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude(s)</i>
<i>Ign. Eph.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Ign. Magn.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Magnesians</i>
<i>Ign. Phld.</i>	<i>Ignatius, To the Philadelphians</i>
<i>Trad. Elders</i>	<i>Tradition of the Elders</i>

## Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

<i>Apoc. Sedr.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Sedrach</i>
<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch</i>
<i>Gk. Apoc. Ezra</i>	<i>Greek Apocalypse of Ezra</i>
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>

<i>T. Ab.</i>	<i>Testament of Abraham</i> (rev. B)
<i>T. Ash.</i>	<i>Testament of Asher</i>
<i>T. Benj.</i>	<i>Testament of Benjamin</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>T. Naph.</i>	<i>Testament of Naphtali</i>

## Josephus

<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>
<i>Life</i>	<i>The Life</i>

## Parsing Categories and Abbreviations

Category	Abbreviation	Meaning	Short Form <sup>a</sup>
<b>Person</b>	1st 2nd 3rd	first, second, third	1 2 3
<b>Number</b>	sg. pl.	singular, plural	S P
<b>Tense-Form</b>	aor. pres. impf. pf. plpf. fut. <sup>b</sup>	aorist, present, imperfect, perfect, pluperfect, future	A P I R L F
<b>Voice</b>	act. mid. pass.	active, middle, passive	A M P
<b>Mood</b>	ind. impv. subj. opt. inf. ptc.	indicative, imperative, subjunctive, optative, infinitive, participle	I M S O N P
<b>Gender</b>	masc. fem. neut.	masculine, feminine, neuter	M F N
<b>Case</b>	nom. gen. dat. acc. voc.	nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative	N G D A V

<sup>a</sup> In some charts and reference sections, the short-form abbreviations are used. See the explanation of the short-form parsing system for verbs at the end of chap. 13.

<sup>b</sup> A superscript 1 or 2 before a tense-form means “first” or “second” (e.g., <sup>1</sup>aor. = first aorist; <sup>2</sup>R = second perfect).



# INTRODUCTION

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## THE LANGUAGE OF KOINE GREEK

**1.1.** The language that you will study in this book has one of the longest histories of any known language. We can trace it backward well beyond 2000 BC, and in its various forms and transformations Greek has continued as a language to the modern form spoken in Greece today. The Koine Greek of the NT and the LXX is but one narrow slice of a much larger history. What you will learn in this book will not enable you to read or understand the oldest forms of the language, which used a totally different writing system. Nor will it enable you to communicate with people who speak Modern Greek (even if you were to learn Koine using Modern Greek pronunciation). The following summary, and it is only that, will help you understand how the narrow slice of Koine fits into the larger picture of the Greek language.<sup>1</sup>

### The Pre-Koine History of the Greek Language

**1.2.** Before 2000 BC a people group who came to be called *Hellenes* (οἱ Ἕλλη-νες) came to reside in and around the Aegean. The region in which they settled was designated *Hellas* (ἡ Ἑλλάς), and their language the *Hellenic language* (ἡ Ἑλληνική γλῶσσα). From where they came and exactly when remains somewhat of a mystery. The designation *Greek* comes from the Latin word *Graeci*, which the Romans used to describe these people.

The oldest known written texts in Greek, dating from the thirteenth century BC, use a form of the Greek language that is called *Mycenaean Greek*. They were written, not in the Greek alphabet that we know and use today, but in a script called *Linear B*. This was not even an alphabetic script but used glyphs

1. This summary generally follows Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and Its Speakers*. See also Buck, *Greek Dialects*; and Palmer, *Greek Language*.

representing syllables rather than individual letters—a syllabary rather than an alphabet. An inscription using this form can be seen in figure I.1.



National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Photo courtesy of John S. Lee

Figure I.1. Mycenaean, Linear B Greek Tablet (TA709)

**I.3.** Another ancient form of writing Greek is described as being written in boustrophedon style. In this format the lines of text run alternately from left to right, then right to left. This is the origin of the term *boustrophedon*, which means “as the ox plows the field.” The first part of the word comes from βούς and means “ox”; the second part comes from στρέφειν, which means “to turn.” (After the ox drags the plow the length of the field, he turns and begins a new furrow in the opposite direction.) The oldest such writing known is from the eighth century BC. You can see a sample of this form of writing in figure I.2. The actual artifact is just over three inches square.



Courtesy of the L. H. Jeffery Archive, Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents, Oxford

Figure I.2. Fragmentary Archaic Athenian Inscription, IG I3 1418

**I.4.** Following the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization, the Greek language disappeared into a dark tunnel; though it did not cease to exist, there are scarcely any written remains of the language in this period. When it finally emerged



from the “Greek Dark Ages” (eleventh–ninth centuries BC), we find evidence of a multitude of dialectal variations in existence in the eighth century BC. Although the details remain unclear (and disputed), it appears that during those centuries (and perhaps earlier) a range of Greek dialects spread across the area then known as Greece (the Greek mainland, Thessaly, Macedonia, the Peloponnesus, the Aegean Islands, the western edge of Asia Minor, Crete, and Cyprus). The evidence is sketchy, but as best we can determine, there were two main forms of Greek in use in the eighth century, each with multiple subdivisions, as can be seen in the following table.<sup>2</sup>

West Greek		East Greek	
<i>Peloponnesian Doric</i>	<i>Northwest Greek</i>	<i>Attic-Ionic</i>	<i>Arcado-Cypriot</i>
Doric	Aeolic	Ionic	Arcadian
Megarian	Boeothian	Attic	Cypriot
	Thessalian		

The approximate locations in which these dialects were spoken are shown in figure I.3.



Figure I.3. Dialects of Ancient Greece. Key: bold = dialects; italics = place names

2. There is some disagreement as to these groupings and even the geographical distribution shown in the map (fig. I.3). The data summarized here follows Horrocks, *Greek*, 13–42.

**1.5.** These diverse forms of the language persisted for several centuries on more or less equal footing. It was not until the seventh to fifth centuries BC that some of the dialects began to acquire a “panhellenic” status as a result of the literature written in them. The first and perhaps most important literary works in Greek are the Homeric works the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. We know very little of their author or dates (scholars propose a wide range from the twelfth to the seventh centuries BC), but these epic poems as we know them are composed in an archaic eastern Ionic dialect with an added sprinkling of Aeolic elements for metrical purposes. The Greek epic tradition (which probably began as an oral form) culminated in the Homeric texts in the eighth century. They achieved a literary prestige that provided the foundation for widespread imitation and the beginning of some standardization favoring the Ionic dialect in the seventh century and following.<sup>3</sup>

The sixth and fifth centuries BC represent the flowering of Classical Greek civilization and with it the beginnings of Greek prose literature of a philosophical and scientific nature. Here we meet writers such as Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, and Herodotus, all of whom wrote in Ionic prose. Their achievements established Ionic as the prestige language for prose writing as of the fifth century. Ultimately, however, Attic, a sister dialect to Ionic, became the standard form of Classical Greek. This was due to several factors. Politically, in the fifth century Persia conquered Asia Minor, including Ionia on the western coast, greatly diminishing the influence of the major Ionic-speaking area. Athens was a key force in stopping Persian expansion westward, developing into a major maritime power at this time. Athens was also becoming an intellectual, cultural, and commercial center. Greek rhetoric originated in Athens about this time, producing noted orators such as Thucydides and Isocrates. This was the time of the great philosophers Socrates and Plato. The net result was the rise of Athens and its dialect, Attic, to become the gold standard of Classical Greek, albeit with the adoption of a number of formerly Ionic features. This change brought about the great influence and prestige of Attic Greek, which would last for centuries.<sup>4</sup>

## Koine Greek

**1.6.** Language is always embedded in and affected by history and culture. Nowhere is that more clearly seen than in the development of Koine Greek.

### *Development of Koine*

In the fourth century BC, Macedonia rose to power and came to dominate the Greek mainland under the leadership of Philip II. It is disputed whether the language of Macedonia should be considered a Greek dialect (if so, it was characterized by greater divergence from Attic than any of the other Greek dialects) or was another Indo-European language closely related to Greek. To provide a

3. On these matters see Horrocks, *Greek*, 9–59.

4. Horrocks, *Greek*, 60–78.

basis for political power in Greece, however, Philip's administration adopted Attic as the language of government and education. This was the natural culmination of the growing Hellenization (or perhaps better, Atticization) of Macedonian culture, a process that had begun in the fifth century.<sup>5</sup>

**1.7.** Building on his father's power base in Greece, Alexander III (356–323 BC), best known as Alexander the Great, accomplished a spectacular conquest of the ancient world: Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Persia, and the frontiers of India. In accomplishing this, the young military and political genius spread Greek language and culture over a vast area. The language in use as this triumph began was standard Attic. The process of assimilating many other cultures (as well as large numbers of foreign troops into the ranks of the Greek army) had a deep impact on the language, becoming Koine Greek (κοινή διάλεκτος, “the common dialect”), the lingua franca of the Alexandrian Empire. “For the first time the notion of ‘Greek,’ which hitherto had unified the dialects only as an abstraction, acquired a more or less concrete instantiation in the form of the standard written, and increasingly spoken, Koine.”<sup>6</sup>

The language changed as it spread, absorbing some non-Attic features and being simplified grammatically. Learning this language became imperative for indigenous populations, whether to enable military or civil service in the new regime or simply to do business with their new neighbors and masters. Koine, which was imposed top-down by the Greek rulers in the administrative centers of the empire, served a unifying function “by cementing in place the idea of a common Greek culture based on a common intellectual heritage expressed in a common Greek language.”<sup>7</sup> Even through the political and military maneuvering of the second and first centuries BC, in which Rome emerged as the new world power, having defeated all the various divisions of Alexander's empire, Koine Greek remained the lingua franca despite the formal position of Latin as the language of Rome. Greek language (and to a lesser extent Greek culture) remained the de facto standard for most areas of life under Roman rule for several centuries. The Greek language as spoken by the Jews is sometimes called *Hellenistic Greek*, but this language is no different from Koine, and many scholars use the term for all Greek of the Hellenistic period.

### Characteristics of Koine

**1.8.** Three major characteristics distinguish Koine Greek from Classical Greek.<sup>8</sup> The first is semantic change. Languages change continually; new words are created or borrowed, and old words take on new meaning or disappear altogether. This is evident in Koine. To note only a few examples: In Classical *λαλέω* meant

5. Horrocks, *Greek*, 79–80.

6. Horrocks, *Greek*, 87.

7. Horrocks, *Greek*, 88.

8. The discussion in this section will not be clear to you until you have mastered a good bit of this book, but it is important information for you to have as your study progresses. For now, be content with knowing that there are distinctions between various forms of the language.

“I babble,” but in Koine it becomes the usual verb used to refer to normal speaking. Βάλλω could formerly refer to a somewhat violent throwing, “I hurl.” This meaning is toned down in Koine, in which the word means simply “I throw,” or even “I put” or “I send.” The careful Classical distinction between εἰς and ἐν is giving way in Koine, where εἰς begins to encroach on the semantic territory of ἐν. Likewise with conjunctions, ἵνα, which in Classical always indicated purpose, is broadened in the Koine and used for content, purpose, result, or temporal reference.

**1.9.** Second, the grammar is also simplified in Koine. Although Classical Greek had many conjunctions, Koine uses relatively few, the most common of which is καί. Word formation is simplified. Older μι verbs are replaced with ω forms. Irregular formations of both verbs and nouns are regularized; for example, the second singular of οἶδα was formerly spelled οἶσθα, but in Koine it follows the regular endings and is spelled οἶδας. Attic verbs spelled with γιγ- are simplified to γι- (e.g., γίγνομαι and γιγνώσκω become γίνομαι and γινώσκω). Forms with θη begin to replace the usual aorist middle forms -σαμην and -ομην, serving as dual-voice aorist middle/passive forms. The Attic preference for -ως as the ending for some second-declension masculine nouns shifts to -ος. Some forms either disappear altogether or are used much less frequently. For example, the use of three grammatical numbers (singular, plural, and dual) is simplified to two (singular and plural). Use of the optative and the future participle falls off significantly.

**1.10.** Third, there is an increased explicitness and clarity in Koine, probably a reflection of the lack of intuitive understanding of bilingual, second-language users and the consequent need to spell out matters that native speakers assumed. As a result compound verbs become more common. Pronouns are supplied more frequently as subjects of verbs. Prepositions are used more frequently where formerly case alone was considered adequate for use by native speakers. The dative case in particular occurs less frequently on its own, being supplanted by various prepositional phrases. Direct discourse is now more common than indirect discourse. Redundancy in the language increases—for example, using the equivalents of “the very same” and “each and every.”

## Later Forms of the Greek Language

**1.11.** The later forms of the Greek language will not be considered in any detail here.<sup>9</sup> Following the Koine period is Byzantine Greek, from the fourth century AD to the fall of Byzantium/Constantinople in AD 1453. The Roman Empire divided into East and West during this period (AD 395), with the East retaining Greek as the common language but the West turning increasingly to Latin. It is during this period that by far the largest number of extant NT manuscripts were copied, most of them in Byzantium, using the new minuscule handwriting style that was invented in the ninth century (see chap. 1).

9. Those interested should consult Horrocks, *Greek*, parts 2 and 3, pp. 189–470. A summary of the characteristics of Byzantine Greek is given on pp. 226–27, 272, and in more detail, 284–322.

After 1453 the language is called *Modern Greek*. In the earlier history of Modern Greek there were two dialects: *Katharevousa* (καθαρεύουσα), the official language of government, education, and church; and *Demotic* (δημοτική), the common, spoken language of every day. These reflect an attempt to restore a form of the language based on ancient Attic on the one hand (*Katharevousa*) and the continued developments in the Koine on the other (*Demotic*).<sup>10</sup> In 1976 the Demotic form was legislated as the official language of Greece and is now referred to as *Standard Modern Greek*.<sup>11</sup> An additional change was implemented in 1982, when the previous system of multiple diacritics was abandoned for a simpler, monotonic system. The older, polytonic Greek employed three accents, two breathing marks, and a diaeresis. Standard Modern Greek is now written with only one accent (the *tonos*), an occasional diaeresis, and no breathing marks. To note a few of the differences in Standard Modern Greek when compared with the Koine, there are now only three main cases: nominative, genitive, and accusative; the dative has disappeared except in a few set expressions. The perfect and future tense forms have been dropped, their function being replaced by the use of auxiliary verbs. The optative mood, infinitives, and *μι* verb forms have been eliminated. Only a past participle remains.

## Nature of the Greek of the New Testament

**1.12.** How are the “anomalies” of the Greek found in the NT to be explained, since they differ from Classical Greek at many points? The answer to that question is evident in light of the preceding discussion, but the question was debated prior to the twentieth century. It is worth noting here so that you can read older works with some understanding of their limitations. Formerly, three common explanations were offered. The Hebraists argued that the unusual constructions found in the NT (when compared with Classical Greek) were due to Hebrew influence. The purists insisted that the anomalies were really good, Classical Greek, so the goal was to search for Classical parallels to such constructions (even if such parallels are rare and sometimes forced). The third proposal was Holy Spirit Greek: scholars such as Cremer and Thayer suggested that the Holy Spirit *changed* the language of any people who received a divine revelation so that it would be adequate to communicate divine revelation. Thayer, for example, listed hundreds of unique NT words that were necessary to express the message exactly. Since Thayer’s time, however, almost all these words have been found in earlier Greek literature. His work was prepared before the discovery of a wide range of biblical papyri, so he had no knowledge of

10. The use of a Katharevousa Greek (“corrected” by Attic norms) dates to the mid-nineteenth century and continued until 1976.

11. An extremely contentious, politicized debate throughout the twentieth century culminated in this decision. For the historical, political, cultural, and linguistic background of the controversy, see Horrocks, *Greek*, 438–66.

the vast quantity of material that would be published shortly after his lexicon came off the press.<sup>12</sup>

**I.13.** In the twentieth century it was argued that the NT was written in standard Koine Greek. This was the conclusion of scholars such as Deissmann and Moulton, who initially studied the papyri. Two scholars have more recently suggested qualifications or refinements to the Deissmann-Moulton judgment. Rydbeck compares the NT to the *Fachprosa*, the technical prose writers of the Koine period.<sup>13</sup> He contends that in the first century AD there was an intermediate level of Koine Greek between that of popular Greek and the literary. He appeals to the technical, scientific prose writers of the early imperial era such as Theophrastus and Dioscurides, arguing that their style is neither that of the popular, spoken language of the time nor that of the literary writings. This was the language of the scientist as well as government.

Wallace has argued that the language of the NT should be understood as conversational Greek.<sup>14</sup> That is, Koine Greek has within it a range of expression, ranging from the “high” literary Greek of a writer like Polybius or Plutarch to the speech of illiterate people on the street (see fig. I.4). Between these two extremes is the conversational Greek of educated people—essentially Rydbeck’s *Fachprosa*. There is a full range of options along this spectrum, and the NT writers (as do the LXX translators) take their places in the central area. Some texts such as Luke-Acts, James, and 1 Peter lie toward the right side of the conversational portion of the spectrum. Toward the left end of this span are the books with simpler Greek such as Mark and John. The Pauline writings and Matthew sit squarely in the middle. There are perhaps, as Wallace suggests, three overlapping factors necessary to account for the Greek of the NT. The *vocabulary* is largely shared with the vernacular Greek of the day. The *grammar and syntax*, however, are closer to the literary Koine. Also relevant is the *style*, which in the case of the NT (and LXX even more so due to its nature as a translation) is Semitic.

Vernacular	Conversational	Literary
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Figure I.4. Nature of Koine Greek

12. Even in the twentieth century some similar suggestions were made. It was proposed that the NT was a unique dialect of Koine (Turner and Gehman) or that parts of the NT were translation Greek, either from Aramaic (Torrey, Black) or Hebrew (Segal, Manson). For classic essays by these writers, see the collection by Porter, ed., *Language of the New Testament*.

13. Rydbeck, “On the Question of Linguistic Levels.”

14. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 17–30.

# LESSONS

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## ALPHABET

## GETTING STARTED

**1.1.** This is where it all begins. This chapter will introduce you to the alphabet and to some basic concepts as to how meaning is communicated in Greek. Not all languages are structured in the same way; the structure of Greek is quite different from English.

### Alphabet and Pronunciation

**1.2.** Until you learn the alphabet well, there is not much else that you can do. It is difficult to learn pronunciation from a book, so teachers will supplement this material to help you learn to pronounce the letters and words of the language. Their pronunciation should be followed even if it differs from what is given here, so that you can understand each other.

#### The Greek Alphabet

**1.3.** We will start with the alphabet. There are twenty-four letters, one of which has two forms. Just like English (but not like all languages), the Greek alphabet also has both uppercase and lowercase letters.<sup>1</sup>

α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ/ς τ υ φ χ ψ ω

Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η Θ Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν Ξ Ο Π Ρ Σ Τ Υ Φ Χ Ψ Ω

1. Greek has not always had uppercase and lowercase letters. When the literature of Koine Greek was written, there was only one case. The origin of two distinct cases, *upper* and *lower*, as we call them in English, can be traced to the ninth century AD.

Each of these letters also has a name. In English, an *a* is an *a* is an *a*, and there is not much more we can say about that letter in terms of identifying it.<sup>2</sup> But in Greek, the letter  $\alpha$  has the name *alpha* (ἄλφα). See the table below under “Pronunciation” for the name of each of the Greek letters.

### Writing the Letters

**1.4.** The handwritten forms of Greek letters are shaped slightly different compared with the printed forms above.<sup>3</sup> Follow the style and method for writing each letter as shown in figure 1.1. Begin each letter where the star appears. Some characters have a small arrow to indicate the direction in which you should begin the stroke. Most characters can be drawn with a single stroke, but some require two ( $\epsilon$ ,  $\kappa$ ,  $\lambda$ ,  $\tau$ ,  $\phi$ ,  $\chi$ ,  $\psi$ ) or even three ( $\pi$ ) strokes. Be careful that each lowercase letter is proportioned vertically in relation to the midline. (The uppercase letters are all written “full height.”) Be sure to make the nu ( $\nu$ ) and upsilon ( $\upsilon$ ) distinct. The nu must always have a sharp point at the bottom, and the upsilon must always have a rounded bottom.

There are two forms of the lowercase sigma. When it occurs at the beginning or middle of a word, it is written  $\sigma$ , but when it comes at the end of a word (and only then), it is written  $\varsigma$  and is called a *final sigma*. The  $\sigma$  is a *medial sigma*.

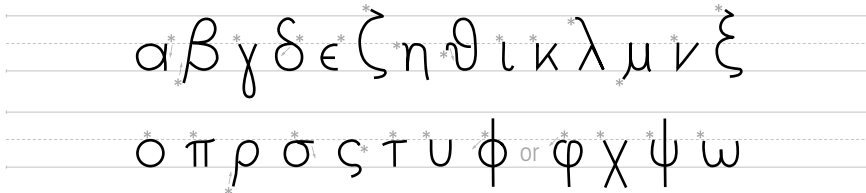


Figure 1.1

**1.5.** Figure 1.2 shows what the author’s handwriting looks like. It is not fancy, but it is legible. It is easy to look at printed characters in a book or on screen and despair of copying them, so this shows you what your own attempts should resemble. You can surely do better, but your goal should be no less. Even if your English handwriting is atrocious, work hard at developing a neat Greek hand. It is much easier to learn Greek when you can read what you have written.

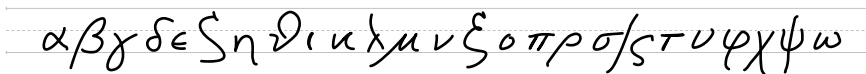


Figure 1.2

2. Technically some English letters also have names (e.g., the letter *j* can be identified as a *jay*, and *y* may be spelled out as *wye*), but these are rarely, if ever, used in common parlance.

3. There are a few variations in some of the letters. Your teacher may write a letter or two somewhat differently from what is shown here. If so, follow that pattern.

### Handwriting Practice

1.6. Use the blank lines below for your initial practice. You can pretend that you are back in kindergarten or first grade.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Recognition

1.7. The following passage from the Greek NT contains every letter of the Greek alphabet. Can you identify all twenty-five forms? (Remember that there are twenty-four letters, but one of them has two forms.)

ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτῶ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος. (1 Pet. 3:19–20)

### Pronunciation

1.8. Here is a pronunciation key for each letter. The sound each letter makes in a word is similar to the italicized English letter(s) in the fourth (or fifth) column.<sup>4</sup>

Lowercase	Name	Uppercase	Pronunciation	Alternate Pronunciation <sup>a</sup>
α	alpha	A	<i>alms</i>	
β	beta	B	<i>book</i>	<i>voice</i>
γ	gamma	Γ	<i>goat</i>	yield (before ι, ε, η)
δ	delta	Δ	<i>dog</i>	<i>this</i>
ε	epsilon	E	<i>epic</i>	
ζ	zeta	Z	<i>adze, kudzu</i>	<i>zoo</i>
η	eta	H	<i>ape</i>	
θ	theta	Θ	<i>theism</i>	
ι	iota	I	<i>igloo (short), ski (long)</i>	<i>ski (always)</i>
κ	kappa	K	<i>kite</i>	
λ	lambda	Λ	<i>lid</i>	
μ	mu	M	<i>mouse</i>	
ν	nu	N	<i>not</i>	
ξ	xi	Ξ	<i>ax</i>	

4. The pronunciation of Greek in its various historical stages is debated by scholars. What you read in this chapter represents one form of what is called Erasmian pronunciation, though an alternate system is also given. See the explanation in the preface.

Lowercase	Name	Uppercase	Pronunciation	Alternate Pronunciation <sup>a</sup>
ο	omicron	Ο	<i>optimum</i>	<i>obey</i>
π	pi	Π	<i>pepper</i>	
ρ	rho	Ρ	<i>red</i>	
σ/ς	sigma	Σ	<i>side</i>	
τ	tau	Τ	<i>top</i>	
υ	upsilon	Υ	<i>moon<sup>b</sup></i>	
φ	phi	Φ	<i>phase</i>	
χ	chi	Χ	<i>loch<sup>c</sup></i>	
ψ	psi	Ψ	<i>cups</i>	
ω	omega	Ω	<i>obey</i>	

<sup>a</sup> The last column in the chart above gives the phonetic values used in “Reconstructed Koine.” Only sounds that differ are listed; all others are the same. See also the chart of the diphthongs below. You should use *only* the phonetic values in column 4 or the ones in column 5 (not both), depending on which system of pronunciation your teacher uses.

<sup>b</sup> The pronunciation of upsilon varies considerably among NT grammars and teachers, so you may be advised to use a different pronunciation. If you know German, the pronunciation of upsilon is often said to sound like *ü* as in *über*.

<sup>c</sup> The letter chi makes a guttural sound pronounced in the back of your throat; it is not the more “crisp” sound of *ch* in *choir*. Follow your teacher’s pronunciation.

Each letter sounds like the first sound in its name.

α sounds like the *a* in *alpha*.

λ sounds like the *l* in *lambda*.

φ sounds like the *ph* in *phi*, etc.

Gamma (γ) sounds like our English *g*, but a double gamma (γγ) sounds like *ng*. There are a few other combinations with γ that do this also (γκ, γξ, γχ), but the double gamma is the most common. For example, ἄγγελος is pronounced *an'-ge-los* (not *ag-ge-los*).

## Vowels

**1.9.** Vowels are the “glue” that hold consonants together, enable pronunciation (it is nearly impossible to pronounce a string of consonants with no vowels), and distinguish similar words. In Greek they also have a morphological function: they serve to join various parts of a word (e.g., a stem and an ending) and to distinguish some forms of a word from other forms.

*Hint:* To help remember the Greek vowels, relate them to English vowels:

English vowels: *a e i o u* (and sometimes *y* and *w*)<sup>5</sup>

Greek vowels: α ε ι ο υ + η and ω

5. English teachers and grammarians do not agree on whether or not to include *w* as a vowel.

The following table shows you which vowels are short and long as well as how the short ones lengthen (Greek vowels have a habit of doing that). Vowels that can be either short or long (depending on the spelling of a particular word or form) are technically pronounced differently in each case, but most people tend to be a bit sloppy in such distinctions. There are rules to determine when one of these is long or short,<sup>6</sup> but this need not concern us right now. You will learn the most significant variations from listening to your teacher pronounce Greek in class.

Short	Long	Either Long or Short
ε	▶ η	α, ι, υ
ο	▶ ω	

## Diphthongs

**1.10.** Diphthongs (sometimes called *digraphs*) are a combination of two vowels that are pronounced as a single sound. The eight diphthongs are as follows in the table below. The pronunciation of each is illustrated by the italicized English letters in the second column. The third column gives one example of a Greek word in which the diphthong occurs.

	Pronunciation	Example	Translation	Alternate Pronunciation <sup>a</sup>
αι	<i>aisle, eye</i>	αἶρω	I lift up	<i>epic</i> (same as ε)
ει	<i>weight, freight</i>	εἶ	if	<i>ski</i> (same as ι)
οι	<i>boil</i>	οἰκία	house	<i>mew</i> (same as υ)
αυ	<i>sauerkraut, how</i>	αὐτός	he	<i>Ave Maria</i> <sup>b</sup>
ου	<i>soup, hoop</i>	οὔδέ	neither	
υι	<i>suite</i>	υἱός	son	
ευ, ηυ	<i>feud</i>	εὐθύς	then	<i>ever</i>
		ηὔξαμεν	we grow	<i>knave</i> <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> See the table under “Pronunciation” above and the note on the “Alternate Pronunciation” column.

<sup>b</sup> Before the letters π, τ, κ, φ, θ, or χ, the diphthong αυ is pronounced like the *af* in *after* when using Restored Koine pronunciation.

<sup>c</sup> Before the letters π, τ, κ, φ, θ, or χ, the diphthong ευ is pronounced *ef* and ηυ becomes *ehf*.

6. As just one example, iota is long “when it ends a word or syllable, or forms a syllable by itself, e.g. ἐλπί-σι, ὄτι, πεδ-ί-ον; the sound of *i* in *pin*, when it is followed by a consonant in the same syllable, e.g. πρίν, κίν-δυνος” (Kühner, *Grammar of the Greek Language*, 17).

## Similar Letters

Be careful not to confuse the Greek letters that look like an unrelated English letter:

eta	η	≠	n
mu	μ	≠	u
nu	ν	≠	v
rho	ρ	≠	p
chi	χ	≠	x
omega	ω	≠	w

Improper diphthongs are also combinations of two vowels, but here the letter iota is written *below* the preceding letter. There are three such combinations:  $\alpha$ ,  $\eta$ , and  $\omega$ . An iota is not always written as a subscript when it follows another vowel. It usually happens when various endings are added to a word, and then only if the preceding vowel is a long vowel. (An iota is the only letter that can be written as a subscript, and it does so only under a long vowel:  $\eta$ ,  $\omega$ , or long  $\alpha$ .) Here is an example:  $\tau\hat{\omega}$  Ἡσαΐα  $\tau\hat{\omega}$  προφήτη. Pronunciation of these improper diphthongs is the same as that of the letters *without* the subscript:  $\alpha$ ,  $\eta$ ,  $\omega$ . The iota subscript distinguishes only the written form of the word, not its oral form.

Diphthongs are almost always long. The only exceptions are  $\omicron\iota$  and  $\alpha\iota$  when they come at the end of a word, in which case they are considered short for purposes of applying the accent rules (see the Advanced Information for Reference section at the end of this chapter).

### Diaeresis

**1.11.** When two adjacent vowels are pronounced as parts of separate syllables (especially if they would normally form a diphthong), they are marked with a diaeresis: two dots written above the second vowel. (*Diaeresis* is from the word διαίρεσις, “division, separation.”) The vowel so marked is almost always an iota, sometimes an upsilon. This is most common in Greek names and other words transliterated from a Semitic language. Almost all words in the LXX with a diaeresis fall into this category—for example, Σεμεΐ (“Shimei”), Κεΐλα (“Keilah”), Αμεσσαΐ (“Amasa”), and Ἰαΐρ (“Jair”). The most common such word is Μωϋσῆς (“Moses”), which occurs 80 times in the NT and more than 700 times in the LXX. Other common forms with a diaeresis include Καϊάφας (“Caiaphas”), Βηθσαΐδά (“Bethsaida”), Ἑβραΐστί (“in the Hebrew/Aramaic language”), and ἀλληλουϊά (“hallelujah”). Other Greek words with a diaeresis that are not the result of transliteration include προΐσθημι, χοϊκός, διῶσχυρίζομαι, διῶλίζω, πραΰς, δηλαΐστός, and ἀΐδιος. (English makes sparing use of the same marker; it can be seen in a word like *naïve*.)

### Breathing Marks

**1.12.** Greek uses one of two diacritic marks above the first vowel (or diphthong) in a word beginning with a vowel to indicate pronunciation. The two diacritic marks are the smooth breathing (ᾀ) and the rough breathing (ᾶ).

### *Diaeresis in Greek Manuscripts*

Sometimes a diaeresis is used in a Greek manuscript that is written *scriptio continua*, that is, without spaces between words, to clarify a word division. The oldest known NT manuscript,  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$ , includes such a mark in John 18:31–32, ΟΥΔΕΝΑΪΝΑΟΛ[ΟΓΟΣ]. The text reads as follows in a printed Testament: οὐδένα· ἵνα ὁ λόγος. The diaeresis marks the conjunction of the vowels alpha and iota as *not* being a diphthong. In this case the two letters are part of two different words—words that are even part of two different verses in our modern texts. A diaeresis was no longer needed for this purpose once Greek orthography developed a minuscule script that used word division, in the ninth century.

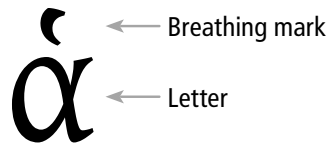


Figure 1.3

You may have noticed that the Greek alphabet does not have any equivalent of our English letter or sound *h*. This is the purpose of the breathing marks: they tell you whether or not there is to be an *h* sound at the front of a word.<sup>7</sup>

The smooth breathing mark means that there is no change in sound. That is, pronounce the vowel as you normally would—for example,  $\acute{\alpha}$  = *ah*. The rough breathing mark adds an *h* sound in front. That is, pronounce the vowel with the *h* sound in front of it:  $\alpha$  = *hab*;  $\epsilon$  = *heb*; etc.). Greek also uses a rough breathing mark (never a smooth) on all words that begin with the letter rho ( $\rho$ ). This is the sound *rh*.<sup>8</sup> When a word begins with a diphthong, the breathing mark is placed over the second letter—for example,  $\alpha\hat{\rho}\mu\alpha$ .

When an iota ( $\iota$ ) occurs at the beginning of a word, it has a *y* sound:  $\text{Ἰησοῦς}$  is pronounced *yay-soos*.<sup>9</sup> This is common in Greek names, especially names that originated as Hebrew or Aramaic words.

## Punctuation

**1.13.** Greek uses the following punctuation marks. Some are the same as English, some are different.

Commas and periods are the same as English:  $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ ,  $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\nu$ .

The Greek semicolon (or colon)<sup>9</sup> is a raised dot:  $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma\cdot$

A question mark looks like our English semicolon:  $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma\cdot$

The last mark in the list is the hardest to keep straight when you are beginning, but it will make an enormous difference in what you understand a text to say. For example, the statement  $\xi\sigma\tau\iota\nu\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  says: “There is a god” (or perhaps, “God is” or “God exists”). But if we change the punctuation to  $\xi\sigma\tau\iota\nu\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma\cdot$ ; then we have: “Is there a god?” (or perhaps, “Does God exist?”).

7. The front of a word is the only place where Greek uses the *h* sound (although in Latin script the letter *h* is used to transliterate  $\phi$  [phi] and  $\theta$  [theta]). Some scholars suggest that the *h* sound was not pronounced in first-century Koine. It is, however, vocalized in academic, Erasmian pronunciation.

8. Breathing marks may also appear in some texts when there is a double rho in the middle of a word. This depends on the editor and is not a common convention in current printed texts or in BDAG.

9. Greek does not distinguish the colon from a semicolon as we do in English. The raised dot (sometimes called a *middle point* or a *mid-dot*) in Greek serves to indicate either function, though it is most commonly the equivalent of an English semicolon.

## Accents

**1.14.** There are three accent marks in ancient Greek.<sup>10</sup>

acute:  $\acute{\alpha}$

grave:  $\grave{\alpha}$

circumflex:  $\hat{\omega}$  or  $\tilde{\omega}$

These accents were not often written at the time when the LXX and the NT were written, though they originated around 200 BC. The accents were developed to indicate not stress (as we use accents in English dictionaries today) but pitch. This reflected the way Greek was pronounced in the Classical period. The acute marked a high, rising pitch, the circumflex a pitch that rose and fell on the same syllable, and the grave a normal, low pitch.<sup>11</sup> Consistent use of accents does not show up in Greek manuscripts until after AD 600. This means that the accents you see in a printed edition of the LXX or NT were not originally present. Although they are later editorial conventions, they are accurate, reliable, and very helpful.

**1.15.** How do you know which accent to use and where to put it? Accent rules are complicated. Entire books have been written on Greek accents.<sup>12</sup> Some teachers expect you to learn a fair bit about these matters. Others take a more pragmatic approach and expect you to know accents only when they differentiate between two words. Unless your teacher tells you otherwise, follow these guidelines.

Know the names of the three accents.

Stress the accented syllable when you pronounce a Greek word.

Remember that a grave accent can never stand at the end of a word unless there is another Greek word immediately following it (without even a punctuation mark

### *The Hazards of Pronunciation*

A story is told of the fourth-century Athenian actor of tragedy Hegelochus, “who in declaiming a line of Euripides ending with  $\gamma\alpha\lambda\acute{\eta}\nu\ \acute{\omicron}\rho\hat{\omega}$  (‘I see a calm’) pronounced a circumflex instead of an acute, and sent the audience into roars of laughter:  $\gamma\alpha\lambda\tilde{\eta}\nu\ \acute{\omicron}\rho\hat{\omega}$  = ‘I see a weasel!’” (MHT 2:52).

### *Poly Who?*

In Modern Greek all three accents have been replaced with a single accent mark, the *tonos* (which looks similar to an acute accent). This is why ancient Greek is described as *polytonic* (that is, it has multiple accents: *poly-*) but Modern Greek is *monotonic* (a single accent: *mono-*). Modern Greek has also dropped diacritical marks such as breathing marks and the diaeresis.

10. The accent named *grave* is pronounced *grāv* (an *ä* sounds like the *a* in father); some pronounce it like the English synonym for a cemetery plot: *grave* (*grāv*). The circumflex accent can be written either as a simple curve ( $\frown$ ) or in the “wiggly” tilde form ( $\sim$ ). Many fonts and published books (including *CL*, *BDAG*, and the NA Greek NT) use the tilde form, but others such as the UBS Greek NT and Rahlfs’s LXX use the curved form. The more usual form in handwritten text is the simpler curved shape.

11. The grave is sometimes described as a falling pitch, but “in fact it indicated a pitch maintained at the normal level, in contrast to (and therefore lower than) the acute or the circumflex” (Carson, *Greek Accents*, 16). For those who can read music, these accents are given in musical notation in MHT 2:53.

12. One of the best is Carson, *Greek Accents*.



intervening). If it does (e.g., when you cite a word out of context), the grave must *always* be changed to an acute accent.

There will be a few instances in which the accent will make a difference in the word, and in those cases I will tell you what you must learn. For Greek students who want to go a bit further in this area, see the Advanced Information for Reference section at the end of this chapter for a brief summary or Carson's book *Greek Accents* for the details.

### Uppercase Letters

**1.16.** What about the uppercase letters? Uppercase letters are used less frequently in printed editions of Greek texts than in English. There are only three situations in which you find an uppercase letter in modern editions of Koine Greek texts:

Proper names are capitalized.

The first letter of a *paragraph* receives a capital letter (but *not* the beginning of every sentence).<sup>13</sup>

The first letter of a direct quote is capitalized. There are no quotation marks in Greek, so the uppercase letter is one of your clues to a quotation.

You will learn the uppercase letters as you go. Most of them are quite obvious and easy to recognize.

αΑ βΒ γΓ δΔ εΕ ζΖ ηΗ θΘ ιΙ κΚ λΛ μΜ νΝ ξΞ  
οΟ πΠ ρΡ σΣ τΤ υΥ φΦ χΧ ψΨ ωΩ

For practice in identifying the uppercase letters, try reading this palindrome one letter at a time.<sup>14</sup>

ΝΙΨΟΝΑΝΟΜΗΜΑΜΗΜΟΝΑΝΟΨΙΝ

13. The NA text also uses a capital for the beginning of a "subparagraph," otherwise indicated by a wide space within the line of text.

14. Cited by Metzger, *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian*, 23. For an explanation of this text, see the sidebar "A Greek Palindrome."

### Acute Accents "Out of Flow"

Not changing a grave accent to an acute accent when "out of flow" (the technical designation for a Greek word without another Greek word immediately following it) is one of the most common mistakes people make with Greek accents, especially when copying a word from a digital text. People who know will think that *you* know what you are doing if you always make this simple change.

For example, if in a research paper you refer to the first word in Mark 1:1, Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ, your statement should read *not*, "The first word in Mark's Gospel is ἀρχή," but, "The first word in Mark's Gospel is ἀρχή." In its original context the word ἀρχή is followed immediately by another Greek word (τοῦ), so the grave accent is correct. But when you cite that word alone, it is followed by not a Greek word but a punctuation mark or an English word.

### A Greek Palindrome

A palindrome is a word or sentence that reads identically forward and backward—for example, "Do geese see God?" The palindrome inscription cited in the text, ΝΙΨΟΝΑΝΟΜΗΜΑΜΗΜΟΝΑΝΟΨΙΝ, is from the Hagia Sophia.<sup>a</sup> Written in modern orthography the palindrome reads, Νίψον ἀνόμημα μὴ μόναν ὄψιν, and means, "Wash your sin, not only your face." The word *palindrome* is itself from a Greek word, παλίνδρομος, a compound of πάλιν, "again," and δραμεῖν, "to run" / δρόμος, "a race, race course."

<sup>a</sup>In Greek, Ἁγία Σοφία is short for Ναός τῆς Ἁγίας τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφίας, "Church of the Holy Wisdom of God." This is an Eastern Orthodox church building in Constantinople (modern Istanbul) that was constructed in the fourth century. For over a thousand years it was the Patriarchal Basilica of Constantinople. It is now a museum.

### Now You Try It

**1.17.** Identify each of the “marks” (letters, accents, breathing marks, etc.) in this portion of the NT (Mark 1:1–3).

<sup>1</sup>Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ. <sup>2</sup>Καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἠσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ, Ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου. <sup>3</sup>φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, Ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ.

### The “Original” New Testament

**1.18.** You might be interested to know that at the time the NT was first written, *all* the letters were “uppercase”—or at least all the same case—and most of them looked similar to forms that later became uppercase letters. These letters are called uncials (or sometimes majuscules). Lowercase letters were not invented until the ninth century. Figure 1.4 is a photo of possibly the oldest known manuscript of any part of the NT. This manuscript is known as  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$  (that is, papyrus manuscript number 52), dated to the first half of the second century AD, perhaps about AD 120. If that date is accurate, then it may be only a quarter century from the time John originally wrote the Gospel in Ephesus—hundreds of miles from where this copy was found in Egypt. The letters look quite different from the way they are written today. Also notice that there is no word division and no punctuation. Those features come much later. The text here is John 18:31–34. The actual manuscript fragment measures about 3.5” × 2.25”. It is presently located in the John Rylands University Library at the University of Manchester.



The John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester

Figure 1.4. Manuscript  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$

By contrast, figure 1.5 shows a much later (fifteenth century AD) manuscript, written in minuscule script, which has both uppercase and lowercase letters. In

this writing style many letters are written together, and numerous ligatures are used. This is manuscript 545 and shows the beginning of Mark's Gospel. You will notice that the title of the Gospel, ἘΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΡΚΟΝ (in modern orthography, Εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Μάρκον) is still written in the older, uncial script.



Photo provided by the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts

Figure 1.5. Manuscript GA 545 from the Special Collections Library, University of Michigan

The text that you see in this textbook and in a printed LXX or Greek NT is the modern form of the Greek alphabet, which was developed after the printing revolution in the fifteenth century.<sup>15</sup> New Testament scholars have long since worked through the questions of the proper word division and punctuation. There are a very few instances in which there is not agreement on such matters and where it does make some difference in what the text says, but those are few and far between. Unless you run across a discussion of such matters in a good commentary, you can safely trust your Greek NT as it is printed without constantly worrying as to whether or not the word division is correct.

For example, in Mark 10:40 the original would have looked something like this:

### ΑΛΛΟΙΣΗΤΟΙΜΑΣΤΑΙ

15. Technically, we use the modern form of the *polytonic* Greek alphabet. Modern Greek (as spoken and written in the country of Greece today) is *monotonic* (see the explanation under “Accents” above), but that is a relatively recent change, dating from the 1960s, when a major change in Greek spelling and orthography was legislated by the Greek government.

This might be read as ἄλλ' οἷς ἡτοίμασται and translated, “but it is for those for whom it is prepared.” Or it could be read as ἄλλοις ἡτοίμασται and translated, “it is prepared for others.”<sup>16</sup> Modern translations go with the first option.

### Sing the Alphabet

**1.19.** Music is another way to practice your developing Greek pronunciation skills. There are a number of Greek alphabet songs, but the one shown in figure 1.6 is very simple, does not require much musical skill, and uses an old, familiar tune.

Benjamin G. McGrew, Jr. Greek Alphabet Song Steve Giegerich

Tune: 10 Little Indians (but a bit slower than usual)

Figure 1.6

## Semantics and Structure

**1.20.** Now that you know the alphabet and are becoming comfortable at pronouncing Greek words, we need to figure out how these basic building blocks can express meaning. The various Greek texts that you want to read and understand (probably the Greek NT and perhaps the LXX) consist of a large number of alphabetic characters grouped into segments of various sizes. This grouping is not random or mathematical, but it is deliberate and meaningful. We do not understand texts merely by recognizing the letters or by knowing the words formed from them. Words are one of the smaller groups of letters that convey information, but these words must be organized into a coherent, structured

16. You will need to read the context to make sense of this example, but the issue is that “the seats beside Jesus, then, are reserved either for certain ones who have already been designated (and these might well be the sons of Zebedee themselves), or for others (excluding the sons of Zebedee)” (Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 277).

whole to communicate meaning. You need to understand the basic structure of language to begin comprehending this meaning.

**1.21.** Language consists of structured information. Although the word is one such structural unit, there are even smaller units that are meaningful. The smallest such units are sometimes called *morphemes* and consist of individual letters or syllables that modify the meaning of an individual word. For example, in English one morpheme is the letter *s* added to the end of some nouns to create plurals. The word *cat* is singular, but *cats* is plural; the difference in meaning is the one-letter morpheme *-s*. Likewise, other structural meaning units are larger than words. A verb, such as *run*, is often accompanied by several related words that compose a verb phrase—for example, *had been running*. But more is still needed to make a meaningful statement. Who or what is running? Is this a reference to a race or hunting or a boat, a fish, a disease, or a harried mother? Without context, there is only potential meaning in this phrase.

He had been running toward the finish line when he stumbled.  
 The hounds had been running the fox the whole evening.  
 The yacht had been running before the wind when the storm hit.  
 The salmon had been running for several days.  
 Her nose had been running all day.  
 She had been running all week and was exhausted.

Each of these statements provides more information that changes our understanding of the verb *run* or the verb phrase *had been running*. This additional information, however, is organized in a structured way. In English it is typical first to indicate who it is that is doing the action, then to tell what they did, and finally to give additional information about the event. An English speaker understands the pattern in which these pieces of information are recorded. If the expected pattern is not followed, communication is either hindered or prevented altogether.

all week running she had been and exhausted was  
 was she all running week exhausted had been and

Both of the examples just given have all the same words, but they do not follow English patterns. The first might sound like someone trying (not very successfully) to imitate Yoda, but the second is total nonsense.

**1.22.** Various languages have different patterns for forming communicative sentences. English is sometimes described as an *analytical language*. Languages of this type depend on the order of words in a sentence and various particles to indicate the relationship of the words in the sentence and thus the intended meaning. The words have a very limited range of changes to their form. Other languages can be called *agglutinative*. In cases such as these, meaning units are juxtaposed in ever-increasing-length words for which there is no limit in length.<sup>17</sup>

17. In Turkish, an agglutinative language, *ev* = house; *evler* = houses; *evleri* = his houses; *evleriden* = from his houses, etc. I am told that in Hawaiian, *Kananinobeakouhomeopuukaimanaalohihi*

By contrast, Greek is an inflected (sometimes called *synthetic*) language, in which meaning is indicated by various morphemes (prefixes and suffixes) added to words to indicate how they are related to other words in the sentence.<sup>18</sup> As a result, what we assume to be “normal” word order in an English sentence can be very different in Greek, since the inflectional endings on the words tell us which word is the subject and which the object, and so forth.

**1.23.** Other than word order, there are additional elements of structure in both English and Greek. One of these relates to the kinds of words that are used. Speaking somewhat broadly, we can say that some words are function words and some are content words. Content words are those that have lexical value (or more likely, values) that can be defined in terms of reference. We can define the lexical value or content of a word like χεῖρ; it is the body part at the end of the arm containing fingers, that is, a hand. But other words do not lend themselves to this sort of referential definition. Instead of defining their content, we can only describe how they function in a sentence. For example, to describe the word ἵνα, we can say that it is a word that normally functions to introduce a subordinate clause indicating purpose, result, content, or explanation. There is no real “content” to such a word; it does not refer to anything. In summary, remember that content words “mean,” function words “do.”

Sentences normally contain both content words and function words that are structured in such a way as to communicate meaning. Although there are some exceptions (e.g., short, one-word sentences such as “Fire!”), we usually expect both content and some indication of function. Take the following sentence as an example:

This book is largely concerned with Hobbits, and from its pages a reader may discover much of their character and a little of their history.<sup>19</sup>

As a few samples, these are content words: *book, Hobbits, pages, reader, discover, character, and history*. Function words include *this, with, and, from, a, and may*. Neither of these sets of words communicates meaning on its own, not even if we put a period after them and enclose them in quotation marks.

“Book Hobbits pages reader discover character history.”  
“This with and from a may.”

In the following chapters you will learn many content words that are part of Koine Greek vocabulary, words such as κύριος, οὐρανός, Ἰησοῦς, πιστεύω, γράφω, and ἀποθνήσκω. There will also be numerous function words, such as καί, γάρ, οὐν, ἐν, ἐνώπιον, ὅ, and εἰ. More important, you will learn how these words are arranged in a structure that communicates meaning.

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*nokeawealamakaokaokalani*, a single word consisting of sixty-three letters, means “The beautiful aroma of my home at Sparkling Diamond Hill is carried to the eyes of heaven.”

18. The addition of various morphemes may seem agglutinative, but inflected languages can add only certain types of prefixes and suffixes and in fixed patterns. There are a limited number of elements that can be added to the base word, and compound words are relatively rare.

19. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*, Prologue, §1, “Concerning Hobbits.”

## Vocabulary

**1.24.** Vocabulary is essential to the beginning stages of learning Greek. There is nothing more frustrating than staring at a written text and not knowing what the words mean. Even if you recognize what part of speech<sup>20</sup> they are, you must have a basic vocabulary even to guess at the meaning of other words. Although context is always the determinative factor in meaning, if you do not know many words, there will be no meaningful context to consider.

In this textbook you will learn 465 words if you master the assigned vocabulary (15 words per chapter). These vocabulary assignments begin in the next chapter. The list of words you will learn in this book includes all the words that occur 44 times or more in the NT, many additional words that occur between 43 and 36 times in the NT and very frequently in the LXX, and a few others that occur fewer than 36 times in the NT but that are frequently used words in the LXX. From a LXX perspective you will learn all the words that occur more than 460 times in the LXX, many that occur more than 200 times, some that occur more than 100 times, and others that occur fewer than 100 times but that are frequent in the NT. This will give you a reasonable base from which to read most NT and LXX texts, though you will still need to consult your lexicon frequently. In your future study you will want to extend your vocabulary abilities further, at least to the words occurring 20 or more times in the NT (and 10 would be better). If you want to read much LXX, perhaps 100+ would be a good goal in that larger corpus.

**1.25.** What a student is typically expected to memorize as a reading aid are the English glosses for these common Greek words, that is, how they might be translated into English in some common contexts. You learn, *λόγος*, “word”; *θεός*, “god”; *καί*, “and.” But what do these words actually *mean*? That is a different question. Although vocabulary cards and textbook lists typically give only a few one-word equivalents (i.e., glosses), these vocabulary words can be defined.

20. *Part of speech* is the traditional term for what is now sometimes called *word class*. Either term includes such categories as noun, verb, adjective, and so on. The vocabulary lists given at the end of each chapter are divided into these groups so that you have an idea how the Greek words you are learning are likely to function in a Greek text.

### *Why Learn Vocabulary?*

“There is almost never a student who can sight-read complicated Greek or Latin after a year of study. Part of the reason for this is vocabulary. Think of how many words you know in English. If you are a typical educated adult native-English speaker, you might know 30,000 or 40,000 words. Furthermore, you know words from all walks of life; you know some technical vocabulary of many fields, from auto mechanics to politics to religion. Of course, there are certain technical fields whose vocabulary is rarely recognized by anyone other than specialists, but most of us know a wide variety of words from many fields. It is very rare for a non-native speaker to gain that kind of breadth of vocabulary in a foreign tongue, ancient or modern. What you are hoping for is not that you would be able to pick up anything in Greek or Latin and read it easily. Instead, you are hoping to learn enough grammar and enough of the vocabulary of your field (whether it is religion, history, medicine, or law) that you can read material in your own field with some facility.”

(Fairbairn, *Understanding Language*, 174–75)

We are accustomed to our English dictionaries providing actual definitions, but Greek-English dictionaries have only recently begun providing similar help. You are not expected to memorize formal definitions for the 465 words in this textbook, but the vocabulary assignments in each chapter and the glossary in the back of the book provide a definition for each word. You should read these carefully, since they enable more accurate understanding of the words you are learning; they also will enable you to distinguish between some words that cannot be differentiated on the basis of an English gloss. If you were to learn both δεξιός and ἐξουσία as “right,” you would not know which one meant “right, as in authority” and which meant “right, as opposed to left.”

The definitions provided are not exhaustive. Many of these words have other, less common uses that are not included. The definitions given are based on and derived from the major lexicons, often simplified to some extent. The purpose of these definitions is to help you think in terms of *meaning* rather than simple English glosses. The lexicons should be consulted for more authoritative discussions. Although this textbook assumes the use of Danker’s *Concise Lexicon (CL)* as a companion volume, other lexicons can be used. The only other standard lexicon that provides definitions is the third edition of Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (BDAG), an essential tool for serious study of the NT.<sup>21</sup>

It is very important that you learn the assigned words well and drill and review them constantly during this course. Begin working on the vocabulary at the same time you begin studying the material for each new chapter; do not wait until you have finished the chapter to tackle the assigned vocabulary words. Your teacher will talk about some ways to learn and review vocabulary. Not everyone learns the same way when it comes to vocabulary, so try several methods to find what works for you. The “tested and tried” system uses small paper flash cards, or you can use the newer digital flash-card systems.

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### Advanced Information for Reference: Greek Accents

**1.26.** To take the next step in learning accents, you first need to know something about syllables in Greek words. The most basic principle is that for every vowel or diphthong, there is one syllable. Single consonants go with the following vowel; double consonants (e.g., γγ) are divided.

The last three syllables of a Greek word are named, starting from the end of the word. The last syllable is called the *ultima*, the second-to-last syllable is the *penult*, and the third is the *antepenult*. Accent rules relate to these named

21. Louw and Nida’s lexicon (LN) is a useful supplement, but it is not a standard lexicon and cannot serve as the only such reference work to be consulted. For LXX study there are more specialized lexicons available (LEH gives only glosses; MLS provides basic definitions).



syllables, and accents can occur only on these three syllables. A syllable is considered long or short if the vowel or diphthong in that syllable is long or short.

The accent on nouns (and related words) is said to be retentive (or persistent) in that it usually stays on the same syllable in which it is found in the lexical form (that is, the form as it is spelled in a lexicon). Verb accent, by contrast, is recessive in that it moves toward the front of the word as far as the general rules of accent allow when the ending changes. (Many infinitives, however, are not recessive.)

Here are the most basic rules of accent.

1. An acute accent can be used on any of the last three syllables of a word.
2. A circumflex accent can occur only on one of the last two syllables (ultima or penult) and only if that syllable is long.
3. A grave accent can occur only on the ultima.
4. If the ultima is long, the accent can occur only on one of the last two syllables.
  - a. If the accent is on the penult, it can only be an acute.
  - b. If the accent is on the ultima, it may be either acute or circumflex.
5. If the ultima is short and the penult is long, the penult must have a circumflex *if* it is accented (it may not be).
6. If there is an acute accent on the ultima and there is another accented Greek word immediately following with no intervening punctuation, the acute always changes to a grave.
7. If a word in a Greek text has a grave on the ultima, that word, if cited out of context with no other Greek text immediately following, or with a punctuation mark immediately following, or if followed by an ellipsis in the citation, must have the grave changed to an acute.

An observant reader will notice that rules 1–5 do not specify which accent must be used or on which syllable. They only indicate what is and is not possible. The actual accent must be determined from the accent on the lexical form as modified by these rules when the ending on the word changes. (You will soon learn that the endings on nouns and verbs and other parts of speech often change to indicate the word’s function in the sentence or to mark particular nuances of meaning.)

The above summary does not include some specific situations in which accents will change. These situations include words with a contraction (especially contract verbs) and words that are classed as enclitics or proclitics. Explanations of some of these situations will be found later in the book.

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### *Accent Trivia*

For those of you who like Greek trivia, here are some terms related to accents. The rest of you can safely ignore these terms—though if you ever encounter one of them, you can find out what they are all about right here. Each is the name for a particular syllable that has a particular accent.

*Oxytone*: ultima syllable with an acute accent

*Paroxytone*: penult with acute

*Proparoxytone*: antepenult with acute

*Perispomenon*: ultima with circumflex

*Properispomenon*: penult with circumflex

*Barytone*: a word with no accent on the ultima

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## Key Things to Know for Chapter 1

**1.27.** Each chapter will conclude with a summary section to enable you to verify that you have mastered the most important material. Some entries will be statements, others questions. The vocabulary words assigned for each chapter, beginning with chapter 2, are assumed; they will not be listed again in the “Key Things to Know” sections.

Greek alphabet: You must be able to recite it orally as well as write it.

Vowels: Do you know the seven letters that are classed as vowels?

Diphthongs: Can you pronounce each one correctly when you find it in a word?

Accents: Unless your teacher tells you otherwise, know the three items listed in §1.15. (Some teachers will want you to learn more about accents.)

Miscellanea: Do you recognize the two breathing marks and the various marks of punctuation?

Pronunciation: It will take a few weeks before you are totally comfortable reading Greek aloud, but by the time you have finished this chapter, you should be able to read clearly and accurately from a printed Greek text and be able to follow along and distinguish the words when you hear someone else read a text (though you will not know what most of them mean yet). You may read slowly at first, but keep practicing. It will come in time.