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Learn to Read New Testament Greek

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

The Greek language has always had a peculiar attraction for both readers and expositors of the New Testament. More than a hundred introductory grammars of New Testament Greek have been produced in English alone, many of them by scholars of the first rank. It would be unusual, therefore, if the present grammar did not contain a great deal that has appeared elsewhere, and I am sure that the call for this book did not arise from the deficiencies of its predecessors. I find, nevertheless, some satisfaction in the knowledge that any subject is promoted, in however small a degree, by the independent treatment of the same material in the light of the most recent research. Accordingly, the aim of the present volume, which was written at the kind invitation of the publishers, has been to meet the need for up-to-date subject matter, a linguistically informed methodology, and an emphasis on contemporary models of language learning. The simplified explanations, basic vocabularies, and abundant exercises are designed to prepare the student for subsequent “practical” courses in exegesis, while the linguistic emphasis lays the groundwork for later courses in grammar. It is my hope that this book will prove to be not altogether unworthy of its predecessors, and that the nature of the lessons will establish it as a useful introduction to Greek linguistics, a field that is uniquely suited to provide new light on the words of Scripture.

The text is divided into 26 lessons, most of which are arranged according to the following pattern: a presentation of the grammatical concepts and forms to be learned, divided into manageable units; a list of essential vocabulary words to be mastered; and exercises based on the material covered in the lesson. The book is suitable for study or review, for individual or group work, as part of a refresher course, or as a handy reference guide. In most classroom settings it can be used for a full year of study by taking up a lesson a week, with ample time for supplementary testing and review.

Several characteristics of the lessons as a whole deserve a few words of explanation. (1) In presenting the grammar proper, every attempt has been made not just to state rules but to give the student an understanding of the nature of the language, especially in such fundamental topics as the significance of verbal aspect and the function of the article. (2) Since

many students are unfamiliar with grammar and particularly with grammatical nomenclature, each topic is introduced by a simple preliminary explanation of terminology with illustrations from the English language. (3) Throughout the text I have adopted the simplest language possible to explain the subject matter, and have included only those linguistic concepts and terms that in my judgment have the clearest application to the teaching of beginning Greek. (4) Since the most inspiring approach to ancient Greek is through original Greek sentences, the lessons contain numerous examples derived from the New Testament itself and as far as possible containing only grammatical forms already introduced. (5) Rote memorization of paradigms has been kept to an absolute minimum, and the student is instead taught how to recognize basic patterns in words and how to interpret these through morphological analysis. (6) As an aid to understanding, various visual devices have been adopted, including the use of bold type, underlining, tables, and graphs. (7) Finally, in presenting the chief features of the language, primary principles have been set forth in large type, while matters of detail have been presented in reduced type (without implying that the topics so presented are of minor importance or can be skipped).

The various inflected and uninflected forms presented here are normal for a beginning grammar. In view of the fact that many students have had no prior exposure to verb inflection, special care has been given to the gradual description of the Greek tenses. The tenses of the active indicative are presented as follows: present and future (Lesson 3), imperfect and aorist (Lesson 7), and perfect and pluperfect (Lesson 10). Subsequent lessons treat the middle and passive voices of the indicative mood, contract and liquid verbs, participles, infinitives, the subjunctive mood, the imperative and optative moods, and finally verbs of the $-\mu\iota$ conjugation. Considerable effort has been made to place paradigms of more or less similar forms side by side for ease of comprehension (as with the present and future active indicative), as well as to have new forms follow related ones in natural sequence (as with contract and liquid verbs). On the other hand, the introduction of the middle and passive voices has been deliberately postponed until after the entire active system has been learned, a sequence that in actual practice has achieved the goal of a clearer understanding of the significance of verbal aspect in New Testament Greek. In order that the learner may have some opportunity to become acquainted with the Greek tenses before facing the challenge of inflection, a preliminary over-

view of the Greek verb system is given in Lesson 2. This is supplemented by a comprehensive review of the indicative mood in Lesson 16.

The vocabularies contain words that are of great enough frequency in the Greek New Testament to justify recommending that these words be learned permanently as soon as encountered. All the words of one type have been grouped together, and an unusually full list of English cognates and derivatives has been provided in order to demonstrate the close relationship between English and Greek and to enable the student to learn the vocabulary as easily and comprehensively as possible. Wherever possible, Greek roots have been added to the word lists. This is a device for easing the burden of vocabulary acquisition, and the instructor who uses this book as a text may wish to require these forms to be learned as part of the regular vocabulary, especially by students who plan to continue their studies of Greek beyond the first year.

The Greek to English exercises in the text are designed to illustrate the new grammatical principles introduced in the lesson as well as those forms and grammatical usages that have been discussed previously. By going over these exercises again and again, the student will gain considerable facility in the workings of the language. For the first part of the book, these sentences have only rarely been taken from the New Testament, though I have tried not to introduce any usages that are unnatural to the New Testament idiom. Beginning with Lesson 18, however, excerpts from the Greek New Testament are used exclusively for the translation exercises. This use of genuine Greek has a twofold aim: to give students an insight into the language and thought of the New Testament writers, and to prepare them for the crowning experience of their studies—reading and understanding the original text of the New Testament. A prime consideration in the inclusion of these excerpts was that the material be interesting per se and not chosen merely because it illustrates forms and syntax.

Because the emphasis throughout this text is on reading Greek rather than on Greek composition, the treatment of Greek accents has been assigned to an appendix. Other omissions include English to Greek exercises, numerals, and such rare forms and constructions as the future participle and infinitive, most of the optative, and $\mu\eta\prime$ used as a conjunction. Thus the reader will find here little that is simply “interesting”; the subjects presented are directly relevant to the interpretation of the Greek New Testament. Hence it is all the more critical that the student learn well

whatever principles are included so as to be able to move as quickly as possible from grammar to exegesis.

This volume is the third and final work in a trilogy of contributions to the study of New Testament Greek. The first volume, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications* (Baker), is designed to show the relevance of the modern science of linguistics for the interpretation of the New Testament. The second volume, *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry: A Practical Guide for Students and Pastors* (Baker), is intended to give the student a comprehensive survey of the chief features of New Testament exegesis in a practical and adaptable form. The present work completes the series by presenting in a simple yet comprehensive manner the elements of New Testament Greek. Since this book is primarily concerned with the rudiments of Greek for purposes of language acquisition, it will not take up detailed discussions of linguistics. The treatment of discourse analysis in Lesson 26, for example, is limited to the elements of discourse and only scratches the surface of this important field of study. Students interested in pursuing such topics should consult the bibliography provided in the Epilogue.

It now remains to acknowledge with warmest gratitude those who have helped me write this grammar and who are largely responsible for anything that may be useful in it. In the first place, my indebtedness to the authors whose works are listed in the Epilogue will be obvious to all, and I hereby record my appreciation for their helpful contributions to the study of New Testament Greek. I am also indebted to those many colleagues and friends who read and criticized the manuscript in syllabus form—Karen Jobes, Joseph Modica, Robert Smith, Stephen Veteto, John Landers, Mark Seifrid, and Chris Church should be mentioned especially—and to my own Students, whose interest provided much encouragement. Special thanks goes to Dr. Ed Childs of Biola University for helping me transcribe the Greek Alphabet Song that appears in Appendix 2. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the faithful support of my colleague and friend David Dockery, formerly of Broadman Press and currently dean of the School of Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Although writing the grammar proved to be a far more daunting task than it appeared when I accepted his invitation, now that it is completed I am grateful to him for having given me the opportunity, as one may hope, of enlarging the readership of the Greek New Testament.

About This Book

At the very least, I am now more able to empathize with the ancient writer of 2 Maccabees 15:37–38:

αὐτόθι τὸν λόγον καταπαύσω. καὶ εἰ μὲν καλῶς εὐθίκτως
τῇ συντάξει, τοῦτο καὶ αὐτος ἤθελον· εἰ δὲ εὐτελῶς καὶ
μετρῖως, τοῦτο ἐφικτὸν ἦν μοι.

“At this point I shall bring my work to an end. If it is found to be well written and aptly composed, that is what I myself desired; but if superficial and mediocre, it was the best I could do.”

David Alan Black

FROM AUTHOR TO READER

Welcome to the study of Greek! The goal of this book is to help you learn to read and understand the Greek New Testament, even if you have never studied a foreign language before. Whether you are trying to write a solid expository sermon, prepare an accurate Sunday School lesson, express proper theology in the lyrics of a song, or translate the New Testament into a foreign language, *New Testament Greek* is a guide without which you are likely to stumble, or even miss the way. The focus throughout this book is on those aspects of grammar where Greek offers its greatest contributions to understanding the New Testament, contributions that are generally not attainable from an English translation.

The principles and methods used in *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* will enable you to make rapid progress in your studies. New information is introduced in small, manageable units, and points of grammar are fully explained and lavishly illustrated. After seventeen lessons you will begin reading selected passages from the Greek New Testament, and by the end of the course you will be able to read much of the New Testament without constant reference to a dictionary. You will also have an understanding of the structure of the Greek language, an ability to use commentaries and other works based on the Greek text, and a growing capacity to plumb the depths of God's revelation for yourself.

In *Learn to Read New Testament Greek*, rote memorization of grammatical forms has been kept to an absolute minimum. Instead, you will learn to recognize recurring patterns in words and how to interpret these through linguistic principles. This will equip you to read even unfamiliar passages from the New Testament with confidence. In addition, by learning the basic word lists, nearly seventy-five percent of the words of the New Testament will be familiar to you, and the rest will be within reach of an intelligent guess.

As you use this text, follow these simple instructions:

1. When you begin a new lesson, read it through quickly. Then study it section by section, pausing at the end of each short section to assimilate its contents. Never begin a new lesson until you are thoroughly familiar with the previous one. If you are a member of a Greek class, ask questions on any point you do not understand. Your teacher will be pleased that you are sufficiently concerned to ask.

2. When you feel you have understood the lesson, begin the exercises. To benefit most from the text, do all of the exercises. Each has been designed to give you extensive practice in using a specific Greek structure. If you are part of a Greek class, be careful not to fall behind in the exercises, since “catching up” is extremely difficult in an elementary course.

3. Never write the English translations of words in your textbook. If you do, you will remember the English and forget the Greek. Instead, do all the exercises on a separate sheet of paper. Then read the exercises again, preferably aloud, until you are able to translate them easily and quickly.

4. Finally, enjoy your studies and take pleasure in your progress. Don't get impatient if your pace seems slow. Learning a foreign language requires a great deal of time and effort. Claims of miracle-methods by which languages can be learned in a few days or weeks are utterly irresponsible and unfounded. On the other hand, if you make proper use of your instruction, you will be surprised how rapidly you progress. By the end of the course you will actually be reading your New Testament in the original Greek!

Note: You will need to purchase as soon as possible an edition of the Greek New Testament. Two editions are widely used: the Nestle-Aland 27th edition (= NA²⁷), and the United Bible Societies 4th (corrected) edition (= UBS⁴). UBS⁴ has the same text as NA²⁷ but a different critical apparatus. It cites fewer variants but gives more detailed evidence for those cited. Both editions are available in a wide variety of bindings. UBS⁴ is also available bound with *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*. Yet another important edition of the Greek New Testament is *The New Testament in the Original Greek, Byzantine-Majority Textform*, compiled and edited by Maurice Robinson and William G. Pierpont (Chilton Book Publishing, 2005), which takes a “majority text” position.

PREFACE TO EXPANDED EDITION

In preparing this edition I have taken into account the friendly and helpful comments of reviewers, colleagues, and students. The most obvious changes occur in the back matter, where I have added a number of helps: a key to the exercises, a summary of noun paradigms, a table of case-number suffixes, a table of person-number suffixes, a summary of prepositions, a list of words differing in accentuation or breathing, and a list of principal parts. It is hoped that these additions will enhance the usefulness of the book as a reference tool. Elsewhere, misprints have been corrected, and a few minor improvements have been made. Otherwise, the basic plan of the book remains the same, the first edition having confirmed a need for this sort of introduction to New Testament Greek.

I wish to acknowledge the helpfulness and encouragement of my students at Talbot School of Theology, Grace Bible Institute, Simon Greenleaf University, Grace Theological Seminary, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, California Graduate School of Theology, and Chong Shin Theological Seminary. I am also indebted to the following colleagues for their wise criticisms and suggestions: Peter Frick of St. Paul's College, Robert Yarbrough of Covenant Theological Seminary, Thomas Lea of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Simon Kistemaker of Reformed Theological Seminary, Thomas Friskey of Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary, Michael Martin of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Darrell Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary, William Klein and Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary, John Harvey of Columbia Biblical Seminary, William Warren of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Glenn Koch of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Robert Sloan of Baylor University, Robert Smith of Point Loma Nazarene College, and Carey Newman of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to Trent Butler, John Landers, and Steve Bond of Broadman Press for their support of this project since its inception.

Preface to Expanded Edition

It is, perhaps, inevitable that some errors or omissions will still have escaped notice, and I would be grateful if users of this grammar would bring these to my attention.

David Alan Black

THE LETTERS AND SOUNDS OF GREEK

The first step in studying New Testament Greek is learning how to read and write the Greek alphabet. Learning the order and sounds of the Greek letters will help break down the strangeness between you and Greek, enable you to find a word in a Greek-English dictionary, and reveal the relationship between Greek and English words.

1. The Language of the New Testament

You are embarking on the study of one of the most significant languages in the world. Its importance lies not so much in its wealth of forms as in the fact that God used it as an instrument to communicate his Word (just as he had earlier used Hebrew and Aramaic). History tells us that the ancient Hellenes first settled in the Greek peninsula in the thirteenth century B.C. Their language consisted of several dialects, one of which—the Attic spoken in Athens—became the most prominent. It was largely Attic Greek that was adopted as the official language of the Greek empire after the conquests of Alexander the Great, which accounts for its use in the New Testament. This new world language has been called the “Koine,” or “common” Greek, since it was the common language of everyday commerce and communication. In the city of Rome itself, Greek was used as much as Latin, and when Paul wrote his letter to the Roman Christians, he wrote it in Greek. This, then, is the language of the New Testament, a language belonging to the living stream of the historical development of Greek from the ancient Hellenes to the modern Athenians, a language spoken by common and cultured people alike, a language uniquely suited to the propagation of the gospel of Christ when it began to be proclaimed among the nations of the world.

2. The Greek Alphabet

The first step in studying Greek is learning its letters and sounds. This is not as hard as you might think. All the sounds are easy to make, and Greek almost always follows the phonetic values of its letters. We should mention that the pronunciation you are learning is something of a compromise between how the sounds were probably produced in ancient times and how they are spelled. This scheme of pronunciation has the practical advantage of assigning one sound to each letter, so that if you can remember the pronunciation of a word, you will generally be able to remember its spelling.

Below you will find the Greek letters with their closest English equivalents. When you have studied them carefully, cover the fourth and fifth columns and try to pronounce each letter.

Name	Upper Case	Lower Case	English	Pronunciation
Alpha	A	α	a	father (long)
Beta	B	β	b	ball
Gamma	Γ	γ	g	gift
Delta	Δ	δ	d	dog
Epsilon	E	ε	e	bet
Zeta	Z	ζ	z	adz
Eta	H	η	ē	obey
Theta	Θ	θ	th	thin
Iota	I	ι	i	machine (long) pit (short)
Kappa	K	κ	k	kin
Lambda	Λ	λ	l	lamb
Mu	M	μ	m	man
Nu	N	ν	n	name
Xi	Ξ	ξ	x	wax
Omicron	O	ο	o	omelet

Name	Upper Case	Lower Case	English	Pronunciation
Pi	Π	π	p	pin
Rho	Ρ	ρ	r	rat
Sigma	Σ	σ, ς	s	sing
Tau	Τ	τ	t	tale
Upsilon	Υ	υ	u	lute (long) put (short)
Phi	Φ	φ	ph	physics
Chi	Χ	χ	ch	chemist
Psi	Ψ	ψ	ps	taps
Omega	Ω	ω	ō	gold

i. Note that gamma is pronounced as a hard *g* (as in *gift*), never as a soft *g* (as in *gem*). However, before *κ*, *χ*, or another *γ*, *γ* is pronounced as an *n*. Thus ἄγγελος (“angel”) is pronounced *angelos*, not *aggelos*.

ii. Did you notice that sigma has two forms? It is written ς at the end of a word, and σ in all other positions (cf. ἀπόστολος “apostle”). The “ς” form is called final sigma.

iii. In ancient Greek, the letter χ was probably pronounced like the *ch* in Scottish *loch* or German *Bach*. Since this sound does not occur in English, the *ch* sound in *chemist* may be used instead (i.e., approximately the same sound as for *k*).

3. Greek Phonology and Morphology

The Greek sounds represented by the letters of the alphabet are called *phonemes* (from φωνή, “sound”). Roughly speaking, phonemes are the smallest elements that contrast with each other in the phonological system of a language. In English, the words *pig* and *big* are distinguished from each other by the phonemes *p* and *b*. Likewise, *κ* and *χ* are different phonemes because they affect meaning: ἐκεῖ means “there,” and ἔχει means “he has.” Similarly, in Romans.5:1 one phoneme makes the difference between “*we have* [ἔχομεν] peace with God” and “*let us have* [ἔχωμεν] peace with God.” Phonemes, then, are sounds that speakers of a language know to be meaningful parts of that language.

Phonemes generally combine to form what linguists call *morphemes* (from μορφή, “form”). Morphemes may be defined as the minimal units of

speech that convey a specific meaning. Examples of English morphemes include *-s* (occurring as a plural ending in *dogs, cats, houses*), *-ed* (occurring as a past tense ending in *loved, hoped, wanted*), and *-ly* (occurring as an adverbial ending in *badly, nicely, hardly*). Just as a knowledge of English morphemes enables us to understand the difference between *friendship, friendliness*, and *unfriendly*, so an understanding of Greek morphology will aid us in the knowledge of Greek word meanings. *You are not expected to master Greek phonology and morphology in this course.* Still, the benefits of implementing a linguistic approach, even at an introductory level, far outweigh the disadvantages of ignoring it altogether.

4. The Greek Vowels

As in English, the Greek letters may be divided into vowels and consonants. Vowels are produced by exhaling air from the lungs. Greek has seven vowels: α , ϵ , ι , \omicron , υ , η , ω . Two of these are always short (ϵ , \omicron); two are always long (η , ω); and three may be either short or long (α , ι , υ). Hence the tone value of α , ι , and υ can be learned only by observing specific Greek words.

Sometimes two different vowel sounds are combined in one syllable. This combination is called a *diphthong* (from $\delta\acute{\iota}\phi\theta\omicron\gamma\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, “having two sounds”). Greek has seven common or “proper” diphthongs, four of which end in ι , and three of which end in υ :

Diphthong	Pronunciation	Example	Definition
$\alpha\iota$	aisle	$\alpha\acute{\iota}\omega\nu$	“age” (cf. <i>aeon</i>)
$\epsilon\iota$	eight	$\epsilon\acute{\iota}\rho\eta\nu\eta$	“peace” (cf. <i>Irene</i>)
$\omicron\iota$	oil	$\omicron\acute{\iota}\kappa\omicron\varsigma$	“house” (cf. <i>economy</i>)
$\upsilon\iota$	suite	$\upsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$	“son”
$\alpha\upsilon$	Faust	$\alpha\acute{\upsilon}\tau\omicron\varsigma$	“self” (cf. <i>automobile</i>)
$\epsilon\upsilon$	feud	$\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\lambda\omicron\gamma\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma$	“blessed” (cf. <i>eulogy</i>)
$\omicron\upsilon$	soup	$\omicron\acute{\upsilon}\rho\alpha\nu\omicron\varsigma$	“heaven” (cf. <i>Uranus</i>)

In some instances, the long vowels α , η , ω are combined with an ι . In this case the ι is written *beneath* the vowel (α , η , ω) and is called an *iota-subscript*. Since the ι is not *pronounced*, these combinations are often

referred to as “improper diphthongs.” Several words containing an iota-subscript are found in the opening verses of the Gospel of John, which are used in the exercises to this lesson (§ 11): ἀρχῆ, αὐτῶ, τῆ, σκοτία.

5. The Greek Consonants

Consonants are produced by interfering with the flow of air from the lungs. The Greek consonants can be classified according to (1) *how* one interferes with the flow (called the *manner of articulation*), (2) *where* one interferes with the flow (called the *place of articulation*), and (3) whether the vocal cords vibrate in producing the sound.

Manner of articulation involves either the *complete* interruption of the flow of air or the *incomplete* restriction of the flow. This distinction provides the basis for classifying consonants into *stops* (sometimes called *mutés*, as in β and δ) and *continuants* (sometimes called *fricatives*, as in φ and θ).

Place of articulation involves three basic possibilities: at the lips (producing *bilabials*, as in μ and π), at the teeth or just behind them (producing *dentals* or *alveolars*, as in δ and τ), or at the velum or palate (producing *velars* or *palatals*, as in γ and κ).

Finally, the vibration or lack of vibration of the vocal cords distinguishes *voiced* consonants from *unvoiced* consonants (note the difference between β and π).

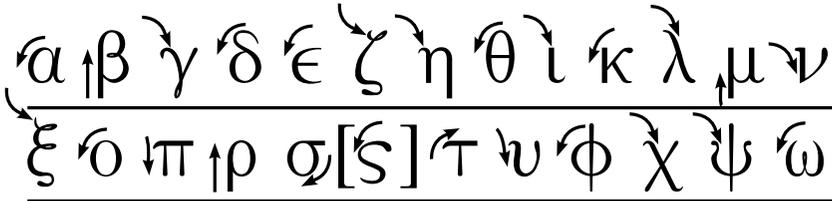
Greek also contains four *sibilants*, or “s” sounds (ζ, ξ, σ, and ψ). Three of these are *double letters*, or combinations of a consonant with an “s” sound (ζ [dz], [ks], ξ [ks], and ψ [ps]). In addition, Greek has three *aspirates*, or letters combined with an “h” (θ [th], φ [ph], and χ [ch]), and four *nasals*, so called because the breath passes through the nose (λ, μ, ν, and ρ). Acquaintance with these terms will simplify the introduction of certain concepts later in this text.

6. The Use and Formation of the Greek Letters

The Greek upper case letters are the oldest forms of the Greek letters. They are found in ancient inscriptions and are used in modern printed books to begin proper nouns, paragraphs, and direct speech (where English would use quotation marks). Greek sentences do not, however, begin with capital letters. The lower case letters are therefore of greater importance than the capitals and should be mastered first.

The following diagram shows you how to form the Greek lower case letters. The arrows indicate the easiest place to begin when writing. No-

tice that many of the letters can be made without lifting pen from paper (e.g., β and ρ are formed with a single stroke, beginning at the bottom). Be very careful to distinguish the following pairs of letters: φ and ψ, ν and υ, ν and γ, and ο and σ.



7. Breathing Marks

Every Greek word beginning with a vowel or a diphthong has a symbol over it called a *breathing mark*. The *rough breathing mark* (^h) indicates that the word is to be pronounced with an initial “h” sound. The *smooth breathing mark* (^ˆ) indicates that the word lacks this initial “h” sound. Thus ἐν (“one”) is pronounced *hen*, and ἐν (“in”) is pronounced *en*. The breathing mark is always placed over the *second* vowel of a diphthong (e.g., εὐλογητός, “blessed”). Initial ρ and υ always have the rough breathing mark, as in ῥῆμα (“word”) and ὑποκριτής (“hypocrite”). When used with ^h, however, the rough breathing is generally not pronounced (cf. “rhetoric,” “rhododendron”). When the initial vowel is a capital letter, the breathing mark is placed to the left of it, as in Ἄβραάμ (“Abraham”) and Ἑβραῖος (“Hebrew”).

8. Greek Punctuation

Although punctuation marks were not used in ancient Greek, they are found today in all printed editions of the Greek New Testament. Greek has four marks of punctuation. The *comma* (,) and the *period* (.) correspond in both form and function to the English comma and period. The *colon* (:) and the *question mark* (;) correspond in function to the English colon and question mark but differ in form.

Since there is no punctuation in the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament, the punctuation of modern printed editions is often a matter of interpretation (cf. John 1:3b–4). Moreover, because Greek has no quotation marks, in several New Testament passages it remains uncertain

where direct speech begins and ends (cf. Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus in John 3). These and other problems of punctuation are best treated when encountered in the New Testament.

9. Greek Diacritical Marks

Modern printed editions of the Greek New Testament employ three different diacritical marks. The *apostrophe* (') indicates the omission of a final short vowel before a word that begins with a vowel or diphthong, as in δι' αὐτοῦ (“through him”) for διὰ αὐτοῦ (John 1:3). This process is called *elision* (from Lat. *elido*, “I leave out”). The *diaeresis* (¨) occurs where two vowels that normally combine to form a diphthong are to be pronounced separately, as in Ἰσαΐας (the Greek form of “Isaiah”; John 1:23). Notice that this word consists of four syllables (Ἰ-σα-ι-ας), not three (Ἰ-σαι-ας). Finally, the *coronis* (´) indicates the combination of two words with the loss of an intermediate letter or letters. This process of merging two words is known as *crasis* (from κρᾶσις, “a mingling”) and is found in such English forms as “I’m,” “you’re,” and “don’t.” In the New Testament, crasis occurs in a number of specific combinations, the most common of which include κάγω (for καὶ ἐγώ, “and I”; John 1:31) and κάκεῖνος; (for καὶ ἐκεῖνος, “and he”; John 6:57).

10. The Greek Accents

Printed editions of the Greek New Testament use three accent marks: the *acute* (´), the *grave* (`), and the *circumflex* (^). The importance of accents for the study of Greek is twofold: (1) accents occasionally distinguish between words that are otherwise identical (e.g., εἰ means “if,” but εἶ means “you are”); and (2) accents serve to indicate which syllable in a Greek word is to be stressed in pronunciation. Otherwise it is possible to read New Testament Greek without knowing any more about accents. In subsequent lessons, accents will be treated where relevant. For those with a special interest in learning the rules of Greek accentuation, Appendix I provides a detailed summary.

The Greek accents were invented about 200 B.C. as an aid to the correct pronunciation of Greek among foreigners. The accents originally indicated pitch rather than stress. The acute marked a rise in the voice, and the circumflex marked a rise followed by a fall. The grave accent was not usually given. Accents were not regularly used in texts until after the fifth century A.D.

11. Exercises

a. Study the pronunciation of the Greek letters and diphthongs, and practice saying each sound aloud. It is exceedingly important to be able to read the characters accurately and quickly before proceeding further. An incorrect pronunciation will hamper the learning process and easily mislead you into a confusion about words and forms. For the Greek alphabet set to a traditional tune, see Appendix 2: The Greek Alphabet Song.

b. Pronounce the following Greek words. Notice their similarity to English words.

ἀπόστολος	<i>apostle</i>
σῶμα	<i>body</i> (cf. somatic)
φωνή	<i>sound</i> (cf. phone)
καρδία	<i>heart</i> (cf. cardiac)
φόβος	<i>fear</i> (cf. phobia)
γένος	<i>race</i> (cf. genus)
Φίλιππος	<i>Philip</i>
ἔξοδος	<i>departure</i> (cf. Exodus)
ζωή	<i>life</i> (cf. zoology)
Πέτρος	<i>Peter</i>
θεός	<i>God</i> (cf. theology)
γυνή	<i>woman</i> (cf. gynecology)
πατήρ	<i>father</i> (cf. paternal)
ψυχή	<i>soul</i> (cf. psychology)
πόλις	<i>city</i> (cf. political)
Χριστός	<i>Christ</i>

c. Practice writing the Greek lower case letters in proper order, aiming at simplicity and ease of recognition. It is helpful to pronounce the *name* of each letter while writing, since the name contains the sound of the letter.

d. The following passage from John 1:1–5 contains all but three letters of the Greek alphabet (only μ, ξ, and ψ are absent). Read these verses aloud with proper accentuation, striving for fluency in pronunciation. Remember that there are no silent letters in Greek except for the iota-subscript.

The Letters and Sounds of Greek

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος. οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

e. It is important to know something of the history and development of the Greek language. Try to read the article “Language of the New Testament” in a reference book or Bible encyclopedia. For some suggestions, see the bibliography given in the Epilogue (§ 181).