

**ZONDERVAN™**

*Greek for the Rest of Us*

Copyright © 2003 by William D. Mounce

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, *Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530*

---

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Mounce, William D.

Greek for the rest of us : mastering Bible study without mastering biblical languages /  
William D. Mounce.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-310-23485-9

1. Greek language, Biblical--Grammar. 2. Bible. N.T.--Language, style. I. Title.

PA817.M655 2003

487'.4—dc21

2003002245

---

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed services, without the prior written permission of the author.

Macintosh is a registered trademark of Apple Computer, Inc.

Windows is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation.

Made with Macromedia is a trademark of Macromedia, Inc.

Adobe® and Acrobat® are trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated.

Typeset by Teknia Software

*Printed in the United States of America*

---

03 04 05 06 07 08 09 /❖ DC/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Table of Contents

Preface .....	ix
Abbreviations .....	xii
What Would It Look Like If You Knew a Little Greek? .....	xiii
<b>Week 1: Getting Acquainted with Greek .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1 The Greek Language .....	2
2 The Greek Alphabet .....	4
3 Pronunciation .....	13
4 What Are Translations? .....	19
<b>Week 2: The Building Blocks of Language .....</b>	<b>43</b>
5 English Grammar: Nouns .....	44
6 English Grammar: Verbs .....	48
7 English Grammar: Clauses and Phrases .....	51
8 Phrasing—An Introduction to Our Bible Study Method .....	55
<b>Week 3: How Do We Modify Ideas? .....</b>	<b>81</b>
9 Conjunctions .....	82
10 Adjectives .....	92
11 Phrases .....	97
12 Clauses .....	103
13 Fine-Tuning Phrasing .....	109
<b>Week 4: How Do We Describe Action? .....</b>	<b>143</b>
14 Greek Grammar: Verbs .....	144
15 Present Indicative .....	151
16 Future Indicative .....	155
17 Two Past Tenses (Imperfect and Aorist) .....	157
18 Perfect Indicative .....	162
19 How to Use the Paper and Electronic Tools .....	165
<b>Week 5: What Else Is in a Verb? .....</b>	<b>177</b>
20 Participle .....	178
21 Subjunctive .....	186
22 Infinitive .....	190
23 Imperative .....	194
24 What Are Word Studies? .....	198

<b>Week 6: How Do We Describe Things?</b> .....	<b>221</b>
25 Nominative and Vocative .....	222
26 Accusative .....	226
27 Dative .....	228
28 Genitive .....	232
29 How to Read a Commentary .....	237
30 The History of the Bible and Textual Criticism .....	251
<b>Appendix</b>	
Hebrew for the Rest of Us .....	269

## W E E K 1

# Getting Acquainted with Greek



In this first week we are going to learn the Greek alphabet. It's fun, and we will need to be able to pronounce Greek if we are going to accomplish our goals. I will also talk to you about the nature of languages and translations. If you have a mistaken view of the relationship between language and the meaning conveyed by words and phrases, studying your Bible will be severely hampered. But don't worry; the discussion is more practical than it is theoretical. So hold on to your hat, and let's go.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Greek Language



The Greek language has a long and rich history stretching all the way from the thirteenth century B.C. to the present. The earliest form of the language is called “Linear B” (13th century B.C.).

The form of Greek used by writers from Homer (8th century B.C.) through Plato (4th century B.C.) is called “Classical Greek.” It was a marvelous form of the language, capable of exact expression and subtle nuances. Its alphabet was derived from the Phoenicians. Classical Greek existed in many dialects of which three were primary: Doric, Aeolic, and Ionic (of which Attic was a branch).

Athens was conquered in the fourth century B.C. by King Philip of Macedonia. Alexander the Great was Philip’s son and was tutored by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. He set out to conquer the world and spread Greek culture and language. Because Alexander spoke Attic Greek, it was this dialect that was spread. It was also the dialect spoken by the famous Athenian writers. This was the beginning of the Hellenistic Age.

As the Greek language spread across the world and met other languages, it was altered (which would happen to any language). The dialects also interacted with each other. Eventually this adaptation resulted in what we call Koine Greek. “Koine” (κοινή) means “common” and was the common, everyday form of the language, used by everyday people. It was not considered a polished literary form of the language, and in fact some writers of this era purposefully imitated the older style of Greek (which is like someone today writing in King James English). Koine unfortunately lost many of the subtleties of classical Greek. For example, in classical Greek ἄλλος meant “other” of the same kind while ἕτερος meant “other” of a different kind. If you had an apple and you asked for ἄλλος, you would receive another apple. But if you asked for ἕτερος, you would be given perhaps an orange. Some of these subtleties come through in the New Testament but not often. It is this common, Koine Greek that is

used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the New Testament, and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.

For a long time Koine Greek confused many scholars because it was significantly different from Classical Greek. Some hypothesized that it was a combination of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Others attempted to explain it as a "Holy Ghost language," meaning that God created a special language just for the Bible. But studies of Greek papyri found in Egypt over the last one hundred years have shown that Koine Greek was the language of the everyday people used in the writings of wills, letters, receipts, shopping lists, etc.

There are two lessons we can learn from this. As Paul says, "In the fullness of time God sent his Son" (Gal 4:4), and part of that fullness was a universal language. No matter where Paul traveled he could be understood.

But there is another lesson here that is perhaps a little closer to the pastor's heart. God used the common language to communicate the Gospel. The Gospel does not belong to the erudite alone; it belongs to all people. It now becomes our task to learn parts of this marvelous language to help us make the grace of God known to all people.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Greek Alphabet



### Introduction

We will learn the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet and the transliteration of each.

A transliteration is the equivalent of a letter in another language. For example, the Greek “beta” (β) is transliterated with the English “b.” Because they have the same sounds, it is said that the English “b” is the transliteration of the Greek “beta.” It is common in modern texts to set off a transliterated word in italics.

Jesus’ last word from the cross was *tetelestai*.

This does not mean that a similar combination of letters in one language has the same meaning as the same combination in another.

kappa + alpha + tau (κατ) does not mean “cat.”

Some word study books and commentaries avoid the Greek form and give only the transliteration. On the next page I have listed the letter’s name, its transliteration (in italics), the small and capital Greek form, and its pronunciation. The CD-ROM included with this book will help you with the pronunciation of the alphabet and the reading exercises in the following chapters.



Different books may follow slightly different transliteration schemes. Be sure to check the book’s scheme before looking up a word.

**Alphabet Chart**

Alpha	<i>a</i>	α	A	a	as in father
Beta	<i>b</i>	β	B	b	as in Bible
Gamma	<i>g</i>	γ	Γ	g	as in gone
Delta	<i>d</i>	δ	Δ	d	as in dog
Epsilon	<i>e</i>	ε	E	e	as in met
Zeta	<i>z</i>	ζ	Z	z	as in daze
Eta	<i>ē</i>	η	H	e	as in obey
Theta	<i>th</i>	θ	Θ	th	as in thing
Iota	<i>i</i>	ι	I	i	as in intrigue
Kappa	<i>k</i>	κ	K	k	as in kitchen
Lambda	<i>l</i>	λ	Λ	l	as in law
Mu	<i>m</i>	μ	M	m	as in mother
Nu	<i>n</i>	ν	N	n	as in new
Xi	<i>x</i>	ξ	Ξ	x	as in axiom
Omicron	<i>o</i>	ο	O	o	as in not
Pi	<i>p</i>	π	Π	p	as in peach
Rho	<i>r</i>	ρ	P	r	as in rod
Sigma	<i>s</i>	σ/ς	Σ	s	as in study
Tau	<i>t</i>	τ	T	t	as in talk
Upsilon	<i>u/y</i>	υ	Υ	u	as the German ü
Phi	<i>ph</i>	φ	Φ	ph	as in phone
Chi	<i>ch</i>	χ	X	ch	as in loch
Psi	<i>ps</i>	ψ	Ψ	ps	as in lips
Omega	<i>ō</i>	ω	Ω	o	as in tone

You may not need to learn the capital letters right away, but you will soon enough.

**Helps**

The vowels are α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, ω. The rest are consonants.

Sigma is written as ς when it occurs at the end of the word, and as σ when it occurs elsewhere: ἀπόστολος.

υ is transliterated as “u” if it occurs with another vowel (εὐαγγέλιον › *euangelion*), and “y” if it occurs as a single vowel (μυστήριον › *mystērion*).

Do not confuse the η (eta) with the English “n,” ν (nu) with “v,” ρ (rho) with “p,” χ (chi) with “x,” or ω (omega) with “w.”

Notice the many similarities among the Greek and English letters, not only in shape and sound but also in their respective order in the alphabet. The Greek alphabet can be broken down into sections. It will parallel the

English for a while, differ, and then begin to parallel again. Try to find these natural divisions.

### Pronunciation

In pronouncing the Greek letters, use the first sound of the name of the letter. Alpha is an “a” sound (there is no “pha” sound); lambda is an “l” sound (there is no “ambda” sound).

There is some disagreement among scholars on the pronunciation of a few letters, but I have chosen the most common.

γ usually has a hard “g” sound, as in “get.” However, when it is immediately followed by γ, κ, χ, or ξ, it is pronounced as a “v.” ἄγγελος is pronounced “angelos” (from which we get our word “angel”). The γ pronounced like a “v” is called a “gamma nasal” and is transliterated as a “n” (*angelos*).

The ι can be either short or long, like the two i’s in the English “intrigue.” Just listen to how your teacher pronounces the words (or to me on the CD-ROM).

### Miscellaneous

**Iota subscript.** Sometimes an iota is written under the vowels α, η, or ω (α, η, ω). This iota is not pronounced but it does affect the word’s meaning. It normally is not transliterated.

**Capitals.** Originally the Bible was written in all capital letters without punctuation or spaces between the words. For example, John 1:1 began,

ΕΝΑΡΧΗΗΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ

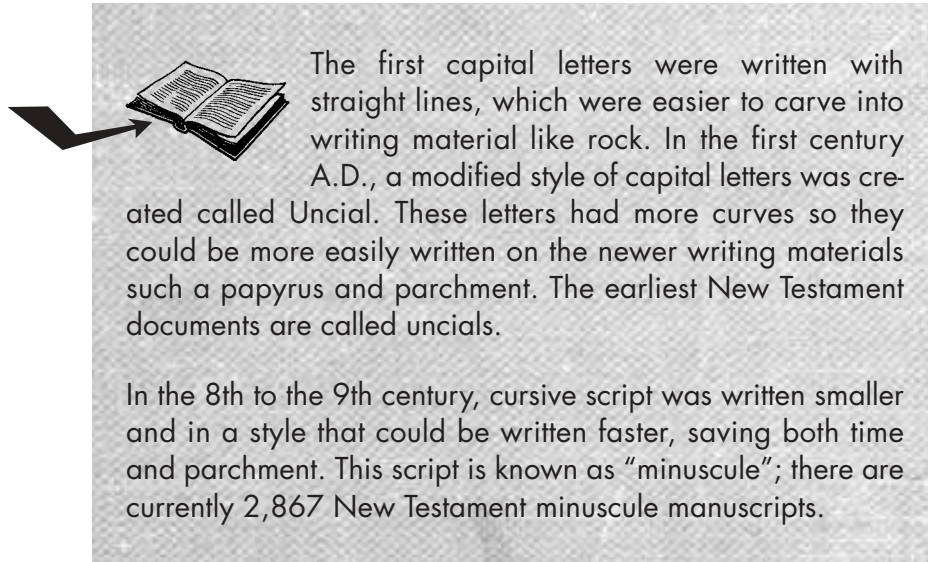
The cursive script was created before the time of Christ but became popular in the ninth century. In cursive the letters are connected, like our present-day handwriting. Spaces were also added between words. In Greek texts today, John 1:1 begins,

Εν αρχη ην ο λογος

In our Greek texts today, capitals are used only for proper names, the first word in a quotation, and the first word in the paragraph.

A **diphthong** is a combination of two vowels that produce only one sound. The second vowel is always an ι or an υ.

αι	as in aisle	αιρω
ει	as in eight	ει
οι	as in oil	οικια



αυ	as in sauerkraut	αυτος
ου	as in soup	ουδε
υι	as in suite	υιος
ευ, ηυ	as in feud	ευθυσ / ηυξανεν

Greek has two **breathing marks**, “rough” and “smooth.” Every word beginning with a vowel or ρ has a breathing mark. (I omitted them in the previous examples.)

The **rough breathing mark** is a ˆ placed over the first vowel and adds an “h” sound to the word.

ὑπερ	‣	<i>hyper</i>
ῥαββι	‣	<i>rhabbi</i>

The rough breathing mark is transliterated as an *h*, and is placed before the transliterated vowel (but after the initial ρ).

The **smooth breathing mark** is a ˊ placed over the first vowel and is not pronounced or transliterated.

ἄποστολος	‣	<i>apostolos</i>
-----------	---	------------------

Either breathing mark is placed before an initial capital letter.

Ἰσραηλ	‣	<i>Israēl</i>
Ἱεροσόλυμα	‣	<i>Hierosolyma</i>

Either breathing mark is placed over the second vowel of an initial diphthong.

αἶτεω	›	<i>aiteō</i>
Αἶτεω	›	<i>Aiteō</i>
Αἶ	›	<i>Hai</i>

John 1:1 looks like this with the breathing marks.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος

### Summary

1. It is essential that you learn the Greek alphabet and transliterations right away.
2. The vowels in Greek are α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, and ω.
3. A diphthong consists of two vowels pronounced as a single vowel. The second vowel is always an iota or upsilon.
4. An iota subscript is an iota written under the previous vowel; it is not pronounced.
5. Every word beginning with a vowel or ρ must have a rough or smooth breathing mark.

### Exercises

1. Write out the alphabet. The asterisk marks where you start.

α\* β γ δ\* ε\* ζ\* η\* θ ι κ

λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ\* σ\* τ\*

υ\* φ χ ψ ω