
GREEK FOR EVERYONE

**INTRODUCTORY GREEK FOR
BIBLE STUDY AND APPLICATION**

A. CHADWICK THORNHILL



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For my parents,
Bobby and Darlene,
who have invested so much in me

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Preface

If you've ever wondered why our Bible translations differ (sometimes drastically), why pastors, theologians, and scholars differ on how to interpret the Gospels or the writings of Paul, what reading the original words of the New Testament might reveal, or how to better study the New Testament in order to better teach, preach, or live its message, this book was written for you. Studying the New Testament in Greek opens up a world of interpretation not possible without it. A colleague of mine often says it's like going from black-and-white television to high-definition. This book will not make you a master of the Greek language, but it will enable you to understand its basics, interact with quality commentaries and research on the New Testament, and gain more confidence in rightly interpreting the Bible.

The resources available today for learning Greek and Hebrew are immense and incredibly helpful. With that in mind, I have written this book to focus solely on issues of morphology (how words are formed), grammar (how meaning is structured), syntax (how words and phrases are arranged), structural analysis (how ideas interact with one another), and introductory exegetical (i.e., interpretive) matters. The goal is to understand how language as a whole works, and in particular the Greek language, and to apply our findings to Scripture. Through this book we will not become experts in Greek, but we will become better students of the New Testament.

This book is dedicated to all of the students who have put up with my instruction in Greek grammar for nearly a decade now. Their interactions have helped to shape how I understand, teach, and appreciate the language of the New Testament. My goal for this book is to equip the reader with a working knowledge of Greek. This will not be equivalent to the experience most students receive in an undergraduate, seminary, or graduate program in Greek, where the emphasis is on memorizing numerous vocabulary words, conjugations, and declensions and translating large portions of the New Testament. Rather, this book aims to equip those who do not undertake that process. While other, more intensive approaches may result in a more extensive understanding of the language and more efficient interaction with texts, this approach will seek to equip the reader with the *skills* to work through a passage exegetically, knowing how to get the lay of the textual land and understand what features to give the most attention.

I would be remiss, of course, not to thank also my own Greek professors. First, Dr. Ben Gutierrez introduced me with his usual passion to Greek in his introductory grammar courses many years ago and helped instill in me a desire to continue growing in my knowledge of New Testament Greek. Also, Dr. Jim Freerksen greatly influenced me through his instruction and his modeling the patience, persistence, and humility needed for those seeking to both learn and teach the Scriptures to others.

Drs. Wayne Stacy and Daniel Steffen have my gratitude for their thorough and insightful comments and remarks on a rough draft of this text. Their input was invaluable, and the book is better off because of their thoroughness.

One final note: I have generally opted not to include endnotes in the initial chapters of this work in order to make it as accessible as possible to the reader. This may give the regrettable impression that everything herein is the result of my own work. This is certainly not the case. I would like to acknowledge the important conversation partners on whom I have relied in writing this work. First, Logos Bible Software, which I highly recommend, was invaluable in searching for examples

and looking at usage patterns. I rely in most places on the *Lexham Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* for interlinear presentations (with modifications in places), and the text of the Greek New Testament is taken from the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, 28th edition. Second, I highly recommend the works of A. T. Robertson (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*), William Mounce (*Basics of Biblical Greek*), Rodney Decker (*Reading Koine Greek*), Daniel Wallace (*Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*), Stanley Porter (*Idioms of the Greek New Testament*), Constantine Campbell (*Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek*), and Steven Runge (*Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*).¹ I have reviewed other works on occasion, but these resources were ever at my side and are a must for anyone who is interested in taking their study of New Testament Greek further than what is offered in this (very) introductory book.

I pray both that this book faithfully represents the language of the New Testament and that it might be used “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12).

Abbreviations

General

acc.	accusative	neut.	neuter
chap(s).	chapter(s)	nom.	nominative
dat.	dative	pl.	plural
fem.	feminine	sg.	singular
gen.	genitive	voc.	vocative
masc.	masculine		

Bible Editions and Versions

AMP	The Amplified Bible
CEV	Contemporary English Version
ESV	English Standard Version
GNT	Good News Translation
GW	<i>GOD'S WORD</i> Translation
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version
LEB	Lexham English Bible
LXX	Septuagint
MSG	The Message
NA ²⁸	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , Nestle-Aland, 28th edition

Abbreviations

NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NET	The NET Bible (New English Translation)
NIrV	New International Reader's Version
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TLB	The Living Bible
TNIV	Today's New International Version
UBS ⁵	<i>The Greek New Testament</i> , United Bible Societies, 5th edition

Secondary Sources

BDAG	Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
Liddell-Scott	Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9th ed. with rev. supplement (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996)
Louw-Nida	Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i> , 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989)
LTW	Douglas Mangum, ed., <i>Lexham Theological Wordbook</i> (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014)
Lust	J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, eds., <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i> , rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003)
NIDNTTE	Moisés Silva, ed., <i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014)

1



Language Learning, Koine Greek, and the Greek Alphabet

Learning a new language is like learning to dance. There are rules that govern one's participation in the activity. In dancing, the elements of rhythm, space, and motion come together to create something beautiful. Should one not follow the rules appropriately, moving too fast or slow, moving the wrong way or the wrong foot, the results become disastrous. You could go from tango to disco in one fell swoop!

Language, like dance, has its own rules. Instead of coordinating our movements to the music, we bring together different elements to create meaning, things such as lexical (think “dictionary”) data, grammar, and syntax. But in order to understand what is being said, we must understand the parts to understand the whole, just like trying to learn a new dance. Like a zoom lens, our approach in this book will take that journey by first, after our preliminaries, thinking about the whole of how language works before examining the parts that make up a sentence, and then zooming back out to see how the whole looks different with these parts understood.

How to Learn a New Language

In my first-semester Greek classes, my students often look for shortcuts as they navigate the maze of learning a new language (and a “dead” language at that!). Eventually they catch on and realize that shortcuts do not exist in the world of language learning. Repetition and memorization are the initial building blocks of the adventure, and apart from those practices, little progress can be made. There are some important strategies, however, that can help along the way. As I coach you through this journey, I would like to pass on to you these same time-tested principles.

Study in increments. Students quickly discover that cramming for a language exam does not work well. Just as a good meal deserves to be savored, learning a language requires a slow-paced, methodical approach. I often ask my students, “How do you eat an elephant?” to which the only proper response is “One bite at a time!” Greek will feel like an elephant on your plate at times, so approaching this feast in small, manageable bites is a necessity.

Master vocabulary. One of the most important building blocks in learning a language is mastering the vocabulary. Here, again, where memorization is so important, shortcuts will prove ineffective, and a manageable approach is essential. Through this book we will work to learn some of the most common vocabulary in the New Testament in order to make our study of the text more efficient. Keeping up with the vocabulary is a must!

Learn in a group. Learning in general takes place more effectively when a group of learners collaborate. When you are ready to quit, they will be there for encouragement. When a new concept or term isn’t sticking, they may have some memorization techniques to help you. If possible, working through this book with other like-minded individuals will be to your advantage.

Don’t take shortcuts! I’ve mentioned several times now that there are no shortcuts in language learning. This doesn’t mean that they haven’t been tried, but rather it means that they have been found wanting. Time and repetition are vital for language to stick. You may be able to

cram for a vocabulary quiz, but a few weeks, months, and years from now, that information will not be retained. Time and repetition (both in this book and afterward) will ensure the effort you put into learning will continue to pay dividends down the road.

Make sure you understand the material before moving on to the next chapter. Going back to our meal analogy, even if it were possible to eat the elephant in one sitting, the aftermath would not be pretty. No matter how savory a meal might be, if you overindulge, there will be consequences. In the same vein, your brain can take only so much new information at one time before it shuts off. As we move through the material, make sure that you understand each chapter and its concepts before moving on to the next. Allow the concepts to simmer and soak into your brain. Language learning, to be effective, must be a marathon, not a sprint.

Use multiple senses. The more senses you employ in language learning, the more quickly your brain will absorb the information. This means that reading (visual), writing (physical), and saying (audial) the letters, words, phrases, and sentences that we explore will contribute to better retention. I've found that the last element (saying) intimidates students the most, but just remember that you will never do what you do not try. Even if the sounds come out weird or wrong at first, keep practicing until you get it right.

Start using your Greek for reading the New Testament. One of the best motivating factors for persevering in your Greek studies is to start looking at the New Testament. All sorts of great resources (which we will discuss later) are available to make the Greek New Testament accessible to new readers of Greek. The more you use Greek in your own study, whether for sermon preparation, academic study, or personal enrichment, the more likely you are to keep using it in the months and years ahead.

What Is Koine?

Language itself is never static, always evolving through usage. We often laugh at the new words added to the dictionary each year that

seem unnecessary (like “hashtag,” “selfie,” and “tweep” in 2014), but this practice recognizes that culture, and language with it, is constantly in flux. You may notice, as will be illustrated through this book, that the words and forms that are used most frequently in most languages are often the most irregular, breaking the normal patterns of usage. For example, most verbs in English do not change their form significantly when their subject changes (e.g., I run, you run, he runs). Common verbs, such as a stative verb like “is,” however, are often irregular (e.g., I am, you are, he is). With usage comes accommodation and alteration.

The language of the New Testament is known as Koine (i.e., “common”) Greek. As the Greek language spread across the ancient world as a result of Alexander the Great’s conquests, the language encountered other dialects and went through various metamorphoses. The Koine period, spanning from about 330 BCE to 330 CE, represents the height of ancient empires, when the entire Mediterranean region was united under a single rule and language. Koine, as a common dialect, was less polished than its earlier, classical predecessor, a result of the spread of the language. Koine, in general, adopted shorter, less complex sentences than classical Greek, and implicit features in classical Greek became explicit (and thus easier to recognize for the masses) in Koine. Even within Koine, however, there were more and less polished forms of the dialect, as found when comparing, for example, the Greek of Mark against the refined Greek of Luke-Acts. Thus, when we examine exegetical features related to grammar, we must take care to do this in the context of the writing we are studying and avoid making sweeping claims that may or may not be true of the style of each author of the New Testament.

The other benefit of learning Koine is that, while grammatical differences exist between them, much of what is learned about the New Testament applies also to the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint [LXX], the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the writings of many of the early church fathers. Investing in learning this language can pay dividends beyond just our study of the New Testament.

Table I. Greek Alphabet and Pronunciation

Letter Name	Upper-case	Lower-case	Transliteration	Pronunciation	Alternate Pronunciation
Alpha			<i>a</i>	“a” as in “father”	
Beta			<i>b</i>	“v” as in “vet”	“b” as in “book”
Gamma			<i>g</i>	“g” as in “go”	
Delta			<i>d</i>	“th” as in “the”	“d” as in “dog”
Epsilon			<i>e</i>	“e” as in “bet”	
Zeta			<i>z</i>	“dz” as in “gadzooks”	
Eta			<i>ē</i>	“i” as in “ski”	“a” as in “ape”
Theta			<i>th</i>	“th” as in “theater”	
Iota			<i>i</i>	“i” as in “ski”	“i” as in “igloo” (short), “i” as in “ski” (long)
Kappa			<i>k</i>	“k” as in “kettle”	
Lambda			<i>l</i>	“l” as in “love”	
Mu		μ	<i>m</i>	“m” as in “mother”	
Nu			<i>n</i>	“n” as in “nose”	
Xi			<i>x</i>	“x” as in “oxen”	
Omicron			<i>o</i>	“o” as in “oval”	“o” as in “hot”
Pi			<i>p</i>	“p” as in “party”	
Rho			<i>r</i>	“r” as in “race”	
Sigma		σ	<i>s</i>	“s” as in “snake”	
Tau			<i>t</i>	“t” as in “tour”	
Upsilon			<i>u, y</i>	“u” as in “flu” or “i” as in “ski”	
Phi			<i>ph</i>	“ph” as in “phone”	
Chi			<i>ch</i>	“ch” as in “loch”	
Psi			<i>ps</i>	“ps” as in “psychology”	
Omega			<i>ō</i>	“o” as in “oval”	

Alphabet, Pronunciation, and Punctuation

We won’t get far learning Greek if we don’t know the alphabet and how to pronounce it. In table 1 you will find the letter names, upper-case symbols (found in our earliest manuscripts, without accents or

punctuation marks—more on that below and in chap. 15), the lowercase symbols (which we will use and are found in our printed Greek New Testaments), the transliteration values (which we use when writing Greek in English characters), and the pronunciations. While varying pronunciation systems are employed by Greek scholars, we will use the one that likely best approximates how Koine Greek was spoken in the ancient world. (The final column of the table also provides a version of the Erasmian pronunciation scheme, which is the traditional pronunciation system many teachers and scholars favor.)

We have a few more bits of information to cover before we are ready to start reading Greek. First, we have seven vowels in Koine Greek (α , ε , η , ι , ο , υ , ω) and seventeen consonants. **Sigma** is represented by two symbols, one occurring at the beginning of or within a word (σ , such as in σῆμα), and one occurring only at the end of a word (ς , such as in ἄς).

Second, you may also notice that **upsilon** (υ) has two different transliteration values, a *u* occurring when it is paired with another vowel (forming a diphthong, such as αυ) and a *y* when it occurs on its own (such as εϋ).

Third, like English, Greek employs what are known as **diphthongs**, which are vowel combinations that make a single sound together. Table 2 lists the proper diphthongs in Koine Greek.

The improper diphthong, which is not pronounced, occurs when an **iota** (ι) is placed below an alpha (α), eta (η), or omega (ω). This iota subscript (such as α̣ under the alpha [α] at the end of ἄς) is not pronounced, but it does often impact the meaning of a word, so be aware of it.

Fourth, **gamma** (γ), when preceding another guttural consonant (like gamma [γ], kappa [κ], chi [χ], or xi [ξ]), will make an “n” sound, as in the word ἄγγελος , which we would pronounce as “angelos” rather than “aggelos.”

Fifth, there are also **accents** and **breathing marks** in Greek. **Accents** were added to help nonnative speakers recognize when to make changes in their vocal inflections when pronouncing words. They occur only

Table 2. Diphthongs

“ai” as in “air”
“ei” as in “receive”
“oi” as in “oil”
“ui” as in “suite”
“av” as in “avoid”
“ev” as in “ever”
“ou” as in “soup”

over vowels and diphthongs. The **acute** accent (´) points upward, the **grave** accent (`) points downward (to the grave!), and the **circumflex** accent (ˆ) is curved. **Breathing marks** occur only at the beginning of a word and usually over a vowel or diphthong, and they can affect both the pronunciation and the meaning of a word. The **smooth** breathing mark (᾿) is unpronounced and is the most common. The **rough** breathing mark (᾿͵) is pronounced with an “h” sound.

Finally (and by now you are saying, “There is more?”), our Greek New Testament also contains “uninspired” **punctuation**. As we mentioned in passing earlier, our earliest manuscripts were written in uppercase characters and contained no punctuation. Punctuation, like accent marks, was added later to aid in reading. Our four punctuation marks are the **comma** (,), which looks like an English comma; the **period** (.), which looks like an English period; the **semicolon** (;), which looks like a “floating” period; and the **question mark** (?), which looks like an English semicolon.

Let’s Read!

In just one chapter you are now already ready to start reading Greek (never mind that we will have no idea yet what any of this means). Feel free to brag to your friends! But seriously, let’s work at practicing some of what we just covered.

Let’s sound out the word below (you can reference the chart above, but be sure to memorize the alphabet and its sounds as soon as possible).

For good measure, let's break it into syllables.

Okay, let's put it back together now and then transliterate it.

logos

Curious about this word? means “word,” “message,” or “account.” We are familiar with this from John 1:1, where we read, “In the beginning was the Word [].”

Okay, now let's try a few words together. Sound out each letter, and then put the sounds together for each word. You may even want to write it down on a piece of paper or index card as you say it.

Let's separate the syllables again to make it easier.

Now again together and transliterated.

eulogēsai se kyrios

Curious what this means? This comes from the Septuagint of Numbers 6:24 in the passage known as the priestly blessing. We might translate this as “May the Lord bless you.”

May he bless you (the) Lord

(How did we know that was the object of our verb and the subject? More on that ahead.)

All right, one last thing to practice before we move on (and remember, make sure you have this chapter well in hand before moving on to the next). Write out the following passage on a sheet of paper, and

