

Greek Lesson #1

David K Vallance / January 6, 2005

1. Why NT Greek?

- **The Inspiration of Scripture.** For serious students of the Bible who believe in the verbal inspiration of Scripture, there can be no substitute for studying the very words breathed by the Holy Spirit (2 Tm 3:16). Salvation requires “a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tm 2:4), and our doctrinal fellowship, the apostles’ doctrine (Ac 2:42), derives from the Bible’s language.
- **The Heritage of Local Assemblies.** Assembly truths were rediscovered by brethren who combined deep spirituality with serious scholarship. Men like J. N. Darby, Samuel Traggel, William Kelly, Thomas Newberry, William Hoste, W. E. Vine, and F. F. Bruce were first-rate scholars, on par with the best secular academics of their day. Ironically, assemblies have come to reject formal training of any kind, and now glory in ignorance. Their anti-intellectualism not only betrays the legacy of the early brethren, but threatens the very survival of assembly testimony.
- **The Protection of Divine Truth.** God expects every Christian to be a student of His Word. When one teacher speaks, the other teachers must be competent to judge what he says (1 Cr 14:29). Every believer—brother or sister—should be like the Bereans, who “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Ac 17:11). If a large number of believers take the Bible seriously and study it carefully, the assembly will remain the self-correcting organism that God designed it to be. A biblically literate assembly will protect itself against the error of professional clerisy, where “Gnostic” teachers arise whose special training and advanced knowledge allow them to intimidate others and trump what “simple believers” try to teach.

2. KoinevGreek

Homer, the author of the *Iliad* (ca. 725 B.C.), wrote in Archaic Greek, which derives from the earliest Greek spoken by the Mycenaean and Achaean peoples who had moved into Greece by 1400 B.C. By 500 B.C., Classical Greek had developed. Of the various dialects (Aeolic, Arcadian, Attic, Cyprian, Doric, Ionic), the Attic dialect gained ascendancy because of the cultural prominence of Athens. Most of the ancient Greek philosophers and playwrights wrote in the Attic dialect of Classical Greek. Around 300 B.C., Alexander the Great carried the Greek language to the ends of his vast empire, and the form adopted in the conquered lands was called Hellenistic or Koinev (“common”) Greek. This form of Greek, somewhat simpler than Classical Greek, became the common language of the Western World and Middle East from ca. 330 B.C. to ca. 330 A.D., and was the language chosen by the Holy Spirit for the NT.

3. The Greek Alphabet

- **Orthography** (< οἱ ῥῶτ' straight, upright; correct + γραῖ ἡ writing)
 - The aspect of language study concerned with letters and their sequences in words.
 - A method of representing the sounds of language by written symbols; spelling.

The Phoenicians invented the alphabet, which uses symbols to represent the sounds of speech. These letters derive from earlier pictographs—e.g. the Hebrew *aleph* [ʔ] originally depicted an ox, and *beth* [ʔ] a house. Greek has 24 letters:

Lower Case	Upper Case	Spelling		English	
a	A	α	alpha	a	<i>short: and / long: father</i>
b	B	β	beta	b	<i>big</i>
g	Γ	γ	gamma	g, n (before g, k, c, x)	<i>God, ankle, angle, oinks</i>
d	Δ	δ	delta	d	<i>door</i>
e	Ε	ε	epsilon	e	<i>met</i>
z	Ζ	ζ	zeta	z, dz	<i>zeal, adze</i>
h	Η	η	eta	e	<i>obey</i>
q	Θ	θ	theta	th	<i>thing</i>
i	Ι	ι	iota	i, i	<i>short: pit / long: police</i>
k	Κ	κ	kappa	k	<i>keep</i>
l	Λ	λ	lambda	l	<i>law</i>
m	Μ	μ	mu	m	<i>mother</i>
n	Ν	ν	nu	n	<i>number</i>
x	Ξ	ξ	xi	x	<i>fox</i>
o	Ο	ο	omicron	o	<i>not</i>
p	Ρ	ρ	pi	p	<i>poor</i>
r	Ρ	ρ	rho	rh	<i>rhythm</i>
s, "	Σ	σ	sigma	s	<i>save</i>
t	Τ	τ	tau	t	<i>time</i>
u	Υ	υ	upsilon	u	<i>short: put / long: lute</i>
f, j	Φ	φ	phi	f	<i>phone</i>
c	Χ	χ	chi	hard <u>ch</u>	<i>Scots lo<u>ch</u>, German <u>ich</u></i>
y	Ψ	ψ	psi	ps	<i>tips<u>y</u></i>
w	Ω	ω	omega	o	<i>vote</i>

Vowels

- Vowels are continuous sounds that you make by the way you shape your tongue and mouth while exhaling air and vibrating your vocal cords.
- The seven Greek vowels are **α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, and ω**.
 - Epsilon (ε) and omicron (ο) are always short
 - Eta (η) and omega (ω) are always long
 - Alpha (α), iota (ι), and upsilon (υ) may be short or long

Short	e	ο	ι	α	υ
Long	η	ω	ι	α	υ

Diphthongs

- < di" two + j qeɣgomaɪ emit a sound, speak
- A diphthong is a combination of two vowel sounds in one syllable.
- The second letter of a Greek diphthong is always iota or upsilon.
- When **ι** follows the long vowels **α, η, and ω** to form the diphthongs **αι, ηι, and ωι**, the iota is customarily written beneath the preceding long vowel: **α/η/ω/ι**. The iota written beneath the line and under these other vowels is called "iota subscript." Ca. 100 B.C. the pronunciation of the iota in these diphthongs was lost, and later was omitted in writing. Medieval Byzantine scholars academically restored the iota to the orthography, as they similarly did with Hebrew vowel points.

αι	ai	<u>a</u>isle
ει	ei	ve<u>i</u>n
οι	oi	so<u>o</u>il
αυ	ou	<u>o</u>ut
ευ	eh-oo	eh (<u>me</u>t) + oo (<u>mo</u>on)
ου	ou	<u>o</u>ur
ηυ	ey-oo	eh (<u>ob</u>ey) + oo (<u>mo</u>on)
ωυ	oh-oo	oh (<u>vo</u>te) + oo (<u>mo</u>on)
υι	ui	<u>q</u>ueen (the U is pronounced like a W)
α/ι	α	like α, with iota pronounced lightly
η/ι	η	like η iota pronounced lightly
ω/ι	ω	like ω iota pronounced lightly

Most classicists do not distinguish the pronunciations of long and short **α** or **υ**. Thus Biblical Greek is phonetic—we pronounce each Greek letter *exactly* the same way each

time, and thus can completely predict the pronunciation of a Greek word by its spelling. This makes Greek spelling and pronunciation much easier than English. There are, however, a few exceptions to this—but at least they are *consistent* exceptions:

- 1) **g** combined with a palatal stop (**g, k, C, X**) changes to **n**
- 2) Initial **Z** is **z**, but internal **Z** is **dz**
- 3) Long and short **i** are distinguished, e.g. the **i** in **i@a** is long [HEEnah], while **i** in **po|i**" is short [POLis].
- 4) Initial **i** (an iota that begins a word), with smooth breathing [**]**, is pronounced as the semivowel “y” for euphony (< eu|good, well + j wnh|sound, voice). Thus the word for Jesus, **jhsou**" , is pronounced [yay-SOOS] (not [ee-ay-SOOS]).

4. Text (John 1:1-2)

The NT was written in *uncial* form—all capitals, no spaces between words, and no punctuation or diacritical marks. John 1:1 in the original autograph manuscript would have appeared like this:

???????????? G? C?? ???? G? C?? ?

?? C???? T????? T?? C????? G? C

The lower-case Greek letters and diacritical marks were introduced by Medieval Byzantine scholars, and are thus a relatively recent development in Greek orthography.

En ajrch/hh ol logo", kai ol logo" hh prof' toh qeon, kai qeof'
 hh ol logo". ou%o" hh ejn ajrch/prof' toh qeon. panta di' autou'
 egeneto, kai cwri' autou' egeneto oupe%e\$ ol gegonen.

Word in Text	Translation	Part of Speech	Lexical Entry
ejn	in	preposition with dative case	
ajrch/ hh	beginning was	noun, feminine, dative case verb, past progressive (imperfect) active indicative 3 rd singular	ajrchv-h", hj eijniv (I am)
ol logo"	the word	article (definite article) noun, masculine, nominative case	logo" -ou, ol
kaiiv	and	conjunction	

proʹt	with	preposition with accusative	
ton	the	article (definite article)	
qeon	God	noun, masculine, accusative	qeotʹ -ouʹ, oʹ
ou%oʹʹ	this [one]	pronoun, demonstrative, masculine singular	
panta	all	adjective, neuter nominative plural	paʹʹ
diʹ	by or through	preposition with genitive	diav
aujʹtouʹ	him	pronoun, masculine genitive singular	aujʹtoʹʹ
eʹgeneto	became, happened	verb, past aorist active indicative 3 rd singular	ginomai
cwriʹʹ	apart from	adverb	
ouʹdeʹv	not [even]	adverb	
eʹn	one	adjective, neuter singular	ei%ʹ
geʹgonen	had become	verb, present perfect active indicative 3 rd singular	ginomai

5. Morphology (< morʹj hʹwform, shape + loʹgoʹʹ word; study)

- The study of the structure and form of words in language or a language, including inflection, derivation, and the formation of compounds.
- Some words, like the prepositions eʹn and proʹtʹ, the conjunction kaiʹʹ and the adverb cwriʹʹ, never change. They are spelled exactly the same way every time. However, since Greek is an *inflected* language, most words (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and verbs) modify their spelling according to their function in the sentence (their *case*) and to reveal other important information (such as *gender, person, number, tense, aspect, voice, and mood*). Thus qeotʹʹ and qeon are the same word—the word for God—but the [-ʹʹ] ending of the first word says “subject” (nominative case), while the [-n] ending of the second word says “direct object” (accusative case). This may seem daunting if you have no previous experience with inflected language, but all of this will come with practice!

6. Philology and Etymology

- Philology (< j iʹloʹʹ love, fondness + loʹgoʹʹ word, language) is comparative and historical linguistics—the study of literary works to establish accurate texts and determine their meaning.
- Etymology (< eʹtumoʹʹ true meaning + loʹgoʹʹ word, study) is the study of the derivation of words (< true account or analysis of a word)
- arʹchvʹ-hʹʹ, hʹj (55) **beginning, first; origin, first cause; ruling power, authority, ruler (earthly or spiritual)**
 - Stresses priority and/or preeminence
 - **ARC-** (first in time or rank) > Borrowed: arch-, archo—, archaic, archaism, archbishop, archetype, —archy, monarchy

- **logō'' -ou, ol (331) word; statement, speech; saying, message; reason; treatise, account; the Word**
 - O-grade noun of verb **legw**, speak < to relate < to lay together, lay before < to collect. **ol logō''** is the word by which the inward thought is expressed, *or* the inward thought or reason itself. What is uttered springs from inward thoughts, which are in turn collections of ideas.
 - ***leg-** (to collect, with derivatives meaning to speak) > **LEG**⁻² (to say); cognate: **leech** (a physician < one who speaks magic or healing words); **legere** (to gather, choose, pluck; read) [lecture, legend, legible, legion, lesson, collect, diligent, elect, elegant, intelligent, neglect, sacrilege, select], **lex** (law < collection of rules) [leg-, legitimate, loyal, privilege]; **lignum** (firewood < what is gathered), **legare** (to dispute, commission, charge < to engage by contract) [legacy, allege, colleague, delegate, relegate]; borrowed: logarithm, logic, logistic, logomachy, catalogue (ending —logue), theology (ending —logy, a treatise), lexicon, alexia, alexithymia, dyslexia.