

New Testament Greek

1. Alphabet, Pronunciation; Value of Greek

Date: 070909G

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What I want to do in this first session is teach the Greek alphabet. It will be good for everyone who is here to learn the alphabet, even if you are not planning to take the entire course.

But, we will not need all the time just to learn the alphabet, so I will be going into some other matters that are also important for all who study the Bible seriously, which I assume we all do.

First lesson:

Greek alphabet

1. Teach the characters and pronunciation of their names.

2. Erasmic versus true pronunciation

Erasmus (1466–1536): contemporary, acquaintance, of Luther.

Purpose: make it easier to learn spelling of Greek words.

Difficulty: many characters are correctly pronounced “ee,” so it is confusing to learn spelling if using correct pronunciation. See 2nd Edition, page 31, footnote.

3. Diphthongs and pronunciation, Erasmic and modern

How we can tell that modern Greek pronunciation is the close, if not identical, to New Testament pronunciation. Itacism.

High degree of illiteracy; uneducated masses spelled the words based on how they sounded.

Common writing material for disposable notes was pot sherds.

Notes to the butcher or produce seller, used, then discarded.

Durable, many found, but with these common misspellings, but all related to characters or combinations pronounced “ee.”

Lo and behold, modern Greek pronunciation does the same!

Examples of pronunciation

The New Testament, ἡ καὶνη διαθήκη:

Hay Kye Nay Dee Ah Thay Kay or Ee Kenny Thee Ah Tiki

Need to distinguish diphthongs to learn to spell

So, this is why we will use the Erasmic (Erasmian) system.

4. Writing the characters.

Demonstrate on overhead. (two strokes for phi (φ), please)

You should practice writing the characters between now and next week. Don't be satisfied just to go through them once.

The best way is to write the same character over and over again, then go to the next character.

Spend more time on characters that are more difficult.

Do as you please; but, the more time you spend practicing it, the more you will master it, so it will no longer be a trial.

The value of learning New Testament Greek

I. The stability of the language, and therefore of the Greek text. Imagine what it would be like if the Bible had actually been written in English — no questions of translation at all!

Now, suppose the Bible had been written in English at time of King James, and became a worldwide sensation, just as it happened with the New Testament.

Assuming this new religion is sweeping the world, and the converts all believe that every word of these writings is inspired by God, utterly infallible, just as they are written — only, this is the King James era of the English language.

I have to wonder if the English language would be as different from the King James language as English is today.

In fact, you only have to look at what actually has happened to the Greek language to see the effect: Greek has changed less since the New Testament was written than English has changed since the King James translation of the Bible.

In fact, I have here a copy of the New Testament that is commonly used in Greece today, and it's essentially identical to the *Textus Receptus* that we believe is the best New Testament Greek text.

In other words, the very existence of the inspired writings solidified the language, and that gives us confidence that we do have the correct text available to us.

We will talk more about different texts of the Greek New Testament in a later teaching.

II. The precision of the Greek language

One of the particular characteristics of the Greek language is that it is an extremely precise language.

Hebrew, by comparison, is very difficult to nail down. Anyone who has studied Hebrew knows it is a mainly pictorial language. We have a hard time relating, because we tend to think more in the Greek manner, which is mathematical, scientific, and precise.

Greek leaves very little to the imagination; very little to debate.

That alone does not keep people from debating. If they can't argue about one thing, they will argue about something else.

Mistranslation of the Greek almost has to be deliberate!

III. Stability and precision of language are both insufficient. But, starting from essentially uniform translations, what people will do is debate the interpretation. Interpretation, in a sense, is the invention of man, to have something to argue about when they cannot argue about the correctness of the translation. Most versions of the Bible today, with few rare exceptions, are not translations but interpretations. The King James, New King James, New American Standard, and a version by Jay P. Green, can be regarded as translations. But not the New International Version, The Living Bible, or a lot of others that are popular today. So, if we have several good translations of a reliable original Greek text, why does anyone need to study the Greek? The short answer is, there just are things you lose in translation. So by studying the Greek, you can learn things that you can teach using many words, that you would not include in a translation. Furthermore, as our own language changes, we sometimes need to find better ways to express things, to be clearly understood. But, there is more to it than what is lost in translation, or changes in our own language, that require fresh expressions. It is wonderful that we can be confident we have an accurate Greek text of the New Testament. But, consider the people in Greece today: they have no translation problem at all, to understand the words of the New Testament. Nevertheless, most of them are Greek Orthodox, descendants from the state church begun by Constantine around 312 A.D. That is an important date you need to remember. Constantine ruled from 311 to 336 A.D., and during battle in 312 he had a vision of a flaming cross, because of which he made the cross his emblem. He went on to win that battle, and, as a result, changed his policy from merely tolerating Christianity to declaring Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire. People were now to be considered Christians by birth. Infants were baptized as an indication of their membership in the state church from birth. This brought apostolic Christianity essentially to an end. Apostolic Christianity speaks of Christianity being spread through the ministry of God's chosen ministers, as in Ephesians 4:11, as opposed to Christianity by birth, as in a state religion. So, it is not just referring to the age of the apostles, but the means by which the gospel is spread. Of course, we know the age of the apostles really never ended.

There still are all the five ministry offices of Ephesians 4:11 today. There still are some who go out and evangelize scripturally, along with having signs following the ministry of the Word, as we're told in Mark 16. But, anyway, what is my point here? The significance of this is that, although the nation of Greece today has the same Bible as the apostles produced within the first 100 years of Christ's birth, it does not mean they understand it! Even having the Word of God in your own native language doesn't ensure you can understand it.

IV. Holy Spirit essential to understand and interpret the Word. Something else is required to understand God's Word: namely, the Holy Spirit, whose ministry is, among other things, to guide the believer into all truth, and reveal things to come, John 16:13. I'm not going to take time today to preach about why you need the baptism in the Holy Spirit. But, I can say, it makes a difference. So, the value of New Testament Greek is not that, if you know the Greek you can automatically understand the Bible better. But, it does give you additional tools which, along with the Spirit of God, can give you greater insight into the original meanings of the words God inspired, and the apostles put down in writing.

V. The limits of this course. This course will not make anyone an authority on Greek. But, God is not nearly as concerned about us being authorities on Greek as being able to rightly divide the Word of truth, and this is just one more tool to help us do that better. Our purpose is to enable you to read the Greek New Testament, to whatever level of proficiency you desire, depending on how far you desire to apply yourself to this study. We cannot possibly cover the language the way I learned it when I took it in college, 5 one hour classes a week for 36 weeks! That difference can only be made up by the time you spend: doing the assignments, up to practicing various skills, even attempting to read what you can from the *Textus Receptus* on your own. No one even has to do the assignments; you can get something out of the class just by coming week after week. But, you will get as much out of the course as you put into it. Oh, how blessed I'd be for at least a good group of you to really be able to read the Greek New Testament with understanding. By the way, between classes, I am available to answer questions or problems with your studies. You can call me at 574-269-6560, or 574-551-2203, and I will be glad to talk with you. This is not an imposition. I will enjoy helping you with your studies.