

Introduction to New Testament Greek

A Guide for Parents

Introduction

Objective 1: Engage – discover the basics of New Testament Greek

Objective 2: Equip – give tools to help students learn New Testament Greek

Welcome to this special hour-long class for parents of students of New Testament Greek. I'm thankful that there were several who took an interest in learning more about New Testament Greek, and I hope that this class will be helpful for you.

I have a broad purpose and a narrow purpose in doing this class. The broad purpose for doing this class is to contribute toward a movement of Christians who are taking an interest in New Testament Greek because of their desire to limit the distance between themselves and the New Testament. I believe that our churches will be healthier if Christians took an interest in the original languages of the Bible.

The kind of interest that I would hope for Christians to have in Greek (and Hebrew, for that matter) and the kind of benefit that I hope for that interest to bring is probably comparable to the spectrum of interest and benefits that is common with respect to auto mechanics. Not everyone who owns a vehicle will receive formal education in how to maintain and repair that vehicle. However, all vehicle owners should at least learn some basic information so that they can tell when something is wrong and so that they can do the kind of preventative maintenance that lengthens the life of the vehicle.

Some vehicles owners will simply learn how to fill the car with gas, fill up the fluids, and check the tire pressure. Others will go on to learn to change the oil, the breaks, and maybe even some belts and hoses. Everyone understands that not every vehicle owner will take an interest or develop skill at this level, but some will and those who do will benefit from it as they save money and extend the life of their vehicle. But then there are expert mechanics who are trained, certified, and can do just about anything. But even within this category of people (you can think of pastors here) they might have a focused specialty. One mechanic might focus on body repair while another focuses on engine replacements. Whatever the case may be, we have a category for a spectrum of skill and payback in the auto mechanic world.

I think that churches would be stronger if we had this same category of skill and payback with respect to the biblical languages. What you will learn in this class, if the broad purpose is accomplished, is to just recognize terms and to know where to turn for answers to basic questions. It is something like the equivalent to knowing that you must check the oil and transmission fluid in your vehicle and, if an old guy asks if you have checked your blinker fluid recently, you'll know that he is kidding. You might even be able to detect if you are about to get ripped off when you take your car to the mechanic for basic service.

The narrow purpose for giving this lecture is to give you some basic skills so that you will be better equipped to help your children as they navigate through the challenging subject of New

Testament Greek. Whenever children are learning a language that is unknown to their parents, parents really want to help their student, but they don't have any tools to do so. This lecture should give you some basic skills so that you will not only have a general conception of what your child is talking about when you ask them how Greek is going, but also so that you might be able to participate in their efforts by helping them study and by giving them encouragement along the way.

Alphabet, Vowels, and Pronunciation

Objective 1: Recognize the 24 Greek letters of the alphabet

Objective 2: Correlate the sound of each letter with the symbol

Objective 3: Properly pronounce diphthongs

Objective 5: Read Greek out loud (even without translating) with an aim to review vocabulary and paradigms

The alphabet is the foundation of any language. If you do not know the alphabet, you simply will not be able to read the Greek New Testament – much less the individual vocabulary words that your children are memorizing.

There are 24 letters in the Greek alphabet:

LOWER CASE	UPPER CASE	LETTER NAME	ERASMIAN PRONUNCIATION	RECONSTRUCTED KOINE GREEK ¹ PRONUNCIATION	MODERN PRONUNCIATION
α	A	Alpha	f ather		
β	B	Beta	b all	Hab a na v a ult	v a ult
γ	Γ	Gamma	g ift	gh o ul y e s	gh o ul y e s
δ	Δ	Delta	d og	dh	dh , th at
ε	E	Epsilon	e cho		
ζ	Z	Zeta	kud z u	z oo	z oo
η	H	Eta	a te	Pedro	e at
θ	Θ	Theta	th in		
ι	I	Iota	sit (short) ski (long)	ski	ski
κ	K	Kappa	k ey		
λ	Λ	Lambda	l ock		
μ	M	Mu	m om		
ν	N	Nu	n ail		
ξ	Ξ	Xi	fo x		
ο	O	Omicron	o ften	o bey	o bey
π	Π	Pi	p ond	s pill	p ond b ond
ρ	P	Rho	r hyme		
ς / σ	Σ	Sigma	s and		
τ	T	Tau	t ap	s till	t oe d oe
υ	Υ	Upsilon	bo ot	German " ü "	be at
φ	Φ	Phi	ph one		
χ	X	Chi	a che	German " ch "	a che h ue
ψ	Ψ	Psi	oo ps		
ω	Ω	Omega	o bey		

As you can see on the chart, there are different pronunciation systems for reading New Testament Greek. However, the most commonly used system is the Erasmian pronunciation and that is what we use at ACA.

Additionally, the Greek New Testament only uses the upper-case letters for:

- Names (People or Places)
- Titles (Books or Epistles)
- New Paragraphs

As such, upper case letters appear relatively infrequently in the GNT. I do not make students memorize the upper-case letters; however, it is good to be familiar with them. I *do* have students memorize the Greek alphabet (lower-case) in order and with proper pronunciation. It is important for students to be able to recognize the character as well as to pronounce the sound of the letter. *This is more important than learning the name of the letter for reading.*

There are 24 letters (though 25 characters, including the terminal sigma). There are 7 vowels.

Greek Alphabet: α β γ δ ε ζ η θ ι κ λ μ ν ξ ο π ρ σ/ς τ υ φ χ ψ ω

Practice: Write out the Greek Alphabet and circle the vowels:

Special Pronunciation:

- The double gamma: When a gamma (γ) occurs before another gamma or before another hard consonant (κ, ξ, χ), it will be pronounced with an “n” sound. For example, αγγελος will be pronounced an-ge-los rather than ag-ge-los.
- The lack of an “h” character in Greek is made up for by a rough breathing mark: ᾱ
- Diphthongs: seven sets of vowels combine to form a new sound:

αι — aisle
αυ — kraut
ει — freight
ευ — feud
οι — oil
ου — soup
υι — suite

Notice that each of the Greek diphthongs approximates an English diphthong. Of course, there is some variation with English diphthongs that is not observed with Greek diphthongs (e.g. Either is pronounced either as i-ther or ee-ther, not ay-ther).

Reading Greek

Objective #1: Recognize the importance of learning vocabulary for reading and comprehension

Objective #2: Distinguish between glosses and translation

Objective #3: Provide tips for memorizing vocabulary

Learning the alphabet, character recognition, and word pronunciation are the building blocks that allow students to identify Greek words and learn vocabulary. The vocabulary lists consist of an English gloss(es) in connection with a Greek word.

Of course, every word has a semantic range and the translation of that word is determined by the context in which the word is used. For example, the English word “run” has 148 definitions! Only the context in which the word is used will provide the information needed to determine the right translation/interpretation within the word's semantic range. So, the English glosses are not, strictly speaking, translations. Nevertheless, they are important building blocks that allow students to gain a sense of each word's basic semantic range that will become more refined as they continue their studies.

I'm currently taking a German class and my textbook (Wilson, *German Quickly*) includes some vocab memorization tips that I've adapted to Greek that may be useful as you seek to coach your children:

1. Some words are easy to memorize because their common rendering in English is not really a translation, but a transliteration (the approximation of phonetical values). For example, βαπτίζω is often glossed as “I baptize.” Allow the transliteration to give you word associations with the other glosses: “I wash, I immerse, I dip”.
2. Treat memorizing a word like remembering a person's name. When you see an unfamiliar word that you must memorize, say it and the English gloss several times and find some meaningful link to make it more memorable.
3. Take the time to learn the word correctly in the first place. It will pay off in the long run.
4. If you have established a false link or have learned the word incorrectly, try to undo the link as soon as possible, as it will plague you until you do. Remind yourself of the correct definition, and try to think about it during the day, when doing a mindless activity, or even when falling asleep!
5. Keep a list of words you often forget and place it where you can refer to it easily. Review that list frequently and remove words as you become more familiar with them. Asterisk or underline the word in your lexicon to help you find it more quickly.
6. Try to memorize just a couple of words at a time. Anytime words all start sounding the same is a time to stop trying to memorize them, or to mix up the order so that similar sounding words are not put back to back.

7. Place words on post-it notes and place them in places that you frequent around the house (e.g. On a bedroom mirror) or take a picture of them to use as the background for your phone.
8. Use every opportunity you can to memorize words.
9. Find a friend (sibling, classmate, etc.) and memorize together. Incorporate it as part of the time that you spend hanging out and incorporate vocabulary words into your conversations.

Additionally, parents who have learned to pronounce Greek words can verbally quiz their children and help them to review their vocab words. Who knows, maybe you will memorize some and can incorporate them into your conversation with your children!

Finally, as you talk with your children about your Bible reading, ask them if they can look up a particular word of interest in their Greek New Testament. If they do not know the word, it will give them a good opportunity to use their lexicons!

Introduction to Nouns

Objective #1: Explain the declinable nature of nouns.

Objective #2: Show similarities between English and Greek nouns.

Objective #3: Demonstrate paradigms as “decoder cards”.

Nouns are words that represent a person, place, thing, or idea.

Case

In English, we describe the function of nouns in a sentence with identifiers such as: Subject (S), Direct Object (DO), Indirect Object (IO), etc. Furthermore, we identify the function of nouns based on their place in a sentence.

For example: *Jim throws Tim the ball*. In this sentence we know that Jim is the subject rather than Tim because Jim appears before the verb.

In Greek, however, word order does not communicate the function of a noun in a sentence. Instead, that function of the noun is communicated by case endings. We could do this in English as well:

JimS throws TimIO the ballDO. Now that there is a case ending system, regardless of how the words are arranged we would be able to identify the function of each noun. For example, in the sentences *The ballDO TimIO throws JimS* or *Throws JimS the ballDO TimIO* we know that Jim remains the subject of the sentence.

In Greek, there are four cases that approximate to the common English markers:

Nominative — Subject Case

Genitive — Possession or Family Relationship (helping word: of)

Dative — Indirect Object (helping word: to/for)

Accusative — Direct Object

Number

Nouns can be either singular or plural in both English and Greek. In English we signify the grammatical number with particular word endings. For example:

Bird (sg) → Birds (pl) Box (sg) → Boxes (pl) Ox (sg) → Oxen (pl)

The case endings on Greek nouns indicate not only the function of the noun in the sentence, but also the grammatical number of the noun.

Gender

English nouns do not really have grammatical gender in the same way that Greek nouns have grammatical gender. In Greek, grammatical gender does not correlate to biological gender in the same way that English nouns sometimes change form to communicate biological gender. For example:

Prince (masc.) → Princess (fem.) King (masc.) → Queen (fem.)

Waiter (masc.) → Waitress (fem.)

Noun case endings do not necessarily portray the grammatical gender, but there are case ending patterns that are associated with the gender. The patterns (sometimes called declensions) are memorized so that students can parse (explain all of the information embedded in the form of the noun) nouns to determine their function in a sentence.

Articles

In English, nouns are specified with a definite article (the) or are left unspecified with an indefinite article (a/an). In Greek, there is no indefinite article; there is only the article. The article has a variety of uses but is most often translated as “the”.

Furthermore, the article always agrees with its noun in case, number, and gender. Because there are some nouns that are particularly difficult to identify (and a minority of case endings for nouns overlap) the article will always provide the information needed to parse the noun.

Paradigm Example:

FIRST DECLENSION NOUN—ETA PATTERN						
	SINGULAR			PLURAL		
NOM	ἡ	φωνή	the voice	αἱ	φωναί	the voices
GEN	τῆς	φωνῆς	of the voice	τῶν	φωνῶν	of the voices
DAT	τῇ	φωνῇ	to/for the voice	ταῖς	φωναῖς	to/for the voices
ACC	τὴν	φωνήν	the voice	τάς	φωνάς	the voices

Introduction to Verbs

Objective #1: Explain the inflected nature of Greek verbs.

Objective #2: Show conceptual similarities in verb form changes in Greek and English.

Objective #3: Demonstrate verb paradigms and “decoder cards”

Verbs provide the core action to a sentence. In Greek, verbs are inflected, similar to the way that nouns are inflected. Information is embedded in verbs forms that allow them to be distinguished in a sentence. In English, we have a similar (though less comprehensive) way of doing this:

Write → Wrote Bake → Baked Eat → Ate Run → Running See → Saw

The verb forms communicate:

1. Person: 1st, 2nd, or 3rd
2. Number: Singular or Plural
3. Voice:
 - a. Active: The subject performs the action.
 - b. Middle: The subject both performs and is affected by the action.
 - c. Passive: The subject receives the action.
4. Mood: Indicates the authors understanding of the verbal action’s relationship to reality. The action can be portrayed as factual, possible, desired, commanded, etc.
 - a. Indicative mood: represents something as certain/factual.
 - b. Subjunctive mood: represents something as probable, contingent, or indefinite.
 - c. Optative mood: represents somethings as possible or hoped for.
 - d. Imperative mood: represents something as requested or demanded.

- e. Note: technically, participles and infinitives are not technically moods since they are dependent on verbs, but we refer to them in this way in our parsing.
5. Tense: Greek uses tense-forms to identify verbs. In English, tense usually indicates that an action is past, present, or future. In Greek, time is not inherent in tense (except for in the indicative mood). The Greek tenses are:
- | | | |
|---------------|-----------|----------------------|
| a. Present | λυω | I am loosing/I loose |
| b. Imperfect | ελυον | I was loosing |
| c. Future | λυσω | I will loose |
| d. Aorist | ελυσα | I loosed |
| e. Perfect | λελυκα | I have loosed |
| f. Pluperfect | ελελυκειν | I had loosed |
6. Aspect: Verbal aspect is the subjective perspective or viewpoint form which an author communicates the action of the verb. While English emphasizes time, Greek emphasizes aspect. The three aspects are:
- Imperfective Aspect (present and imperfect tenses): the author depicts the action as ongoing or in process, without attention to the action's beginning or ending. This is the "progressive perspective" of the author.
 - Perfective Aspect (future and aorist tenses): the author depicts the action as complete or as a whole. This is the "wholistic perspective" of the author.
 - Stative Aspect (perfect and pluperfect tenses): the author depicts a state of affairs or ongoing relevance resulting from a previous action or state. This is the "combinative aspect" because it combines elements of ongoing (imperfective) relevance with a wholly (perfective) completed past action.

Example Paradigm

PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE				
	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
1ST	λύω	I am loosing	λύομεν	we are loosing
2ND	λύεις	you are loosing	λύετε	you are loosing
3RD	λύει	he/she/it is loosing	λύουσι(ν)	they are loosing

Greek Tools & Resources

Resources

- <https://www.bhacademic.com/beginninggreek/#resources>
 - Vocabulary Sheets
 - Practice Exercises
 - Student Powerpoints
 - Vocabulary Scripture Verses
 - Vocabulary Memory Devices
 - Lecture Video Links
- Daily Dose of Greek: <http://dailydoseofgreek.com/>
 - 2 Minute daily videos
 - Many other Greek resources
- Biblical Language Guide: *Dictionary of English Grammar for Students of Biblical Languages*, Kyle Greenwood; \$15.19
- Greek Devotionals:
 - *Exegetical Gems from the Greek New Testament*, Benjamin Merkle; \$14.19
 - *Devotions on the Greek New Testament: 52 Reflections to Inspire and Instruct*; \$12.79
 - *Devotions on the Greek New Testament, Vol. 2*; \$16.41

Reader's GNT

- UBS Greek Reader's
- Website: gntreader.com
- More resources: <https://biblicalgreek.org/translate/greek-new-testament-online/>

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Note: I've used several Greek Grammars without citation, so please do post these notes publicly.