

# Fundamentals of New Testament Greek

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# Introduction

All beginning grammar books are incomplete in their coverage of the language they introduce. In fact, grammar books often present half-truths (even lies!) about the language that we have seen needed correcting in second-year classes. We trust that this text contains fewer such statements than others. In an effort to minimize incompleteness, we have included fuller and more comprehensive discussions, definitions, and presentation of material than are usually found in other beginning grammars. Students may initially find this approach daunting, though we are convinced that, in the long run, it will serve them better. Not all of the material is for instantaneous learning or instant recall, but collectively it is meant to lay a solid foundation, to fill in gaps, and to provide an understanding that is both broad and deep.

This volume and its accompanying workbook are designed to accomplish the following tasks:

- introduce the student to the basic morphology (i.e., the forms of verbs, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives) of the Greek New Testament
- introduce the student to the elementary syntax (i.e., the arrangement of words and phrases) of the Greek New Testament
- provide a variety of exercises to promote understanding of New Testament Greek
- introduce basic vocabulary of the Greek New Testament in roughly its order of frequency
- illustrate the relevance of a knowledge of Greek for understanding the meaning of the New Testament
- develop an appreciation for serious and careful study of the Greek language so that the student can continue to read the Greek text of the New Testament with profit and delight
- provide guidance in seeing how careful, scholarly study of Greek can lead to a better understanding of the Bible and to greater spiritual maturity and personal piety.

We address these goals in the following ways in this book. Each chapter is arranged in a similar fashion. It begins with a brief list of the key points covered in the chapter. Then come definitions of the basic concepts that the chapter explains and exemplifies.

Except for chapter 1, each chapter continues with a list of vocabulary to be learned. The vocabulary is divided into sections by type of word (verb, noun, etc.), with usually the lexical form (i.e., the form dictionaries use to list the word) and a basic gloss, or translation equivalent. The vocabulary is collected at the back of the book in an inclusive alphabetical list. At the completion of this textbook, students will have learned over 950 words of the

New Testament — that is, essentially all words in the Greek New Testament that appear twelve times or more, plus a number of others that occur in the translation exercises found in the accompanying workbook.

The next major section or sections of each chapter have extended explanations of the basic concepts to be learned in the chapter. These explanations include information about the meaning of the particular Greek forms being learned and morphological information on how the forms are created and modified. The information appears in various formats, using different type-sizes and styles to help focus the use of the book. The essential material is in the regular type, with interesting, important, but less immediately essential material in other presentation styles. Students should learn well the information in the regular type and should read and try to retain as much of the other material as possible. They will refer back to this set-off material as they learn more Greek or encounter problems in subsequent lessons. We realize that we have presented a lot of material in these chapters, but our goal is to cover satisfactorily all of the major points of Greek grammar.

The final major section in each chapter contains paradigms of the forms being learned, along with brief formulas that encapsulate how the various forms are created. These formulas are useful to learn, to help not only in forming the particular word forms but in parsing them. Parsing is the process of fully identifying a particular form. For example, as will be learned below, a verb form in Greek typically conveys a great variety of information, often including tense-form, voice, mood, person, and number. In parsing, we emphasize identifying all of the information, doing so in a set pattern. Parsing of nouns and other words is also done. Some teachers and students may wish to learn the paradigms first and then refer to the explanations, an approach that is certainly acceptable. Here we are simply pointing out both the formal tables of information (i.e., paradigms) and the explanation of what these forms mean and how they are created. It is essential that students learn both, in either order. A complete set of paradigms is provided at the end of the book as well, cross-referenced to the individual chapters. As a means of quick review, a summary of what has been introduced and learned concludes each chapter.

The accompanying workbook of exercises is designed to support what is found in these chapters. The variety of exercises includes creating various forms of a given word, parsing of the forms, substituting one form for another, and translating actual sentences from the Greek New Testament and also an extended passage.

Review exercises after every five chapters draw upon the information from the previous chapters. These review exercises are based upon actual examinations that have been used by us and others who have used this textbook. The result is exercises that are designed to actually test and determine what the students are learning. Some teachers may wish to use these review exercises as models for their own examinations, while others may wish to assign them formally for students to complete as graded assignments. Others may wish to refer students to them to use as their own progress reports.

The thoroughness of this textbook allows teachers to use it in the way that they see best. Some may wish not to schedule certain chapters but to hold them over to a second- or intermediate-level Greek class. Others may wish to add further exercises or reading assignments.

Throughout, we encourage the reading of Greek out loud. In the first chapter, we have included both the traditional Erasmian pronunciation system, used in some form by most teachers of biblical Greek, and pronunciation of the letters based upon contemporary Greek

pronunciation. The advantage of the Erasmian system is that, with few exceptions, it gives each letter a different pronunciation, thus helping students to learn to differentiate the letters and sounds to aid in spelling and recognition. The advantage of the contemporary Greek pronunciation is that it more accurately reflects the pronunciation as it was developing at the time the Greek New Testament was written, as indicated by the evidence from papyri and inscriptions. Furthermore, it enables students to relate more easily with modern Greek culture (including with modern Greeks, who often find the Erasmian pronunciation system stilted, if not offensive!). Its difficulty, however, is that many of the vowels are pronounced the same, making spelling more difficult. Teachers will need to decide for themselves which form of pronunciation they use, but we advise that they select one and use it unswervingly, so that students are not confused. We like to emphasize pronunciation, demonstrating what the Greek sounds like to students and asking them to read aloud the Greek, both as a class and individually. We have also often found it useful to schedule an oral reading examination as part of the assessment for the Greek course.

A further recommended use of spoken biblical Greek (using either of these two pronunciation systems) is in Scripture memory and meditation. A natural way to solidify knowledge of word forms and of syntax is to memorize Bible verses and passages in Greek (very simple ones at first, of course!) and to use them in personal meditation (again, out loud is best) in the spirit of Psalm 1 and similar passages. Such repetition provides an excellent, if indirect, way to review vocabulary, the cases, the verb forms, and all other details of morphology and syntax, at the same time providing an opportunity to foster the spiritual maturity and personal piety that for many will be the ultimate goal of these Greek studies.<sup>1</sup>

Students are often amazed at how long it takes to learn Greek but then at how little time it takes to lose their knowledge. We have found that any student willing to devote two uninterrupted hours each day to study of the lessons in this book is virtually assured of success, often quite startlingly good success. Retaining the knowledge gained can be accomplished as well. To avoid loss of Greek over one summer between Greek classes, or even over the Christmas break between semesters, we have developed a twenty-minute drill to aid students in retaining their Greek.<sup>2</sup> The drill, divided into four, five-minute segments, each devoted to a particular task, should be done once a day, every day. The first five minutes should be spent reviewing the vocabulary of one chapter in this textbook. The student should cover up the English meaning and go through the vocabulary list as quickly and as many times as possible in the five minutes, reviewing the vocabulary and its translation. The second five minutes should be spent reviewing the Greek paradigms in the same chapter. The student should note the particular paradigm to be reviewed and then first repeat or write down quickly from memory the full conjugation of the word appearing in the paradigm. In the remaining time, the student should select other words from the current or previous vocabulary lists and create the equivalent paradigm. The third five minutes should be spent working through selective and representative exercises, including the translation passages, for the same chapter. The fourth five-minute slot requires that the student have a copy of the Greek New Testament and an English Bible. The student should select a book

1. On these topics, see Craig A. Noll, "Biblical Meditation: A Forgotten Resource in Learning New Testament Greek?" *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 11 (2009-10): 62-67.

2. This drill is adapted from one developed for Hebrew by Prof. Richard Rigsby, Biola University, La Mirada, California, based on fifteen minutes of daily study.

to work through, such as John's gospel. The student should turn to chapter 1 and start going through the text, translating a verse at a time and parsing every significant form. The English text can be used as an aid where the student gets stuck, just to pick up the sense of the passage. Then the student should turn back to the Greek text, trying to make as much progress through the passage as possible. The student should do this drill each day, progressing through the chapters in this book, as well as the selected section of the Greek New Testament. Essentially, every month the student will have reviewed this entire textbook and as a result will keep fresh on the fundamentals of New Testament Greek.