

EMMAUS PATHWAY

New Testament Greek

Unit 1

1. Introduction: the language.

In the time before Christ, the country of Greece consisted of a large number of city-states. Although there was a common language, different dialects (Ionic, Doric, Attic and Aeolic) were spoken in different places. Of these, the Attic dialect, spoken at Athens, became the most predominant and was adopted as the official language of literature. We know it now as *Classical Greek*.

Alexander the Great conquered the then-known world and adopted Attic Greek as the language of the Greek-Macedonian empire. It was therefore used in all areas of the empire: trade, administration, learning etc. During this time, the pure Attic form of the language was gradually broken down and became simpler and less rigid. It absorbed forms from other dialects and even from other languages.

This everyday language became known as *koine* or *common* Greek. In the time of Roman supremacy, Latin became the official language, but *koine* Greek continued to be spoken throughout the empire. It is therefore the language in which the New Testament is written.

2. The Alphabet (General)

1. The original writings of the New Testament were set down in capital letters known as *uncial* writing. Uncial was replaced in about the 9th century A.D. by *cursive* (running) writing. Now we have the New Testament in cursive writing while the capital letters are represented by the uncial letters.

2. The 1st Century manuscripts of the New Testament were not only all in capital letters but also without any punctuation. It can therefore occasionally be difficult to determine whether a particular sentence is a question or a statement (although this problem is seldom encountered). Remember also that the division of a passage into verses is simply a convenience for the sake of easy reference - the original writings were not divided up in this way.

3. Capital letters are now used infrequently in the Greek New Testament. They occur at the beginning of a paragraph and as the first letter of a *proper* noun (the name of a person or a place).

4. We don't know exactly how *koine* Greek was pronounced. This course will use a pronunciation scheme in common use today.

3. The Alphabet: (Specific)

The alphabet is divided into *consonants* and *vowels*. Vowels may be further combined into one sound called a *diphthong* (diff – thong)

Consonants: *b, c d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w x, y, z*

Vowels: *a, e, i, o, u*

Diphthongs *ai, au, ei, eu, oi, ou, ui*

Here is the Greek alphabet showing the pronunciation of the letters and their English equivalents. Notice that the *order* of the letters is different from that in the English alphabet.

<i>Greek name</i>	<i>Greek letter</i>	<i>Capital letter</i>	<i>English equivalent</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>
Alpha	α	Α	a	cat
Beta	β	Β	b	bat
Gamma	γ *	Γ	g	gun
Delta	δ	Δ	d	dog
Epsilon	ε **	Ε	e (short)	met
Zeta	ζ	Ζ	z (dz sound)	adze
Eta	η	Η	e (long)	air / they ^
Theta	θ	Θ	th	thin
Iota	ι	Ι	i	pit / kiosk #
Kappa	κ	Κ	k	kill
Lambda	λ	Λ	l	lot
Mu	μ	Μ	m	man
Nu	ν	Ν	n	net
Xi	ξ	Ξ	x	six
Omicron	ο	Ο	o (short)	got
Pi	π	Π	p	pin
Rho	ρ	Ρ	r	rat
Sigma	σ/ς ##	Σ	s	sin
Tau	τ	Τ	y	top
Upsilon	υ	Υ	u	lute / put
Phi	φ	Φ	ph	photo
Chi	χ	Χ	ch	loch
Psi	ψ	Ψ	ps	lapse
Omega	ω	Ω	o (long)	moan

4. Notes on the Alphabet

- * When you see two *gammas* together (- γγ -) as in ἄγγελος, the first γ is pronounced as an “n” - so we have the sound “-ng”- as in “England”. This is why ἄγγελος came into our language as the word “*angel*”.
- ** Two of the Greek vowels (e / o) can be *long* or *short*. If a Greek word contains a long vowel, and we want to write the word out in English lettering, we put a stroke (like a hyphen) above the long vowel to distinguish it from its short counterpart.
- ^ Whichever is preferred. Can be pronounced as *air* or *eh*.
- # The sound of this vowel can be lengthened naturally from *i* to *ee* depending on its position in a word.
- # # When the “s” appears at the beginning or the middle of a Greek word, it’s written as σ. When it’s the final letter of a word, it’s written as - ς.

Both forms of the letter “s” can be seen in the word σωζεις (“*you are saving*”).

Note of interest: *omicron* literally means “*little o*” (μικρος = “*little*”) and *omega* means “*big o*” (μεγας = “*big*”)

5. Pronunciation of Diphthongs

ai	as in	<i>aisle</i>
au		<i>Strauss</i>
ei		<i>eight</i>
eu		<i>feud</i>
oi		<i>boil</i>
ou		<i>soup</i>
ui		<i>quit</i>

As you read the Greek New Testament, you’ll find a number of marks above the words. These are called “*accents*”.

e.g. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὀμιλεῖν.

Many of these accents are of no assistance whatsoever in your reading of the Greek text and therefore they are omitted in all exercises given in this course. There are a few exceptions to this. Here are *two* very important ones:

When a Greek word begins with a *vowel* or a *diphthong*, we’ll always find one of two accents above the vowel (the *second* vowel in the case of the *diphthong*). These two accents denote *smooth* or *rough* breathing and you need to be aware of the difference between them.

6. Smooth Breathing:

The most common accent is shaped like an apostrophe and it indicates *smooth breathing* (e.g. ᾶ-). This means that there is no “h” sound or *rough breathing* before the vowel or diphthong. As it’s an accent that actually indicates the *absence* of something, you can readily see that it will make no difference whatsoever to the *pronunciation, spelling* or *meaning* of the word. In actual fact we could omit it altogether - but for the sake of consistency with other courses, we’ll leave it in! To illustrate this point, let’s write out a couple of words – and give the equivalent English lettering:

ἄρτος = artos (*bread*) - accent makes no difference to the English spelling
 εὐλογεῖ = eulogei (*he blesses*) – accent is above the second vowel of the diphthong

7. Rough breathing

The second accent we find above initial vowels and diphthongs is the opposite to smooth breathing. It’s known as *rough breathing* and is written like an initial quotation mark – the opposite to the apostrophe (e.g. ἁ-).

When you see this accent above the initial vowel or diphthong, it means that the word begins with the sound “h” (we call this *rough breathing*). Not only is the “h” sound present in our pronunciation of the word, but if we write the word with English lettering, we must also put in the letter “h”. Effectively then, this accent is *the Greek equivalent of the letter “h”* which is placed *above* the initial letter - not in front of it!

e.g. ἁλός = holos (*whole*)
 ἁρίσκει = heuriskei (*he finds*)

You can see that the *spelling* (and therefore the *meaning*) of a word can change depending on what accent is used at the beginning.

Consider the word ἐν as an example. This word would be written in English letters (transliterated) as “en” and means “in”. The accent above the ε changes nothing.

Another word is ἥν. It’s very similar to the one above but notice that there is rough breathing above the vowel. This word would be transliterated as *hen* and means *one*. The accent in this case is the equivalent to a letter “h” before the word – changing its spelling and meaning!

8. Transliteration.

To become familiar with the alphabet, write out the passages below in English letters.

Remember

- the *smooth breathing* does *not* appear in the spelling.
- the *rough breathing* appears as an “h” at the beginning of the word.
- you are not *translating* the passage (giving the English meaning) – you are *transliterating* (substituting English letters for the Greek ones).

Exercise 1.a Transliterate the following into English letters:

Και ὁ λογος σαρξ ἐγενετο και ἐσκηνωσεν ἐν *ἡμιν, και ἐθεασαμεθα την δοξαν αὐτου, δοξαν ὡς μονογενους παρα πατρος, πληρης χαριτος και ἀληθειας. (John 1:14)

Exercise 1.b Transliterate the following into English letters:

Οὕτως και *ἡ ἀναστασις των νεκρων. σπειρεται ἐν φθορα, ἐγειρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσια· σπειρεται ἐν ἀτιμια, ἐγειρεται ἐν δοξη· σπειρεται ἐν ἀσθενια, ἐγειρεται ἐν δυναμει· σπειρεται σωμα ψυχικον, ἐγειρεται σωμα πνευματικον. εἰ ἐστιν σωμα ψυχικον, ἐστιν και πνευματικον. (1 Cor.15:42-44)

* Notice that whenever the *eta* (η) is used with *rough breathing* (ῥ), there is a second accent (´) alongside the rough breathing. *This is to be ignored.* It occurs in this course because this particular font construction is the only one available on the character map in use.

9. Punctuation Marks:

- the *full-stop* at the end of sentences is the same as in English.
- the *semicolon* (;) is identical to the full stop but is placed at the top of the letter (e.g. ...α·).
- *commas* are exactly the same as in English.
- a *question mark* in Greek is written as a *semicolon* (;) would be in English.

e.g. ὑμεις δε τινα με λεγετε εἰμι; (Matt.16:15)
(Who do you say that I am?)

Take your time with this unit to absorb the information.

Reading Greek letters will come more and more naturally to you as you go through the course. Before too long, you'll find yourself reading out Greek words without consciously thinking about it.