

Preface to the Revised and Expanded Edition

Introduction to the Student

Wanting to read the Greek New Testament is noble. The New Testament is a sacred text for over a billion people living in the twenty-first century; it contains the religious and ethical teachings of early believers who have changed the world; and, of course, it contains the words of Jesus—and it was originally written in Koiné (Common) Hellenistic Greek. Reading the New Testament in its original language is the most direct way to experience this sacred text.

Pastors want to learn Greek to add depth and insight to their sermons; students want to learn it to add intensity to their religious quest; historians, archaeologists, and other scholars want to learn it to be able to read primary literature. These numerous good reasons and others promise a reward, but they do not make the task any easier. Seasoned language learners will tell you that learning a new language is not easy, but they will be quick to tell you that it can be efficiently and skillfully done.

Learning Hellenistic Greek is both like and unlike the learning of other languages. Like any language, you will learn sounds, words, and sentences. But unlike the learning of a modern language such as Spanish, French, or German (or even modern Greek!), you will not learn to converse in Koiné Greek. Your competence will be in reading, not conversing. This may sound a little disagreeable because you will never get to talk to anyone! But half of conversation is listening, and reading an ancient text entails listening. Some people are not good listeners, but it is a skill that can be nurtured.

Greek letters *look* so different from English letters that a popular saying in English, when something looks strange and unfamiliar, is “that’s Greek to me!” This is a small obstacle, however, and soon disappears. Indeed, in some ways Greek is quite comparable to English (as is Latin), and a common experience of those who learn Greek is that they learn much about English. One reason is that Greek and English are related to each other historically. Another reason is that becoming a student of any language will heighten your awareness of language in general—even your own language. You will think, speak, and write differently—hopefully *better*.

Revisions and Additions to This Edition

To understand the basic structure of this grammar, carefully read the Preface to the first edition, authored by James Allen Hewett. While the original structure has been left essentially intact, this revision involves more than the correction of errors and improvements in formatting. Building on Hewett's excellent work, the discussions in each chapter have been substantially rewritten in the light of more recent discussions in Greek grammar.

Many of the revised chapters now begin by distinguishing "The Basics" from material that is labeled "A Step Beyond." These distinctions serve to alert the student to what in the chapter is critical to master as opposed to material that is of an intermediate level, and may also be helpful in shaping the instructor's lesson preparations for each unit.

We agree with many of our colleagues that the rules of accentuation are not an essential element of learning to read the Greek of the New Testament. For this reason, we have relegated rules and discussion of accents to an appendix, except where important in identifying forms. Despite this fact, since ancient Greek was intended to be read aloud (even in private), and because language instructors know that both hearing and seeing are essential elements of learning a language, we have consistently followed the practice of presenting the Greek text with proper accentuation.

A few other changes made in the interests of pedagogy are (1) additional tables, charts, and examples; (2) the shortening of some explanations; (3) the reduction of references to secondary literature in the text and footnotes; and (4) the addition, beginning in chapter 5, of some relatively basic English-to-Greek exercises. This latter change was made on behalf of instructors who have discovered the pedagogical value of translating into the language being learned, and who wish, as time permits, to challenge their students to a higher level of competence.

Finally, chapter 3 provides traditional Western ("Erasmian") pronunciations that serve to highlight the visual differences between Greek letters and diphthongs. These pronunciations are sometimes maligned as artificial constructs by those who speak ecclesiastical or modern Greek, and, indeed, not all may have predominated in the New Testament period. For example, it is fairly clear that, by the first century, *o* and *ω* were regularly confused. This suggests that when New Testament texts were being written, the pronunciation of *o* and *ω* may have been virtually indistinguishable (i.e., both may have sounded like the *o* in *wrote*). It is also very likely that by the second century (and perhaps even in the first century in some areas) *α* sounded more like *ε* (the *e* in *bed*), and *ει* more like *ι* (the *i* in *bit*). Whatever scheme of pronunciation one chooses, however, it is important to be consistent.

Beyond the revisions and expansions of existing material, two completely new chapters have been added that seek more thoroughly to integrate English as the learning platform for the acquisition of Greek. Chapter 1 ("Traditional Components of Grammar") is devoted to basics of traditional English grammar. This chapter replaces

some of the scattered discussions of English grammar found throughout the first edition. Because the book modestly integrates modern linguistic theory, chapter 2 (“Meaning”) is devoted to terms and concepts useful to students beginning the learning of a language. Both of these new chapters are short and descriptive, their sole reason for existence being to provide the student with a basic background and some of the learning tools necessary to begin language study. We offer the chapters as resources and hence without exercises. Since a review of portions of these chapters will, on occasion, be helpful as students learn Greek, we provide occasional review suggestions throughout the grammar as well. At all times our inclusion and presentation of information aim to make the student a skillful and efficient learner of Greek.

To the Instructor

One modest yet important contribution we have made in this second edition concerns the presentation of Greek grammatical forms. To this day, grammars have been plagued with several inconsistencies regarding the way verbal suffixes are categorized and presented. Specifically, grammars will argue one or more of the following points: (1) in most tenses, voices, and moods, linking (thematic) vowels are attached between stems and endings, but in the present and future active indicative, the linking vowels are to be included with and treated as endings (-ω, -εις, -ει, etc.); (2) the future active is characterized by the -σ- tense suffix while the aorist has the -σα- tense suffix, and the perfect active tense, the -κ-, with an -α- linking vowel attached (cf. the pluperfect’s κ + ει); and (3) the perfect is a *primary tense*, but the perfect active indicative uses *secondary-tense* personal endings (i.e., identical to the aorist *except for the third plural*).

Antonios N. Jannaris has suggested a solution to the first inconsistency.¹ Discussing the historical development of verb endings, he has argued that the present and future active indicative use the linking vowels ο and ε throughout the conjugation (as do the imperfect and second aorist tenses), and that these vowels have lengthened in the first and third singular and the third plural because of contraction with prehistoric -μι endings—endings that, in the first and third singular, have, in effect, dropped out. In other words, the first and third singular no longer contain “endings,” as it were. J. Gresham Machen began to acknowledge this fact, but then he seemed to back away from its implications for more immediate didactic purposes.²

Regarding the second inconsistency, the future and first aorist active indicatives should be understood as both using a -σ- tense suffix, just as the first perfect and pluperfect both use a -κ- tense suffix. Further distinctions between verbal affixes are

¹*An Historical Greek Grammar* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1897; repr. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1968), 197, §766.

²*New Testament Greek for Beginners* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 21. Cf. William H. Davis, *Beginner’s Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York and Evanston, Ill.: Harper & Row, 1923), 26.

to be found in the linking vowels (aorist and perfect using α[ε]) and personal endings (primary vs. secondary).

If one works from these first two basic observations, the third inconsistency disappears because the present, future, and perfect active indicatives—primary tenses all—have *primary tense* personal endings (-, ζ, -, -μεν, -τε, -σι[ν]). We still recommend that students memorize the λύω paradigms for the active indicative tenses, but we believe that a consistent presentation of the grammatical rules of word formation (and their exceptions) will engender better understanding and retention of forms, especially as the student moves beyond the active indicative to the other voices and moods.

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Thanks from both of us to our Claremont *Doktor Vater*, Jim Robinson, who, to the day he retired from active teaching, required his doctoral students to read Greek New Testament passages aloud in every class; and to the late Howard Jackson of Pomona College and Claremont Graduate University, our brutally honest (but always out of the purest of motives) instructor for Hellenistic Texts Seminar.

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And finally, we owe our deepest appreciation to our loving and ever patient spouses, Annette Robbins and Ellen Davis.

Mike Robbins

Steve Johnson

Preface to the First Edition

This text is written for the person who seriously wishes to learn Greek and to read intelligibly a Greek New Testament. Whereas it is expected that the volume will be primarily used in classroom settings, the text was written with the intention that a person, using the *Key to Exercises* to evaluate his or her exercises, could readily progress to competent exegetical studies without professorial help.

Experience has shown that the most significant stumbling block to learning Greek is an inadequate knowledge of English grammar. Hence, while the text assumes that a person does know English grammar, it also includes explanations and illustrations of each English grammatical counterpart as new Greek materials are introduced.

The text proceeds from the basic structures of the verb and noun to the more complex constructions. Forms and vocabulary are introduced at a rate such that by the end of two semesters (30 weeks) or an intensive summer program (e.g., eight 40-hour weeks), the student will have covered all the grammar and vocabulary necessary to enter basic Greek exegesis courses.

My goal, preparing students for basic Greek exegesis, determined the scope of the text. In exegetical studies one wishes to move along to matters of interpretation, employing grammatical skills already learned. With this in mind materials have been included that are not found in most beginning grammars, but which are essential if one is to comprehend the significance of the variety of forms that Greek writers used. One will find minimal information that is simply “interesting”; the materials herein are functional and relevant to exegesis. For these reasons students who have already studied Greek for a year or so will find this to be an excellent tool for refurbishing and synthesizing prior knowledge and for acquiring materials ordinarily presented at the intermediate level of language study.

The approach to the noun system is traditional. Nouns of the second and first declensions are introduced in early chapters, together with the other nominal items—adjective, pronoun, article—that are of like formation. Always, the determinative factor for presentation has been to show repetition and similarity so as to facilitate learning.

The verb system has been presented differently from most texts. Although the principal parts are given in the vocabularies, the conjugations are introduced according to the formative endings. For example, when learning the primary active endings,

the student is able to see the tenses that use these endings and he or she can simply note that a sigma between the stem and endings differentiates the two tenses. Persons using this text for review purposes and who began Greek study from the principal part approach will find tables illustrating this perspective.

The first twelve chapters contain all words of the first and second declensions, the omega conjugation, and the particles that occur more than fifty times in a Greek New Testament. The remainder of the text presents all other words occurring more than thirty times (for an approximate total of 475 items). The vocabularies are presented with exercises that use the words in the same or immediately preceding chapters. In addition the exercises from Chapter 15 forward will have terms marked with an asterisk that do not occur in the vocabularies of this text, but are encountered infrequently in a Greek New Testament. These may be readily identified by consulting a standard Greek lexicon. Accents are treated as a separate section in the early chapters; elaborations are provided as different grammatical forms are introduced.

The exercises illustrate and give practice in using the grammatical matters being learned. I have chosen not to include English to Greek translations because my goal is exclusively to immerse students in Koine Greek and to have them reading it. On the basis of this text, a student will not be able to buy an admission ticket for the Acropolis tour. She or he will be able, however, to understand and explain the nuance of meaning when a writer shifts from an aorist imperative to an aorist subjunctive, moves from a present to an aorist participle, or chooses to use the simple genitive or dative case.

In keeping with this intent, I begin exclusively using verses from the Greek New Testament for the exercises after Chapter 14. Students often have a familiarity with some of the verses and may be tempted to rely upon memory for “translation.” A few class recitations and attempts at explaining the “translation” in the light of a literal or precise translation usually correct any such temptation. By using the New Testament itself for exercises, the student is soon rewarded in terms of reaching the goal of this language study. Moreover, there is opportunity at this early stage of learning to determine what the student is doing with various published translations. This fosters an appreciation that often translation of these texts involves interpretation. Hence, it is all the more critical that one learn whatever rules there may be so as to have at one’s disposal what controls do exist.

Persons coming to the study of Greek may be helped if they understand that the task, finally, is one of becoming so conversant with the Greek idiom that they can comprehend what is being said *in Greek*—not in translation. One then moves from Greek into one’s own vernacular and expresses the original thought in comprehensible ways, faithfully presenting to the listener or reader the message of the original statement. That is true translation; that is the goal toward which this text is directed.

This is neither a text in hermeneutics nor in linguistics. Nor is it a general Greek grammar. It consciously presents the grammar of *New Testament* Greek. As such, it introduces and familiarizes the reader with the idiosyncrasies encountered in the var-

ious New Testament documents. The relevance of this text to the study of any Koine Greek text is obvious, but the student should be aware of the specific focus.

It is my distinct pleasure to thank a number of people for the part they have played in preparing me for the production of this text. Little did I realize some 28 years ago that Dr. James N. Truesdale of Duke University, in beginning classical Greek—or even four years later when I was the only member of a senior Greek composition class—was introducing me to one aspect of my life’s work. Dr. James L. Price Jr. of Duke’s graduate religion program introduced me to Koine Greek in Romans and Matthew. At Wheaton, Dr. A. Berkeley Mickelsen and Merrill C. Tenney spent a year saturating me in the grammar and thought of the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline letters, and Hebrews; since then, I have not been the same. Professor F. F. Bruce, my doctoral supervisor, always encouraged me and lived before me the model of excellence in handling the original texts. Dr. Robert Lyon of Asbury Theological Seminary gave me the opportunity to teach beginning and intermediate Greek grammar when I was seeking vocational direction. Each of these men I value and salute with gratitude, appreciation, and admiration.

I thank Drs. James M. Efird, Duke Divinity School; Robert Lyon; Berkeley Mickelsen, now retiring from Bethel Seminary; Professor F. F. Bruce, formerly Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, England; my former colleagues in the undergraduate college and the seminary at Oral Roberts University—Arden Autry, James Shelton, Siegfried Schatzmann, Linda Pattillo, Trevor Grizzle, and Robert Mansfield—Lynn M. Nichols, University Editor; and all of my students these past ten years for the reading and rereading of manuscript portions. It is a particular pleasure to recognize Edna Fassett, one of those who has used the text to teach herself, passed all the tests at an A level, frequently offered helpful critiques, and proofed galleys—all this at seventy years of age. Many errors are gone because of their perceptive eyes. Many things are clearer due to their suggestions. The lacks are mine, and I invite you the reader to share any oversights you may note.

To four, who were youngsters when this work began and may be found in some of the illustrations, my thanks is abiding.

When all has been said and done, I am acutely aware that I have only touched a part of the whole. Much more could have been said. Nevertheless, my goal will have been reached if by the work that you hold, the Gospel is better comprehended. καὶ τῷ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

*James Allen Hewett
Tulsa, Oklahoma
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