

## A Little Bit of Greek

Session 1: An Introduction to New Testament Greek

In person at Wai 'ālae Baptist Church

Online via Zoom:

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### The Nature of Languages

It is difficult and many times impossible to capture all that one language says when translating it to another language. That's in part because language is not just a way to communicate. Language is connected to culture. It is connected to real human beings. Even the way language sounds is connected to something about the culture. Some languages flow and sound almost musical to us. Other languages sound stilted, awkward, and cumbersome to our ears. All of this says something about the people who spoke these languages and about those of us trying to understand.

For example, each of my children have a Hawaiian name given to them by an expert in Hawaiian and based on dreams my wife had while pregnant with each of them.

*Kamālamapu'a* – The one who cares for flowers

*Kaleipohai'anela* – The circular lei of angels or the lei of a group of angels

*Ke'alohilani* – The brightness of heaven, Shimmering light of heaven, royal brightness

Sometimes the names were literal and other times figurative.

Word for word transference not only does not work. It can also be confusing, awkward, or erroneous. What verse is this?

Is and faith hoping reality things proving not seeing; in these for spoken well of the elders.

Ἔστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπίζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων· ἐν ταύτῃ γὰρ ἐμαρτυρήθησαν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι.

This is Hebrews 11:1-2, the first part of which is familiar to many Christians.

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. <sup>2</sup>For by it the people of old received their commendation.*

**Why did God choose such a difficult language for the New Testament? Why didn't He use an easier one, like English?**

- English did not exist in the first century and would not begin to emerge until centuries later.
- English is as or more difficult to learn than Greek. We will see a comparison of the two later.
- Learning any new language is difficult, especially for most adults.

**Greek Is the Language of the Revelation**

As Christians, we believe the Bible is God's Word. Most statements of faith by conservative Christian groups state that we believe God's Word is without error "in the original autographs." In other words, the truest form of God's Word in the New Testament is in Greek. If for no other reason than this, Christians who believe the Bible is God's authoritative Word should want to know how to read it in the original language.

### **Where Are the Original Autographs?**

No original autographs have been discovered. NT manuscript evidence dates back to the early second century and perhaps even into the first century.

### **How Do We Know What the Original Greek Was?**

We can reconstruct the original Greek from ample manuscript evidence. This is known as textual criticism, and it is a practice that has been used to reconstruct ancient literature of all types. However, there is a major difference.

***There is vastly more manuscript evidence for the New Testament than any other ancient text.***

Nearly 6,000 pieces of manuscript evidence in Greek

Nearly 24,000 pieces of manuscript evidence in all languages combined

Second place – *Iliad* with about 600

### Textual criticism

Textual criticism compares manuscript evidence looking for similarities and differences and reconstructs the original based on the best explanation of the differences. Here are some of the general principles applied.

- Prefer older reading
- Prefer reading supported by widest number of geographical areas
- Watch for "typos" – errors of ear and eye
- Prefer shorter reading – copyists more likely to add
- Prefer more difficult reading – scribes likely to help text
- Prefer the reading that best helps explain the origin of the other readings

All of these principles are considered collectively to reconstruct the original manuscripts. Two of three notable exceptions are included in the New Testament.

Mark 16:9-20

John 7:53-8:11

1 John 5:7-8 *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*

### **Are the English translations reliable?**

Reconstructing the original autographs can be done through textual criticisms, but how reliable are the translations? In part, it depends on the translation and what people mean by "reliable." In brief,

***Most major English translations are faithful representations of the original text effectively expressing the truth of the original.***

Good translations

- Use the latest manuscript evidence.
- Are done by interdenominational teams of scholars.
- Are reviewed by other scholars.

The two most popular English translations will be compared later in this course.

### How English and Greek are Different

	<b>Greek</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>Nouns, adjectives</b>	Case system to show function	Case system for pronouns only
<b>Verb tenses</b>	9 tenses	12
<b>Verb moods</b>	4 moods	3 moods, focus on 2
<b>Verb voice</b>	3	2
<b>Syntax</b>	Case system, emphasis	Word order, emphasis

There are many other differences regarding grammatical constructions, idioms, and the like. There are some things that can be expressed in English with a single word, but require multiple words in Greek and vice versa.

### Living languages

Languages are constantly developing and growing – even more so when the language gains nearly universal usage. Greek has multiple dialects. With regards to the Bible, most people are concerned with just two – classical and Koine. Classical is largely the Greek spoken in Attica. Athens is the most well-known city. It is sometimes called Attic Greek.

Koine Greek began in the army of Alexander the Great and continued to spread during the Hellenization of the Western world. It was the common language of the area for more than 1,000 years.

The majority of Koine comes from Classical Greek. It typically uses shorter, less complex sentences. There are also differences in spelling, pronunciation, syntax, and grammatical forms. The simplification makes it a more “user-friendly” language that non-native speakers can learn.

In the New Testament, Luke, Acts, and Hebrews are written in classical Greek. The rest of the books are in Koine Greek.