

## “Is A Little Bit Of Greek A Dangerous Thing?”

OR

“The Importance of the Original Languages for Studying the Bible”

### Introduction

Greek and Hebrew can be for everyone!

Different reactions to Greek and Hebrew preaching points:

- Sceptical?
- Superior?
- Stupid?
- Spurred on?

### People often ask:

Are you saying I have to learn Greek and Hebrew to understand the Bible?

If I don't learn it properly, is it worth learning at all?

Isn't a little bit of knowledge dangerous because I might get misled or even mislead others...?

### Question for you:

Am I looking to learn a Bible language for my own study and enjoyment of the Bible?

Am I looking to be able to share my learning and study with others in preaching/teaching?

Don't just leave Greek and Hebrew to the “experts”!

- John 5:39-47
- John Brown story from 1746
- Matthew 13:53-56

### A few words about New Testament Greek

The Greek language spans many centuries:

13<sup>th</sup> century BC – Linear B

8<sup>th</sup> century BC – Homer

4<sup>th</sup> century BC – Plato

] – **Classical Greek**

- Aristotle
- Alexander the Great – dialect **Attic Greek** – Hellenistic Age
- **Koine Greek** = “common” Greek, aka Common Attic – lingua franca of the Mediterranean and Middle East until 300 AD

The New Testament is written in Koine Greek.

CAUTION: Accessible doesn't necessarily mean simplistic!

- Acts 4:13
- Acts 26:24
- You don't need a degree to get hold of some useful gems!

**A few areas where a knowledge of Greek can enhance our understanding and love for the text:**

- **Interpretation**

- Romans 8:3

**NIV**

“For what the Law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the **sinful nature**, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of **sinful man** to be a **sin** offering. And so He condemned **sin** in **sinful man**...”

**NASB**

“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the **flesh**, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of **sinful flesh** (margin: ‘**flesh** of **sin**’ literally) and as an offering for **sin**, He condemned **sin** in the **flesh**...”

Greek words: **σαρκος (sarkos) = flesh**, **ἁμαρτία (hamartia) = sin**

- **Themes**

- Theme of sacrifice in Colossians:

**NASB**

Col 2:1 “personally” - ἐν σαρκι (*en sarki*) – literally “in flesh”

Col 2:17 “substance” - σωμα (*soma*) – literally “body”

Col 3:12 “heart” - σπλαγχνα (*splangchna*) – literally “guts”

Col 3:14 “perfect” - τελειότητος (*teleiotes*) – used for a sacrifice with all the rights fully performed

- **Word Play**

- **NASB**

Philemon 1:10-11 – the name Ὀνησιμος (*Onesimos*) means “useful, profitable”, Paul goes on to use a different Greek word with a similar meaning to say he was “useless” ἄχρεστον (*achreston*) but now is “useful” εὐχρεστον (*euchreston*)

- **Word Study**

- John 21:15-17 – two words for “love” - ἀγαπαω (*agapao*) and φιλεω (*phileo*)  
**NASB** paraphrased

“...Jesus: do you love (*agapao*) me?...Peter: you know that I love (*phileo*) you...Jesus: do you love (*agapao*) me?...Peter: you know that I love (*phileo*) you...Jesus: do you love (*phileo*) me?...Peter: you know all things, you know that I love (*phileo*) you...”

- **Emphasis**

- Ephesians 2:4-6

**συν**εζωοποίησεν (*sun-ezdopoesen*) – “made us alive **together**”

**συν**ηγειρεν (*sun-egeiren*) – “raised us up **together**”

**συν**εκαθισεν (*sun-ekathisen*) – “seated us **together**”

- **Flow**
  - 1 Corinthians 11 – men and women and head coverings in church  
Helps to know that *άνηρ (aner)* “man” and *γυνή (gune)* “woman” also mean “husband” and “wife” – context determines which translation you choose.
- **Imagery**
  - John 1:14  
NASB “dwelt” = literally “tabernacled” - *έσκηνωσεν* – reinforces the Mosaic imagery – the glory and presence of God now found, not in a tent, but in a person – Jesus!
- **Structure**
  - Titus  
Same root word for “appeared” comes three times, once in each chapter:  
1:3 - *έφανερωσεν (ephanerosen)*  
2:11 - *έπεφανη (epephane)*  
3:4 - *έπεφανη (epephane)*  
Helps unlock the message of the letter

#### Two more Greek Gems – unusual words:

- Luke 12:42  
NASB “servants” – *θεραπεία (therapeia)* – word used three times in New Testament, this is the only place not translated “healing” – God’s servants run a healing household!
- James 2:1  
NASB “attitude of personal favouritism” – *προσωπολημψιας (prosopelempsiais)* – compound word:  
*prosopo-* “face, countenance, outward appearance, **mask...**”  
*-lempsiais* “take, receive, **seize upon**, catch hold of...”

#### Debbie’s Amplified Version

“My brothers, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ who is truly full of glory whilst at the same time seizing upon people because of their outward glory which is only a mask...!”

#### A few words about Biblical Hebrew language and culture

- Semitic language originating from the “Fertile Crescent”
- Includes modern day Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Cyprus
- Three branches:
  - East Semitic = Akkadian (Babylonian)
  - **Northwest Semitic = Ugaritic, Aramaic, Canaanite dialect developing into Hebrew around 1000BC**
  - South Semitic = Arabic
- Biblical Hebrew is also called Classical Hebrew

- Importance and influence of oral tradition and poetic forms

**A few areas where a knowledge of Hebrew can enhance our understanding and love for the text:**

- **Meanings of names**

- Ruth = “friend”?, Naomi = “pleasant”, Elimelech = “my God is king”, Mahlon = “sick”, Chilion = “weak”, Boaz = “in him is strength”
- Judges 3:8-10 - Cushan Rishathaim = “dark doubly wicked one” – Othniel delivers Israel from his oppressive rule – change the vowels and could be something like “double portion taker from Cush”!
- Judges 9:26ff - Gaal Ben Ebed = “loathsome son of a slave” – a baddy rebelling against another baddy, Abimelech – change the vowels and could be something like “redeemed son of a slave”!

- **Wordplay**

- Isaiah 61:3 - beauty for ashes – פאר (*p'er*) – consonants P-A-R and אפר (*apher*) – consonants A-P-R
- Gen 6:8 - Noah found favour – נח (*Noach*) – consonants N-CH and חן (*chen*) – consonants CH-N

- **Imagery**

- Numbers 15:38 – “tassles” literally “blossoms” – cf Aaron’s blossoming rod in Numbers 17

**God’s word evokes worship**

- Not just singing
- Spiritual warfare
- Rekindling first love

**Conclusion**

- Have your cake, eat it and learn how to bake it?!
- Try learning the alphabets and looking at an interlinear every now and then?
- Try out linguistic commentaries too
- A word for preachers and teachers
  - Matt 13:51-52
  - James 3:1

**Recommended**

Teach Yourself Biblical Hebrew *R K Harrison*

The Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar *William D Mounce*

NET Bible Online *netbible.org*

**Bibliography**

Introducing Biblical Hebrew *Allen P. Ross*

Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar *Gary D. Pratico & Miles V. Van Pelt*

The Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar *William D Mounce*

Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies *William Wilson*

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The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament *Kohlenberger III, Goodrick & Swanson*

With acknowledgements to Roger Forster and Faith Forster whose teaching prompted my enquiry into one or two of the Greek Gems!

<http://www.biblestudywithrandy.com/2015/11/wordplay-in-the-old-testament/>  
<https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/language/culture-of-the-hebrew-language.htm>

## The Greek Alphabet

Greek Letter	Greek Capital	Letter Name	Letter Sound
α	Α	alpha	a as in <b>father</b>
β	Β	beta	b as in <b>baby</b>
γ	Γ	gamma	g as in <b>gate</b>
δ	Δ	delta	d as in <b>door</b>
ε	Ε	epsilon	e as in <b>egg</b>
ζ	Ζ	zeta	z as in <b>maze</b>
η	Η	eta	e as in <b>prey</b>
θ	Θ	theta	th as in <b>think</b>
ι	Ι	iota	i as in <b>fatigue</b>
κ	Κ	kappa	k as in <b>kite</b>
λ	Λ	lambda	l as in <b>light</b>
μ	Μ	mu	m as in <b>moon</b>
ν	Ν	nu	n as in <b>note</b>
ξ	Ξ	xi	x as in <b>fox</b>
ο	Ο	omicron	o as in <b>pot</b>
π	Π	pi	p as in <b>paint</b>
ρ	Ρ	rho	r as in <b>rat</b>
σ or ς	Σ	sigma	s as in <b>sun</b>
τ	Τ	tau	t as in <b>tap</b>
υ	Υ	upsilon	u as in <b>tune</b>
φ	Φ	phi	ph as in <b>phone</b>
χ	Χ	chi	ch as in <b>Bach</b>
ψ	Ψ	psi	ps as in <b>caps</b>
ω	Ω	omega	o as in <b>bone</b>

## The Hebrew Alphabet

Hebrew Letter	Letter Name	Letter Sound	Written as
א	aleph	(silent)	'
ב	bet	b as in <b>boy</b> or v as in <b>van</b>	b
ג	gimel	g as in <b>good</b>	g
ד	dalet	d as in <b>day</b>	d
ה	he	h as in <b>hay</b>	h
ו	waw	w as in <b>way</b> or v as in <b>vain</b>	w
ז	zayin	z as in <b>zoom</b>	z
ח	het (chet)	ch as in <b>Bach</b>	ḥ (ch)
ט	tet	t as in <b>toy</b>	ṭ
י	yod	y as in <b>yes</b>	y
כ or ך	kaph	k as in <b>king</b>	k
ל	lamed	l as in <b>lion</b>	l
מ or ם	mem	m as in <b>mother</b>	m
נ or ן	nun	n as in <b>now</b>	n
ס	samek	s as in <b>say</b>	s
ע	ayin	(silent)	'
פ or ף	pe	p as in <b>pasta</b>	p
צ or ץ	tsade	ts as in <b>boots</b>	ṣ (ts)
ק	qoph	q as in <b>unique</b>	q
ר	resh	r as in <b>run</b>	r
ש and שׁ	sin and shin	s as in <b>song</b> and sh as in <b>ship</b>	s and š (sh)
ת	taw	t as in <b>toy</b>	t