

## Preface

The Greek language of the New Testament is such a precise language that once known, the reader will no longer be handicapped in the Word. By this is meant that it is not possible to interpret completely the thoughts of the original author without going to the original author's language. That means going back to the Hebrew and Greek. Having just a cursory knowledge of the original language helps greatly in the understanding of the Scriptures, but falls short, especially for the English speaker, in understanding the effect and extent of a particular verse.

Luther wrote an important letter, "To the Councilmen of all cities in Germany that they establish and maintain Christian Schools." In this 1524 treatise, Luther wrote:

Here belongs also what St. Paul calls for in 1 Corinthians 14, namely, that in the Christian church all teachers must be judged. For this a knowledge of the languages is needful above all else. The preacher of teacher can expound the Bible from beginning to end as he pleases, accurately or inaccurately, if there is no one there to judge whether he is doing it right or wrong. But in order to judge, one must have a knowledge of the languages; it cannot be done in any other way. Therefore, although faith and the gospel may indeed be proclaimed by simple preachers without a knowledge of languages, such preaching is flat and tame, people finally become weary and bored with it, and it falls to the ground. But where the preacher is versed in the languages, there is a freshness and vigor in his preaching, Scripture is treated in its entirety, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and illustrations. Hence, Psalm 129 likens such scriptural studies to a hunt, saying to the deer God opens the dense forests; and Psalm 1 likens them to a tree with a plentiful supply of water, whose leaves are always green.<sup>1</sup>

χαρις υμιν και ειρηνη  
(Grace and peace to you)

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, ed. W Brandt and H Lehman, *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), pp.357-366

# Chapter One

## The Story of Language

The Greek of the New Testament is very unique. It is, in a word – preserved. Preserved for all time. Frozen in time by a sovereign God who has preserved His Word in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and Greek of the New in order for His creation to have a precise knowledge of what He has to say to mankind. In fact, God created Adam mature for fellowship with Him. Therefore, Adam was either created already knowing a language or shortly after his creation was “gifted” (supernaturally given), a complex language to talk with Him in the garden. Adam, Eve and God talked in the garden.

It did not take long for man to disobey God’s Word and mankind fell. Through one man’s sin, death entered the world. Adam and Eve and all their descendents did, however, obey God with the command to populate the earth and soon the number of people on the earth increased greatly and sin multiplied. Evilness increased so much that God had to miraculously confuse the common language. Different language groups were born and mankind separated, by families, into unique ethnic groups.

Language is predominantly a spoken form of communication, but God preserves His Word in the written form. The spoken form is more versatile in that one can stress certain words by the inflection of the voice. In the written form, God gave man a way to preserve His Word in a permanent record, and commands mankind to preserve His sacred word faithfully and carefully.

Legal documents, trade records, history, ancient and modern, are all recorded in writing. All languages have certain fundamental elements with rules that regulate its form. This has to be or we could not understand each other. All those years in school taking English for the purpose of teaching us how to read and write. In America the early Puritans wanted all children to learn how to read and write so that all children in America could understand God’s Word for themselves. Not being ignorant of our Savior’s gift – that God came in the flesh, died on the cross as the perfect sacrifice, was buried, and was raised from the dead. He lives, so we may have eternal life with Him.

## The Story of Greek

The Greek language has developed through the ages from its early dialects about 1500 B.C. The language is generally classified into five periods. The *Formative period* extends from the origin of the race to Homer (c. 900 B.C.)<sup>2</sup>. It was during this period that the Ionic branch was established and in particular Attic Greek which dominated the dialects. This was the language of Athens.

The next great period of the Greek language is called the *Classical period*. This period extended from Homer to the great Alexandrine conquest (c. 333 B.C.). Attic was the dialect with few carryovers of the dialects Doria and Aeolic which are identified as irregular and exceptions. This type of Greek was not confined to Athens though and spread as God moved in the world causing the Leopard of Daniel (Daniel 7) to conquer Medo-Persia, Egypt and all areas between. The Leopard of Daniel was identified as

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<sup>2</sup> These five periods are defined in Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: MacMillan Publishing 1994)



Greek Old Testament Septuagint in their service. The Roman occupation forces, though Latin, had to speak Greek in order to communicate with the local populations throughout the Hellenistic world.

### **The Greek New Testament Manuscripts and Modern Tools**

The Biblical writings of the New Testament that have come down to us today has been analyzed (textual criticism) to the point that the major versions are all very good<sup>4</sup>. The major manuscripts in use are the Textus Receptus (TR), the Majority Text (MT), and the Nestle-Aland (NA<sup>26</sup>). With the computer resources that are commonly available today, each one of these texts may be used with complete lexical detail. There are two dominate resources that modern academia uses, Bible Works™, and Logos™. There are, however, a number of very good free resources that can be found on the internet, Online Bible, and e-Sword are just two of many. Each of these software programs provides the Greek text along with lexical detail. It is encouraged that anyone learning a language not use these resources. It is recommend that those learning the language do things the old fashion way – memorize the vocabulary and forms. This insures that the learner spends the proper amount of time and energy learning the language. Greek is not a hard language to learn, but it does require the effort needed to quickly identify the root word and its form.

Since Greek uses a lot of compound words, knowing the basic vocabulary is essential, and the compounds can be “broken down” by literally saying the compounds to get to the new word. This is fun as can be seen by the example using the word knowledge, ‘*gnosis*’ is knowledge, but ‘*epi-gnosis*’ is over-knowledge, or upon-knowledge, which is a complete or precise knowledge. And ‘*a-gnosis*’ is the compound of the negative particle and the Greek word for knowledge which is combined to give not-knowledge, or the English equivalent, ignorance.

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<sup>4</sup> For a good description of the history of the Greek manuscripts see Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford University Press, 1992), or Philip Comfort, *Early Manuscripts & Modern Translations of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990).