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Preface

When people learn that I am a Greek teacher, one of the more common responses is, “Oh, I have always wanted to learn Greek.” (It may not be the most common, but it has happened a lot.) I always ask them why they want to learn Greek. To date, no one has said they really want to learn the language. What they want is to understand the Bible better, and especially to know what the Greek words behind the English translation mean.

In a perfect world, we would all know Greek and be able to understand the Bible better because we would not rely on translations. But the world is not perfect, and many people are not able to spend the years required to learn Greek properly, even those who have a seminary education.

As I thought about how I might help the situation, I came to the conclusion that if people knew a little about Greek and a lot about how to use the good biblical study tools, they could in fact glean much from the Bible and from other resources that are otherwise beyond their grasp. This includes:

- understanding why translations are different
- finding what the Greek words mean
- seeing the author’s flow of thought and his central message
- reading good commentaries and using other biblical tools that make use of Greek

Several years ago I wrote the *English-Greek New Testament (EGNT)*, which helps people get to the Greek behind the English, and now I am writing this text to help you learn how to use *EGNT* and other such tools.

Because I spend a lot of time analyzing the biblical author’s flow of thought, this book along with one like *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Fee and Stuart) can also be used in a hermeneutics class where students are learning how to interpret the Bible.

In the Appendix I discuss the basics of Hebrew. I cover the basic areas of the language and the difference between working with Hebrew tools

and Greek. However, this is not my area of specialty, and my hope is that one day there will be a “Hebrew for the Rest of Us” written by some friends of mine.

There are, of course, many dangers in relying on tools rather than actually knowing Greek and Hebrew, and I expressed those concerns in the preface to *EGNT*. My fear is that people will think they actually know Greek and Hebrew even though they only know how to use the tools. Alexander Pope once said, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. But as I indicated in *EGNT*, I saw that it is a little bit of *arrogance* that is dangerous. So I offer this text, praying that you will recognize the limits of the approach.

GRU is divided into “weeks,” and each week is divided into chapters. The first group of chapters in each week normally discuss Greek grammar, and the final chapter usually takes this new information and shows you how knowing it helps your Bible study.

I suspect this text will be used in many different ways. As I have spoken with those teaching the “Tools” class in different colleges and seminaries, I have found that they have widely different goals. Some will work straight through this text; others will pick and choose individual chapters. I trust that it will help you regardless of your specific class goals.

I am often asked how long it takes to work through the book. When I taught it in seminary, I found that students could easily do one chapter a day, although the last chapter in each “week” could take two days. I lectured once a week, for three hours. This was a comfortable pace and the students were able to get the work done without stress.

The greatest challenge of the book was to find good examples of what I am teaching, especially for the homework assignments. As I continue to find more, they will be posted at my website, www.teknia.com, along with other information you may find helpful.

The CD-ROM that is included with the text should prove itself invaluable. It contains my lectures over the entire book, lectures I originally gave for a seminary class and eventually taped when lecturing to a church Bible study group. Most of the emphasis in the lectures is on the final chapter in each “week.” The CD-ROM also includes demonstration versions of software to help you study your Bible better. There are instructions on how to use the CD-ROM (see page 10).

Of the many people I would like to thank, most goes to my Greek assistant Matt Smith for his many hours of help, to my colleagues Lynn Losie, Doug Stuart, and Daniel Wallace for their help, to my editor Verlyn Verbrugge, to many students who patiently endured while I changed my mind on how to teach this material, to Gary Pratico and Miles Van Pelt for their help with the Hebrew, to Steve Yoell, my fellow pastor, for carrying the church load while I finished, to the many laypeople who read the text

and helped me see when I was getting too technical, as a Greek teacher has a tendency to do, and to Robin, my wife, who patiently encouraged me to finish the task well.

I trust that you will find this a valuable resource as you work to understand the Word of God better.

Bill Mounce

Abbreviations

Bible Versions

ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NIrV	New International Reader's Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TEV	Today's English Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version

Book Abbreviations

BBG	<i>The Basics of Biblical Greek</i> (William Mounce, Zondervan)
EGNT	<i>English-Greek New Testament: A Reverse Interlinear</i> (William Mounce, Zondervan)
ESNT	<i>Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament</i> (Daniel Wallace, Zondervan)
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (revised and edited by Frederick Danker, University of Chicago)

Other Abbreviations

e.g.	for example
f	one following page
ff	more than one following page
i.e.	that is (used for a restatement)
v	verse
vv	verses

What Would It Look Like If You Knew a Little Greek?

What will you be able to do when you are done working through this text that, perhaps, you cannot do now?

1. *You will often be able to understand why translations are different. How many times have you been in a Bible study where the leader is discussing a verse, but your Bible appears to say something considerably different? How can the translations be so different? What does the verse really say? Let me give you a few examples.*

Luke 2:14 is one of the better-known verses in the Bible. In the KJV (King James Version) it reads,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Is there anything in this verse that bothers you? It is a statement of blessing, and God's angels say, "peace and goodwill toward men." Does God's peace extend to all people? "Peace" is a marvelous biblical concept that designates a cessation of hostility between God and us; it's the result of justification (Rom 5:1). The RSV (Revised Standard version) says,

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased.

Here, peace isn't extended to all people, but only to those who are the recipients of God's pleasure. Why are the KJV and the RSV different? The answer is that the Greek manuscripts are different at this verse. Some have *eudokias* with the "s" (the Greek sigma), which is followed by the RSV; others have *eudokia*, which is followed by the KJV. The "s" completely changes the meaning. (I will discuss the issue of different Greek manuscripts in chapter 30.)

Another example is Mark 16. If you are reading Mark 16 in the RSV, after the women see that the tomb is empty, the Bible says,

And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.

The gospel ends at verse 8 on a note of fear. But let me tell you a story that is related, although it won't sound like it at first. Have you ever seen those movies they often show in high school sociology class about the snake people of the Appalachians? They handle rattlesnakes as part of their church worship, and they don't die. They also drink poison, and they don't die. Why are these people doing this? Why are my cousins doing this? (They actually are my cousins, by the way. My family is from Gravelswitch, Kentucky.) "Because the Bible says so," they would respond. If you are reading the KJV, it doesn't stop at verse 8 but goes on to verse 20. Verse 18 says, "And these signs shall follow them that believe, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink anything deadly, it will not hurt them and they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." Wouldn't you like to know whether v 18 belongs in the Bible or not?

Here is a more subtle example. In 2 Corinthians 1:15 the ESV (English Standard Version) reads,

Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you may have a second experience of grace.

Sounds as if Paul is talking about a second work of grace subsequent to conversion. But see how other translations handle the passage.

In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing (NASB).

Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double pleasure (RSV).

Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice (NIV).

Since none of the other translations give any suggestion of a second work of grace, it is doubtful that the ESV means to suggest this. (I can say this with full certainty, since I was one of the twelve translators of the ESV.)

So what are we going to do with these differences? First of all, we will work to understand why they are different. Second, we will learn to pull the translations together. So often in Bible study when the translations are different, we seem content to let them say different things. Rather, what we need to do is use the different translations to come together and arrive at a common meaning, a meaning that perhaps has several nuances that the different translations are trying to convey.

2. *You will discover the meaning of the Greek and Hebrew that lies beneath the English. This is called doing "word studies."* Without knowing Greek or Hebrew or without knowing how to use the study tools, the best you

can do is learn what the English word means. But as you will learn in several weeks, words can have a wide range of meanings. Think through all the ways we use the word “of,” “can,” and “run.” Words don’t have exact counterparts in different languages. The range of meaning of an English word will almost never be the same as the range of meaning for the Greek word behind the English. We call this the word’s “semantic range.” So just because an English word can have a certain meaning, it is by no means certain that the Greek or Hebrew behind it has that specific meaning.

A good example of this is the Greek word σάρξ, *sarx*. This word can be translated many different ways because English has no exact counterpart to it. In as short a book as Galatians we find *sarx* translated by the NIV (New International Version) as “flesh,” “human effort,” “illness,” “man,” “no one,” “ordinary way,” “outwardly,” “sinful nature,” and “that nature.” All these English words partially overlap in meaning with *sarx*, but none is an exact equivalent.



Another example is in 1 Corinthians 7:1. The RSV translates, “It is well for a man not to *touch* a woman.” Lots of good youth group talks on dating come out of the word “touch.” But guess what? The NIV translates 1 Cor 7:1 as, “It is good for a man not to marry.” Wait a minute! Are we talking about dating or are we talking about marriage? The fact of the matter is that *haptesthai* can mean “to touch” or it can be understood to be speaking of marriage. Translators have to pick one meaning or the other.

There is another example later on in the same chapter. The RSV translates 1 Corinthians 7:36 as,

If any one thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his *betrothed*, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin.

Paul has been encouraging people not to marry in order to be more involved in the gospel ministry, but then he says if that's not your gift, if your passions are strong, then there is nothing wrong with getting married. Go ahead and marry your "betrothed." However, when you read the same verse in the NASB (New American Standard Bible) it reads,

But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.

The italics in the NASB's translation indicate that it has added a word, but the difference is more than that. The question is, who is the "he" who is acting unbecomingly? Is it the husband-to-be (RSV) or her father (NASB)? Either way you look at this verse, it can be confusing.

Another example is John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (NIV).

What does "so" mean? Most readers think it means "a lot." That's just about the only way someone would read the English. But did you know that the Greek word behind "so" most likely means, "in this way." "For God loved the world *in this way*: he gave" The giving of his Son shows *how* God loved the world, not *how much*. (This is why the footnote in the ESV reads, "Or *For this is how God loved the world.*")

My favorite example when it comes to translating words is Matthew 26:27, which talks about the Lord's Supper. The KJV says,

Drink ye all of it.

My dad tells the story of how, when he was younger, he made sure he drank every last little bit of grape juice in that little cup. He would shake it until every drop was gone; he was going to obey Scripture and drink "all of it." Only one problem: that's not what the verse means. The "all" means "all of you," not "all the liquid." The RSV translates, "Drink of it, all of you."

So as we learn about Greek and translations, we'll see why these types of differences occur and what the Greek really means.

3. *You will also learn the basics of exegesis.* "Exegesis" is a fancy word for Bible study. Using a methodology I call "phrasing," you will learn to

divide a biblical story into smaller, more manageable, pieces, locate the main thought, and see how the other statements in the passage relate to the main point. You will then lay the passage out visually in a way that helps you see the author's flow of thought. This is the best way to help you learn what good commentary writers are trying to do.

For example, below is the salutation from Jude. How many main thoughts are there, and how many descriptions of the recipients does the author include?

1:1 Jude,
 a servant of Jesus Christ and
 a brother of James,
 To those
 who have been called,
 who are loved by God the Father and
 kept by Jesus Christ:

1:2 Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

The salutation breaks down into three sections: author; recipients; greeting. Jude tells us three things about the recipients: they have been called; they are loved by God; they are kept by Jesus.

4. *The final thing that I am going to help you learn is how to read good commentaries.* Let's say you're going to have a Sunday School lesson on Romans 1:17 and you need the help of a commentary. (A commentary is a book that explains what each verse means.) One of the best commentaries on Romans is by C. E. B. Cranfield, so let's say you pick it up and try to read his discussion of the verse. Here is a small part of his discussion (pp. 95-96).

The other main disagreement concerns the question whether in the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in 1.17; 3.21, 22 (cf. 10.3) θεοῦ is to be understood as a subjective genitive or as a genitive of origin, or—to put it differently—whether δικαιοσύνη refers to an activity of God or to a status of man resulting from God's action, righteousness as a gift from God. In support of the view that θεοῦ is a subjective genitive and δικαιοσύνη refers to God's activity, a number of arguments have been advanced: (i) That in 3.5 (θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην) θεοῦ must be a subjective genitive (cf. also 3.25, 26)

Does this make sense? Probably not right now. But by the end of this text you will know what a subjective genitive and a genitive of origin are. You'll know what a genitive is. I want you to know enough about English and Greek grammar so that you can pick up an excellent commentary and be able to follow the discussion.

Stated in reverse, I don't want you to make silly mistakes that come from misreading commentaries or misapplying Greek and Hebrew grammar. For example, you probably know the passage, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all speak in tongues?" (1 Cor 12:29). Have you ever heard anyone claim the answer is "Yes," and insist that a "real" Christian must have spoken in tongues once? I have. But when you get your commentary on 1 Corinthians out, you will read something like this: "Questions preceded by μή expect a negative answer." What does that mean? It means that Greek can indicate whether the person asking the question expects the answer "Yes" or "No." (We do this in English by adding a phrase, like: "All don't speak in tongues, do they?") In 1 Corinthians 12:29, the Greek indicates that Paul's expected answer is, "No."

Limitations

There are limitations to our approach, or what I like to call "baby Greek." You will not be learning the full language, and my concern is that you will forget that you know only a little. I'm going to give you the ability to sound authoritative by citing Greek and Hebrew words and grammar, and perhaps be completely wrong. I actually put off writing this book for several years because of this concern, but I finally came to the conclusion that it's not a little Greek that proves dangerous. It's a little bit of pride that proves dangerous.

If you don't respect this fact, then these tools can become just another way in which you can be wrong. I know a well-known speaker who was talking about how a Christian should not incur debt. I believe in debt-free living, so don't misunderstand me at this point, but the problem was in how he used Romans 13:8: "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." He claimed something like the following.

Now what's really important in Romans 13:8 is that there are three negations. Unlike in English where if you have two negations they cancel each other out, in Greek when you have double negations they pile up on each other making the statement stronger. Paul has three negations in Rom 13:8 and he's making the point that it's really a sin ever to go into debt.

There are no negatives in this verse in the sense this author speaks of negatives, although you will find μή used once in the idiom εἰ μή, *except*, and twice as parts of words meaning *to no one* and *nothing*. In none of these situations do the rules the speaker was citing apply. He is teaching thousands of people, and he's wrong. So I say as a gentle warning: please remember what we're doing and what we're not doing. We're learning to

use the tools; we're trying to follow good commentaries; we're trying to understand what words mean. We're not learning enough Greek to make complicated grammatical pronouncements that aren't supported by the commentaries.

I remember when I was in seminary sitting in the balcony of a large and well-known church listening to the preacher say, "Well, the Greek says this and the Greek says this." And I'm looking at the Greek and I say (I hope to myself), "You're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong." He didn't really know Greek, but he was using it—it seemed to me—to elevate himself in a position of authority over his people. He should have been more careful, and more humble.

Jehovah's Witnesses are another good example of misusing Greek. They will cite John 1:1—"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was *a god*" and argue that there is no word "the" before "God." Jesus is not "the" God but "a" god, a created god, a secondary being with Satan as his brother. But if they really knew Greek, they wouldn't make such a horrible and obvious mistake, for two reasons. (1) There's technically no such thing as the word "the" in Greek. There is a word, *ó*, that can be translated as "the," but it can also be translated as "my," as "your," or as many other words. There is no exact equivalent for the word "the" in Greek. (2) Grammatically the Greek explicitly states that Jesus is, in our language, "the God" (cf. Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 266-269).

One last illustration. Last year I was sitting at my desk grading papers, minding my own business, and I received a phone call from an elderly gentleman. He started talking and was evidently lonely so I listened, and within ten minutes he had accused every translator of being intentionally deceitful, of not knowing what they were doing, of mistranslating God's Word, and God was going to curse them. I said,

Well, Sir, do you know any translators?

No, I've never met any of them.

Well, I know a lot of them, and they are godly men who would never mistranslate anything on purpose, and they know a lot more Greek than you.

Well, they don't translate 2 Peter 3:5 properly. The Greek says God created "die-uh" [his mispronunciation of the Greek] water. The earth is formed *through* water. "Die-uh" means "through" and so in this verse Peter is saying that God created the world "through" water and everyone is translating it "out of" water.

He was absolutely insistent that *dia* meant "through" and he went through a fifteen minute discussion in physics. (I didn't have any idea what he was talking about.) When he finally paused for a breath, I said,

“First of all, it’s pronounced ‘dia.’ There’s a good chance that if you can’t pronounce it, then you probably don’t know what it means.” (I was a little frustrated.) Then I tried to explain that all words have a range of meaning. *Dia* can mean “through,” but it can also mean “out of” or “by,” and the translators must make an interpretive decision as to which word they use. (By the way, the ESV did agree on “through,” so he should be happy.) I tried to impress upon him the fact of how dangerous it was to slander Christian brothers and sisters and to accuse them of intentionally doing things when he didn’t know what he was talking about.

So why should you learn a little Greek, if it is possible to make these types of errors? Because the personal rewards of deepening your biblical study are so great that it is worth the effort. Just remember the importance of humility (Phil 2:1-13) and meekness (Matt 5:5), and that while knowledge puffs up, love builds up (1 Cor 8:1).