

CHAPTER 1

The Alphabet – Chs. 1-2 were adapted for Modern Greek by Dr. Perry Phillips

24 Letters, the Gateway into the Language

This is the way Greek letters are pronounced in Modern Greek.

Small/Capital

α / Α	Alpha sounds like “a” in father.
β / Β	Beta sounds like “v” in violet.
γ / Γ	Gamma sounds like “y” in yet.
δ / Δ	Delta sounds like “th” in then.
ε / Ε	Epsilon sounds like “e” in met.
ζ / Ζ	Zeta sounds like “z” in daze.
η / Η	Eta sounds like “ee” in meet.
θ / Θ	Theta sounds like “th” in think. (In this grammar, "th" pronounced like then will be shown as th . "th" pronounced like think will be shown as th .)
ι / Ι	Iota short sounds like the “ee” in meet.
κ / Κ	Kappa sounds like “k” in kitchen.
λ / Λ	Lambda sounds like “l” in law.
μ / Μ	Mu sounds like “m” in mother.
ν / Ν	Nu sounds like “n” in new.
ξ / Ξ	Xsi sounds like “x” in axe.
ο / Ο	Omicron sounds like “o” in obey.
π / Π	Pi sounds like “p” in peach.
ρ / Ρ	Rho sounds like “r” in three. (Form the "r" in the front of the mouth as in the word three, not as in the word rod.)
σ / Σ	Sigma sounds like “s” in set. Sigma looks like ζ when it comes at the end of a word (final sigma)—σοφός (wise).
τ / Τ	Tau sounds like “t” in talk.
υ / Υ	Upsilon sounds like “ee” in meet.
φ / Φ	Phi sounds like “ph” in phone.
χ / Χ	Chi sounds like “ch” in Bach. (In this grammar, "ch" always indicates that it be pronounced like ch in Bach since there is no ch sound as in "cheese" in Greek.)
ψ / Ψ	Psi sounds like “ps” in lips.
ω / Ω	Omega sounds like “o” in obey.

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We will focus on the lower-case letters, miniscules, although the early uncial (uppercase) manuscripts were written without punctuation or spaces between the words in all uppercase letters, majuscules (major writings). Be able to recognize the upper-case letters. Capital letters are used in proper names, to begin direct quotations, and at the beginning of paragraphs. You may want to use the *Mastering New Testament Greek* disk to work on the pronunciation of these letters and to drill yourself.

Easy English look alike: α, β, ε, ι, κ, ο, ζ, τ, υ

Double consonants: θ (~~th~~), ξ (*xs*), φ (*ph*), χ (*ch*), ψ (*ps*)

Easy to confuse letters:

η—eta (with n)

ν—nu (with v)

ρ—rho (with p)

χ—chi (with x)

ω—omega (with w)

Here are some English-like examples to use for sounding things out. Pronounce the following, accenting the capitalized syllables:

ανθρωπος—pronounced “AN-~~th~~ro-pos” (anthropology)

θεος—pronounced “the-OS” (theology)

προφητης—pronounced “pro-FEE-tees” (prophet)

Χριστος—pronounced “Chree-STOS” (Christ)

καρδια—pronounced “kar-THEE-a” (heart; cf. cardiac)

αμην—pronounced “a-MEEN” (amen)

Vowels: α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, ω

There is no "long" or "short" version of these vowels in Modern Greek. See the pronunciation guide above.

Nasal gamma: The “g” sound of a gamma changes to a “n” sound when put before: γ, κ, χ, ξ. ἄγγελος is pronounced: “ANgelos.” This is called a “nasal gamma.”

Final sigma: Sigma is always written σ unless it comes at the end of a word, when it is written ς. This form is called a final sigma. It is pronounced the same. Thus σοφός (wise) shows the two forms of the sigma (note the final sigma form).

Eight diphthongs: 2 vowels with 1 sound. Diphthongs are combination vowels. Two vowels are written but result in only one sound. These are frequent in Greek, and so be aware of them. The final letter of a diphthong will always be an ι or an υ (closed vowel). *The diphthongs in Modern Greek are the place of greatest phonetic divergence.*

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αι	as in met.	(<u>α</u> ίμα, blood)
ει, οι	as in meet	(<u>ε</u> ίμί, I am; άνθρωποι, men)
υι	as in yet	(<u>υ</u> ιός, son)
αυ	as in av if followed by a voiced sound, otherwise aspirated as af .	(<u>α</u> υγό; egg; <u>α</u> υτός, he)
ευ	as in ev if followed by a voiced sound, otherwise aspirated as ef .	(πισ <u>τ</u> εύω, I believe; <u>ε</u> υθέως, immediately)
ηυ	as in eve if followed by a voiced sound, otherwise aspirated as eef , as in reef .	(<u>η</u> ύξανεν he grew)
ου	as in boutique	(Ιη <u>σ</u> ούς, Jesus)

Consonantal pronunciation shifts in Modern Greek: ντ / μπ

- 1) **Initial ντ**: "D" as in "Dog" for words beginning with ντ,
Medial ντ: "d" or "nd" (as in "aND" or "eND") in the middle of a word. There is no hard and fast rule as to whether ντ is voiced as "D" or as "ND." It's a matter of preference and region. The tendency, however, is to use "ND" in the middle of words.

No words in Koine Greek start with ντ, but there are words in Modern Greek that do.

Examples: λέγοντος (léghoNDos) "saying"
 πάντα (páhNDah) "everything (neu., pl.)"
 εντροπήν (eNDropēn) "shame" (acc.)

- 2) **Initial μπ**: "B" as in "Boy" when beginning a word.
Medial μπ: Otherwise, "B" or "MB" when in the middle of a word. Again, "B" or "MB" is a matter of preference and region.

Examples: λάμπει (láBē or láMBē) "shines, illuminates" (3rd sing.)
 ἀμπελώνη (aBelónē or aMBelónē) "vineyard" (dat.)
 ἐμπρόσθεν (eBrósthēn or eMBrósthēn) "before" or "in front of"

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Iota subscripts (Improper diphthongs): There are 3 letter combinations that are formed by taking the vowels α, η, and ω and subscripting an iota under them. It doesn't affect pronunciation but may be significant in specifying grammatical features: α, η, ω

Dieresis (Ἡσαΐας—Isaiah: Ἡ-σα-ΐ-ας)—cancels the diphthong effect (indicates the two vowels must be kept separate). The dieresis shows that a vowel must be pronounced as a separate syllable. It will be found often on Old Testament names (Μωϋσής = Moses).

Ἡσαΐας	Ἡ-σα-ΐ-ας	Isaiah (Jn. 1:23)
Μωϋσής	Μω-ϋ-σής	Moses (Jn. 1:45)
Ἀχαΐα	Ἀ-χα-ΐ-α	Achaia (Acts 18:12)

A phonetic chart is also a helpful way of grouping the letters:

Labials (lips)	π	β	φ
Dentals (teeth)	τ	δ	θ
Velars (palate)	κ	γ	χ

Phonetic sigma addition:

Labial + σ = ψ	Velar + σ = ξ	Dental + σ = σ
(π + σ = ψ)	(κ + σ = ξ)	(τ + σ = σ)

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Vocabulary

In Modern Greek, monosyllabic words have no accent mark. Modern Greek uses only one accent mark (a vertical accent [']) in multisyllabic words, and that is to stress the syllable when vocalizing the word. For now, for the words in the box, read the words aloud and use the accent mark to stress that syllable. Later, we will discuss the various accent and breathing marks used in the Greek New Testament and how to vocalize them in Modern Greek.

The number following the word is the number of times the word is used in the New Testament. The word after the dash gives an English parallel.

ἄγγελος	angel (175)—angel
ἀμήν	truly, verily (129)—amen
ἄνθρωπος	man, human (550)—anthropology
ἐγώ	I (1,175)—ego
θεός	God (1,317)—theology
καί	and, even, also (9,153)
καρδία	heart (156)—cardiac
λέγω	I say (2,354)
προφήτης	prophet (144)—prophet
Χριστός	Christ, Messiah, anointed one (529)—Christ

Things to Know and Do

1. Be able to chant through the alphabet, saying the name of each letter in order. Be able to do the Alpha-robics moves. See if you can say the Greek alphabet as fast as you can say the English alphabet. Can you see where the name “alphabet” comes from? Know what a final sigma looks like. What are diphthongs, and what sound does each make? (*Note that there are no "long" and "short" vowels in Modern Greek.*) What are the three iota subscripts? What role does the dieresis play? Know the vocabulary items (recognize and write them).
2. Work on the drills and exercises in Mastering New Testament Greek, Interactive chapter 1.
3. Do the worksheets from the workbook.