

The Basics of Biblical Greek

(second edition)

William D. Mounce



Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar: Second edition
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This edition is printed on acid-free paper.

This text is affectionately dedicated to my parents,

Bob and Jean Mounce.

It is my wish that a study of biblical Greek will help to produce in you the same qualities that have always been exhibited in both their lives: a love for their Lord and His Word; an informed ministry based on His Word; a sense of urgency to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those they meet.

ὁ νόμος τοῦ κυρίου ἄμωμος,
ἐπιστρέφων ψυχάς·

ἡ μαρτυρία κυρίου πιστή,
σοφίζουσα νήπια·

τὰ δικαιώματα κυρίου εὐθεῖα,
εὐφραίνοντα καρδίας·

ἡ ἐντολὴ κυρίου τηλαυγής,
φωτίζουσα ὀφθαλμούς·

ὁ φόβος κυρίου ἀγνός,
διαμένων εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος·

τὰ κρίματα κυρίου ἀληθινά,
δεδικαιωμένα ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό.

καὶ ἔσονται εἰς εὐδοκίαν τὰ
λόγια τοῦ στόματός μου καὶ ἡ
μελέτη τῆς καρδίας μου ἐνώπιόν
σου διὰ παντός, κύριε βοηθέ μου
καὶ λυτρωτά μου.

ΨΑΛΜΟΙ ΙΗ 8-10, 15

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Preface

A publisher once told me that the ratio of Greek grammars to Greek professors is ten to nine. It is reasonable to ask, therefore, why this one should be written. There are several good reasons. Most existing grammars fall into one of two camps, deductive or inductive. Deductive grammars emphasize charts and rote memorization, while inductive grammars get the student into the text as soon as possible and try to imitate the natural learning process. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages. The deductive method helps the student to organize the material better, but is totally unlike the process by which we learn languages naturally. The inductive method suffers from a lack of structure that for many is confusing. My method attempts to teach Greek using the best of both approaches. It is deductive in how it initially teaches the material, but inductive in how it fine-tunes the learning process. (See the following “Rationale Statement” for more details.)

Most grammars approach learning Greek primarily as an academic discipline; I make every effort to view learning Greek as a tool for ministry. My assumption is that you are learning biblical Greek so you can better understand the Word of God and share that understanding with those around you. If some aspect of language study does not serve this purpose, it is ignored.

There are many practical ways in which teaching methodologies can be improved. For example, anything that encourages students to continue learning should be included. This may not be the normal way textbooks are written, but my purpose is not to write another normal textbook. It is to teach you the language of the New Testament. Learning language can be fun and meaningful.

Probably the greatest obstacle to learning, and continuing to use, biblical Greek is the problem of rote memorization. So many would-be exegetes lose their ability to use the Greek New Testament because they are not able to work in the language on a continuing basis. But there is an interesting observation here. When I was first learning Greek, I used to ask my father what a certain form meant. He would tell me, and when I asked how he knew he would respond, “I’m not sure, but that’s what it is.” What was frustrating for me then is true of me now. How many people who have worked in Greek for years are able to recite obscure paradigms, or perhaps all the tense forms of the sixty main verbs? Very few I suspect. Rather, we have learned what indicators to look for when we parse. Wouldn’t it be nice if beginning students of the language could get to this point of understanding the forms of the language without going through the excruciating process of excessive rote memory? This is the primary distinctive of this textbook. Reduce the essentials to a minimum so the language can be learned and retained as easily as possible, so that the

Word of God can be preached in all its power and conviction. I also trust that the software included on the CD-ROM will help your memorization.

The writing style of the text is somewhat different from what you might expect. It is not overly concerned with brevity. Rather, I discuss the concepts in some depth and in a “friendly” tone. The goal is to help students enjoy the text and come to class knowing the information. While brevity has its advantages, I felt that it hinders the self-motivated student who wants to learn outside the classroom. For teachers who prefer a more succinct style, I have included overview and summary sections, and have placed some instruction in the footnotes and the Advanced Information sections. The section numbers also make it easy for teachers to remove information that they feel is unnecessary for their students. For example: “Don’t read §13.4-5 and §13.7.”

It is possible to ignore all the footnotes in this text, except for the footnotes to the vocabulary, and still learn Koine Greek. The information in the footnotes is interesting tidbits for both the teacher and the exceptional student. They will most likely confuse the marginal student. However, the footnotes to the vocabulary, and the footnotes in the workbook, are important and should be read carefully.

Two typographical notes. When I refer to one Greek letter, I call it by its Greek name (e.g., \omicron is referred to as “omicron”). This is to avoid confusion with, e.g., citing “o” and not being clear whether this is an English “o” or a Greek omicron. The symbol \blacktriangleright means that the preceding form develops into the following (e.g., the root $\ast\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\alpha \blacktriangleright \acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\pi\acute{\alpha}\omega$). On the other hand, \blacktriangleleft means that the preceding form develops from the following.

There are many people I wish to thank. Without my students’ constant questioning and their unfailing patience with all my experiments in teaching methods, this grammar could never have been written. I would like to thank especially Brad Rigney, Ian and Kathy Lopez, Mike De Vries, Bob Ramsey, Jenny (Davis) Riley, Handjarawatano, Dan Newman, Tim Pack, Jason Zahariades, Tim and Jennifer Brown, Lynnette Whitworth, Chori Seraiah, Miles Van Pelt, and the unnamed student who failed the class twice until I totally separated the nouns (chapters 1-14) from the verbs (chapters 15-35), and then received a “B.” Thanks also to my students at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and my T.A.’s, Matthew Smith, Jim Critchlow, Jason DeRouchie, Rich Herbster, Juan Hernández, Ryan Jackson, Steven Kirk, David Palmer, Andy Williams, and especially my colleagues and friends, Edward M. Keazirian II, George H. Guthrie, and Paul “Mr.” Jackson.

I want to thank those professors who were willing to try out the grammar in its earlier stages, and for those upon whom I have relied for help: Robert H. Mounce, William S. LaSor, Daniel B. Wallace, Thomas Schreiner, Jon Hunt, Nancy Vyhmeister, Keith Reeves, Ron Rushing, George Gunn, Chip Hard, Verlyn Verbrugge, and Craig Keener. A very special thank you must go to Walter W. Wessel, who used the text beginning with its earliest form and who was constant and loving in his corrections, criticisms, and praise. When I

thought the text was basically done, my excellent editor, Verlyn Verbrugge, continued to fine-tune my work, not just by finding typos and grammatical errors, but by adding substantially to the content and flow of the chapters. (As always, any errors are my fault, and I would appreciate notification of any errors or suggestions. Correspondence may be sent to me at the address on p. xvi and xvii.) And if it were not for the diligent efforts of Ed van der Maas and Jack Kragt, this grammar may never have been published and marketed as well as it has been. I must also mention my marvelous Greek teachers who first planted the seed of love for this language and nurtured it to growth: E. Margaret Howe, Walter W. Wessel, Robert H. Mounce, William Sanford LaSor, and George E. Ladd.

Much of the work, especially in the exercises, could not have been done without the aid of the software programs *Gramcord* by Paul Miller and *Accordance* by Roy Brown. Thanks.

As this is the second edition of the textbook, I would also like to thank the many professors and students who have used *BBG* over the past nine years. Its acceptance has been more than gratifying, and I trust that the fine-tuning that has gone into this edition will be helpful.

A special thank you to my wife Robin, for her unfailing patience and encouragement through the past twenty years, and for believing in the goals we both set for this grammar. Thanks also to my friends at Shiloh Hills Fellowship and Garland Avenue Alliance Church who have so graciously aided me in my research, Richard Porter, Steve Yoell, Scotte Meredith, and my good friends Tyler, Kiersten, Hayden, Ryan, Regan, Reid, Rance, Nikki, Layton, Trent, Derek, Sean, Chris, Julia, Grace, Jonathan, David, Julie, and Lindsay.

And finally I wish to thank the scholars who in spite of crowded schedules agreed to write the exegetical insights for each chapter. As you see how a knowledge of the biblical languages has aided them in their studies, I trust you will be encouraged in your own pursuit of learning and using Greek.

Thank you.

William D. Mounce

Rationale Statement

With so many introductory Greek grammars on the market, it seems appropriate to begin with a rationale for yet another. *BBG* is not just new to be different, but approaches the instruction of the language from a totally different perspective that I hope makes learning Greek as easy as possible, as rewarding as possible, and, yes, even enjoyable.

The following explains my approach, why it is different, and why I think it is better. The acceptance of the first edition has been encouraging.

Goals

1. To approach learning Greek, not as an intellectual exercise, but as a tool for ministry.
2. To provide constant encouragement for the students, showing them not only what they should learn but why.
3. To teach only what is necessary at the moment, deferring the more complicated concepts until later.
4. To utilize current advances in linguistics, not for the purpose of teaching linguistics but to make learning Greek easier.

1. A Tool for Ministry

Biblical Greek should not be taught simply for the sake of learning Greek. Although there is nothing necessarily wrong with that approach, it is inappropriate for a great number of students in colleges and seminaries. Too often they are taught Greek and told that eventually they will see why it is important to know the material. In my opinion, they should be shown, in the process of learning, why they are learning Greek and why a working knowledge of Greek is essential for their ministry.

2. Encouragement

Most students come to Greek with varying degrees of apprehension. Their enthusiasm often wears down as the semester progresses. *BBG*, therefore, has built into it different ways of encouraging them.

- a. Most of the exercises are from the Bible, mostly New Testament, but some from the Septuagint. From day one, the students are translating the biblical text. If a passage has a word that is taught in a later chapter, it is translated. This gives students the satisfaction of actually having translated a

portion of the Bible. Whenever the Greek in the exercises clarifies an exegetical or theological point, I have also tried to point it out.

The disadvantage of using the biblical text is that the student may already know the verse in English. But with a little discipline on the student's part, this disadvantage is far outweighed by the advantages, and in the second edition I added a few made-up sentences.

- b. After every vocabulary word, its frequency is given. It is one thing to learn that *καί* means "and," but to see that it occurs 9,164 times in the New Testament will motivate students to memorize it.
- c. There are some 5,437 different words in the New Testament that occur a total of 138,162 times. Therefore, after every section of vocabulary the students will be told what percentage of the total word count they now know. By the eighth chapter the student will know more than one out of every two word occurrences.

3. Teaching Only What is Necessary

Students only learn what is necessary in order to begin reading the text. After they have mastered the basics and have gained some experience in reading, they are taught more of the details. In order to encourage the better student and make the text more usable for more teachers, this additional detailed material is put in footnotes or in a section at the end of the chapter called "Advanced Information."

For example, some of the rules for accents are included in the Advanced Information, so it is up to the student or teacher as to whether or not they should be learned. The adverbial participle provides another example. Students are taught to use the "-ing" form of the verb, prefaced by either a temporal adverb ("while," "after") or "because." In the Advanced Information, the advanced students can read that they may include a personal pronoun identifying the doer of the participle, and that the time of the finite verb used to translate the participle must be relative to the main verb.

4. Modern Linguistics

Modern studies in linguistics have much to offer language learning. The beginning student should not learn linguistics for its own sake, but the basic principles can be taught and applied generally.

For example, the "Square of Stops" is mastered since it explains many of the morphological changes of the verb. Also, a basic set of case endings are learned, and then students are shown how they are modified, only so slightly, in the different declensions. Once it is seen that the same basic endings are used in all three declensions, memorization is simplified. In the lexicon, all words are keyed to my *The Morphology of Biblical Greek* (see bibliography at the end of this discussion). As the students' knowledge and interest progresses, they will be able to pursue in-depth morphological work in this text.

5. Innovative

BBG seeks to approach the joyful task of learning Greek from new and innovative angles, not merely for the sake of newness but from the desire to make learning Greek as rewarding as possible. The easier it is to learn the language, the more the language will be used by pastors and others involved in ministry.

- a. All definitions are derived from Prof. Bruce Metzger's *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek* and Warren Trenchard's *The Student's Complete Guide to the Greek New Testament*. This way, when students move into second-year Greek and use one of these two excellent study aids for increasing vocabulary, they will not have to relearn the definitions.
- b. A lexicon is provided that lists all words occurring ten times or more with the tense forms for all simple verbs. (Any word in the exercises that occurs less than fifty times will be identified in the exercise itself.) This will be needed for the review exercises. There also is a full set of noun and verbal charts.
- c. Instead of switching students back and forth between nouns and verbs, *BBG* teaches nouns first and then verbs. Because verbs are so important, some have questioned the wisdom of not starting them until chapter 15. Here are my reasons.
 - Over the years I found that excessive switching between nouns and verbs was one of the most confusing aspects in other approaches to teaching Greek.
 - Nouns are learned so quickly that you get to chapter 15 much sooner than you might expect.
 - If you listen to a child learn to speak, you can see that it is more natural to learn nouns first and later move on to the verbal system.

While this approach has proven itself over the past nine years, I did want to be sensitive to other teachers' preferences and especially the amount of time they have to teach Greek. Some teachers have reported that they were barely able to finish nouns by the Christmas break. Therefore, in the second edition, I added a "Track Two" of exercises. It is an alternate set of exercises that allows you to move from chapter 9 up to chapter 15 and learn about verbs, and after several chapters on verbs come back and finish nouns. This involves switching back and forth between nouns and verbs only once, and in my experience it has not shown itself to be difficult.

- d. At the beginning of every chapter is an Exegetical Insight based on a biblical text. These are written by New Testament scholars and demonstrate the significance of the grammar in the chapter.
- e. Next comes a discussion of English grammar, and in the summary of Greek grammar that follows as many comparisons as possible are made

between English and Greek, with emphasis on the similarities between the two languages.

- f. Greek grammar is initially taught with English illustrations. When illustrations for new grammatical constructions are given in Greek, students spend much of their concentration on identifying the Greek forms, and often do not fully understand the grammar itself. In *BBG* the grammar is made explicit in English, and only when it is grasped is it illustrated in Greek. For example,

A participle has verbal characteristics. “*After eating*, my Greek teacher gave us the final.” In this example, *eating* is a participle that tells us something about the verb *gave*. The teacher gave us the final after he was done eating. (*After* is an adverb that specifies when the action of the participle occurred.)

A participle also has adjectival aspects. “The woman, *sitting by the window*, is my Greek teacher.” In this example, *sitting* is a participle telling us something about the noun “woman.”

- g. There is a Teacher’s Packet available for a free download from Teknia’s website. The Teacher’s Packet contains the following.
- Answers for the Workbook.
 - Sample quizzes for each chapter (no answers).
 - Overheads.
 - Software. See pages xix ff. for a discussion of *Learning the Basics of Biblical Greek*[™], *Teknia Language Tools*[™], *FlashWorks*[™], and *ParseWorks*[™].

The Teacher’s Packet, the software, and other helps are available on the web at:

www.teknia.com

See there for the latest versions. You may contact the author at Zondervan, Academic Editorial, 5300 Patterson Ave., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530. You can visit Zondervan’s website at:

www.zondervan.com/books/academic

Greek Class on Audio Tape

Bill Mounce has recorded his two-semester course in which he goes through each chapter in detail. These lectures are available to purchase at his website:

www.teknia.com.

The summary lectures included in the CD-ROM are 8 to 10 minute lectures over the main points of the chapter. These lectures cover everything in the chapter.

You may also write to Teknia at:

Teknia
PO 28428
Spokane, WA 99228

Abbreviations

- Accordance* Roy Brown, *The Gramcord Institute*.
- BBG* *Basics of Biblical Greek*, William D. Mounce (Zondervan, 2003)
- BDAG* *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, eds. W. Bauer, F.E. Danker, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, third edition (University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- Bl-D* *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, eds. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, trans. R. Funk (University of Chicago Press, 1961).
- Fanning* *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, Buist M. Fanning (Clarendon Press, 1990).
- Gramcord* Paul Miller, *The Gramcord Institute*.
- Klein* *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Ernest Klein (Elsevier Publishing Co., NY, 1971), from which I drew heavily for cognates and definitions in the vocabulary sections.
- LaSor* *Handbook of New Testament Greek*, William Sanford LaSor (Eerdmans, 1973).
- Machen* *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (Macmillan, 1951).
- MBG* *The Morphology of Biblical Greek*, William D. Mounce (Zondervan, 1994).
- Metzger* *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, Bruce M. Metzger (Theological Book Agency, 1973).
- Smyth* *Greek Grammar*, Herbert Weir Smyth (Harvard University Press, 1980).
- Wallace* *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics. An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Daniel B. Wallace (Zondervan, 1995).
- Wenham* *The Elements of New Testament Greek*, J.W. Wenham (Cambridge University Press, 1965).