

Starter Notes for Greek

As soon as you have a basic grasp of the Greek alphabet (including accents and breathing marks), you can begin benefitting from English tools. First, there is an interlinear New Testament. I suggest starting at the Gospel of John: <http://biblehub.com/interlinear/john/1.htm>

John's Greek is easier to follow than some of the other NT writers, and just about every introduction to Koine ("common") Greek starts with his Gospel or his letters (1,2,3 John). Koine Greek is different from classical Greek and modern Greek. It was the language of commerce and day-to-day interactions among people of different cultures and different native languages. A common language was part of God's providence in the timing and spread of the Gospel. So resources for classical or modern Greek will not be all that helpful and might be confusing. But there are lots of resources for Koine, or New Testament Greek.

A sample from the beginning of the Gospel will give me a chance to do a little explaining. Some of the information you will become familiar with later, some of the other information is a good place to start. We will look at the first word in the sample text:

The screenshot shows the Bible Hub website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs for 'John', '1', 'Version', 'Commentary', and 'Language'. Below this is a search bar and a dropdown menu for 'Strong's'. A row of Bible versions is listed: NIV, NLT, ESV, BSB, NAS, KJV, HCS, ASV, DBT, DRB, ERV, GWT, ISR, ISV, KJP, NET, OJB, WEB, WBT, WYC, YLT, TNT. Below that are tabs for 'Parallel', 'Sermons', 'Topics', 'Strong's', 'Comment', 'Interlinear', 'Greek', 'Lexicon', and 'Multi'. The main content area is titled 'John 1' and 'Interlinear Bible'. It shows the text 'The Beginning (Genesis 1:1-2)'. The first line of text is: '1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, In [the] beginning was the Word, and the Word was with - God'. A red box highlights the first word 'Ev' (1722 [e]) and its corresponding Strong's number and English translation 'In [the] beginning'.

1722 [e] This is a reference number to Strong's concordance, an English concordance but the reference numbers help you find all the instances of the same Greek word. For example (not in this passage) there are four Greek words for "love" and if you look in an English concordance you will see all the places where the various words were translated "love" but cannot tell which Greek word was used. Strong's numbers (and a later update called G-K numbers, for Goodrick-Kohlenberger) help you see which Greek words were used in what context. One of those details that will help more later. Nothing to worry about now but I wanted you to know what the numbers were for.

En This is the pronunciation of the Greek word, using English letters and sounds. In some commentaries or other books these transliterations are used instead of Greek letters, sometimes both are used.

Ἐν This is the Greek text - the point of the exercise.

- Some letters you will recognize from English (like the Greek *epsilon* that looks a lot like an English "e" in both upper and lower case).
- Others will be a mystery (what the heck is a Xi? (*ksee*), ξ), or even worse, misleading, like the Greek *nu* (pronounced "noo") that looks like an English "v" but has the sound of the letter "n". The Greek letter that looks a little like an English "n" (*eta*, η) is the long "e" vowel.
- Plus there are two different letters like an English "o" – *omicron* (ο, that looks like an "o") and *omega* (ω, that looks like a "w").
- The Greek equivalent of an English "s" (*sigma*) changes its form at the end of a word. *Sigma* looks like this σ unless it is at the end of a word, then ς.
- Other marks like the apostrophe before the E or accent marks (last letter of the second word, ἀρχῆ, the squiggle like a Spanish tilde) will be important later, but not critical for right now.
- The fourth word in the interlinear has a "rough" breathing mark. The Greek text is ὀ like a letter "o" with a backwards apostrophe. Any word starting with a vowel has a "breathing mark" – the backwards apostrophe indicates an "h" sound, called "rough breathing" – so you see the transliteration above it is "ho", pronounced "huh" or "hah" not "hoe" – *omicron* is a short "o" sound; *omega* (which looks a bit like an English "w", ω) is used in words with a long "oh" sound. A word with forward apostrophe (smooth breathing) has no effect on the pronunciation. For example, the second word, ἀρχῆ has the smooth breathing, and is pronounced "arche" and not "harche."
- Finally (for now!), look at the last letter of the second word, ἀρχῆ. If you look carefully, notice the small letter below the line. This is called an *iota* subscript, the Greek equivalent of the English "i" but written below the line. This is part of the spelling of the word that generally does not affect the pronunciation but does affect the meaning, so it is important (or will be later) to notice them. (Most scholars think that when Jesus referred to the "jot and tittle" not passing away from the Law, the "jot" is the small *iota* subscript, and the tittle is the "˘" accent mark.)

Don't get overwhelmed – like any language, there is a lot of new information, starting with the alphabet (the Greek alpha-beta, by the way). After a little practice, the letter changes and accents and other unfamiliar marks will be second nature to you. That's a lot to digest, but should at least help you get a start in reading (even without understanding much if any of it right now). That is my beginning suggestion, just start reading the Greek text – you can use the transliteration line to check your pronunciation. Slowly but surely you will begin to pick out the repeated words (like λόγος) and begin to recognize them (cover the English transliteration line as you read – you will amaze yourself very soon with the individual words you will recognize). You will also notice that sometimes words translated about the same and looking almost the same in Greek have slight differences (like θεόν and θεός). Those are the form changes mentioned below in the grammatical line of the interlinear.

In [the] This is the English literal translation for each word. Right off the bat you see that translators often insert words to make the English read more smoothly and to make more sense - not to add to Scripture but to communicate the meaning of Greek in sensible English. "In beginning" is great Greek but awkward English.

Prep This is the grammatical information – the part of speech as well as "parsing" information, dissecting the way the word is used. Greek is an "inflected" language, meaning that the forms of most words change depending on how they are used in a sentence. English has very few examples of inflection, such as "He goes to the store" but "I saw him at the store." He and Him both are pronouns but they change depending on how they are used in the sentence. Some parsing is pretty simple, like this case where the word is a preposition. Some get more complicated, like the third word, with the parsing [V-IIA-3S](#). Hovering the mouse over that part of the web page will decipher the meaning (but won't be much clearer yet). In a few weeks it will make a lot more sense.

As you have time, start working your way through the Gospel of John, reading the Greek, checking the pronunciation line, noticing words that recur frequently. If you notice anything interesting or anything that raises questions in the parsing, mention it. Otherwise, leave the cryptic abbreviations for later.