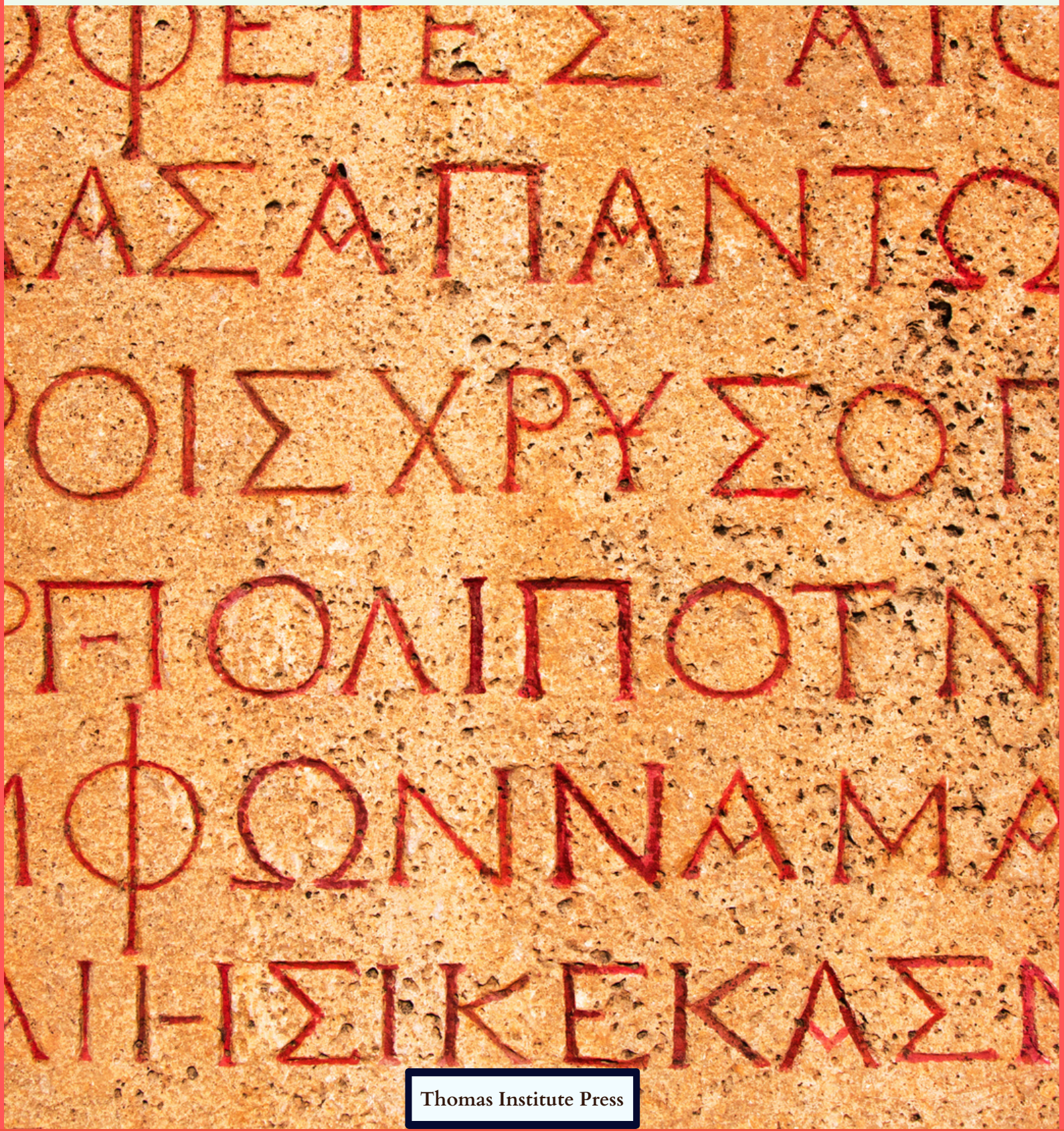
It's All Greek to Me: Common Greek Phrases



Thomas Institute Press

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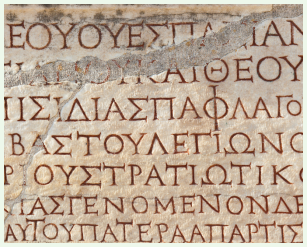
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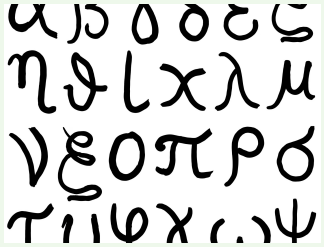
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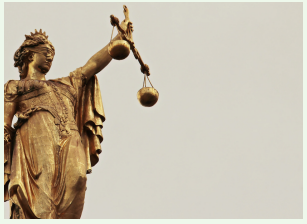
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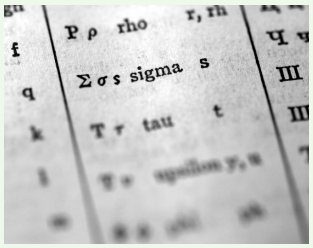








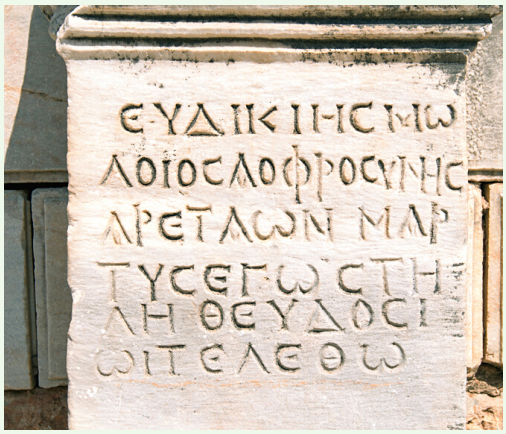








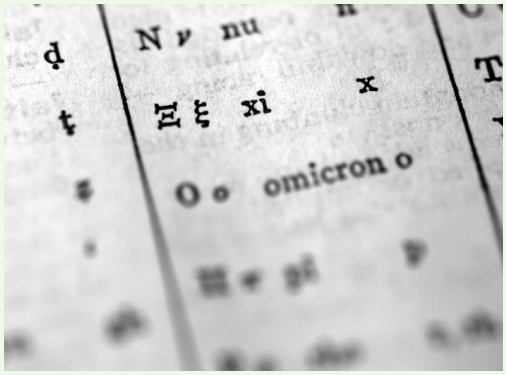
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It's Not as Difficult as You Think

I love languages. My interest in them was piqued when I got the opportunity to learn Portuguese while living in Brazil as a teenager. Since then, I have studied a dozen languages to one degree or another. And there are three that I teach: Latin, Spanish, and (Biblical) Greek. It's this last language—Biblical Greek—that people assume is the hardest.

But the truth is that it's much easier than you think. After all, our English alphabet is modeled on the Greek alphabet, and virtually all the sounds Greek speakers make are also made in English.



For this reason, I have a course on Udemy.com titled "Learn How to Pronounce Biblical Greek." It's a very user-friendly course that starts from scratch and walks you through the alphabet and sounds of Greek in several easy-to-understand lessons. If you want to learn how to pronounce the words you will come across when traveling to Greece, it is an excellent resource you can purchase and use both at home and while in country. Travelers enjoy taking that course and have found it helpful to prepare them for Greece.



No Need to Worry

Before you get too worried, however, I want to let you know that learning the basics of Greek pronunciation is not necessary to travel to Greece. For good or bad, English is the international language, and you will do just fine using it. At the same time, through my years of leading international trips, I have found that learning a few common words and phrases can go a long way in enhancing your experience, minimizing misunderstandings, connecting with locals, and enjoying something new.



Three Parts: Greek Language, Alphabet and Common Phrases

This booklet contains three components related to Greek: a brief overview of the language, the alphabet, and the 15 most important phrases.

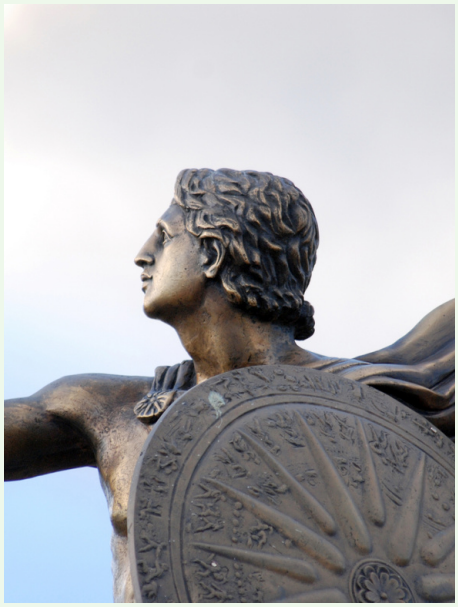
Overview of Greek Language

The Greek language is one of the oldest languages in the world. In fact, it has been spoken for more than 3,500 years! But as explained in another booklet, because ancient Greek city-states were isolated from each other since 80% of Greece is mountainous, the Greek language had lots of dialects.

The earliest form of Greek was called “Early Greek.” However, the form of Greek that is most famous is called “Classical Greek.” This was the kind of Greek written by the great poets, playwrights, and philosophers a few hundred years before the time of Christ. It was a language capable of great precision that offered a unifying manner of speech for later generations to imitate.

Over time, after the conquests of Alexander the Great about three centuries before Christ, which led to the spread of Greek language and culture, a less sophisticated form of Greek developed that was used by ordinary people. It was called “Koine Greek” since Koine [Κοινή] is the Greek word for “common.”

In fact, this form of Greek is more commonly called “Biblical Greek” because it is the form used by the Jewish people to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek and Jewish Christians who wrote the New Testament. After all, the most important Bible versions of all time were written in Greek. (The Greek Old Testament, which was used by Christians, was called the “Septuagint,” while the New Testament was written exclusively in the Greek language.)



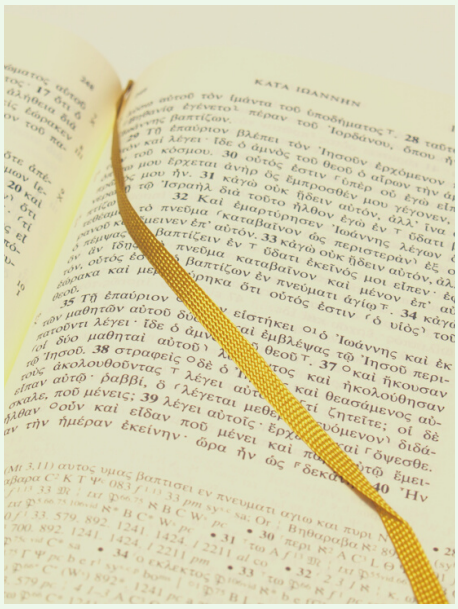




Table: Time Period of Ancient Greek

Form of Greek	Time Period Used	People Using It
Early Greek	1500 – 1000 BCE	All persons
Classical Greek	1000 – 330 BCE	Highly educated
Koine Greek	330 BCE – 330 CE	All persons
Byzantine Greek	330 – 1453 CE	All persons
Modern Greek	1453 – Today	All persons

Greek Alphabet

Let’s now turn to the Greek alphabet. It is one of the most famous alphabets of all time. However, there are much older alphabets, and the Greek alphabet was derived from the Phoenician alphabet, just like the Hebrew alphabet was.

There are 24 letters or characters in the Greek alphabet. Like English, these letters have two forms: one that is uppercase and one that is lowercase. Sometimes the uppercase and lowercase letters appear very similar, but sometimes they look completely different.

α	alpha, "a" as in f**a**ther	ν	ni, "n" as in **n**ew
β	vita, "v" as in **v**ictory	ξ	xsi, "x" as in Te**x**as
γ	gamma, "g" or "y" as in **g**um or **y**es	ο	omicron, "o" as in **o**ff
δ	delta, "th" as in **th**ere	π	pi, "p" as in **p**illow
ε	epsilon, "e" as in **e**lf	ρ	rho, "rh" as in **R**oma
ζ	zeta, "z" as in **z**oo	σ, ς	sigma, "s" as in **s**ilk
η	eta, "ee" as in l**ea**f (like ι and υ)	τ	tof, "t" as in **t**ell
θ	theta, "th" as in **th**eology	υ	upsilon, "ee" as in l**ea**f (like η and ι)
ι	iota, "ee" as in l**ea**f (like η and υ)	φ	phi, "ph" as in **ph**one
κ	kappa, "k" as in **k**ind	χ	chi, "ch" as in lo**ch**
λ	lamda, "l" as in **l**egal	ψ	psi, "ps" as in li**ps**
μ	mi, "m" as in **m**other	ω	omega, "oh" as in g**o**

Interestingly, the Bible was written completely in uppercase letters since lowercase letters had not yet been invented. However, since then, Greek versions of the Bible have adapted to modern style, meaning that they use lowercase for all letters other than the first one if it is a proper noun or the first letter in a sentence.

When looking over the alphabet (see chart above), it is important to always keep in mind two things: first, the "name" of the letter, and second, the "sound" of the letter. For instance, in English, as you know, the name of the letter "w" is "double u," but the sound is "w…," as in "we."

It works the same way in Greek. For instance, alpha (α) is the name of the first letter in Greek. But the sound is different. The sound is actually "a…," as in "father." This will be true of all 24 Greek letters. The name and the sound are not the same.

Common Phrases

Finally, let us discuss one more component to the Greek language: common phrases.

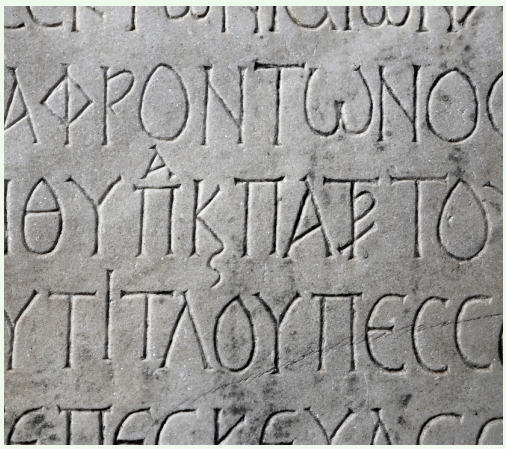
Greek	Pronunciation	Meaning
ναι	nE	"yes"
όχι	O-hi	"no"
γειά σου	yA-sou	"hi," "hello"
ευχαριστώ	ef-ha-ri-stO	"thank you"
καλημέρα	ka-li-mE-ra	"good morning"
καλησπέρα	ka-li-spE-ra	"good afternoon"
παρακαλώ	pa-ra-ka-lO	"thanks"

συγνώμη	sing-nO-mi	"sorry," "pardon"
με λένε…	me lE-ne	"my name is…"
γειά	yA	"bye"
εντάξει	en-dA-ksi	"OK," "alright"
τα λέμε	tA lE-me	"see you later"
δε μιλάω ελληνικά	de mi-lA-o el-li-ni-kA	"I don't speak Greek"
πόσο κάνει αυτό?	pO-so kA-ni af-tO	"How much is this?"
πού είναι η τουαλέτα	pooh I-ne i tu-a-lE-ta	"Where's the bathroom?"









Every language has thousands of words, but some of those words are used much more frequently than others. And here (see phrases in page above), I want to isolate the 15 most common words and phrases you will hear dozens of times a day when in Greece. Ideally, you will take time to learn a few. After all, they are not difficult, and, as a bonus, they are fun to say.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Greek is the official language of Greece. And although you will get along just fine using English, it can be very helpful to learn a few basic phrases in the local language, and the 15 words and phrases I have just taught you are a perfect start.

And if you want to take it to the next level, do yourself a favor by taking my course “Learn How to Pronounce Biblical Greek” on Udemy.com, which will teach you how to pronounce the letters of the alphabet in a dozen very easy-to-understand lessons. Until next time, *ta leme* (τα λέμε), which, as you now know, means “see you later.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What letters from the Greek alphabet do you know?

2. After looking at the 24 letters in the Greek alphabet, which are the trickiest to remember? Why?

3. How many periods of Greek are there? What period is when the Bible was written?

4. How many Greek phrases do you think you would like to learn? Which ones?

5. How do you pronounce "yes" and "no" in Greek?



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