

LESSON I THE ALPHABET

1.1. Introduction

The Greek alphabet consists of twenty-four letters. It does not have the 'c' or 'w' and the 'h' is written as a sign. In this lesson we give the letters that are easiest for us Westerners. They are more or less similar to our letters, that of the Latin alphabet.

1.2 Twelve letters from the Greek alphabet

We give now easily recognizable letters of the Greek alphabet. The other letters we treat of in the next lesson. Right behind the letter we tell how it is to be pronounced. Between parentheses you can see the names of the letters.

A α as in the French 'calme' or 'father' according to whether the syllable is closed or open (alpha),

B β simply 'b' (beta),

E ε always short as in 'bed' (epsilon),

I ι as in 'pin' [closed syllable] or as in 'ville' [open syl.] (iota), or as 'y' in 'yes' before a vowel,

K κ 'k' (kappa),

M μ 'm' (mu),

N ν 'n' (nu),

O ο always short as in 'pot' (omikron),

Σ σ ζ at the end of a word, 's' (sigma),

T τ 't' (tau),

Υ υ always as in the German 'Müller' or in the French 'lune' (upsilon),

Ω ω always long as in 'elope' (omega).

Learn to write these letters and practice them till you know them by heart. You should be able to dream them!

1.3 Spiritus

When a word begins with a vowel, then a little sign is added to it: ' (*spiritus lenis* or smooth breathing) or ˆ (*spiritus asper* or rough breathing). The spiritus lenis leaves the pronunciation of a word unchanged: ἀββα - abba. The spiritus asper however is pronounced

as the 'h'-sound in 'house': ἵνα - hina.

The ρ at the beginning of a word always carries the spiritus asper, but does not change the pronunciation: ῥαββι - rabbi.

The spiritus is written above the vowel when it is a minuscule [small] (ᾱββα); in the case of capitals before the letter (ῚΑββα). In the case of diphthongs the spiritus is written normally above the second vowel (οἶκος - oikos, αἶμα- haima).

1.4 End sigma

As you could have seen in the case of the letter 's', there are two ways to write the sigma: σ, ς. The ς is written only at the end of a word. In all other cases the σ is used. Examples: βιος, σαββατον, βασις.

1.5 Homework:

a) The next words are all from the N.T. Behind the Greek word write the same word in capitals. Try to do this without looking on page 1!

αἶμα
 βασις
 βιος
 ἐκ
 εἰς
 ἰαομαι (pronounce as ya-o-mi).
 ἵνα
 κενος
 μεσος
 μενω
 νοσος
 νους
 οἰκια
 σαββατον
 τεκνον
 υἱος
 ὡς

b) Also the following words are from the New Testament. Behind the Greek word write the same word in small characters. A gain, try to do this by heart!

ῚΑΒΒΑ
 ῚΑΝΑΒΑΙΝΩ
 ΔΙΑ
 ῚΕΝΝΟΙΑ
 ῚΕΥ
 ῚΙΣΟΣ
 ΚΕΙΜΑΙ
 ΚΟΙΝΟΣ
 ΜΕΝ
 ΝΟΤΟΣ
 ΝΥΝ
 ῚΟΤΙ

ΣΤΟΜΑ
ΤΕΚΤΩΝ
ΥΣ
ΩΔΕ

1.6 The background of the New Testament: Introduction

In this part of the lesson we want to give you information about the background against which the events of the New Testament took place. All kinds of subjects will be treated such as administration, religion, philosophy, architecture, transport, vocations and food. We begin with administration. From the third century B.C. onward the conquest of the Mediterranean world began from Rome. Complete swaths of contemporary Europe, North-Africa and Asia were incorporated into the Roman empire. The conquered terrain was usually turned into a province. A governor or proconsul was at the head of such a province. Through subordinates the proconsul took care of all kinds of public affairs, such as the collecting of taxes. Taxes from the provinces enabled the Romans to finance colossal building projects or expensive military expeditions. Often the inhabitants of a province were enjoined to honor the Roman gods and to behave in accordance with Roman legislature. Later, in the times of the first emperors, the inhabitants of the provinces were also confronted with the obligatory cult of caesar. This cult meant that the emperor was worshiped as a god. Most people did not mind that however, because almost all religions in those times were polytheistic. One more or one less divinity made no difference. Their real difficulty lay in the high taxes and the arbitrary behavior of the officials in Roman service. But what happens when a nation that reveres only a single deity is confronted with a foreign sovereignty, customs and . . . an emperor that demands to be honored as a god? More about that in the next lesson.

NOTES: