

Understanding the King James Version of the Holy Bible – Elementary Greek

The New Testament of the KJV Bible was translated from the Greek New Testament known as the “Textus Receptus” or the Received Text.

The Greek of the New Testament is called *Koine* (or Common) Greek. It is different from Modern Greek. It is also called “Biblical Greek.”

The Greek Alphabet is composed of 24 letters.

Upper/lower case	Name	Sound	Pronunciation
A, α	alpha	[ɑ]	a (father)
B, β	beta	[b]	b (bet)
Γ, γ	gamma	[g]	g (get)
Δ, δ	delta	[d]	d (dog)
E, ε	epsilon	[é]	e (get)
Z, ζ	zeta	[dz, z]	dz (cords), z (zero)
H, η	eta	[e]	e (obey)
Θ, θ	theta	[th]	t (top, theology)
I, ι	iota	[i, i:]	i (hit), i (machine), y (yellow)
K, κ	kappa	[k]	k (keep)
Λ, λ	lambda	[l]	l (lamp)
M, μ	mu	[m]	m (mile)
N, ν	nu	[n]	n (new)
Ξ, ξ	xi	[k ^h s]	x (axe)
O, ο	omicron	[o]	o (top) short
Π, π	pi	[p]	p (put)
P, ρ	rho	[r]	r (rod)
Σ, σ, ς	sigma	[s]	s (sit)
T, τ	tau	[t]	t (talk)
Y, υ	upsilon	[u]	u (universe), oo (book)
Φ, φ	phi	[p ^h]	ph (phone)
X, χ	chi	[k ^h]	ch (Scottish loch) guttural
Ψ, ψ	psi	[ps]	ps (lips)
Ω, ω	omega	[ɔ:]	o (note) long o

Vowels – there are seven vowels in Koine Greek.

Greek has seven vowels: α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, and ω. Vowels ε and ο are always short, η and ω are always long, and α, ι, υ may be either short or long.

Diphthongs – combination of two vowels but is pronounced as one syllable. There are seven diphthongs.

Diphthong	Pronunciation	Example	Meaning
αι	Aisle	αἰών	age
οι	Oil	οἶνος	wine
ει	Eight	χεῖρ	hand
υι	Queen	υἰός	son
αυ	Mouse	Παῦλος	Paul
ευ		βασιλεύς	king
ηυ		ἠῦρον	I found

Breathing marks

If a word in Greek starts with a vowel, diphthong or a letter ρ it must have a breathing mark written above it. It is placed above the vowels and “rho” [ρ], and above the second letter in the diphthongs.

Greek has two breathing marks. It can be either rough or smooth.

The rough breathing mark (᾿) indicates that the first sound will have an initial “h” sound.

The smooth breathing mark (῀) indicates that this initial “h” sound is absent.

For example:	ἓν	[hén]	one
	ἐν	[en]	in
	ἡμέρα	[heméra]	day
	ἕξ	[héks]	six
	ἄνῆρ	[anér]	man, husband

Initial ρ and υ always have the rough breathing mark. If a word has two ρρ letters in it, the first one has a smooth and the second a rough breathing mark, respectively. The breathing mark above ρ is silent.

For example:	ῥῶδωρ	[húdor]	water
	ῥῆμα	[réma]	word
	ἐρρόμενος	[erroménos]	strong, vigorous