Chapter 1
The Greek Alphabet

1.1 The pronunciation of Koine (koy-nay) (Common) Greek at the time of the New Testament is a matter of
debate. The system given here is an adaptation of the pronunciation sometimes referred to as Erasmian,
recommended by the Classical Association.

1.2 The Letters and their sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>α</td>
<td>a as in cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>b as in big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma</td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>g as in get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta</td>
<td>δ</td>
<td>d as in dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsilon</td>
<td>ε</td>
<td>e as in get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vau</td>
<td>ϖ</td>
<td>z as in zoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeta</td>
<td>ζ</td>
<td>dz as in az</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eta</td>
<td>η</td>
<td>ee as in see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theta</td>
<td>θ</td>
<td>th as in thin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iota</td>
<td>ι</td>
<td>i as in it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kappa</td>
<td>κ</td>
<td>k as in kick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambda</td>
<td>λ</td>
<td>l as in let</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mu</td>
<td>μ</td>
<td>m as in man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu</td>
<td>ν</td>
<td>n as in no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xi</td>
<td>ξ</td>
<td>x as in taxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omicron</td>
<td>ο</td>
<td>o as in got</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pi</td>
<td>π</td>
<td>p as in pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koppa</td>
<td>ϊ</td>
<td>k as in kick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rho</td>
<td>ρ</td>
<td>r as in red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigma</td>
<td>σ</td>
<td>s as in sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tau</td>
<td>τ</td>
<td>t as in tag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upsilon</td>
<td>υ</td>
<td>u as in put</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi</td>
<td>ϕ</td>
<td>f as in fie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi</td>
<td>χ</td>
<td>ch as in loch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psi</td>
<td>ψ</td>
<td>ps as in tips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omega</td>
<td>Ω</td>
<td>o as in home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
(1) Gamma: when gamma is combined with other gutturals, γγ, γκ, γξ, γχ the γ is pronounced as the "n" in
sing, ink, sinks, etc.
(2) Epsilon: the name means "simple e"
(3) Digamma: the letter dropped out of use before the time of the New Testament.
It was used originally for a "w" or "fw" sound. The name "Vau" reflected its Semitic name.
Greeks called it Digamma because it looked like two superimposed Gammas.
(4) Iota: note that the Greek letter does not have a dot over it.
Before other vowels, i can sound as "y" in yes.
(5) Omicron: the name means "little o"
(6) Koppa: the letter dropped out of use before the time of the New Testament
(7) Rho: at the beginning of a word rho is aspirated: "hr"
(8) Sigma: terminal sigma (at the end of a word) is written ζ. Some textbooks for Classical Greek use the
form ζ for terminal sigma.
(9) Upsilon : the name means "simple u"
(10) Chi : ch as in (Scots) loch, (German) ach, (Spanish) gente. Needs some saliva in the back of the throat
(11) Psi : sounds like a cat spitting
(12) Omega : the name means "big O"

1.3 Comparison with the English Alphabet
You may find it easier to learn the order of the Greek Alphabet if you compare it to the English Alphabet.
C and G were originally forms of the same letter. In Latin, Caius and Gaius are variant spellings of the same
name.
Digamma is included in the table because it corresponds to the English letter F. It is of importance for
studying Homer, because words which originally started with a digamma may influence the length of a
syllable and hence the meter of the poetry.
The original "dz" sound was not used in English, so the letter was dropped from the English alphabet. When
the English Alphabet was formalized, there was need for a letter for the "z" sound, so Z was added to the end
of the alphabet.
Eta gave us the English "h" and has the sound of "ai" in "Aitch" - we will meet this again in the next chapter.
Ways to remember the sequence ζ - η - θ - ι are by the fake Greek word ζηθι or "Zebras ate thin Indians."
English I and J were originally the same letter. The split occurred in the seventeenth century - I is the form
used before a consonant, and J the form used before a vowel.
Xi dropped out of use in Latin, and so never made it into English. The letter "X" for the "ks" sound was
added to the end of the English alphabet later.
Koppa is included in the table because it corresponds to the Semitic Qoph, which gave the English "Q".
1.4 Writing the Letters
You will probably write Greek by hand in order to make notes for yourself or for others to read - so it is good
to learn to write the letters clearly.
The handwritten forms of most of the letters look like the fonts used for printing, but there are a couple of
tricky letters, and a few things to watch out for so that your writing will be easy to read.

α and β - start the alpha at the top right, the beta at the bottom left, below the line. I find it easier to write
the upright stroke of the beta slanting slightly towards the right.

γ - most fonts make the gamma look like a "y". I prefer to make the loop a bit more visible. The loop
descends below the line.

δ - you can start either from the central loop, or from the top curl - whichever is easier.

ε - I like to write epsilon with two strokes, a curve and a short straight horizontal line - the resulting letter is
a bit clearer to read.

ζ - start at the top, make a small loop and then a sweeping curve. The ending hook descends below the line.

η - start at the top left and make the first short leg, then add the second curve and leg. The second leg
descends below the line. I find it easier to let the letter slope slightly to the right.

θ ι κ λ - are easy. Note that there is no dot on the iota.

μ - I like to start with a long sloping leg below the line, to make a clear distinction between a mu and an
upsilon.

ν - Make the "nu" narrow, and pointed at the bottom, to make a clear distinction between it and an upsilon.

ξ - xi is probably the trickiest. It helps to remember that the capital letter is two long horizontal lines with a
shorter horizontal line between them, outlining an "X" shape. The handwritten letter does indicate these three
lines, but writes them as two narrow loops and the line which then curves back on itself.

Ο π ρ σ ζ τ - I like to start the rho with a long sloping stem to distinguish it fromomicron and sigma.
The vertical stroke of the tau ends in a hook.

υ - upsilon needs to be well-rounded, particularly at the base, to distinguish it from nu

φ χ ψ ω - I find it easier to write a slanting line through the phi and psi. The first stroke of the chi
is slightly curved.
1.5 Practice
Using a blank sheet of paper, or the Alphabet worksheet (Appendix A.1), write out each letter of the Greek Alphabet, 50 times each, saying the name and sound of each letter aloud as you write it.

e.g. "Alpha . . ah, Alpha . . ah, . . .
Do this drill until your hand, eye, tongue, ear, and brain respond automatically to the shape and sound of the letters.

1.6 Vocabulary
The Vocabularies will show where the accents come on the words. Learn to put a stress on the accented syllable when learning the word and saying it aloud, but at this stage do not include it when writing or typing - you have enough to do to learn the letters at present.

Read, write, and learn the names:

- Βαρναβᾶς Barnabas
- Λάζαρος Lazarus
- Μάρθα Martha
- Μαρία Mary, Maria
- Μαριάμ Miriam, Mary ("Miriam" is the Anglicized version of the Hebrew "Mar-yam")
- Μάρκος Mark
- Πέτρος Peter
- Πιλᾶτος Pilate
- Σίμων Simon
- Τιμόθεος Timothy
- Τίτος Titus
- Φίλιππος Phillip