



## Rediscovery of the Original Languages; The Dialects of Ancient Greece: Formative, Classical, & Koinē; The Development of a Common Language

2. The rediscovery of the original languages, suppressed for centuries by reliance on inferior Latin translations, opened up an entirely new approach to biblical revelation. Once the Latin shroud was removed then those who looked intently into the original languages discovered salvation by grace, not by works, revealed by literal interpretation, not allegory.

### Couch, 163-64:

As a monk, Luther had been schooled on the allegorical method that had held a stranglehold on the church during the Middle Ages and medieval period. However, while lecturing on Romans and the Psalms, he became disenchanted with the traditional allegorical method of the Roman Catholic Church. His attempt to wrestle with the exegesis of the text led him to confront the inadequacies of his hermeneutical heritage. The allegorical method created only a confusion of multiple meanings, none of which adequately dealt with what he confronted in the biblical text. (p. 163)

Luther rejected the allegorical method and has strong words for it: "Allegories are empty speculations and as it were the scum of Holy Scripture." "Origen's allegories are not worth so much dirt." "To allegorize is to juggle the Scripture." "Allegorizing may degenerate into a mere monkeygame." "Allegories are awkward, absurd, inventive, obsolete, loose rags."

Luther abandoned the allegorical meaning and affirmed that Scripture had only a single meaning (*sensus unum*). The single sense was the historical-grammatical meaning: "Only the historical sense gives the true and sound doctrine." This is discerned by applying the ordinary rules of grammar in light of the original historical context.

He also stressed the literal sense (*sensus literalis*). The Scriptures "are to be retained in their simplest meaning ever possible, and to be understood in their grammatical and literal sense unless the context plainly forbids." His rejection of traditional allegorization was revolutionary; its implications quickly snowballed.

By rejecting the esoterism of allegorical interpretation, Scripture became accessible to ordinary thought; the basic meaning of Scripture became clear and simple to Luther. While the allegorical approach led only to confusion, the single historical meaning revealed the clarity of Scripture.

Lucifer asserted that the study of the original languages should be stressed: "We shall not long preserve the Gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which the sword of the Spirit is contained." (p. 164)

3. What Luther discovered was the Bible in its original state and he decided to interpret it as it was written. And it was written in Hebrew and Greek.
4. Well, to quote the Latin, *O sancta simplicitas!* O, sacred simplicity! The Bible is an inspired text. The Holy Spirit guided selected men to write divine instruction. God created man with the mechanisms prewired in the brain to process language. The languages through which God intended to communicate with mankind were Hebrew and Greek.
5. Therefore the first task for the interpreter is to acknowledge the languages in which the Scripture is written and then allow the grammar and the historical setting in which each of its parts were composed to lead him to a correct translation.



6. The Old Testament is written in ancient Hebrew and the New Testament is written in Greek. But to correctly identify the dialect of the latter is a critical:

**Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed., s.v. "dialect":**

A regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional varieties and constituting together with them a single language. *Illustration:* the Doric *dialect* of ancient Greece.

7. The New Testament is written in Koinē Greek. But this fact was lost to Western translators until the late nineteenth century. This is of crucial importance when it is considered that there are a multiplicity of Greek dialects.
8. Consequently, translators and expositors assumed the New Testament was not a Koinē Greek manuscript and therefore their translations were affected by this ignorance.
9. The development of the Koinē period of the Greek language therefore needs some perspective. For this we return to a study we did a little over five years ago but bears repeating here:

## THE GREEK LANGUAGE

### I. History & Development of the Greek Language: Formative, Classical, & Koine Periods

**Dana, H. E. and Julius R. Mantey. *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. 1, 5-12:**

Greek is the most highly developed and at the same time the most clearly defined of all languages. The history of the Greek language extends back to about 1500 B.C. Previous to Homer, however, the history of the language is wrapped in great obscurity. The development of the language may be divided into five periods (we will note the first three): (pp. 1, 5)

- (1) **The Formative Period.** This period extends from the prehistoric origin of the race to Homer (c. 900 B.C.). The primitive tribes from which the Greek nation arose were members of the great Aryan family which had its original home somewhere in west-central Asia. In prehistoric times a group of tribes from this original stock migrated into the little peninsula of southern Europe now known as Greece. The topographical character of this country is exceedingly irregular. Numerous mountain ranges and the inland penetration of arms of the sea cut the country up into many divisions. As a result of this irregular topography the original tribes were practically barred from intercourse with one another and hence were slow in developing unity of life and language. There grew a number of different dialects, the chief of which were the Attic, Boeotian, Northwestern, Thessalian, and Arcadian. (PP. 5-6) [See Visual: "Beginnings of Historic Greece"]

[NOTE: (1) **Attic** Greek was the Ionic \-ä' nik\ dialect spoken in Attica \a' ti-ka\ whose capital city was Athens. (2) **Boeotian** \b- -' shan\ Greek was an Aeolic \-ä' lik\ dialect spoken in Boeotia \b- -' sha\ whose capital was Thebes \th- bz\. (3) **Northwestern** Greek was spoken in the states of Elis \- ' lis\ and Achaea \a-k- ' a\. (4) **Thessalian** \th- ' sä-l- ' än\ was another Aeolic \-ä' lik\ dialect spoken in Thessaly \the' sa-lē\. (5) **Arcadian** was the dialect spoken in Arcadia \ar-k- ' d- -a\.

All these probably developed from three original dialects: the Doric, spoken in Messenia \ma-sē' nē-a\; Aeolic, spoken in Boeotia and Thessaly; and Ionic, spoken in Ionia \i-ō' nya\ and Attica. The most vigorous and attractive of these was the Ionic which therefore exerted the greatest influence upon subsequent linguistic developments among the Greeks.



- (2) **The Classical Period.** This period embraces the centuries from Homer to the Alexandrian conquests (c. 330 B.C.). In this period the Attic dialect, based chiefly on the old Ionic, secured supremacy. The ancient Greek literature which has come down to us is predominantly Attic. (p. 6)
- (3) **The Koinē Period.** [ κοινή *koinē*: common language or dialect common to all, a world-speech. ] This period extends from 330 B.C. to A.D. 330. It is the period the Greek language was freely used and understood throughout the civilized world, being spoken as freely on the streets of Rome, Alexandria, and Jerusalem as in Athens. There were four main causes bringing about the development of the Koinē Greek. (pp. 6-7)
- a. Extensive Colonization. The Greeks were a very aggressive people and early learned seafaring from the Phoenicians. As a result Greek colonies were planted on nearly all the shores of the Mediterranean. One of the strongest of these colonies was on the eastern coast of Italy, not far from the center of the Latin world.
  - b. Close Political and Commercial Affiliation of the Separate Greek Tribes. The common peril of eastern conquerors brought the several tribes of Greece into closer touch and the campaign of Cyrus brought together Greeks of all tribes and dialects into one great army and did much to develop a common tongue. (p. 7)
  - c. Religious Interrelations. Though each Greek tribe had its own tribal gods there was a sense of religious unity among the race. This was particularly true after the establishment of the great national festivities at such religious centers as Olympia, Delos, and Delphi. Inscriptions upon the statues and memorials of various kinds erected at these centers were in all the leading dialects, and led to the acquaintance of one tribe with the language of another. As the people mingled together at these periodical celebrations, there arose a natural tendency toward a common speech. This factor was certainly very potent in the creation of the Koinē. (pp. 7-8)
  - d. The Alexandrian Conquests. The climax of this merging process was reached in the Alexandrian conquests (334 to 320 B.C.). The mingling of representatives from all the Greek tribes in Alexander's army matured the development of a common Greek, and the wide introduction of Greek culture under his direction distributed the common tongue throughout the Macedonian empire. When Rome conquered this Hellenized territory, she in turn was Hellenized, and thereby the civilized world adopted the Koinē Greek. Hence Paul could write his doctrinal masterpiece to the political center of the Latin world in the Greek language. (p. 8)