



BI540 Using Biblical Greek Study Tools

Short Syllabus

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Course description

This course uses an inductive approach to learning New Testament Greek, discussing features of Greek as they occur in the letter of 1 John. Bible study websites and programs supply information about declensions and conjugations, so we will focus on how we can use that information to understand how the words work together to convey meaning. We will learn the words used frequently in this letter.

This course involves three lectures every week *for twelve weeks*, and three homework assignments every week. Plan for about 12 hours each week, for a total of 144 hours.

Why study Greek?

What benefit is there in learning Greek? The translations we have are good, and in a multitude of translations there is some safety. We are fairly safe when we teach according to what major English translations have in common. They have been developed by people who have studied Greek for a lot longer than we can. We are not likely to come up with new insights that will amaze the evangelical world. So why should we go to the hard work of learning another language?

1. Our devotion to God causes us to want to study his word. We worship God with all our mind. We want to get as close as we can to the words he inspired. Studying Greek is not just a way to make a translation – it is a way to study the Bible in greater depth.
2. We want to learn what the Bible says. Major translations differ, and we'd like a way to understand their differences. When we know some Greek,

- we can find out *why* they differ, and perhaps choose one as better.
3. If we want more understanding, then we need to study, to read more carefully. In-depth study can increase our understanding, and hopefully increase our love for God as well. We can better appreciate word-plays, rhetorical devices, and figures of speech. Ellen Davis says:

One of the great advantages of having to read Scripture in the original languages is that it makes you slow down and pay attention to every little detail of every word, every detail of the grammar, the syntax, and just pause over it. It arrests your attention. It causes you to see things you wouldn't otherwise see.¹

4. Study of the language can increase your confidence that you are hearing what God has said, and what he is saying now. That confidence can make you a better preacher and leader.
5. A little Greek is dangerous. Many preachers use Greek in erroneous ways. Study of the language can help you avoid inaccuracies.
6. Since we have many good translations available, the average Christian does not need to know Greek. It is not necessary for every pastor to know Greek. But every denomination needs people with more training than average, more expertise than average. Each generation of the church needs a few people who know biblical languages. Perhaps you are one of the few who can serve in this specialized way.²

Most people find it difficult to learn a new language. It requires daily, consistent effort – cramming does not work well. Generally, younger people pick up languages easier, but they still need self-discipline and initiative. This course will help you stick to a schedule to keep the Greek recent in your brain.

You will learn some Greek in this course, but not enough to pick up a Greek

¹ Ellen Davis, as cited by Richard B. Hays in “Curiosity and Growth,” *Didaktikos* 4(2) (November 2020): 27.

² For more on this, and other aspects of seminary study, see <https://logosseminaryguide.com/preparing-your-mind-heart-family-for-seminary/>.

text and read it.³ Rather, this course focuses on how to use computerized Greek resources. Websites and programs can inform you of word meanings, and even many grammatical details, but computers do not give much guidance on how those details are useful for understanding sentences. This course will focus on how the language works, and how the details work together to help convey meaning.

Required textbooks

To understand how the Greek language works, we need to know some grammatical terms. This course requires 1) a book about Greek grammatical terms, 2) guidance on avoiding linguistic mistakes, and 3) a modern lexicon. Although computerized Bible study resources suggest “meanings” for Greek words, most free resources are based on old lexicons, created before scholars examined thousands of papyri that showed how Greek was used in the first century. Recent studies in linguistics have given us a better understanding of how word meanings work in a language.

1. For Greek grammatical terms: Mark L. Strauss, *The Biblical Greek Companion for Bible Software Users: Grammatical Terms Explained for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016). ISBN: [0310521343](https://www.zondervan.com/9780310521343). 112 pages. \$11 new, or \$9 used. Describes how noun cases, verb voices and moods are used.
2. For avoiding lexical mistakes: D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996). ISBN: [9780801020865](https://www.bakerbook.com/9780801020865). 160 pages. \$10.
3. A modern lexicon: Frederick William Danker, with Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). ISBN: [9780226136158](https://www.uchicago.edu/9780226136158) 408 pages. The best of the smaller lexicons. 408 pages, \$40 on [bookfinder.com](https://www.bookfinder.com).
4. Please obtain these books before the class begins. To find the lowest prices, you may find it helpful to use www.bookfinder.com.

³ Since most courses in biblical Greek require a lot of memorization (a deductive approach), this course is *not* equivalent to the first semester of most other Greek courses, and may not count as transfer credit for other schools. However, this course will make it easier for you to take traditional Greek courses.

Technology requirements

This course requires that you have access to a website or program that gives you 1) an interlinear Greek-English New Testament, 2) parsing⁴ information for each word, and 3) basic definitions. There are several ways to meet this requirement:

- 1) The biblehub.com website. This is free, with no requirement to register. The disadvantage is that you must be connected to the internet.
- 2) Blueletterbible.com is also free, and offers similar functionality.
- 3) Stepbible.org offers similar functionality, without using Strong's numbers, often offering more than one translation possibility, and some grammatical color-coding. An internet connection is required if you use the website version; a connection is not required if you use the free [desktop version](#). No registration is required, and there is no advertising. Very good.
- 4) [Logos 8 Basic](#). The Logos program comes in many levels, from the free Basic version to one that costs thousands of dollars. This course is designed for the free version. It requires registration, and you will get email advertising, sometimes more than one email per day. You will be offered access to one or three free books each month. Take the free books, decline the others until you have enough experience with the program. The free books can be read on a mobile device with the Faithlife reader app. This may be the best option, if you can resist “good deals” that you really don't need. However, there is no guarantee that the program will remain free or that you will continue to be able to access the free books.
- 5) The course will give brief instructions for each website or program.

Optional resources

Merkle, Benjamin L. *Exegetical Gems From Biblical Greek: A Refreshing Guide*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019. A concise introduction to grammatical terms and meanings, with illustrations from biblical passages. If I had known about this book earlier, I would have made it a required text!

Choose one (or none) of the following introductory textbooks that use a more

⁴ Parsing information tells you, for each word, the part of speech, case, gender and number for nouns, articles, and adjectives; tense, voice, mood, person and number for verbs. These terms will be explained in the course.

traditional approach to learning biblical Greek:

Harris, Dana M. *An Introduction to Biblical Greek Grammar: Elementary Syntax and Linguistics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020. 608 pages. \$40.

Mounce, William D. *Greek for the Rest of Us: The Essentials of Biblical Greek*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013. 320 pages. \$20.

Zacharias, H. Daniel. *Biblical Greek Made Simple: All the Basics in One Semester*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018. 192 pages. \$23.

The most academically respected lexicon is by Danker (see Appendix C), but the large lexicon is very expensive and difficult for beginners to use, due in part to the extensive citations of non-biblical literature. Below are a few smaller lexicons.

- a. Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999). ISBN: [9780826703408](#). 1240 pages. Out of print. \$65. E-book with [Logos](#), \$28. Very readable definitions. The arrangement puts synonyms close to each other; it makes it clear that a word can have different meanings that should not be blurred together.
- b. Barclay Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, revised edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson/German Bible Society, 2011). 9781598566499. 232 pages, \$36. \$14 on Logos.
- c. Spiros Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1991). ISBN: [089957663X](#). New, \$37; used copies cost much less. Not commonly quoted in scholarly works. Indexed by Strong's numbers, so it can be used by people who know almost nothing about Greek.

Student learning outcomes

Through this course, students will be able to...

1. Describe basic elements of Greek grammar and syntax.⁵

⁵ **Grammar** includes all the rules that govern how words are altered to convey meaning;

2. Describe the functions of different cases (for nouns and adjectives), tenses and moods (for verbs and participles).
3. Learn the most common vocabulary words in 1 John.
4. Translate a passage in 1 John with the help of parsing and lexical tools.
 - All outcomes will be assessed by quizzes, frequent assignments, a midterm exam, and a final exam.

For more details, see Appendix B.

This course will NOT enable the student to

- 1) Offer new translation possibilities for verses of the New Testament.⁶
- 2) Give the world stunning insights into the meaning of the Greek text.⁷

Requirements and assignments

1. **Read textbooks.** Most of the work in the course comes in other areas.
2. **Thirty sets of homework, five in each two-week period.** Most GCS classes have ten weeks of lectures, then two weeks for you to write the final project or paper. Since this course does not have a final paper, we will use those weeks for more study and comments. Each homework exercise counts for 2 percent of the final grade.

syntax is concerned with the sequence of words in a sentence, in phrases and clauses. For example, it is syntactically correct to say, “If wishes were horses, beggars would ride.” But if the order of words is changed, the meaning is difficult to decipher even though the correct grammatical forms are used: Horses if wishes were, would ride beggars.

⁶ If you come up with a translation that can’t be found in any published translation, you are almost certainly wrong! Even four semesters of study cannot give you that level of expertise or credibility in any language.

⁷ Grammatical details are only one part of discerning meaning in the Greek text. Most Greek words have multiple definitions, and proper selection of a definition often requires a feel for the language – a feel that can be obtained only with extensive reading. Further study may give *you* stunning insights, but the payoff usually does not come in the first semester. This introductory course will help you reach a more modest goal: to help you read commentaries and theology books that refer to Greek words, and to prepare you for future Greek studies.

3. **Website quizzes.** There will be five quizzes; each one counts for 4 percent of the final grade. You may take the quizzes as often as you want, and only the last grade counts. Thus the quizzes are a method of review, like vocabulary cards. They are also a method of keeping you on schedule.
4. **Self-discipline.** There is no magic formula for making Greek easy. Some people have a knack for learning languages, but most find it difficult. People who already know two languages usually find it easier to learn a third. The key is to work at it every day.

If you have difficulty, if you have questions, it is your responsibility to ask for help. This can be done on the GCS website forum, so other students can see the discussion and benefit from it. We will also keep track of your progress and will contact you if you lag behind. This is not because we like to nag, but because we want you to succeed!

5. **One final exam,** counting for 20 percent of the final grade.

Assignments, estimated hours, and grade weighting

Assignment	Hours *	Percentage of grade
Reading the textbooks	10	0
Reading the lectures	30	0
Reading Q&A forum discussions	6	0
Participating in the discussions	5	5
Weekly homework – 30 sets	60	55
Studying for the quizzes	15	0
Five quizzes: 2 hours/quiz	10	20
Studying for the final exam	4	0
One final exam	3	20
Total – about 12 hours each week	143	100

* This is an estimate. Some students will complete the course requirements in less total time, but to do well in the course, most students will need to take *more* time.

Weekly topics and assignments (tentative)

Week	Topic	Assignments	Reading
1	1A: Getting started: the first word 1B: Finishing the first clause 1C: Two clauses	1A: The second word 1B: The next clause 1C: One more clause	Strauss Carson
2	2A: Finishing verse 1 2B: Finishing verse 2 2C: Finishing the first sentence	2A: A clause in verse 2 2B: Starting verse 3 Study for Quiz 1	
3	3A: Diagramming 3B: Verse 4 3C: Verse 5	3A: Verse 3b 3B: Verse 5a 3C: Verse 6a	
4	4A: Verse 6 4B: Verse 7 4C: Verse 8	4A: Verse 7a 4B: Verse 8a Study for Quiz 2	
5	5A: Verse 9 5B: Verse 10, 2:1 5C: Verse 2:2a	5A: Verse 10a, articles 5B: Verse 2:1b 5C: Verse 2:2b, pronouns	
6	6A: Verse 2:2b-3 6B: Verse 2:4 6C: Verse 2:5	6A: Verse 2:4a, pronouns 6B: Verse 2:5a, pronouns Study for Quiz 3	
7	7A: Verse 2:6 7B: Verse 2:7 7C: Verse 2:8	7A: Verse 2:7a 7B: Verse 2:8a 7C: Verse 2:9a	
8	8A: Verse 2:9 8B: Verse 2:10 8C: Verse 2:11	8A: Verse 2:10a 8B: Verse 2:11a Study for Quiz 4	
9	9A: Verse 2:12 9B: Verse 2:13 9C: Verse 2:14	9A: Verse 2:13a 9B: Verse 2:14a 9C: Verse 2:15a	

10	10A: Verse 2:15 10B: Verse 2:16 10C: Verse 2:17	10A: Verse 2:16a 10B: Verse 2:17a Study for Quiz 5	
11	Features of Greek grammar found in the New Testament but not in 1 John 1:1–2:17	to be determined	
12	Final exam must be taken on or before December 6, 2021.		