

My former pastor of
Green Lake Baptist Church

ORIGIN OF "KOINE" GREEK
R. M. BOWDEN, PASTOR

The language of the Scriptures has a most unusual origin. The purpose of this paper is to help you to understand and appreciate the beauty of this New Testament language called "Koine" Greek.

The Old Testament Scriptures were originally written in HEBREW, ARAMAIC & CHALDEAN. These languages they tell us are relatively simple in structure, & they lend themselves to very quick & easy interpretation into any language. The fact that they are very ancient languages, & in part pictorial, simply amplifies the beauty of the interpretation.

Now, when we come to the New Testament, we are dealing with that which is almost solid doctrine or teaching. Because it is, we should have some knowledge, as to how we got the language of the New Testament Scriptures.

It is not a supernatural language; there is no such thing! It is not a sacred language except that the sacred New Testament is written in the Koine or common Greek. The Koine Greek language originated in a very interesting way.

It all started back in ancient Greece, about 350 B.C.. There was a man by the name of Philip, who was King of Macedon. Philip had been taken as a hostage in order to guarantee that he would not fight one of the Kings of Greece. The King of Thebes.

The name of the King of Thebes was Epaminondas, & he was a genius in his own way. He had an unusual organization of his city-state, & he was in a strange death struggle in southern Greece with the Spartans.

For many centuries the Spartans had dominated the southern part of Greece, & had been able either to rule most of the city-states or to destroy them, as in case of the Athenians.

In a showdown battle between the Spartans & the Thebans, The Thebans were outnumbered but they defeated the Spartans decisively at a place called the Battle of Leuctra.

At this battle a minority group had been able to whip a very large & well trained army & this, deeply impressed Philip, the Macedonian King from the hill country. Being a very wise man & very adaptable, he took all of the information he could gather on this army & the military system, & went back to Macedonia with it.

While back in the hills, two things happened. (1) He married Olympias, a red-head from a nearby country called Epirus. (2) He put into action those wonderful things that he had learned while in the southern part of Greece as a hostage.

The results are very interesting: (1) The marriage to Olympias resulted in one of those things that happens perhaps once in every two or three hundred years - A genius-type individual was born & was given the name ALEXANDER. (2) The other was a very well-organized country called Macedonia.

By the time Alexander was 16, he was already a divisional commander in his father's army & doing very well on campaigns.

He was a most unusual person in every way. In fact, so much so, that when his father was assassinated & he came to the throne, he took over with such facility that immediately things began to happen all over Greece! (1) Thru his mother, he took over Epirus & said it now belongs to Macedonia. (2) Then he took a look into the south & saw all of the city-states still bickering & fighting; so he went down & defeated them all. (3) Then he decided that he was going to take vengeance upon the Persians for their attacks upon Greece in the past.

As one historian puts it, "it wasn't that they killed so many of our wonderful Greek men, but every time the Persian Army stopped for a bivouac (atemporary camp without shelter) they drank up our rivers, they destroyed our countryside & took a hundred years before we had adequate crops again. The Persian Army often numbered a couple of million people, & when a couple of million people drank out of a lake for a few weeks, apparently the lake dried up.

So Alexander decided to launch this great crusade. Therefore he pulled all of these Greeks into a common army. Then immediately he gave commands! But no one did much except the Macedonians; then Alexander realized he had a tremendous problem of communication.

This is not the first time or last time that a member of the human race has had the problem of communication, but there was a very definite reason for the problem in this case. Part of his army was made up of men from Epirus, his mother's country, which is mountainous county, & they spoke Epiorean Greek. Part was made up of Macedonians, & they spoke Macedonian Greek. Part was made up of cultured group from the Athens area & they spoke Attic Greek. Part was made up of Spartans, & they spoke Doric Greek.

Now these are only a few of the languages & you see, they are all called Greek, but they were all different.

The Doric Greek: The Spartans were a military nation & had been for 100 yrs. To be a citizen of Sparta you had to be a soldier. The language of the Spartans was a very simple language, just a series of grunts & military commands.

Attic Greek: Was one of the most literary & beautiful languages that has ever come along. It was the language used by Plato & Aristotle.

Macedonian Greek: It was known in that day as hillbilly greek. It came from the hill country & the sentences were broken up & short as if the people were constantly out of breath from being in a high altitude.

Immediately, Alexander saw that if he was ever going to whip an army together, an all-greek, pan-hellenic army, he was going to have to get a drill regulation where everyone could understand his commands.

His main problem was communication to all these people. So he invented a language. As the language was born from the genius of Alexander, he called it the "COMMON GREEK" or "KOINE GREEK". This is the greek which eventually became the Greek of the New Testament. The word "Koine" is simply a greek word meaning "Common".

In other words, "the language that all of the Greeks will have in common." Alexander, said before he started the language, "I am going to devise a system of communication, in a language, whereby what I say will be subject to only one interpretation."

Alexander, who, within 7 or 8 yrs., was able to conquer the then known world, & the reason was because he had good communications within his army. He devised a special language. He said, "Everytime I say something, there isn't going to be any guess work about it. This is it. It is subject to one interpretation."

So Alexander the Great is responsible for starting & perfecting a very interesting scientific system. It is important to understand that every verb in the Koine Gk is going to have a four-fold navigational fix on it, so that you cannot miss.

I. Every verb has a TENSE, & every tense in the greek language is important. What is a tense? It is an expression of the action or the time of the verb.

II. We have the Voice of the verb which expresses the relationship between the subject & the verb.

III. We have the Mood of the verb which relates the verb to reality.

IV. The 4th. fix is Etymology - we have, in every greek verb, etymology. In other words, how was the word originated or used.

It was necessary to restate some of the translation from the stand point of etymology of a greek word. For example: Eph 4:14 "Be not children, tossed to & fro, & carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, & cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

Now, that is putting together a lot of beautiful old English words. The old thundering diction of the KJV is there. The only trouble is that it does not communicate a whole lot to people today.

In the original it looks like this: "If you do not know the Word of God as a christian, it is like shooting craps with the Devil & the Devil has loaded the dice; so, the odds are against you."

Now, you see, this is where the etymology of the greek language brings out the true meaning of what is being said here. Therefore, many times the etymology of the verb will be brought out.

It is important to know how this language originated, which Alexander took with him all over the world. It became the universal or international language of his day by virtue of the fact that he conquered the world, & also refused to learn anyone else's language.

He made everyone learn his language-The result was that in 300 B.C. The world was speaking a new language. The "KOINE GREEK". When the Romans conquered the world there language was Latin. While Latin is a wonderful language for expression & logic, it still did not have the beautiful way of bringing out all shades of meaning & still sticking to the correct interpretation that Alexander's language did.

Consequently, the Romans even learned the Greek language; while Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire, the Greek language was the language of culture & the language which every educated Roman spoke. So, because of this between Alexander's day & the Day of our Lord, the universal language continued to be KOINE GREEK. And as a result of our Lord's ministry & as a result of the writing of the New Testament Scriptures, this language was used.

We can say therefore, that in the original language, the New Testament is subject to ONE INTERPRETATION. We will find many passages where the application two or more; but as far as the Bible is concerned, in the original language of the New Testament, THE BIBLE IS SUBJECT TO ONE INTERPRETATION.

The following GREEK chart will help you to understand:

I. TENSE: Time & kind of action.

1. Present - Continuous action at the present time.
2. Imperfect - Continuous action in past time.
3. Future - Action planned for a future time.
4. Aorist - Action occurring in a point of time.
5. Perfect - Completed action with finished results in the present time.
6. Pluperfect - Completed action with finished results in past time.

II. VOICE: Relation of the verb to the subject.

1. Active - The subject produces the Action.
2. Middle - The subject participates in the results of the action - Benefited by the action of the verb.
3. Passive - The subject receives the action of the verb. This is the voice of Grace.

III. MOOD: Relation of the verb to reality.

1. Indicative - The mood of reality or certainty.
2. Subjunctive - The mood of potentiality or probability.
3. Optative - The mood of desire or probability.
4. Imperative - The mood of command or volition.

IV. OTHER VERBAL FORMS:

1. Infinitive - It is often used to express purpose or result.
2. Participle - It describes its subject as a doer of action denoted by the verb.

V. CONDITIONAL CLAUSE: Begins with "if".

1. 1st class - If & it is true - Mt 4:6 - Reality
2. 2nd class - If & it is not true - Mt 4:9 - unreality.
3. 3rd class - Maybe it is true & maybe it is not true - I John 1:9 probability.
4. 4th class - I wish it were true but it is not true - Acts 17:27 possibility.

May the Lord help you to a clearer understanding of His Word.