



Koine Greek Language Background

In the central and southern part of ancient Greece, three city-states (Athens, Thebes and Sparta) were fighting to gain the ascendancy over the entire peninsula. This fighting had been going on for several hundred years. Following the Peloponnesian Wars, the Corinthian War (395 - 387 BC), resulted in Sparta gaining predominance over Athens and its allies. In the Theban–Spartan War (378–362 BC), Sparta finally lost its predominance to Thebes when Epaminondas, a genius general and statesman became ruler of Thebes.

In the key battle when the Thebans became the dominant power in southern Greece, there was a man observing the battle who became very interested in the tactics of the Theban army. His name was Philip. His father was the ruler of a group of mountain people who lived to the north. He was in the Theban city because he was a hostage. His father had a tendency to come down out of the hills and raid in southern Greece. And in order to make the father behave, the boy was taken into custody for a while. During this time, the boy observed many of the unusual things that the Thebans had developed under Epaminondas. Among other things, he was quite fascinated by a battle called Leuctra in which a smaller Theban army was able to defeat a larger Spartan army.

As a result of this battle, the hostage went home because the Thebans were now in a good position in their own area. When he went home, he had new ideas running around in his mind. However, he was delayed by several things. He decided to get married first and went next door to another kingdom of northern Greece in the mountains called Epirus. Here, he married a red-headed woman by the name of Olympias. He then started to put some of his ideas into effect and this man became known to history as Philip II when he became ruler of Macedonia.

Philip II also had a son by Olympias named Alexander. Philip II decided that his son would follow in his footsteps and reap some of the benefits of his genius. Therefore, he gave him the best tutor of the age - Aristotle. Aristotle instilled in Alexander the concept of categories, the importance of learning by categories, the importance of observation, the importance of solution by logic, solution by calling on various categories of learning and knowledge. At the same time, Alexander developed a very strong body and the combination was to make him the most unusual man of his age and one of the greatest men of history.

When Alexander was 18 years old, his father Philip II went down and whipped all of the Greeks, but this victory was very temporary because someone decided that Philip II was going to be too tough a man to handle and so the Greeks, while defeated in battle, won a victory by poisoning Philip II. Little did they realize that by getting rid of Alexander's father, they had to accept the son Alexander, for the son immediately came to the throne. We still have the record of his first speech.

Alexander pulled his mountain men together and he said, "My father found you wearing animal skins in the rocks of Macedonia. My father pulled you down out of your caves and out of your rocks." And he pointed to some of them, "Even some of you had some sheep and my father took the animal skins off of you and gave you the tunic of a soldier."

"My father gave you order. My father gave you discipline. My father gave you cities. My father made it possible for you who were craven cowards in the caves of Macedonia to go out and defeat the barbarians around you. You will notice that since my father gave you these things, the Thracians no longer come in to bother you. The people of Epirus do not come in to raid." Alexander went on to list the various



barbarians who in the past had scourged this area.

“Now, he said, “I’m going to start where my father finished. My father gave you something in your homeland; I’m going to make the world your homeland.” And this is exactly what Alexander did.

So Alexander went down and whipped all the Greeks in the south. Instead of calling himself the conqueror, he called himself the champion of Greece. This was a very wise choice of words because immediately everyone was sold on him, not because he was tough and had a great army, but because he promised great things for anyone who was Greek.

Alexander immediately started to weld together an army. He said we’re going back and whip the Persians. The Persians had invaded Greece a number of times in the past, two times specifically reaching the Greek homeland, a number of times in Ionia across the Aegean Sea.

Consequently, Alexander pulled an army together and started to work. Immediately, he found that he had some problems of administration. The biggest problem seemed to be how to say right face, left face, forward march and all the rest of it and say it once instead of four times. Every drill sergeant in the Macedonian army had to say right face and left face and forward march and so on in Ionic, in Doric which was the language of the Spartans, he had to say it in the language of the Thebans - Aeolic, and then he had to say it in the language of the Macedonians.

They were all Greeks, but they all spoke different dialects. These Greek languages were very, very different. For example, the Doric language was a series of grunts and gutturals (for some 500 years) because all they had in their language was a few commands and made known a few needs, and therefore they didn’t have much of a language.

In contrast, the Ionic language, the Attic Greek, was a very beautiful literary language. The language in between was the language of the Thebans. Therefore, it became necessary to take these languages, to mix them, and produce a common language so that all Greeks and all parts of Greece could understand it.

Up to this time, it had never been necessary because Greece is a peninsula with many hills and valleys with little communication. Because Alexander fused together a great Greek army, it became necessary to have good communication among the men. Therefore, Alexander in his genius began to develop a common language for the Greeks.

We call this language Koine, which is the Greek word for common. Alexander took some of the beauties out of the Attic Greek, removed some of the literary, took the Doric Greek and removed the grunts and groans, and he put it all together with the mountain dialect of the Macedonians. The result was a Greek language designed to have only a single meaning for what was written or spoken. Anyone who used this language could only mean one thing. Apparently Alexander had a great contempt for double talk. He wanted people to understand exactly what he said. He did not want a language which would be subjected to two or three interpretations.

So Alexander invented the Koine Greek language which evolved over a period of 300 years and became the most scientific, exact language in the history of communication. The Koine Greek, which Alexander invented is the language of the New Testament.

When Alexander started working on this language, he was in the peninsula of Greece and took the language with him because he took his army with him. When he was 20 years old, he invaded the empire of Persia. He fought three great battles and, in five years, he completely conquered Persia and most of the Persian empire. He spent five more years conquering other areas. Alexander went into India,



into Bactria, and even to the edge of Mongolia. Wherever he went, he was successful and he conquered. The main thing that kept him from conquering the whole of India was that his troops were worn out and refused to go any further.

During this 11 years of conquest, he moved so rapidly that out of the original 35,000 men who started, only about half survived with him. The rest got tired and wanted to settle down. They'd say, "I'm too tired to go any further; I'm going to stay here. This looks like a nice place to stay." And so these soldiers who were tired and exhausted were retired and in this way Alexander started about 75 cities throughout the world.

Of course, a little of Alexander rubbed off on them, a little of the administration ability and principles, so each would organize their own city. These 75 Greek cities throughout the world became so well organized and had such excellent administration that most of them thrived and grew.

Alexander had a policy wherever he went. You had to speak Alexander's language. While he was a genius and had terrific linguistic ability, he didn't bother to learn other languages. It was one of the quirks of a conqueror; you speak to me in my language, I will not learn yours. The result was that those Alexander conquered had to learn his language. And as a result, by the time that Alexander died, at the age of 32 from a severe unconfirmed illness that lasted 12 days, everyone throughout the world spoke Koine Greek.

Where before people had been monolingual, now they were bilingual or trilingual, but included in their linguistic ability was the language compiled by Alexander. Not the beautiful literary language of Attica, nor the language of the Dorians (the Spartans), but a beautiful, concise, clear scientific language which became known as Koine Greek or Common Greek.

The original language of the New Testament is not some super literary language. It was the language of the man on the street. It was a language whereby anyone would understand what was being said. It was a language which was developed with the concept of making it subject to one interpretation and it became the language of the world. While the Romans conquered Greece when they were conquering everything else, they did not conquer Greek culture. The Romans conquered the Greeks, but Greek culture conquered the Romans. Greek culture meant this new language and during 100-150 years under the Romans this language underwent some additional changes in keeping with the orderly concepts of the Romans. While Latin was the language of the Romans, Greek was the language of the world during the Roman Empire.

In the time of our Lord Jesus Christ in Palestine, nearly everyone was trilingual. The Galileans were unilingual and only spoke Aramaic, but the people of southern Palestine, the Judeans, were very well educated and they spoke at least three languages, the Latin of the Roman conquerors, the Aramaic (which was the Hebrew of their day), and they all spoke Greek.

It is no accident that the original language of the New Testament Scriptures would be Koine Greek. This is the language of exact expression, so we have in the Canon of the New Testament, the highest concepts of Bible doctrine that the world has ever known or ever will know. We have the most lucid concepts of God and everything that God wants us to know, so much so that 1 Corinthians 2:16 says, "We have the mind of Christ." This is the language of the New Testament. Every word in the language of the New Testament was so developed that you can take a word, you can give it a suffix, you can give it a prefix, a compound, a double compound word by adding a suffix, a preposition, a basic noun and then adding some suffixes to that and you have a word which will take a paragraph of English to explain.

Every verb in the Koine Greek has a four-fold navigational fix, so we know absolutely where we are at



all times in this language. For example, we know that every verb in this particular language has a tense and these tenses explain the relationship of the verb to time. We have, for example, in the English language a past, a present and a future tense. And this is about as far as we go in relationship with time. But the Greeks went way beyond this. They had some very fine variations. Time to them was broken into a series of different concepts.

Every time you have an Aorist tense in the Greek you have two concepts. Visualize a line which on one side is eternity. The Greek language is the best language in the world for expression of eternity. On the other side of this is time. Here is the time line. The simple Aorist tense would be a point of time in which something happened. But, you could also take a series of parallel points of time and gather them into one group. You could take this point of time and divorce it from time and perpetuate it forever, or you could refer to a point of time in eternity past.

If you are familiar with a point of time in eternity past, that is Ephesians 1:4, where He chose us in eternity past. In Acts 16:31, you have a point of time divorced from time and perpetuated forever. You are familiar with a simple point of time, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." But that point of time is perpetuated forever, "thou shalt be saved," i.e., "you shall be saved one and for all." In other words, the day in which you believe in Jesus Christ, that point in time is taken out of time and it is perpetuated forever. Occasionally, you hear the romantic statement, "I wish this moment could go on forever." While it can't in reality in the English language, the Greeks had a way of preserving that moment and they could preserve it by putting it into the Aorist tense. That point of time could be taken out of time and would be perpetuated forever and ever. That is what it means when it says, "thou shalt be saved" in Acts 16:31. This is just one tense.

Koine Greek also has the concept of Aktionsart, which is the opposite of punctiliar action. This is something that moves along habitually. This is something that continues and there are many ways of expressing that. Linear aktionsart is present time. In past time, something that happened in the past but now has results that continue is a combination of the two in the perfect tense. This is just one of four ways to determine the meaning of a verb in the Greek.

The Greeks also had a mood for every verb. There are four possible moods. The first is the indicative mood. This is something that really happened. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." That is Aorist Indicative. You really are saved when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The subjunctive mood is the mood of potential. Maybe it will happen, maybe it won't. The imperative mood is the mood of command. A very interesting mood in the Greek is the Aorist Optative, which expresses a wish. So again you have a second fix on every verb form in the Greek.

The third navigational fix for every Koine Greek verb is voice, which expresses the relationship of the subject to the verb. For the active voice, the subject produces the action of the main verb. For example, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That is active voice because you yourself do the believing. For the passive voice, the subject received the action of the main verb. For the middle voice, which is rather unique, the subject is either benefitted by the action of the verb or the subject acts upon itself which we call in the English - reflexive. So you have three ways to identify a verb.

The fourth navigational fix is the etymology or the meaning of a word. We now have an almost complete etymology on all of the significant words of the New Testament. We have been able to trace their etymology and how they were used. This is just the Koine Greek verb.

The Greek noun provides many ways of determining it and there is no doubt of the vocabulary of the Greek noun because they had active or passive endings or causative endings. This is in the realm of the



suffixes. For the compounds that came from the prefixes, they could put a preposition with a noun and give it additional meaning and significance. They had other things they could put in front of the noun as well. Sometimes in the New Testament, you will find a noun which is made up of three words and it becomes a very significant and interesting word.

The little word “if” has four concepts in the Greek. If and it’s true is the 1st class condition. If and it’s not true is the 2nd class condition. If maybe it’s true, maybe it isn’t is the 3rd class condition. If, I wish it were, but it isn’t is the 4th class condition. All of these conditional clauses are found in the Greek.

The word “that” is used either as a result clause or a purpose clause. Then you find Aorist Participles where the action of the Aorist Participle precedes the action of the main verb. You also find infinitives that express purpose. All this adds up to something. It adds up to the fact that in the original language of the New Testament there can be for one passage, one interpretation! There may be several applications, but only a single correct interpretation.

People often confuse application and interpretation to where they think a passage means two different things. One man may give the interpretation, the other man gives the application and immediately people are all shook up, they say, “Here are two great spiritual giants, one believes A, one believes B, and these two are so different, how do we get A and B together? We’re all confused; we’re all mixed up.”

Well, one man A went to Dallas Theological Seminary and learned to correctly interpret the passage from the original languages. The other man B just drifted along by reading Christian magazines and listening to other people. B didn’t go to Dallas Theological Seminary. He went to another seminary where he got Apologetics and confusion and, therefore, he sometimes gives an application and very rarely gives an interpretation because he doesn’t have the tools to analyze the passage. What appears to some to be two spiritual giants (and they may or may not be) giving opposite interpretations, one isn’t even interpreting the Word of God at all! So really, there is no confusion, except for those who are uninitiated.

We must now begin with our subject, how we got our Bible with 2 Peter 1:12. It is important that we begin here for a very definite reason. The Bible you hold in your hand should be the most important document in the world to you. It is the source of information with regard to eternal salvation. While eternal salvation is as simple as believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, it can become very complex with its many beautiful facets as we study and absorb these things.

The Bible contains information with regard to the believer’s spiritual life involving God’s wonderful grace assets. The Bible also gives us a complete set of details regarding the future. The believer who masters the Word of God (and only a believer can) is in a position to have peace and happiness in their lifetime. The maturing believer should have no qualms regarding the future, they should always be grace oriented, they should always be productive (divine good), they should always be useful and successful, regardless of what they do in life. You should understand from the Word of God that every believer has a full-time ministry here on earth. Every believer is a servant of the Lord and whether you serve him in business or in the household or in the barracks or wherever it happens to be, every believer serves the Lord.

The Bible is the only source of divine viewpoint and Peter was about to die when he wrote the passage we are considering, 2 Peter 1:12. He is about to check out of this world and he had learned a great many valuable lessons in life. When a person comes to the end of their life, they always wants to pass on what they consider are the most important thing of life. For example, Joseph before he passed on gave what



he considered the most important information. He said, “Don’t bury me in Egypt,” because you are not going to stay here. And even though the Jews stayed there another 400 years, they were never discouraged. That is, the believers (the believing remnant) were never discouraged, never gave up because they had the promises of God uttered from the lips of Joseph just before he died. When someone is ready to die, they usually get around to the important things in life.

"Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you." (2 Peter 1:12, NASB)

Although Peter was just about to die, he wanted to leave behind something that was very important - the heritage of the Word of God. There is only one reason why women are free today - the Word of God. The Word has made them free. This is rare in history. A lady in the past was on the par with a horse, but not a good horse. Wherever there is the influence of regeneration, of Christianity since the day of Pentecost, you find that women get a fair shake in life. It is the only place they do. I don’t suppose there is one woman in a thousand who appreciates the freedoms they have as a result of the Word of God. Certainly the United States of America in this century and Great Britain in the past century are perfect illustrations of the influence of Christianity historically in a national entity. All of these things came to pass because of one thing - the mind of Christ, the Word of God, the Canon of Scripture.