

Greek Before Christmas

*a forced march through Grammar
to the gates of Reading*

Steve Hays

Ohio University

Illustrations by Leah Vincent



Before Christmas Press
www.beforechristmaspress.com

© Steve Hays 2006

All rights reserved

hays@ohio.edu

8.1.2011

Before Christmas Press

15170 SR 550, Athens, OH 45701

www.beforechristmaspress.com for information and orders

ISBN 0-9759902-2-5

Cover illustration:

The Journey of the Wise Men

Zaki Baboun, Palestinian artist

www.asianchristianart.org

*In memory of Gareth Morgan:
All the good stuff came from him.*

Contents

<i>A Note to Students</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>A Note to Faculty</i>	<i>ix</i>

Part One: Nouns and Adjectives

1. Singular nouns.....	11
2. Plural nouns	26
3. Bases and nominative endings	35
4. Genitive case.....	54
5. Adjectives	68
6. Present tense: active voice.....	75
7. Accusative case.....	83
8. Present tense verbs: middle voice.....	97
9. Dative case.....	102
10. Vocative case.....	114
11. Attic dialect.....	124

Part Two: Verbs

<i>The role of time and aspect in Greek verbs</i>	139
12. Present indicative verbs (process aspect).....	147
13. Aorist indicative verbs (event aspect).....	165
14. Perfect indicative verbs (resultant-state aspect).....	180
15. Imperfect and pluperfect indicative verbs (past time).....	196

16. Future and future perfect indicative verbs (<i>future time</i>).....	210
17. Aorist and future passive indicatives (<i>passive voice</i>).....	228
18. <i>Stems</i> and modes.....	246
19. <u>Imperative</u> mode.....	255
20. <u>Infinitive</u> mode	263
21. <i>Participial</i> mode	269
22. <u>Subjunctive</u> mode	278
23. <u>Optative</u> mode	287

Part Three: Appendices

Appendix One: Noun, Pronoun, and Adjective Forms	298
Appendix Two: Verb Forms	320
Appendix Three: Noun Syntax.....	345
Appendix Four: Verb Syntax.....	349
Appendix Five: Supplementary Information	

A Note to Students

“Always winter and never Christmas; think of that!” laments Tumnus in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. “How awful!” Lucy responds.

“Tell us about it,” mutter masses of petrified Greek students, for whom the winter of grammar seems never to end and the joyous advent of reading real Greek, never to come.

I hope that you are very anxious to read real Greek texts: The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; *Oedipus*; *Medea*; *Lysistrata*; Plato’s brilliant portraits of Socrates; the *New Testament* and other early Christian literature. Whatever texts you want to read, I hope you are as full of anticipation at the prospect of reading and understanding real Greek texts as little children are for the arrival of Christmas. Excited anticipation is one of the best and most human of experiences.

All the same, I hope you will focus that anticipation in a more adult than childlike fashion. Little children wait helplessly for Christmas day. The wise men, on the other hand, are said to have been motivated by their anticipation to journey for months, following a star towards their goal—that setting that later came to be called *Christmas*.

If you want to learn Greek, it’s going to take sustained effort, not just enthusiasm. I doubt that there are any subjects suitable for university study that do not require considerable preliminary learning before the long-awaited intellectual payoff arrives. If there are, Greek is certainly not one of them. Before you arrive at your anticipated goal of reading Greek, you are going to have to travel a rather long and sometimes wearisome road from where you are now intellectually to where you need to be. That road is called “grammar.”

Grammar involves, in the first place, learning to see—really *see*—the individual words in front of you: their common elements and their distinguishing elements. You must, as it were, learn to see that “sing,” “sings,” “sang,” “sung,” “singing,” “song,” “songs,” and “singer” are both the same and different. They are all forms of the notion “sing.” But they are all different forms, and the differences in form convey differences in meaning. This part of grammar—the recognizing of the various forms of words and the meanings those forms convey—is called **morphology**.

Grammar also involves learning how individual words are fit together to make meaningful sentences. You can’t make much sense of English, for example, if you don’t understand the conventions of word order. If your native language happened to operate by using a different sort of word order, you might expect an English sentence to say “Ford’s in Theater President John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln.” And, when instead you found “John Wilkes Booth shot President Lincoln

in Ford's Theater," the sentence would strike you as either nonsensical or comically misconceived. That part of grammar that deals with the way a language arranges its words to produce meaning is called **syntax**.

Basic **grammar**—morphology and syntax—are the Greek that must be learned before you can celebrate the advent of reading. If you want to get to intelligent reading of Greek (or any other language), the road there necessarily passes through grammar

The goal of this textbook is to get you from where you are to "Christmas." In several ways this text seeks to make your journey through grammar to reading as short as possible.

1) This book teaches only grammar. It doesn't try to develop your reading vocabulary—only enough words to enable you to learn basic morphology and syntax. It doesn't give you any extended readings. Any of a number of well conceived elementary readers that your instructor may choose will provide excellent readings—and soon, because this forced march through grammar will not take long.

2) This book does not set out merely to cram a bunch of grammatical data into your short-term memory. Instead, its goal is to help you begin to develop a sophisticated ability to understand morphology and syntax. To that end it tries to explain the "why's" of Greek grammar rather than merely demanding that you memorize the "what's."

3) This method assumes that by the time you finish *Greek Before Christmas* you will have become a fairly sophisticated linguist. Consequently, it doesn't have to teach you every grammatical detail. It omits some topics that traditionally make the study of grammar more of a sojourn than a march because your newfound linguistic skills will enable you to learn (really learn) those matters in the course of reading with a bit of help from your instructor and a more comprehensive reference grammar.

4) This method intends to drive you at a relentless rate: It really is a "forced march" through grammar. It assumes that you will begin without knowing the Greek alphabet. Within a day you should know the alphabet. Within a week you should be able to read and write over fifty noun phrases. Within a month you should be able to recognize and understand the form of virtually any present tense verb (indicative or imperative) or of any noun or adjective that you will encounter in Greek. Later in the year, you will enjoy a similarly pleasant stroll through the grammar of verbs.

There are a couple of reasons for the demanding pace of this method. The primary reason is obvious: The sooner you get through grammar, the sooner you can begin to read the very words of people who observed and commented on the human condition some 2500 years ago.

Second, your intellect may well balk at learning forms. Your mind may tell you that all this grammar stuff is strange, full of trivial detail, and not at all the sort of thing that *you* are equipped to learn. The longer we dally, the more thought you might give to mutiny. You might even be inclined to make camp somewhere near the genitives and spend a whole month crying in your beer about how hopeless the whole expedition is. Your better intuitions know full well, of course,

that such languishing can do no good. And so, this text encourages your instructor to push you on, leaving you little time to malingering or contemplate mutiny. Instead it urges you to march relentlessly on because the ground that must be covered really is finite and manageable, and you really are capable of much greater intellectual efforts and accomplishments than you may yet have realized. So, be prepared for your instructor to lead you quickly through a great deal of material, and—if you work hard and smart—you will, almost before you know it, stand at the gates of intelligent reading.

Steve Hays
Ohio University

A Note to Teachers

Greek Before Christmas shares many of the assumptions of curricula such as that designed by the Joint Association of Classical Teachers of Great Britain (JACT). I agree with them that deep learning of morphology and syntax comes only in the context of extended readings and that students have neither the time nor patience to be immersed in grammar for months on end before they begin to read. Reading of continuous Greek should not come *as slow as Christmas*.

Years of experience in teaching have convinced me, though, that most students require considerable focused attention on grammar *before* they begin reading. If enduring an endless winter without Christmas is awful, celebrating Christmas on the beach in July to avoid the delay is preposterous. In my experience students who attempt to learn grammar while reading from Day One tend not to learn the grammar well at all. The reason, I think, is that racing into reading denies them the discipline of learning to see (*really* see) each word they encounter. As a consequence, they tend to “read” without recognizing the morphological indicators that words contain. Many of the running aids to translation that are a common feature of “grammar through reading” curricula inadvertently reinforce the notion that morphology is of less than fundamental importance.

So, *Greek Before Christmas* attempts to teach grammar, but to teach it fast (so as to get on to reading as quickly as possible) and smart (so as to provide a serious foundation for future linguistic development). A merely fast method might be full of mnemonic gadgetry to enable a quick memorizing of necessary forms. A smart method makes sure that the mechanisms that expedite learning and memory are (on the whole) true fundamental grammatical principles.

If you have read the *Note to Students*, you will be properly skeptical of just how much mastery of the noun and adjective system a student can achieve in less than a month. “So,” you ask, “after a month of morphology, when I take my students into a fine graduated reader (such as the JACT *Reading Greek: Text*, Cambridge University Press), will they really recognize the neuter accusative plural ἀληθῆ the first time they encounter it?” Almost certainly not. But the category of 3rd-declension neuter adjectives will have been set (rather gelatinously, perhaps) into their intellects, and when you explain to them why ἀληθῆ cannot be a first-declension nominative singular, they will understand what you are saying, and they will be well on their way to correctly recognizing similar words in the future. They will, that is, be able to begin the graduated readings in a good reader with the help only of a glossary (with lemmata in lexical rather than inflected form) and a good teacher. They will be reading in virtually the same way that intermediate students do: working

Greek Before Christmas

to make sense of sentences by looking up vocabulary, figuring out forms, and honing syntax.

I personally use the JACT reader, but I do not use their grammar volume because I don't want the students to have recourse to the running vocabularies of inflected forms, which give students the impression that meaning can be obtained without understanding forms. Instead, I give my students an electronic glossary in standard lexical form.

In a typical year my students complete *Part One* of *Greek Before Christmas* (the entire noun-adjective system and a quick functional introduction to present indicative and imperative verbs) in about a month. The next six weeks take us through the first four sections of the JACT reader. We finish *Greek Before Christmas* in another month and then return to the JACT reader for the rest of the year. Sometimes I break off during the final week and have students read a few chapters of one of the New Testament gospels so students can see for themselves that the much rumored gulf between Classical and Koiné Greek is largely non-existent (so long as one learns Classical rather than Koiné in the first place).

The basic intent of *Greek Before Christmas* is to help students see the unifying morphological principles from which the challenging variety of Greek forms has developed. To that end I begin with Ionic, which exhibits less contraction than Attic, less confusing metathesis of quantity, and fewer oddities such as the ε, ι, ρ subclass of the first declension. The final chapter of *Part One* introduces the peculiarities of Attic. My students generally deal with the transition from Ionic to Attic more easily in their third or fourth week than I dealt with the opposite transition in my third year.

The desire to show the unifying features of Greek morphology occasionally seduces me into what I call "useful lies." You will certainly look at some forms and say, "That's not how Herodotus would do that!" And you'll be right, of course. This text will have the more transparent ποιέομεν, rather than the more common ποιεῖμεν; the more instructive πόλι rather than the more common πόλι. You'll encounter quite a few places where I opt to give forms that show the regularities of morphology even when less regular forms are more common in the literature. The point, remember, is to create the initial categories in the students' minds, to teach them to expect regularity. Wherever possible I prefer to defer introducing departures from the principles until the students have got the principles down. So, when you want to take your students into Herodotus, you'll need to point out some uniquely Ionic features. But, you would have to do that anyway, wouldn't you?

Those of you with solid training in historical philology will find a few places where my linguistic explanations border on gimmickry, but I suspect most classicists won't find many such instances. To my mind, at least, those situations are appropriate occasions for "useful lies." The more accurate explanation would burden the student with detail that is more appropriate for advanced classes than for establishing a working foundation for freshmen.

All in all, I think you will find that most students introduced to Greek through *Greek Before Christmas* will exhibit a satisfying ability to deal with the difficulties of morphology and that they may even *enjoy* morphological analysis!