

4. Pronunciation, Breathing Marks, Accents

Lesson in a Nutshell

The first sound of a letter is the sound that it makes.

There are three accents (´ ` ^). Stress the syllable with the accent.

Every word that starts with a vowel will have a breathing mark. The smooth breathing (´) is not pronounced. The rough breathing (`) sounds like an “h.”

Pronunciation

The pronunciation of Greek is marvelously consistent.

For starters, if you know how to say the name of a letter, you know the sound it makes since the first sound of the letter’s name is the sound of the letter.

For example, Beta makes a “b” sound. Delta makes a “d” sound.

As we have seen, every vowel or diphthong in Greek gets its own syllable. This can create words with a large number of syllables. For example, take θεάομαι, which means “I behold.” It would be broken up as follows:

θε - ά - ο - μαι
(αι is a diphthong, remember)

It would be pronounced like this.

thē - a - o - mai

The best way to learn pronunciation is not to read about how to do it, but to hear it and practice.

Please spend plenty of time with the pronunciation video.

Also, be sure to speak words OUT LOUD as you study Greek. Your friends may think you are losing your mind but it will significantly speed your learning.

Breathing Marks

Every Greek word that begins with a vowel (or diphthong) will have a breathing mark over it.

There are two breathing marks, rough and smooth.

smooth	rough
᾿	῀
silent (not pronounced)	pronounced like an “h”

For example, the word **ἀνὴρ** (male/husband) is pronounced “**a-nēr**.” It has a smooth breathing mark which is not pronounced.

The word **ἁμαρτία** (sin) is pronounced “**ha-mar-ti-a**.” Notice that it has a rough breathing mark which is pronounced like an “h” at the beginning of the word.

Accents

Almost every Greek word will have an accent over one of the syllables. Originally, these were pitch accents which either rose, fell, or went up and down.

Accent	Name	Original Sound
´	acute	rising
`	grave	falling
˘	circumflex	rising then falling

Today, most people just place stress on the syllable with the accent. There is debate about the importance of learning the rules of accenting. Since these can get rather complicated and we only have to read Greek, not write it, we will not worry about learning the rules of accenting right now.

Instead, when we read a Greek word, we will stress the syllable which has the accent.

There is one additional accent that you will run across now and then. It is called a *diaeresis*. (*dee-AR-e-sis*) It looks like this:

••

An example of the diaeresis can be found in the word “Isaiah.”

Ἡσαΐαζ
(Isaiah)

Whatever vowel the diaeresis stands above is pronounced as a separate syllable.

Normally the diphthong αἰ would function as a single syllable, like this:

Ἡσ - αἰ - αζ

But since the iota has a diaeresis above it, the alpha and the iota each are pronounced separately, like this:

Ἡσ - α - ἰ - αζ

You will not see many of these.