

Different Ways to Pronounce Greek

As with all languages, the Greek language has changed in pronunciation over the thousands of years it has been spoken. The way Plato spoke Greek is not the same as the way the Apostle Paul spoke Greek, and is not the same as that of a modern Greek speaker. There are several pronunciation systems used in Classical and Biblical Greek education. The major ones are:

- Classical Greek Pronunciation – This is the pronunciation system typically used for the study of Classical Greek.
- Erasmian \i-raz-mē-ən\ Pronunciation - Erasmian pronunciation is the system taught for Biblical Greek in most colleges and seminaries around the world. It was developed by Desiderius Erasmus in the 16th century. It is not how Greek sounded during the time that the New Testament was written during the first century. Though it is similar to the pronunciation of Classical Greek, at no time in the history of the Greek language was Greek actually pronounced this way. It is used for its pedagogical benefits because each Greek letter is assigned only one unique sound.
- Reconstructed Koine Pronunciation – This is a reconstruction of what Greek might have sounded like in the Koine period from about 300 B.C. to A.D. 300 based on historical research. The reconstruction focuses primarily on the pronunciation of the first three centuries A.D. – the period in which the New Testament and other important Christian documents were written. The Greek of this period is known as Koine Greek, Biblical Greek, or Hellenistic Greek.
- Modern Greek Pronunciation – Some teachers of Classical and Biblical Greek use modern Greek pronunciation. Obviously, this is not how Classical or Biblical Greek actually sounded, but it has the benefit of learning how to pronounce the modern, living language.

In order to learn Greek, you must decide which pronunciation system to use. Because this course is designed to prepare a student to eventually learn the Greek language of the New Testament period, a Reconstructed Koine Pronunciation system is taught. This will give the student an appreciation for what the New Testament may have sounded like when it was read aloud in church gatherings, and what early believers like the Apostle Paul sounded like when they taught and preached.

As noted above, Erasmian Pronunciation is used in most colleges and seminaries. Will that be a problem for the student using this course if they eventually pursue Biblical Greek in higher education? Not really. There are two reasons:

- The various pronunciation systems are similar, with the sound of vowels being the major difference. A student can easily adjust their pronunciation with a little practice.
- The newest Biblical Greek textbooks are offering both Erasmian and Reconstructed Koine Pronunciation options. Some professors are already switching to a Reconstructed Koine Pronunciation. So, no matter which pronunciation system a student learns now, they may still find themselves in a class in the future that uses a different pronunciation system.

The important thing is to choose a system and stick with it.