

lessons can be based on things relating to the physical world.

Our life in this age is a journey through a spiritual wilderness while we set our vision ahead, looking for “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10, NKJV; cf. 13:14).

The scorching rays of the sun that we experience in this spiritual desert are the tribulations and difficulties that test our faith and help us to develop characters pleasing to our heavenly Father (Mt. 13:5,6,20,21; Lk. 8:13). If we fail to tap into the water of life that is provided we will be spiritually unfruitful. That water is available daily in the form of the Word of God, and we neglect it at our peril. If we do tap into that water of life we can grow into upright trees of righteousness that produce much fruit to the glory of our heavenly Father.

In addition, there are oases provided where we can find spiritual food, shade and rest after a hard week of travel. There we are able to meet other pilgrims heading for the same city and have the opportunity to encourage one another to continue our journey with determination. Let us not neglect to meet together weekly to remember our absent Lord.

Likewise there are great rocks along the way where we may find shade from the heat of the sun, and springs of water welling up to the surface where we may rest awhile to be refreshed. So it is on the spiritual level that we can benefit from attending Bible classes and other ecclesial meetings, as well as being a help to others who are travelling with us.

However, our journey through the wilderness does have its perils, particularly if we do not keep up with our brethren and sisters but allow ourselves to become spiritual stragglers. The spiritual counterpart of Amalek is the power of sin that lies in wait to trap the unwary traveller and at the same time seeks to steal away the water of life by replacing the Word of God with the wisdom of this world. Our heavenly Father has war on sin “from generation to generation” and will “utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek [sin] from under heaven” (Ex. 17:16,14).

“A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert [shelter] from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa. 32:2). So the Lord Jesus is to us as we journey towards the Kingdom of God.

(Concluded)

The alphabets of the Bible: Greek

John Carder

SOME HISTORIANS and archaeologists theorise that the Phoenicians or the Canaanites invented the Semitic alphabet and taught it first to the Hebrews and then spread it to the Greeks. But there is no evidence that the Canaanites had an alphabetic script or that the Phoenicians developed a literature. No scrolls or books have survived in mainland Phoenicia or in its empire, which stretched to Carthage and beyond. There are some Phoenician commercial records, lists of goods and cargoes, and a very few inscriptions on royal tombs of a late date.

I believe that alphabetical writing was developed for recording the Scriptures, and that the Phoenicians borrowed the Hebrew alphabet mainly for their trading purposes and spread it around the ports of the Mediterranean. Many of the people they traded with were Greek. The Hebrews were not great sailors in the early days,

and Phoenicians are mentioned in the records of Solomon’s overseas ventures.

The earliest Greek records known to us are also lists of goods and cargoes and of palace treasures. They were in a variety of scripts, some still not fully deciphered. The Greek alphabet still in use today was adopted in Attica, with its capital Athens, when that city-state became dominant. This was at the beginning of the ‘Classical’ period, when many still-famous dramatists and philosophers flourished. The start of that period roughly coincided with the return of the Jews from exile, that is, about 500 B.C.

Hebrew and Greek

The very word ‘alphabet’ is Greek, but betrays its connection with Hebrew, comprising the first two letters in both languages. Indeed, the first four letters in each language show the connection:

Greek		Before exile	After exile	Hebrew		Greek		Hebrew		
Alpha	A	Α	א	1	Aleph	Xi	Ξ	פ	60	Samekh
Beta	B	Β	ב	2	Bet/Vet	Omicron	Ο	ז	70	'Ayin
Gamma	Γ	Γ	ג	3	Gimel	Pi	Π	ח	80	Pé/Fé
Delta	Δ	Δ	ד	4	Dalet	koppa	Ϟ	ט	90	Tsadè
Epsilon	E	Ε	ה	5	Hé	Rho	Ρ	ק	100	Kof
di-gamma	ς	Ϛ	ו	6	Vav	Sigma	Σ	ר	200	Resh
Zeta	Z	Ζ	ז	7	Zayin	Tau	Τ	ש	300	Shin/Sin
Eta	H	Η	ח	8	KHet	Upsilon	Υ	ט	400	Tav
Theta	Θ	Θ	ט	9	Tet	Phi	Φ		500	
Iota	I	Ι	י	10	Yod	chi	Χ		600	
Kappa	K	Κ	כ	20	KHaf/Kaf	Psi	Ψ		700	
Lamda	Λ	Λ	ל	30	Lamed	Omega	Ω		800	
Mu	M	Μ	מ	40	Mem	sampi	Ϻ		900	
Nu	N	Ν	נ	50	Nun	chilioi	Α'		1,000	

Hebrew: *aleph, bet, gimel, dalet* (A, B, G, D)

Greek: *alpha, beta, gamma, delta* (A, B, G, D).

The big difference was that the Greeks modified some letters, and they made some extra ones, to introduce the vowels, A, E, I, O, U, into their alphabet.

We have noted in the article about Hebrew ([Mar. 2004, p. 98](#)) that the Hebrew alphabet consisted entirely of consonants. The first letter in the Hebrew, *aleph*, was and is a consonant. It is in itself silent but can take any vowel sound. It is *not* simply a letter A, but its Greek equivalent, *alpha*, is an A and nothing else. The adaptations by the Greeks to fit vowels into the Hebrew system and to adjust the numerical values were very ingenious, as we shall see.

We should first of all note that, unlike Hebrew, Greek has both capital and small letters. The [chart](#) above shows only the capital letters because the earliest Greek manuscripts were written entirely in capitals, especially the Biblical manuscripts. At first, Greek was written in a way more difficult even than Hebrew. One line was written from right to left, the next from left to right, and the next line reverted to right to left again. *Boustrophedon* was the name of that system, meaning 'as an ox turns in ploughing' (in those days), that is, it draws a furrow in one

direction then turns round and goes back beside the first. Not only that, in the right-to-left lines the letters themselves were written back-to-front, so that alternate lines were mirror images. However, the Greeks fairly soon dropped that system and settled for writing from left to right, as we still do.

In both Hebrew and Greek the letters are sounded as indicated by their names: *bet* and *beta* are 'b' sounds, *gimel* and *gamma* are 'g' sounds, and so on. The [chart](#) shows the Hebrew and Greek alphabets side by side along with the numbers represented by the respective letters. First we may note how the shapes of the Greek letters resemble the pre-Exilic Hebrew letters rather than the present printed forms. In many cases the resemblances are clear. In some cases a little imagination is needed, involving a slight rotation or simplification of the original symbol. We should also remember that we are comparing handwritten letters with printed forms.

The alphabets compared

In this section we go into more detail about the Greek alphabet and its links with Hebrew. It will be necessary to refer to the [chart](#) for this. This section is more likely to be of interest to

students who use concordances and lexicons to look up original words, and some readers may wish to skip this part of the article.

The Greeks turned the very first letter into a vowel, the 'a' sound, and changed the fifth letter, the Hebrew H, into a short E. Greek does have an 'h' sound but it is shown like an inverted comma above the initial letters of words and is called a 'rough breathing'. Usually it comes over an initial vowel, as in the word *ho* (one of the seventeen forms of the word 'the' in Greek). The rough breathing is also associated with an initial 'r'. That is why we have spellings such as 'rhythm' and 'rhododendron', which are words derived from Greek. There is also another symbol, called a 'smooth breathing', to show where no 'h' sound is intended.

Next comes another complication, the sixth letter, *di-gamma*, sounded as an 'f' or 'v'. It is derived from the Hebrew *vav*, but was dropped from the Greek alphabet in early times, though not from the numeric system based on the alphabet, being the number six.

The next letter, with the value seven, is sounded as 'z' and is in the same position in both alphabets.

Next we have the introduction of another vowel, *eta*, the long 'e' which displaces the Hebrew guttural *khet*.

The next two letters, values nine and ten, continue the parallel sequence, except that the Greek *theta* is a 'th' sound while the Hebrew *tet* is a simple 't' sound.

The tenth letters, *iota* and *yod* respectively, both have the sound value of 'i' or 'y'.

The letters with the numerical values of 20, 30, 40 and 50 (K, L, M, N) also run parallel, except that the Greek letter *kappa* is a plain 'k'. Its equivalent, the Hebrew *kaf*, can also be pronounced as a guttural letter if it comes in the middle or at the end of a word. This guttural sound was transferred to the end of the Greek alphabet, as we shall see later.

Samekh, one of the two Hebrew letters with an 's' sound, was transformed by the Greeks into the letter X. They also inserted the vowel *omikron*, the short 'o', in place of the mysterious silent Hebrew letter *ayin*.

The letter P is parallel in both alphabets, but, whereas in Hebrew the letter can also have an 'f' sound, this function was transferred to a new letter further down the Greek alphabet.

From this point onwards the two alphabets get out of step by one letter. The Hebrew *tsade*,

numerical value 90, was dropped down the Greek alphabet and promoted to 900, as we shall see later.

The Greek sign *koppa*, value 90, was derived from the Hebrew *kof*, value 100. The *koppa* was dropped early as a letter from the Greek alphabet but, like the *di-gamma*, mentioned above, remained a number symbol.

The letter R, *rho* in Greek, is number 100, but *resh* in Hebrew is 200. The letter S, *sigma* in Greek, is number 200 while *shin* is 300 in Hebrew. The Hebrew letter can have the compound sound 'sh' or a plain 's', but *sigma* has simply an 's' sound.

When we come to the letter 't', in Greek *tau*, value 300, and in Hebrew *tav*, value 400, we reach the end of the Hebrew alphabet and come to five extra letters added by the Greeks.

The first additional Greek letter is *upsilon*, the vowel U, value 400. The second, *phi*, is an 'f' sound. As mentioned above, the Greeks made two separate symbols, *pi* and *phi*, in place of the single Hebrew letter *peh*, which can be pronounced as either 'p' or 'f' according to its position in a word.

The third extra letter is *chi*, the only guttural in Greek. It takes the place of two Hebrew letters, as previously mentioned. The two letters the *chi* replaced were the *khet*, which was changed to *eta*, the long 'e' in Greek, and the guttural *khaf*, which became a simple 'k' in Greek.

The fourth extra letter is the *psi*, for the compound sound 'ps' in such Greek words as *psyche*, meaning 'soul', 'life' or 'mind', and from which we get the word 'psychology', for example. Hebrew does not have a 'ps' sound, though it has 'ts'.

The last extra letter, and the last letter of the alphabet, is *omega*, the long 'o', value 800.

Although their alphabet ends there, the Greeks completed their numeral system by borrowing the Hebrew letter *tsade*, which they called *sampi* and promoted from 90 to 900. They also used *alpha* with an extra stroke for the number 1,000, calling it *chilioi*.

More on numbers in Greek

In Greek, as in Hebrew, there were also names for the numbers: *heis*, *duo*, *treis*, *tessares* and *pente* for 1 to 5, then *deka* (10), *hekaton* (100), *chilioi* (1,000), and so on.

That famous number 666 (Rev. 13:18) appears in different ways in different texts. In some you find it spelled out, *hexakosioi hexekonta hex*, while

in other editions you find it in number symbols. The *Emphatic Diaglott* is one of these; the number is the last group of three letters in the chapter. The very last symbol is the *di-gamma*, which, as stated above, dropped out of the alphabet in early times.

The Greeks also had a simpler number system which was more suited to trade. Basically it was a system of strokes, or notches, for numbers 1 to 4. Then every fifth number was shown by the first letter of its name: *pi* for *pente* (5), *delta* for *deka* (10), *eta* for *hekaton* (100) and combinations of those three letters. It provided the pattern for the later Roman or Latin system of numbers.

Summary

Summing up, we have looked at the transformation of the Hebrew alphabet, related to a Semitic language, to the needs of Greek, a European language. The main changes were the incorporation of vowels and the addition or modification of five symbols for elements not found in Hebrew. In spite of all this, the Greek alphabet increased by only two symbols over the Hebrew, a total of twenty-four symbols compared with twenty-two in Hebrew. In turn, the Greek became the basis for the Latin alphabet, and, with a few more adjustments still, the basis for other European alphabets, including English. This will be the subject of [another article](#), God willing.

Ein Yael

A living museum of Bible times

Dennis Elliott

EIN YAEL is the name given to an ancient terraced farm, one of many situated in the Rephaim Valley in the western outskirts of Jerusalem, a valley traversed by the Tel Aviv to Jerusalem railway line. During the time of Jesus a Roman road skirted the bottom of the valley, in all probability the route along which invading armies travelled to Jerusalem from the Mediterranean coast.

After David, having become king over all Israel, captured Jerusalem and made it his capital, the Philistines advanced against him along the Valley of Rephaim in full force: "But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David; and David heard of it, and went down to the hold. The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim" (2 Sam. 5:17,18). (The word 'Rephaim' means 'giants', and the name probably indicates that the Rephaim referred to in Genesis 15:20 lived in the valley.) 2 Samuel 5 goes on to record how God gave David two great victories over the invading Philistines.

It had been thought that the many terraces on one side of the Valley of Rephaim had been prepared for orchards in Arab times, but the Israeli archaeologist Gershom Edelstein, in excavating some of these terraces, discovered Iron Age pottery which he considered to be from the time of King David. The other side of the valley

was strewn with rocks, which seemed to point to a clearance of the fields for farming. Edelstein had a notion that the rocks had been placed upon the remains of ancient buildings. His excavations confirmed this as correct, and then he discovered that platforms had been excavated out of the side of the hill and that massive roughly-squared stones were used to build up the walls of houses which were still standing up to a metre in height. He found that with the growth of families the original houses had been enlarged, and he concluded that many of these buildings could be dated to the Middle Bronze I period, which he considered pertained to the time of the Canaanites.

The Australian magazine *Archaeological Diggings* reports as follows on an experiment that was tried by Edelstein at Ein Yael: "Gershom wanted to do more than just find things and record them. He wanted people today to understand people of the past, what they did and how they did it. Writing in his interesting little book *Living Museum at Jerusalem*, he said: 'It occurred to me that really the only way to understand and appreciate technology is to study by doing'. In restoring Ein Yael, one of the ancient terraced farms in the Rephaim Valley, he explained his principal aim: 'I wish to create a place where those interested may come and research the elementary processes of agriculture, weaving, pottery, building and metallurgy'. And that is