

Brief History of the Greek Language

Greek is a living language with an immensely long history. Its emergence from the parent stock of Indo-European languages is lost in antiquity, but its written history may be traced to as far back as the 13th Century B.C. Its written history continued on through the period of the great classical writers, like Homer (c. 900 B.C.), Plato (4th Century B.C.), up to the Alexandrian Conquest (c. 330 B.C.). This marked the beginning of the Hellenistic Age when the Old Testament was translated into Greek (called the Septuagint, probably during the 2nd or 3rd Centuries B.C) and the New Testament was written. The language continued up through the Byzantine period of the 6th Century A.D. right into Modern Times. Despite the many changes it has undergone, it has been recognized for 3000 years.

There were many different dialects, such as Attic, Ionic, Aeolic, and Doric that existed side-by-side. Attic became the foremost literary dialect, and was adopted as the official language of the Macedonian Empire after the conquests of Alexander the Great. Alexander ardently desired to propagate the Hellenistic culture throughout his domains. So he sent out “apostles” as language and culture teachers. Throughout this process Koine/Hellenistic Greek developed into somewhat simpler and sometimes less precise forms than the purest Attic Greek and incorporated some forms from other dialects. During this time Koine Greek became the universal second language of the known world. In these days it was the medium that Paul used to communicate the Gospel freely throughout the length and breadth of the Mediterranean world. He wrote to the Christians in Rome, not in Latin, but in Koine Greek.