

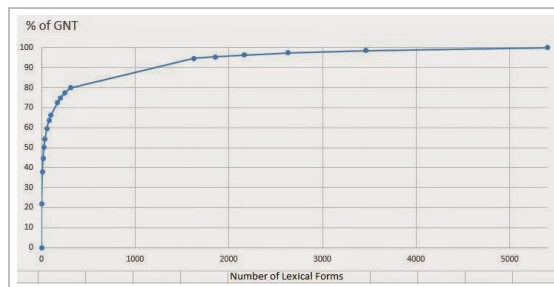
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Biblical Studies and Technological Tools

From scroll to screen... codex to computer...

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2014

Greek New Testament Vocabulary Lists



In preparation for teaching biblical Greek again this fall, I am once again thinking about the vocabulary I am asking my students to memorize. Since my students will eventually be getting Bible software, the first argument I need to make is why bother memorize any Greek vocab at all. My response is that we need a foundational vocabulary simply to talk about the more significant matters of Greek grammar. Additionally, vocabulary memorization gives me an opportunity to talk about Greek words and their range of meaning and usage. (E.g., what is the distinction between *οὐρανός* in the singular and plural? OR What does *ἀμήν* mean? What is its Hebrew background? How is it treated in the LXX? What is distinctive about John's use of it?) Additionally again, even when we start using Bible software, having a basic vocabulary will make one so much more efficient in the use of the software and even in just knowing which word to put the mouse over!

So, how much vocabulary do we need to know? According to a number of studies, a person needs to know 95% of the words in order to deduce the meaning of the others from the context. (Cf. [here](#) and [here](#).) In the Greek New Testament, there are 5400 lexical forms which are used 138,020 times. (BTW, I'm using BibleWorks9's edition of NA27 and the Wordlist Manager for my word statistics. I suspect there are differences depending on the program and text you use.) It doesn't really mean that a person needs to know 5130 ($5400 \times .95$) lexical forms. That's a good thing since there are about 1934 *hapax legomenon* (i.e., words used only once) in the Greek NT. Rather, a person would want to know about 131,119 ($138,020 \times .95$) words according to their instances in the GNT. This would require a person to know every word that occurs 6 or more times and a bunch of the ones used 5 times in the GNT. That is, one would need to know about 1700 of the 5400 lexical forms. That's way too many for my students to memorize in a semester.

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Atlas of the Biblical World, co-authored with Robert Mullins



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Let's start from the top instead. I like to tell my students that if they know the Greek article along with καί and ὁἷ, they know about 23% of the words in the GNT! Some other stats which provide specifics to the chart at the top of this post.

- The 10 most common words cover nearly 38% of the GNT
- The 18 words used 1000 or more times cover over 44% of the GNT.
- To know 50% of the words in the GNT, you need to know the 27 most common ones.
- The 37 words used 500 or more times cover over 54% of the GNT.
- The 100 most common words cover over 66% of the GNT.
- The 200 most common words cover just about 75% of the GNT.
- The 311 words use 50 or more times cover almost 80% of the GNT.

There are certainly other factors which could complicate these stats. Most notably, if you know a word root, you can often determine related lexemes. Again, knowing the prepositions and knowing some verbs, the addition of prepositional prefixes is an easy matter.

So what have I decided to do? Given our limited time, given that we are not aiming to speak or write compositions in Greek, and given that we will be using Bible software, I'm going for the 311 words used 50 or more times in the GNT. Students will be asked to learn 30+ words each weeks for 10 weeks. The vocab quizzes will consist of 10 words each and are multiple choice. Students need to get at least 7 of the 10 correct, and they have 3 chances to take the quiz. I'm also going to make life easier for the students by taking the frequency list and sorting it alphabetically. That way, they will have a mix of common and less common words each week.

I've created my own lists of Greek lexical forms ordered either according to frequency or alphabetically. I've added my own glosses which in many cases provide a bit more information than the typical, minimal glosses. If you would like to use these files which are DOCX files you can get them here:

- [Greek New Testament Vocabulary Usage Percent List](#)
- [Greek New Testament Vocabulary.50plus.alphabeta](#)

I'd be interested to hear what vocabulary memorization requirements others of you have.

Posted by MGVHoffman at 2:34AM [ShareThis](#)
Labels: [greek](#), [greek instruction](#), [greek new testament](#)

4 comments:



[Unknown](#) December 13, 2017 at 4:20PM

Thanks for this. It is a real boost of morale to see that I already know so many of these words.

NIV

Libronix

Save

Bible Study Software

Bible Search

Search the Bible 60%

Verse:

John 3:16; Jn 3:16; John 3

Keyword:

Salvation, Jesus, Gospel

With Operators:

AND, OR, NOT, " "



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Randel [June 13, 2018 at 4:53AM](#)

Thank you so very much, this is so helpful, and allows me to read with greater clarity. Awesome reading tool

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Fellipe [April 19, 2020 at 12:18AM](#)

How did you get to those lists and counts? I'd love to do the same but for a given excerpt of the Bible. Let's say Mark 1-4. That would reduce the vocabulary even more.

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MGVHoffman [April 19, 2020 at 10:27 PM](#)

Most Bible software can do a wildcard search for all words in a range. Results can be sorted by frequency and include a gloss. Then I export to MS Word, and run some quick macros to create the tables.

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