**Adelphos**

*Adelphos* (#80 ἀδελφός) is a masculine singular noun meaning “brother.” The word *adelphos* in its various forms occurs approximately 343 times in the New Testament and approximately 649 times in the LXX. *Adelphos* has a number of usages including:

* A natural brother of the same mother and father (Cain and Abel, Gen. 4:2; Jacob and Esau, Gen. 25:26; Moses and Aaron, Exodus 4:14).
* A half brother from either the mother or father; Joseph and his half brothers (Gen. 37:2).
* Relative, near kinsman. LXX translators sometimes used *adelphos* for the Hebrew word for “brother” (*ach*), which occasionally was used to refer to a more remote descendant, e.g., Laban, Jacob’s uncle was referred to as Jacob’s brother (Gen. 29:12, 15); Abram’s nephew Lot was said to be Abram’s brother (Gen. 14:14, 16).
* Tribesman (Exodus 2:11; 2 Sam. 19:12).
* To indicate ethnic relationship, i.e., fellow countryman (Acts 2:29; 3:17, 22; Rom. 9:3).
* Neighbor, fellow human being (Matt. 5:22-24; 7:3).
* Apostles and elders (John 20:17; Acts 15:23).
* A person intimately related by clan or friendship (Matt. 12:50). This usage of *adelphos* to describe a person’s spiritual relationship with another person carries over into the early church (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:1; 16:12; 2 Cor. 1:1; Philemon 16; James 2:15; 1 John 2:9).
* A member of the Christian community (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:12; Phil. 2:25; 1 Peter 5:12; 2 Peter 3:15).

Words related to *adelphos* include *adelphē* (“sister”); *pseudádelphos* (“false brother”); *adelphotés* (“brotherhood”); *philadelphos* (“brotherly love”).

***Adelphoi***

The Greek word translated “brothers and sisters” is *adelphoi*, the plural of “brother,” *adelphos* (#80 ἀδελφός). As seen above, the word “brother” (singular), has a number of meanings in the Hebrew and Greek languages, and many of those meanings also apply when speaking of “brothers” (plural), but with a notable addition: “brothers” was often used generally both in secular Greek and biblical Greek for “brothers and sisters.”

The plural usage of “brothers” in Greek is similar to how we might colloquially say, ‘Hey guys, listen up.’ If the room is filled with men and women, nobody would assume that the speaker is only addressing the men. It is just a colloquial way to speak to a group. Although, the difference lies in the fact that *adelphos* is a more intimate term that was used to refer to a group of people that the author or speaker was close to, relationally or spiritually.

Since both men and women are typically in view when the plural *adelphoi* is used, it is more appropriate to render it as “brothers and sisters.” (cf. Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Gal. 1:2, 11; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 3:13; James 3:1; 1 John 3:13). However, in some contexts the singular form, “brother,’ also applies to both male and female (cf. 2 Thess. 3:15; 1 John 2:9, 11; 3:10; 4:20, 21). An exception would be in phrases such as “men and brothers” (Acts 1:16; 2:29), or “men, brothers, and fathers” (Acts 7:2). Women may be present in these contexts, but only the men are being addressed directly, as per the customs of that time.

In the past, it was more acceptable in English Bibles to refer to a mixed group of men and women as “brothers” and then expect the ministers to teach that the Greek word “brothers” often included women. But today men and women in mixed audiences are almost always each specifically mentioned, and therefore the translation “brothers” can cause confusion and/or cause people to think that women are being purposely excluded, whereas “brothers and sisters” is clear.

However, adding “and sisters” for clarity can be problematic for translators. When we translate the Greek word “brothers” as “brothers and sisters,” we move the responsibility for deciding what “brothers” means from the reader to the translator. Most of the time the translator can make the proper decision because the context is clear as to whether “brothers” refers to a group of just men or if it refers to a mixed group of men and women. However, there are times when this is not clear, and in those cases, translators must use their best judgment. To complicate matters, there are times when women would have been present and listening, such as in a synagogue or in the Temple, but the speaker only addressed the men, as was customary. We can often see this when the speaker says, “Men, brothers,….” (cf. Acts 1:16; 2:29; 13:26, 38; 22:1; etc., but many English translators felt that “men, brothers” was an idiom and left “men” out. However, when it is in the Greek text it is important in helping us understand who the speaker was specifically addressing).

Some modern translations use a mixed-gender generalization such as “believers” or “Christians” when “brothers” is in the Greek text. Although those generalizations do include both genders, they miss the reason why God put “brothers” in the text in the first place, which was to keep reminding Christians that they are indeed brothers and sisters, and should have special care and love for each other. Christians should view each other as family and “brothers and sisters” of each other because we have the same Father, God.

Through the ages, family has had an important meaning backed by special relationships. “Family” meant special care, special concern, and special love. Since for most of history, police forces did not exist and there was no social security or Medicare (health insurance for the elderly), “family” was the only protection and support a person had. No wonder Psalm 127:4-5 (HCSB) says, “Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons born in one’s youth. Happy is the man who has filled his quiver with them. Such men will never be put to shame when they speak with their enemies at the city gate.”

Sadly, Christians often treat other Christians like the enemy instead of family, but we are to be “especially good” to the household of Faith (Gal. 6:10). Also, the meaning of “brothers and sisters” sometimes becomes diluted or confused by people who teach that “everyone is a child of God.” That is not true. Christians are actually “born” of God by virtue of the New Birth (1 Pet. 1:3, 23; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 John 5:1). Non-Christians have not been “born” of God and are not His birth children. They are His creations, but not His birth children. It is because Christians have been specifically “born of God” that we are truly brothers and sisters as the Bible refers to us.

Closely related to Christians being referred to as brothers and sisters because we are born of God is the understanding that when the Bible uses the phrase “one another,” it is referring to fellow Christians. Christians are to love “one another,” serve “one another,” etc., but in those cases, the phrase “one another” refers to fellow Christians, not just anybody and everybody in the world (see commentary on Gal. 5:13, “one another”).