

Introduction to Greek Tense Form Choice

In the Non-Indicative Moods
(PDF Edition)

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Preface

Since this material attained its written form some ten years ago, I have had occasional thoughts about either publishing it as a series of journal essays or reworking it into a full-fledged book. I began the journal essays a couple of times, but other more urgent projects always intervened. It has finally dawned on me that this project will never go any farther than it is now—at least by me; I simply have too many other writing projects stretching off into the distant horizon. I am, therefore, distributing this manuscript as a PDF file in the hopes that it will be useful to students of Greek and particularly of the Greek New Testament.

Let me clarify here that this work was *not* written primarily for other scholars—it is an instructional manual written for first-year Greek students at our seminary. Furthermore, I wrote this work in 1999 and though I have read subsequent literature on the subject, I have not updated the footnotes in order to reflect this literature. I just don't have the time now, and in those ten years I have not read anything that has caused me to change my fundamental outlook.

Most importantly, the reader should know that this work is certainly not the last word on Greek verbal aspect. I view this as a starting point with a method for analysis of Greek verbs that holds much promise. It may contain minor misjudgments on particulars, but I think it gives beginners in Greek a fair and relatively accurate starting point for their own analysis of Greek verbal aspect as they move forward with their own work.

Finally, the main research for this work was conducted during a study leave generously granted by the Board of Trustees of Westminster Seminary California allowing me to survey Greek literature from Xenophon to Athanasius and non-literary works (papyri and inscriptions) in order to corroborate my ideas. Our board is always most generous and supportive and they have my genuine thanks here.

sola Christi gratia.

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Synopsis

The approach to Greek verbs taught here has several distinctive elements that are outlined as follows. Many terms used throughout the work are defined in the introduction chapter (pp. 7–8).

1. This work focuses on the Greek non-indicative mood verb forms only, not the indicative mood.
2. Tense form choice refers to the factors involved when a speaker or author chose a tense form (present, aorist, perfect) to employ on a particular occasion.
3. Each non-indicative mood must be evaluated on its own terms with its own series of factors influencing tense-form choice.
4. To make global statements about a tense-form's value which spans the various moods (e.g., the aorist is normally "punctiliar" in meaning) is problematic and has contributed to the lack of consensus in studies of Greek verbs.
5. The previous point is particularly problematic when comparing indicative mood tense form choice with the non-indicative moods.
6. The vast majority of tense forms chosen by Greek speakers and authors were the expected ("default") form with minimal or no semantic value beyond the meaning of the lexeme itself.
7. The previous point means that students should focus on the factors directing a speaker or author to choose one tense form over another in a given situation, because only then will the exceptions to what was expected with interesting semantic value stand out and be more certain to be demonstrably correct (present as conative, aorist as inceptive, etc.).
8. When a New Testament author expressed a nuance with a tense form rather than using the default form, later scribes sometimes wrote the expected form confirming the analysis that the form of the original text has aspectual value.
9. My work does not challenge the traditional understanding of the range of meanings of the various tense forms (e.g., present as conative, aorist as inceptive) but rather confirms it and helps students know when such meanings were being communicated by ancient authors.
10. This study is a *starting point* for entry level students of Greek not the last word on the subject.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Orientation

There are many places in the Greek New Testament where the exact significance of verbal tense forms continues to attract the interest of interpreters.¹ Admittedly this interest sometimes draws interpretations which are far too simplistic despite warnings to the contrary. Classic cases of this usually involve an interpretation of present tense forms as representing “continuous” or “linear” action and aorist forms as representing a “once for all” or “punctiliar” kind of event.² In contrast, while considering three passages where various tense forms are found in verbs of various moods (1 Pet. 2:17; John 7:24; 15:16), G. C. Neal cautioned against this type of oversimplification:

There are many factors which might have led a Greek writer to choose one or other tense of these moods of the verb. Certainly one of them might have been the analogy of the imperfect and aorist tenses of the indicative. . . . But considerations of euphony, the predominant tense of the passage, differences in style, and other criteria could have had equal weight. To a great extent also I suspect the choice was arbitrary.³

Let me illustrate Prof. Neal’s point with these three New Testament passages.

- ✧ κρείττον γάρ ἐστὶν **γαμῆσαι** ἢ **πυροῦσθαι**, “for it is better *to marry* than *to burn (with passion)*” (1 Cor. 7:9; NIV).
- ✧ **λύσατε** αὐτὸν καὶ **φέρετε**, “*Untie* it [a donkey colt] and *bring* it here” (Mark 11:2)
- ✧ ἐὰν **ἔχητε** πίστιν καὶ μὴ **διακριθῆτε**, “If *you have* faith and *do not doubt*. . .” (Matt 21:21).

¹The term “tense form” will be used here for the Greek present, aorist, perfect, etc. forms. This term does not imply that tense or the time of a verb’s occurrence is necessarily expressed by these forms.

²For examples and critique see: Charles R. Smith, “Errant Aorist Interpreters,” *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981): 205–26; Randy Maddox, “The Use of the Aorist Tense in Holiness Exegesis,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 16 (1981): 106–18; Frank Stagg, “The Abused Aorist,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 222–31; D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984): 69–77. New Testament commentaries are full of verbal aspect oversimplification as the previous articles catalogue; see also Ronald Ward, *Hidden Meaning in the New Testament* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1969).

³Neal, “In the Original Greek,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 12 (1963): p. 13.

As you can see, the authors in these verses alternate between present and aorist forms in the same context in parallel constructions. They chose different tense forms for some reason. Why?

I find Neal's suggestions that an author chose a particular tense form because of euphony or because of his style very suggestive, and I readily heed his caution and the warnings of others against oversimplification of the Greek tenses. But we study the Greek of the New Testament to find "nuggets" of interpretation, and Greek tense forms have been a very profitable mine for us to date. To think that "to a great extent" the choice of tense form could be *arbitrary* would be, to say the least, bothersome if true. What other points of Greek grammar are merely arbitrary as well? And what are these "other criteria" which might govern tense form choice? And even more basic, *how* do we know when the choice was arbitrary making the form itself semantically insignificant and when was it not?

Subsequent study in the area of Greek verbal aspect led me further into these kinds of questions focusing on tense form choice itself (rather than on questions of verbal aspect proper—a more common subject of discussion). What are the factors governing an author's choice of forms? The answer to this question is not simple, because Greek is not simple as we will see. And in the following analysis, I have not considered matters like euphony and style adequately yet which would complicate matters even more. My original intent is to provide first year Greek students with both a description of the Greek verb system and a procedure for making thoughtful analyses of verb forms. In this light, this essay is a step toward fulfilling that intent. I am not finished yet. However, I have finally arrived at a place where I can say a few things with some confidence as to their reliability and usefulness in the exegetical enterprise.

Background

Before explaining my findings, let me give some relevant background into current discussion on Greek verbal aspect. As in so many areas of scholarship, there is an animated debate today over the proper analysis of the ancient Greek verb system, which can do nothing but bring our understanding of this vital subject into sharper focus. The main participants include Buist Fanning, K. L. McKay, and Stanley Porter.⁴ The debate itself is mostly theoretical and centers on the relationship of verbal aspect, tense proper, and the various Greek verbal "tense forms." Despite disagreements, most debate participants would define the key term *aspect* in a similar way as the manner in which

⁴Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); K. L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek: An Aspectual Approach*, (Studies in Biblical Greek, 5; New York, Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 1994); *idem*, "Time and Aspect in New Testament Greek," *NovT* 34 (1992) 209-28; Stanley Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament* (Studies in Biblical Greek, 1; New York, Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 1989); *idem*, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992). See also: Albert Rijksbaron, *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek: An Introduction*, 2d ed. (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1994); Peter Stork, *The Aspectual Usage of the Dynamic Infinitive in Herodotus* (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1982); B. Comrie, *Aspect. An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics, 2; Cambridge: CUP, 1976).

the Greek speaker or writer represents an event.⁵ The term “description” has been helpfully suggested as a more meaningful and accurate term in place of “aspect.” Regardless of the term used, though, aspect must be distinguished from how the event occurs historically.⁶

Differences over Greek verbal aspect today may be exemplified by the variance between Stanley Porter’s and Buist Fanning’s approaches.⁷ Porter follows a model of “systemic linguistics” where aspect is described in a unified and prescriptive model.⁸ In his view, Greek tense forms grammaticalize only aspect; tense itself is communicated in Greek by contextual factors, not morphologically. Furthermore, Porter says that the present tense forms are more “marked” than aorist forms, which are less marked or “unmarked” throughout the Greek verb system.⁹ The “stative” aspect (perfect and pluperfect forms) “is the most heavily weighted” and hence has the most semantic value.¹⁰

In some ways, Buist Fanning’s work resembles Porter’s. Both are informed by modern linguistics and both are exploring Greek with a common notion of what verbal aspect means. However, Fanning focuses much more attention on the variety of factors which influence the interpretation of verbal aspect. As a result of this, Fanning addresses the inherent meaning of verbs in particular to show how patterns of usage can be found and predicted for verbs with particular *kinds of meaning*. Fanning, following certain linguists, divides events into categories which each sub-divide in a way which

⁵I use “event” to refer to any action or state to which a verb form may refer. See the definition below. “Tense” refers to the time of an event’s fulfillment; either absolutely in respect to the writer’s time frame, or relative to that of a lead verb; cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 497–98.

⁶The term *Aktionsart(en)* is frequently invoked at this point to refer to the “objective” fulfillment of an action or state; however, I do not use this term for reasons which will be explained later.

⁷For a convenient collection of essays summarizing part of the debate see: Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds., *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research* (JSNTSS, 80; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

⁸D. A. Carson says that Porter’s system is virtually immune to criticisms of his interpretation of particular data; see “An Introduction to the Porter/Fanning Debate,” in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics*, p. 24. However, any theory which is exempt from adjustment or even outright refutation from data is given too much personal privilege. See K. L. McKay, “Time and Aspect,” for thoughtful criticism of Porter’s work.

⁹Porter explains these terms in a glossary: “Marked and unmarked: labels given to various constructions to imply their relative semantic weights. The unmarked structure is often more frequently found, more diverse in form, less regular in structure, of less formal substance, less emphatic and of minimum essential meaning. The marked structure is often less frequent in appearance, more stable in form, more regular in structure, of greater formal substance, more emphatic, and of greater significance in meaning” (*Idioms*, pp. 311–12). Compare *default forms* discussed below.

¹⁰Summarized in *Idioms*, p. 22. The examples Porter gives for this interpretation range across the various moods. A central approach of this paper is that markedness (or “default forms”) varies significantly in the different moods and in different linguistic situations.

seems too theoretical to be of practical value to some.¹¹ However, in my view the value of Fanning’s division is not in the particulars or in the subtleties of his categories, but in the point that lexis plays a fundamental role in verb form choice. Fanning writes:

[F]ully subjective choices between aspects are not common, since the nature of the action or the procedural character of the verb or verb-phrase can restrict the way an action is viewed by a speaker. In fact, aspect interacts so closely with such features and is so significantly affected by them that no analysis of aspect can be fully meaningful without attention to these interactions.¹²

Porter’s criticism of Fanning focuses on this point. He writes: “Tense usage is not dependent upon lexis, otherwise there is no accounting for the number of different tense forms in Greek that may be used with the same lexical item within the same temporal contexts.”¹³ Porter faults Fanning for what he thinks is theoretical confusion, primarily, he says, because Fanning’s method compromises the coherent interconnection of the aspects his own systemic approach identifies (or creates).¹⁴

I do not wish to review this debate any further nor to interact explicitly with its concerns in any detail in this work for various reasons. In part it is because I am not a true partisan. My own theoretical framework resembles Fanning’s more than Porter’s, yet I have learned and adopted much from Porter and many other scholars to whom I gratefully acknowledge my debt. Their work has been immensely helpful.

Another reason that I am not joining the verbal aspect debate directly is that I am not trying to develop a theoretical model of Greek verbal aspect here. I am working in what linguists call “pragmatics”; an analysis of how the language works in light of the interconnection of all factors in specific contexts. From this, I have developed principles to guide Bible interpreters in the evaluation of certain forms in various contexts by asking the simple, guiding question, “What factors influenced the author to choose this form in this context?” In my opinion, the question of *tense form choice* which I address here is one which should properly be asked *before* (or at least alongside) the

¹¹E.g., McKay, *New Syntax*, p. 29, n. 1. See Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 129 for a graphic overview of these categories (states—actions>activities—performances, etc.).

¹²Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 85.

¹³Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, p. 87. Interestingly, in the same work Porter calls for the evaluation of the role of lexis in verbal aspect in several places (pp. 87; 96–97 and 184), but he does not develop this thought.

¹⁴In my understanding, what drives Porter’s work and his criticism of Fanning is his search for a perfectly coherent system within Greek verbal aspect “with all the working parts functioning together” (Porter, “In Defense of Verbal Aspect,” in *Biblical Greek Language*, p. 45). However, I simply believe that living languages are full of inconsistencies which defy perfectly symmetrical (or systemic) modeling—*imperfect* modeling perhaps! The Greek of the New Testament in particular, with its variegated history and influences, is full of such inconsistencies and caprices. This comes out particularly in the fact that I do not agree with Porter, for example, that the aorist is the “unmarked” or less marked verb form across the board. The aorist is marked in some constructions and contexts, but not in others. See below for discussion of how this bears on Greek infinitive usage.

development of a general theory of Greek verbal aspect. The thesis—really, the *theses*—of this paper may support one theory or another, but for now I simply hope to establish the accuracy of my analysis, which, I find, is of immediate and important help for exegetes who are wrestling with the significance of a particular verbal tense form in a particular context.

Put succinctly, my central concern revolves around the discovery of the factors which influenced an author’s tense form choice in the non-indicative moods. This requires that we detect the *grammatical system* (“*langue*,” Saussure) which guided an author’s choice of tense form in a particular situation, including those places where no set form was required. As far as I have found, this issue has not been investigated extensively by any of the participants in the current debate themselves nor by other Greek scholars.¹⁵ But it deserves focused attention.¹⁶

Groundwork and Assumptions

It is best to explain certain presuppositions and to define some terms before going further. First, I will here discuss tense form selection factors for the Greek non-indicative moods only: the infinitive, subjunctive, imperative, participle, and optative mood forms.¹⁷ The indicative mood must be analyzed along different lines at least partly because of the interference of the factor of tense. In my opinion, most of the work in verbal aspect to date applies most directly to the indicative, and only indirectly to the non-indicative moods. Hence, the following is one of my key working assumptions and is well supported by the evidence: each mood must be treated separately as operating according to independent, though analogous sets of principles affecting tense form choice.¹⁸ Failure to treat the various moods discretely has led to assertions about tense

¹⁵This does not mean that scholars are unaware of the issue. For example, see Porter’s definition: “Greek verbal aspect is a synthetic semantic category (realized in the forms of verbs) used of meaningful oppositions in a network of tense systems to grammaticalize the author’s *reasoned subjective choice* of conception of a process” (*Verbal Aspect*, p. 88; emphasis added). And Fanning’s work does address this point indirectly, but at length. Stork’s *Aspectual Usage* does address the idea of tense form choice in Herodotus.

¹⁶Note especially the remark by Moises Silva: “Neither Fanning nor Porter takes sufficient account of the fact that, quite frequently, aspectual choices may be greatly restricted by a variety of factors, such as the grammatical system itself” in “A Response to Fanning and Porter on Verbal Aspect,” in Porter and Carson, *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics*, 74–82; quote from p. 79. My efforts here attempt to uncover such “variety of factors” in the Greek “grammatical system.”

¹⁷We will only discuss the optative in passing, because it is relatively rare in the New Testament and follows easily understandable lines. For the sake of brevity I will refer to the Greek infinitive and participle as *moods* here, although they technically do not qualify as such. I will generally use older terminology found in standard grammars merely to accommodate to the terms with which most people are still familiar.

¹⁸For example, in one short verse we find three tense forms in four forms: “Ὡστε ὁ δοκῶν [present] ἐστάναι [perfect] βλέπω [present] μὴ πέση [aorist] (1 Cor. 10:12). In my analysis, each these forms conforms to standard lines of usage for its mood. Paul is not just choosing forms arbitrarily.

and aspect which are undercut, in my mind, by examples drawn indiscriminately from the various moods without careful consideration of the factors influencing the tense form selection process for each particular mood.¹⁹ In short, *we must analyze Greek moods separately in any discussion relating to verbal aspect*. The main purpose of this paper is to present the underlying principles guiding tense form selection in the New Testament for each non-indicative mood.

Secondly, I assume that the inherent lexical meaning of a verb sometimes plays a key role in tense form choice. As the sketch of the current debate above indicates, I am indebted to Buist Fanning's work for this idea. My exact schema, however, does utilize a more simplified taxonomy of inherent meanings as will be discussed shortly.

Thirdly, we are dealing with elements of the grammatical structure of the Greek language and therefore with features which do not easily change over time. In contrast, for instance, lexemes in any language may experience metasemasia (changes in meaning) relatively quickly.²⁰ This means that even when we take stylistic, personal, regional, or dialectal variance into consideration, we should be able to discern the same factors influencing Greek tense form choice throughout the ancient period, not just in the New Testament period. Neither I nor anyone else has done a thorough, statistical job in this area yet; however, my reading in Greek authors from Xenophon (fourth century BC) to Athanasius (fourth century AD) have convinced me of the general reliability of my approach so far.²¹

Fourthly, I should also mention that I am dealing almost exclusively here with the present and aorist forms of the various non-indicative moods—the perfect and future tense forms will receive only cursory treatment at the end. The present and aorist “tenses” account for the vast majority of non-indicative tense forms of interest and stand in bipolar opposition in the structure of the Greek verb system. For example, the 38 perfect and 5 future infinitives in the New Testament compare with over 2,000 instances of the present and aorist infinitive forms.

Finally, the terms which need definition follow in alphabetical order.

¹⁹For example, J. W. Voelz is particularly susceptible to this in his essay: “Present and Aorist Verbal Aspect: A New Proposal,” *Neotestamentica* 27 (1993) 153-64.

²⁰Easy sources for examples in this regard are the original King James and the New King James versions (which correspond in time separation about as much as Xenophon does with Paul). We find the same basic syntax operating in both translations even amidst so many lexical differences. E.g., “Now *as touching* things offered *unto* idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge *puffeth* up, but *charity edifieth*” (KJV); “Now *concerning* things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge *puffs* up, but *love edifies*” (NKJV) (1 Cor. 8:1).

²¹The work of Peter Stork (“Aspectual Usage of the Dynamic Infinitive in *Herodotus*”) is of particular interest in this regard. I also should note that future work in the LXX in connection with tense form choice will be quite important, despite the fact that the various translators show such wide variance in their facility with tense form choice factors. This element in Greek, being rather subtle and not represented in Semitic languages, undoubtedly took a considerable amount of time to master. Some LXX translators did not seem to have done very well in this regard (e.g., Joel).

Argument: Elements in a statement which compose information essential to the full expression of a verb form. For instance, a clause making up indirect discourse is the “argument” of the lead verb of communication.

Aspectual Nuance (or just Nuance): The tense form when it is *not* default and is therefore “marked,” communicates a nuance of verbal aspect. These nuances are the ideas covered in most standard treatments of Greek verbs; for instance, for the present stem forms: customary, conative, inchoative, or progressive action; for the aorist stems: inceptive (or ingressive), simple (or “complexive”), and consummative action.²² This paper does not add anything new to the analysis of verbal aspect proper, so one should read it along with the standard treatments. Here we are solely concerned with the question: *How can we know that these nuances were intended by a Greek author in a particular statement?*

Default Forms: The tense form endorsed by the conventions of Greek tense form usage. The specific conventions influencing tense form choice are the subject of this essay. This concept is nearly synonymous with the term, the “unmarked” form (in opposition to the “marked” form) as long as one understands that the “markedness” of forms varies in different linguistic situations and that there may even be varying degrees of markedness.²³

Event: Any state, relationship or action to which a verb form refers.²⁴ Events can be broadly sub-divided into atelic and telic events (see below).

Lexeme: The basal form of a word considered without reference to its various morphological transformations. Similar to the common term “lexical form,” though, technically, a lexical form also serves as an inflected form. Hence, sample verbal lexemes are: βάλλω, ἔρχομαι, ἔχω, δίδωμι, φοβέομαι, κτλ.

Lexical Determination: When a verb is missing particular tense forms, its realizations in the only form possible are said to be lexically determined. For instance, εἶναι is lexically determined because no aorist or perfect forms exist in the NT for the infinitive of εἶμι (even though γένεσθαι might be appropriated as this verb’s virtual aorist form).

²²See, e.g., Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 513–86.

²³See Porter’s definition of marked forms given in note 9 above.

²⁴There is no satisfactory term in English for this concept. Compare Rijksbaron’s “states of affairs” as “a cover term for ‘that which is expressed by a predication’ (=roughly: a verb form and its arguments, e.g., subject and object)” in *Syntax and Semantics*, p. 3, n. 4. The verb’s “argument” (complements or other essential components) may also be included as the reference of my term *event*.

Lexical Factor: The inherent character of the event referenced by a verb form. The older term *Aktionsart* (German, “kind of action”) approximated this idea, but it has been defined so differently by different scholars that I no longer use it.

Realization: The expression of a verb form with all its attendant parts in a context. For instance, εὐρηκέναι is the realization of the lexeme εὐρίσκω in Rom. 4:1.

Statement: Any utterance, either oral or written, which forms a unit of discourse bearing upon the tense form choice of a verb form. This includes one word ejaculations to complete paragraphs (and beyond in some cases). Usually, a statement consists of a sentence or two.

Tense Form: The form of any verb which communicates tense or aspect (present, aorist, etc.). I do not mean to imply that these forms necessarily communicate “tense” in every case. “Aspect form” could also be used, but I have chosen a term which communicates easily with most students of Greek.

The Key Factors

It is time to introduce the main factors which influenced Greek tense form choice in a general way. Perhaps it would be useful to remind you of our precise question. In the following examples, ask yourself why the authors varied the tense forms in these places:

- ✧ ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, “As for me, *to live* is Christ and *to die* is gain” (Phil. 1:21).
- ✧ πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἐὰν εἴπωσιν ὑμῖν ποιήσατε καὶ τηρεῖτε, κατὰ δὲ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν μὴ ποιεῖτε, “So then, *do* and *keep* everything they tell you, but *do not act* according to their deeds” (Matt 23:3).
- ✧ χαίρομεν καὶ ἀγαλλιῶμεν καὶ δώσωμεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῷ, “*Let us rejoice* and *be glad* and *give* glory to him” (Rev 19:7).
- ✧ ὅς δ’ ἂν ἔχη τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ θεωρῇ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα καὶ κλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, “Whoever *has* the world’s goods and *sees* his brother in need and *shuts off* his compassion from him . . .” (1 John 3:17).
- ✧ ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ’ ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον, “in order that everyone who believes in him *might not perish* but *have* eternal life” (John 3:16).
- ✧ τοῖς ἔργοις πιστεύετε, ἵνα γνῶτε καὶ γινώσκητε ὅτι ἐν ἐμοὶ ὁ πατὴρ καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ, “Believe my works, in order that *you might learn* and *know* that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father” (John 10:38).

These examples were chosen because they alternate between present and aorist forms in parallel constructions. The last example (John 10:38) has both tense forms of the same verb. Hence, *something* caused a variation of form here. What?

My analysis of tense form choice involves a variety of key issues which vary according to the different moods. There is one obvious consideration, though, which cuts across all of the non-indicative moods: “lexical determination” which we discuss next.

Lexical Determination

Some few verbs have only one non-indicative tense form making them “lexically determined.” This means that an author had no choice of form to use in the statement, hence we as interpreters should not draw verbal aspect nuances from these forms. The lexically determined form is necessarily “default” and semantically “unmarked.”

For example, εἰμί has no aorist infinitive in the Greek morphological system (only εἶναι)²⁵ and οἶδα has no truly present infinitive (only εἰδέναι). Hence, it would be overdoing things to interpret εἶναι or εἰδέναι as having any “continuative” or “linear” significance beyond the idea already communicated lexically. Other verbs, like ἀγαπάω, ἔχω, or ζάω have aorist forms available in Greek (ἀγαπήσαι, σχεῖν, ζῆσαι), even though only the present forms (ἀγαπᾶν, ἔχειν, ζῆν) occur in the New Testament. While these verbs should not be pressed for interpretive nuance, they are technically not lexically determined.²⁶ When analyzing statistical work on tense form usage in Greek, one should note these lexically determined forms, since they often constitute exceptions to the general patterns and should thus be removed from the pool.

Several of the non-indicative moods (and the indicative to some extent) are also influenced to at least some degree by another important factor: the inherent character of the lexeme’s referent. This idea has been floating around among Greek scholars for quite some time connected to the German term *Aktionsart* (“kind of action”). Let us discuss these two points in reverse order.

A Note on *Aktionsart*

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, scholars have reflected on how the nature in which an event occurs—usually referred to by the often-misunderstood term *Aktionsart*—relates to verbal aspect. As mentioned, I do not use the term *Aktionsart* for a variety of reasons, but principally because it is sometimes confused with “aspect” in our literature as referring to the *description* of an event as progressive, momentary, etc.

²⁵Disregarding, of course, the future infinitive of εἰμί (ἔσσεσθαι) found four times in the New Testament. The aorist forms of γίνομαι (γένεσθαι) were employed as virtual aorists of εἰμί.

²⁶Some other verbs which occur only in their present tense infinitive forms in the New Testament are: ἀγνοεῖν, δουλεύειν, δύνασθαι, ἐργάζεσθαι, μνημονεύειν, φοβεῖσθαι, and φρονεῖν. Cf. John Thorley, “Aktionsart in New Testament Greek: Infinitive and Imperative,” *NouT* (1989): 290–315, esp. pp. 310–11.

Furthermore, even when Aktionsart is properly distinguished from verbal aspect, scholars often describe the various “kinds of actions” as “objective” (and aspect as “subjective”) which is problematic. Describing *Aktionsart* as “objective” misses the point that we can only be dealing with the *perception* of the nature of various events by the Greek-speaking community. This communal perception and intuitive classification of events into “kinds of actions” makes for a situation much more complicated and less “objective” than the precipitate announcement of “*Aktionsartige*” categories allows. One lexeme may refer to a variety of different types of events. Or one Greek speaker may intuitively classify a lexeme’s referent as one type of *Aktionsart* according to his own instincts, while another as a different type. And furthermore, a rigid classification into *Aktionsartige* categories does not allow terms to change over time, to be subject to regional differences in perception of events, or to be subject to authorial puzzlement over the proper *Aktionsartig* compartmentalization of rare terms. And even more important for our purposes, we cannot assume that *our* perception of the inherent character of a certain event necessarily matches that of the ancient Greeks.²⁷ It is for this reason that I distinguish the taxonomy of inherent meanings from the older *Aktionsartig* discussion.²⁸

Inherent Meaning: The Atelic/Telic Distinction

The following consideration was often a key element in the choice of a tense form in all the moods (including the indicative on rare occasions). Events, because of the natural character of how they come to pass can be divided into two main classes relevant for Greek tense form choice: atelic (“unbounded”) and telic (“bounded”). *Atelic* relates to a verb referent which is a state of being, a condition, a relationship, or even a certain kind of action that has no natural terminus implied in its being or accomplishment. On the other hand, a *telic* verb—always an action, never a state—refers to an action which does have an understood terminus, whether it takes some discernible amount of time (“performance”) or not (“punctual”) to perform this act. The following chart (with explanations to follow) illustrates this taxonomy of events.

²⁷This is borne out to me annually when I ask Greek students how we should classify ἁμαρτάνω in First John. Most of them inevitably say that this is a *stative* verb, because “sin” is a state of being in their minds (they are really thinking of *being guilty*). I point out that John undoubtedly conceived of an instance of ἁμαρτάνω as referring to a discrete act—a “performance” not a state—because “sin is an act of transgression of a divine commandment” to freely paraphrase 1 John 3:4 and other texts.

²⁸For insightful points on the necessarily subjective nature of Aktionsart, see Carl Bache, “Aspect and Aktionsart: Towards a Semantic Distinction,” *Journal of Linguistics* 18 (1982): 57–72, or the review of his conclusions in Fanning, “Approaches to Verbal Aspect,” pp. 50–51.

Let me also gratefully mention that the original stimulus for my understanding of the inherent lexical character of verbs came from Fanning’s *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* and Rijksbaron’s *Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek*

Events:**ATELIC:**

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. Stative (states and relationships) | —State |
| 2. Activity (actions with no inherent termination) | —Action |

TELIC:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 3. Performance (bounded actions with perceived duration) | —Action |
| 4. Punctual (bounded actions with little perceivable duration) | —Action |

ATELIC, Stative: A stative verb is a condition or relationship (personal, temporal, or local) of the subject of the verb. Thus a stative verb refers not to what someone *does* (an action) but to what someone *is* or to a *relationship* the subject has with someone or something else. One way to distinguish a stative verb from an action is to ask whether any exertion of will is involved; with states there is none, with actions there is. And a formal characteristic of stative verbs of condition is that they do not take a direct object (versus a predicate nominative); whereas a stative verb of relationship may have such an object with whom or with which the relationship exists. Examples of verbs with stative meanings are: εἰμί “I am”; ἀσθενέω “I am sick”; ζῶω “I am alive”; φοβέομαι “I am afraid”; κοιμάομαι “I am asleep.” These stative verbs denote a state or condition of the subject and do not take a direct object. In some cases, an idiomatic phrase may need to be considered as a whole: ἔχω ἐν γαστρὶ “I am pregnant” is a condition (and a relationship between a woman and a child), likewise κακῶς ἔχω “I am sick” is stative. Verbs of relationship are: ἀγαπάω “I love”; μισέω “I hate”; πιστεύω “I am believing (in)” (a relationship between people or between a person and a proposition); ἔχω “I have” (a relation between a person and an object); πλουτέω “I am rich” (a relation between a possessor and wealth); (κατ)οικέω “I am dwelling” and πάρεμι “I am present” (relationships of location).

ATELIC, Activity: Activities are viewed as having no set limit for their completion (“unbounded”).²⁹ For example: περιπατέω “I am walking”; ἐσθίω “I am eating”; λέγω and λαλέω “I am talking”; κηρύσσω “I am preaching”; ποιέω “I am doing”; ἀναγινώσκω “I am reading.” In many contexts there is no termination of these actions communicated by the verb itself.

TELIC, Performance: A performance is an action that is limited (“bounded”) in that it includes its climax, conclusion, or termination. The terminus, however, occurs after some perceived duration of the action, versus a “punctual” which has little or no perceivable duration. For example, ἀνοίγω “I open”; δίδωμι “I give”; ἐτοιμάζω “I prepare”; καλέω “I call” ἐνδύομαι “I get dressed”; in all instances these actions are naturally terminated after an understood interval.

TELIC, Punctual: Punctuals are done in a moment without taking any perceived or significant time duration for the action. For example, ἀγοράζω “I buy”; βάλλω “I throw”; πίπτω “I fall”; εὐρίσκω “I find.” Fanning’s term for the last example is “climax,” since “finding” is preceded by searching (others call it a “prefixed” bounded action).³⁰ I

²⁹ Cf. McKay (*New Syntax*, pp. 28-29) where he speaks about “activities which are, or are very like, states of being.”

³⁰See Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 155.

have subsumed climaxes under punctuals, because in practice they both influence tense form choice in the same way.

The difference between an *atelic* event and a *telic* event is best demonstrated by example. But first, here is an important preliminary observation: *atelic verbs are often expressed in present tense forms and telic verbs in aorist tense forms*. (This will be discussed later in the survey of each mood.) Now our example:

- ✧ καλόν μοι **ἀποθανεῖν** εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, ἢ **βασιλεύειν** τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς, “It is better for me *to die* in Christ Jesus than *to be king* over the ends of the earth” (Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans*, 6.1; LCL translation).

The two infinitives are in a parallel construction as subject nominatives, a construction which allows inherent lexical meaning to play the leading role in tense form selection. ἀποθνήσκω refers to dying as a telic event (rather than as the state of being dead or as the process preceding death). We note that Ignatius chose the aorist tense form for this telic verb. βασιλεύω is either stative, referring to a political relationship, or to an atelic activity of exercising rule as king; we note the present tense form choice by Ignatius. Hence, these verbs represent the telic and atelic types of verbs respectively, and, as we will see, the choice of different tense forms was made because of the different inherent nature of each verb.³¹

A potentially confusing thing about the atelic/telic distinction is that one lexeme may point to more than one kind of event.³² Hence we cannot say that ἔχω is a stative verb (e.g., ἔχω ἐν γαστρὶ “I am pregnant”) when it can also communicate an action (“I hold onto”). Likewise, we cannot say that ποιέω is an atelic verb (“I am doing”—and *activity*) when sometimes it is telic (“I make something”—a *performance*).³³ As you may imagine, a tense form used with these verbs will often act in conjunction with these various meanings to indicate which one an author had in mind. The atelic/telic character of a particular lexeme is quite often more complex than first meets the eye, and we must be open to the possibility that sometimes the inherent nature of events may have been perceived differently by different Greek speakers or writers and that the ancient Greeks may have viewed some events differently than we do.³⁴

³¹The statistics for ἀποθνήσκω in the NT and LXX follow the pattern illustrated here: P(resent) = 13; A(orist) = 65 (aorist predominates for the telic verb); for βασιλεύω: P = 41; A = 26 (present predominates for the atelic verb).

³²The same point is made by Sicking and Stork: “[O]ne and the same verb, according to its context, can refer to Situations of a different type: e.g., *drank* in *he drank water* refers to a durative [=atelic] Situation, in *he drank a glass of water* to a terminative [= telic] Situation”; C. M. J. Sicking and P. Stork, “The Synthetic Perfect in Classical Greek,” in *Two Studies in the Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek* (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1996) 124.

³³See also: ἐσθίω (“I eat”), πίνω (“I drink”), and sometimes νηστεύω (“I fast”) which have this same sort of ambiguity accounting for interesting tense form data.

³⁴This comes home from time to time when researching the frequency of tense forms. For instance, I first thought of φεύγω (“I flee”) as an atelic (activity) type verb, but in the NT and LXX the aorist infinitive form for φεύγω occurs 20 times compared with 6 present forms. This possibly suggests that the Greeks regarded φεύγω as a telic verb rather than an unbounded process.

I do not want to get deflected into a too theoretical sidetrack. But let me mention that it is extremely difficult in many cases to determine whether the distinct meaning of some verbs is a function of inherent lexical semantics or of verbal aspect proper. This is particularly the case with an atelic “activity” verb which might be limited by contextual features so that it functions as a virtual telic verb.³⁵ The atelic manifestation occurs in the lexeme’s present tense forms and the telic in its aorist tense forms. Is this because the verb has two distinct meanings (atelic and telic) or because there is an aspectual nuance playing on one meaning? It is impossible to establish with absolute certainty. Suffice it to say that there is a complex interaction of aspect and inherent lexis which must be carefully interpreted in each case.

Another point to mention and also to stress before proceeding is that the Greeks had an intuitive sense of the atelic/telic distinction which manifested itself in their tense form choices.³⁶ This makes the preceding taxonomy not an imposition of foreign ideas on their language, but a description of a key, intuitively understood factor affecting their use of Greek. The evidence for this is widespread and convincing, some little part of which is presented below in the discussion of the various factors affecting tense form choices in the various moods.

Textual Variation

One interesting piece of evidence which should be exploited further for the analysis of tense form choice is the value of variant readings for understanding the formal expectations in certain situations. There are situations we will discuss below, where one particular tense form is expected as the normal (the “default” or “unmarked”) form. However, when an author goes against the expectations directed by the underlying rules of Greek usage for some reason, the scribes sometimes changed this form to the one they expected. Whether these changes were accidental or intentional is not important. What is important, is that such variants indicate clearly that there *were* expectations of tense form usage which Greek speakers intuitively understood. To go against the grain of these expectations for whatever reason (allusion to another text like the LXX, subtle nuance of verbal aspect, idiolect, etc.) meant “marking” one’s form in the Greek speaking community. (And, of course, these are the forms most interesting for exegesis.)

³⁵For instance: δός μοι **πείν**, “Give me (something) *to drink*, please” (John 4:7) is telic; μή γὰρ οἰκίας οὐκ ἔχετε εἰς τὸ ἐσθίειν καὶ **πίνειν**; “Don’t you have houses for eating and *drinking*?!” (1 Cor. 11:22) is atelic. The opposite process of moving from telic verb to (characteristic) atelic meaning can also be observed. For instance: ἔρχεται γυνὴ ἐκ τῆς Σαμαρείας **ἀντλήσαι** ὕδωρ, “A Samaritan woman came *to draw* water” (John 4:7) is telic; κύριε, δός μοι τοῦτο τὸ ὕδωρ, ἵνα μὴ διψῶ μηδὲ διέρχωμαι ἐνθάδε **ἀντλεῖν**, “Sir, please give me this water that I will not get thirsty any more and have to keep coming back here *to draw* (water)” (John 4:15) is atelic (iterative or customary).

³⁶A. Rijksbaron’s in *Aristotle, Verb Meaning and Functional Grammar: Towards a New Typology of States of Affairs* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1989), makes a good case that this basic kind of distinction was understood by Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, Book Θ, on the distinction between κινήσεις and ἐνέργειαι; see especially the handy chart in Rijksbaron, p. 15), though no ancient Greek author explicitly wrote about tense form choice in their language.

Let me illustrate with but one example. As we will discuss, μέλλω clearly expects the *present* form of the infinitive as its complement (a ratio of 84 : 7 in the NT). But in Acts 12:6 we read: ὅτε δὲ ἤμελλεν προαγαγεῖν αὐτὸν ὁ Ἡρώδης, “Now when Herod *intended to lead him forth*. . . .” Interestingly this aorist reading is found in \mathfrak{P}^{74} , A, 453, and a handful of other mss., but most manuscripts have the present form προσάγειν or προάγειν (B, 33 and a few other mss. have προσαγαγεῖν). One can easily conjecture that the *lectio difficilior* προαγαγεῖν is original and those scribes who anticipated the present form after ἤμελλεν conformed Luke’s aorist infinitive to their expectation.³⁷ One finds the same sort of evidence in other variant readings where the atelic/telic expectation for a lexeme to be expressed in one tense form or another causes variants to occur.

Conflicting Situations

When a situation arises where, for example, the construction calls for a present tense form but the event is telic (normally preferring aorist forms), the author obviously had to make a difficult choice: the default form might not be entirely clear to him or to his readers. Now we can speculate that if this situation arose enough times, the Greek language community resolved it one way or another and everyone understood which form was “proper.”

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge the fact that there may have arisen situations when the biblical authors were not trying to express a special aspectual nuance—i.e., they wanted to use the default form—but were unsure of the “proper” form to use. We must also acknowledge once more that there may be many situations which were flexible and therefore allowed things like one’s style, levels of formality of the discourse, or euphony, to govern certain tense form choices, again without communicating a special aspectual nuance. The analysis I will give does not focus on these types of situations, but rather on those where we can discern clear grammatical “rules” influencing the choice, but it is worth mentioning these important considerations for the reader’s further reflection. Greek verbal aspect is a very subtle part of speech, and it will not do to oversimplify our description of it even for the sake of clarity.

With these preliminary considerations out of the way, let us begin our examination of tense form choice factors in the non-indicative moods. We begin with the infinitive and then move to the subjunctive, which both display analogous underlying factors guiding the choice of tense forms.

³⁷The same type of variation occurs in Rev. 1:19 and 3:2 where μέλλω is followed by aorist infinitives.

CHAPTER TWO: Infinitive Tense Form Choice

Introduction

This chapter addresses only the narrow question of Greek infinitive use as it relates to tense form choice. The syntax of the infinitive in purpose clauses, result constructions and so forth, is not discussed; consult the standard grammars for information on infinitive syntax.¹

When an English writer faces a syntactical situation which calls for an active infinitive there is one basic form to use, the simple infinitive: “to do,” “to fall,” “to sleep,” “to be silent,” etc. If some particular nuance is desired, the English speaker must employ a periphrastic construction consisting of the infinitive of an auxiliary verb and a participle (or “gerund”) of the target verb: “to be doing” (simple or progressive), “to start doing” (inceptive), “to keep doing” (continuative), or more complicated, “to have been doing.”

The Greek writer, in contrast, has three active infinitive forms at his disposal for most verbs without the need for periphrasis: ποιεῖν (present), ποιῆσαι (aorist), and πεποιηκέναι (perfect).² As I pointed out earlier, general treatments of Greek verbs too often make it appear that the choice between these three forms was also made in order to bring out some aspectual nuance: ποιεῖν, “to be continually doing”; ποιῆσαι, “to do once or as a summary whole”; and πεποιηκέναι, “to have done.” In reality, though, the choice between the various tense forms of the infinitive was complicated by certain factors which guided Greek usage. In some cases, for instance, the present tense infinitive form was “default” and therefore carried no continuative (or “linear”) nuance. The factors of infinitive tense form selection are what we will cover now; though, again, here we will elucidate only the choice between the present and the aorist infinitive forms; the perfect form receives separate treatment in Chapter Six.

I have found that the following five factors guided a Greek writer or speaker in the choice between present and aorist infinitive tense form: (1) the verb is lexically determined—no choice exists; (2) the inherently atelic/telic character of the event; (3) the demand of some constructions for one tense form or the other; (4) communication of relative time (tense) in indirect discourse; and (5) the author is communicating an aspectual nuance. Note that sometimes, exegetes jump immediately to point number five when looking at a Greek verb form. However, a nuance should be considered *only after the first four factors have been evaluated*. If the tense form is *default*, no nuance can be established safely. We now turn to these factors in the order just given.

¹Wallace, pp. 587–611; Young, Chapter 11; Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, §§361-417; BDF §§388-410; cf. my *Primer* §26.6 and *First John Reader*, Chapter 10.

²The rare future infinitive (λύσειν and πορεύσεσθαι) occurs five times in the NT and is discussed later.

Lexical Determination Factor

Let me remind you that if a form has only one tense form of the infinitive in use, this factor alone determined a Greek author's choice of form. There was no choice! Hence, no special interpretive conclusions should be drawn out of these forms. For example, εἶμι has no aorist infinitive (only εἶναι)³ and οἶδα has no truly present infinitive (only εἰδέναι). Hence, it would be wrong to interpret εἶναι as having any "continuative" or "linear" emphasis in any of its occurrences or εἰδέναι as having any aoristic nuance. Other verbs, like ἀγαπάω, ἔχω, or ζάω have aorist forms available in Greek (ἀγαπήσαι, σχεῖν, and ζῆσαι), but only the present forms (ἀγαπᾶν, ἔχειν, ζῆν) actually occur in the New Testament; they should likewise not be pressed for interpretive nuance.⁴

Inherent Atelic/Telic Nature Factor

As I sketched out above, events inherently have a certain diverse character to them. Some events are static states, conditions, or relationships. In some languages, verbs which refer to these kinds of events are marked out differently from telic actions with an inherent termination point. For instance, Hebrew has a stative verb vowel pattern which differs from that of active verbs.⁵ The Greek language recognized this basic difference between "atelic" events (both states and activities) and "telic" events (both performances and punctuals) by showing a preference under certain conditions for the present or the aorist tense form in the infinitive. Here is the pattern we can discern:

*Verbs referring to events which the Greeks felt were **atelic** in nature tend toward **present** tense infinitive forms.* For example:

<i>Atelic Infinitives:</i>	<i>Present NT/LXX</i>	<i>Aorist NT/LXX</i>
ἀγαπάω	8/19	0/6
βασιλεύω	1/40	2/24
διδάσκω	13/2	3/8
δουλεύω	7/19	0/1
ἐργάζομαι	6/14	0/3
ἔχω	30/23	0/0
ζάω	12/35	0/4
περιπατέω	10/0	2/0
ὑπάρχω	6/11	0/0
φοβέομαι	1/23	0/2
Total	280	55

³Disregarding, of course, the future infinitive of εἶμι (ἔσσεσθαι) found four times in the NT. See Chapter Six.

⁴Some other (atelic) verbs which occur only in their present tense infinitive forms in the New Testament are: ἀγνοεῖν, δουλεύειν, δύνασθαι, ἐργάζεσθαι, μνημονεύειν, φοβεῖσθαι, and φρονεῖν.

⁵E.g., the *sere* under the second consonant marks a stative verb in the Qal stem: לָגַל.

There are some inconsistencies and ambiguities in this raw data which I will explain in a bit. However note that if we removed βασιλεύω and διδάσκω from this list, the tendency illustrated here would be even more pronounced (P = 224; A = 18). When this pattern was established in Greek usage, there was probably a feeling that there was a congruence between certain kinds of verbs and the general significance of the present aspect. In any case, there is a marked tendency for atelic verbs (of any sort) to appear in their *present* tense forms in Greek.⁶ The corollary of this pattern is next.

Verbs referring to events which the Greeks felt were telic in nature tend toward aorist tense infinitive forms. Just as events which are inherently atelic in meaning are normally referred to by verbs in their present infinitive forms, *telic* verbs—performances, punctuals, or any other type one can conceive of—tend to be expressed in their *aorist* forms in Greek. For example:

	<i>Present</i>	<i>Aorist</i>
<i>Telic Infinitives:</i>	<i>NT/LXX</i>	<i>NT/LXX</i>
ἀγοράζω	0/3	3/4
ἀποθνήσκω	5/8	16/49
βάλλω	1/2	12/1
δίδωμι	6/13	38/c. 150
ἐτοιμάζω	0/2	4/11
–λαμβάνω	4/4	22/35
–πέμπω	0/1	3/6
πίπτω	0/0	1/13
–στρέφω	9/15	6/96
σώζω	3/14	23/37
Total	90	530

I should clarify some points about the data just presented which may or may not be obvious at first glance. One must go beyond the statistical listing with each verb to explain its occurrences in the unexpected form. For example, I evaluate ἀποθνήσκω as a fairly rigid *telic* verb, since it does not have a wide range of meanings and its most common meaning refers to an event essentially limited in its temporal fulfillment as everyone understands. Since this is so, one expects this verb to occur in its *aorist* infinitive tense forms. Why, then, does ἀποθνήσκω occur at all in its *present* infinitive forms? All occurrences of ἀποθνήσκειν in the New Testament and three occurrences in the LXX are put as complements with μέλλω which, as we will see, requires a present tense form complement. The other LXX occurrences of ἀποθνήσκειν can also be evaluated as determined by the construction. “Interference” of conflicting factors of this sort in tense form choice will occupy us more fully below.

⁶I will occasionally refer to “atelic verbs” (or to “telic verbs”) where the reader must understand: “verbs which refer to events which are inherently atelic (or telic) in nature.” A verb or a lexeme may refer to a number of different kinds of events, even to both atelic and telic events, within its semantic range. So a verb itself is neither atelic or telic—the referenced event is; but I will use the terms “atelic verb” and “telic verb” as shorthand on occasion.

Furthermore, we can posit in the case of the LXX that the subtleties of Greek tense form usage were not well understood by some of the translators, who sometimes evidence only a tentative grasp of Greek. Different tense forms in the infinitive are foreign to Hebrew and to Aramaic, and tense form usage in Greek would have required a considerable fluency to master. Finally, some of the variation in the statistics reported were caused by authors expressing aspectual nuances (conative, impending, inceptive, etc.). Hence we should expect *some* exceptions to the atelic/telic patterns!

Atelic/Telic Default Forms

Despite these qualifications of the data above, one can still see quite clearly in the statistical patterns that the inherent character of an event played a key role in tense form selection (alongside possible demands of the construction explained below). This means that when certain lexemes refer to an atelic event they have the present infinitive as their default or unmarked form; and likewise telic verbs have aorist infinitives as their default form. (In both cases “interference” from other factors must also be kept in mind.) Note in particular that, even though grammarians may confidently assert that the aorist is uniformly the unmarked form in the Greek verb system, this does not prove to be the case. The present is “unmarked” in those constructions where that tense form was expected and vice versa. Where the present form was expected, the aorist is more marked. But neither form was uniformly marked in all situations.

This notion of default forms or of tense form markedness is of genuine interest for biblical interpreters for determining when one can legitimately understand an aspectual nuance in a particular context. Default forms, as aspectually less marked than the other options, carries the minimum of aspectual information. Hence, we cannot stress these particular infinitives in our interpretation of the biblical texts where they occur. Here are a few examples which illustrate the principles of default tense forms we have been discussing.

- ✧ ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, “As for me, *to live* is Christ and *to die* is gain” (Phil. 1:21).
- ✧ κρεῖσσων γὰρ . . . ἀποθανεῖν ἄτεκνον ἢ ἔχειν τέκνα ἀσεβῆ, “For it is better . . . *to die* childless than *to have* godless children” (Sir. 16:3).
- ✧ κρεῖσσον ἀποθανεῖν ἢ ἐπαιτεῖν, “It is better *to die* than *to be a beggar*” (Sir. 40:28)

In Phil. 1:21 above, we find present ζῆν and aorist ἀποθανεῖν in parallel constructions: subjects of predications. This particular construction plays no role in tense form selection, so we are dealing exclusively with lexical influence on the choice of form. “To live” or better, “to be alive” (ζῆν) is a classic stative (atelic) event, so much so that present ζῆν is found exclusively in the New Testament, even though aorist ζῆσαι does appear elsewhere in Greek. For Paul to have used the aorist form of *this* infinitive in this context would have “felt” unusual to a Greek reader in the same way that an English speaker would intuitively “feel” about the periphrastic infinitive constructions like “to begin to live” or “to come to life.” The aorist of a stative verb normally has an

inceptive (or “ingressive”) aspectual value when it is not default. Therefore, it would be wrong-headed to interpret the ζῆν in Phil. 1:21 as stressing the continuation of living or some other present aspect nuance like iteration or attempted state (conative).⁷

Correspondingly, ἀποθανεῖν in Phil. 1:21 refers to a classic telic event, so that the aorist is the default form. The interpreter would be wrong to emphasize it somehow. If Paul had expressed this verb in its present form here (ἀποθνήσκειν) it would have been quite unusual and would require careful interpretation. As it stands, there is nothing unusual in the fact that the telic verb ἀποθνήσκω is expressed as an aorist infinitive and that the atelic verb ζῶ is in its present infinitive form. The other two examples here (Sir.16:3; 14:28) also have aorist ἀποθανεῖν in constructions parallel with present forms of atelic verbs (ἔχειν and ἐπαιτεῖν, a stative and an activity verb respectively).

You should keep in mind that some Greek lexemes are more “flexible” and consequently allow quite a bit of freedom to the Greek writer: he may use either the present or the aorist infinitive form without any special nuance being intuited by the reader. With these verbs, there is no discernible reason for the tense choice beyond matters of style, euphony, essential synonymy of forms, or some other reason to be perceived in the context. For instance, ἀφιέναι “to forgive” (present) is used in Mark 2:7, but the parallel passage (Luke 5:21) has ἀφεῖναι (aorist) without any clear difference in meaning.⁸ The choice of form with some verbs may be subjective and arbitrary for the New Testament author.

Although one must be careful with English analogies for Greek grammar, consider the following two infinitive constructions in English to illustrate the possible synonymy of Greek tense forms: “I really ought *to go* now,” and “I really ought *to be going* now.” There is no discernible difference in meaning between “to go” and “to be going” that I, a native English speaker, can discern here. They are completely interchangeable. On the other hand, consider where there may be a discernible difference: “I really ought *to pay* my employees” and “I really ought *to be paying* my employees.” The first infinitive “to pay” may fit a context referring to a specific occasion: “I’m sorry, Frank, I have to go now. *I really ought to pay my employees* before they go home today.” On the other hand, the second infinitive “to be paying” fits a general situation or repeated occurrences of the action better: “James 5:4 says that, as an employer, *I really ought to be paying my employees* and not to withhold their wages.” We may see the same sort of synonymy with Greek tense forms.

Demands of the Construction

The third major factor affecting tense form selection, is the requirement of certain constructions for one tense form or the other. Appendix One below lists the most common infinitive constructions found in the New Testament and shows statistically where one form predominates over another, as well as those constructions which seem more flexible. In some cases, such as the complementary infinitive with ἄρχομαι or μέλλω, an author apparently had little choice but to use the present infinitive without

⁷Compare McKay’s rendering of this infinitive as “to go on living” (*New Syntax*, 56).

⁸We should note that present ἀφιέναι occurs as a variant in Luke 5:21 in the majority of mss. See above for the importance of textual variation for my theses.

making a grammatical *faux pas*, or, even more importantly for exegesis, without communicating an aspectual (descriptive) nuance (conative, perfective, inceptive, resultative, etc.) and hence “marking” the infinitive.⁹ For example, one expects to find τί μέλλεις ποιεῖν, “What are you going to do” (Acts 22:26 and Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1.2.25) in Greek usage but not τί μέλλεις ποιήσαι. Another example of this phenomena is illustrated here:

- ✧ ἔμελλον Ἰησοῦς ἀποθνήσκειν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἔθνους, “Jesus was *about to die* for the nation” (John 11:51).

We have just discussed telic ἀποθνήσκω as it was expressed in its aorist tense forms in three examples given above. The aorist was seen to be its default form because of the telic nature of this verb. In the New Testament, ἀποθνήσκω is found 16 times in its aorist infinitive form compared with 5 present tense forms.¹⁰ What is notable is that all five of these present infinitive forms act as complements of μέλλω as here in John 11:51. This leads to the conclusion that sometimes an infinitive construction will determine the choice of a tense form for a Greek author. Hence, even though ἀποθανεῖν is the default form generally, μέλλειν forces the use of ἀποθνήσκειν instead. Hence, ἀποθνήσκειν is now the default form because of the construction’s influence, so we may not derive any aspectual nuance from this particular infinitive.

The rigors of some constructions for tense form choice is a matter of the conventions of the Greek language itself. *Why* one used one form or another in a certain construction in many cases was merely a matter of convention and usage—what was “proper” Greek. Even if there is an aspectual rationale in the language’s murky past, an author may never have thought about it. One can just imagine a Greek child learning the ropes of infinitive usage in the following scenario:

Child: Μάμμη, σήμεραν ἤρξαμην τὸν ὑσσὸν βαλεῖν, “Mom! I started to throw (aorist infinitive) the javelin today!”

Mother: καλῶς, φίλε. ἀλλὰ λέγε Βάλλειν ἤρξαμην τὸν ὑσσὸν, “That’s nice, dear. But you should say: ‘I started to throw (present infinitive) the javelin.’”

Isn’t this how we learn grammatical conventions in natural languages today? The result of this kind of feature for us “outsiders” to Greek is that we must deduce the structural requirements of tense form selection from piles of data without the aid of the

⁹The seven instances where an aorist infinitive follows μέλλω (Acts 12:6; Rom. 8:18; Gal. 3:23; Rev. 1:19; 3:2; 3:16; 12:4) may represent a Septuagintalism where μέλλω and the aorist infinitive functions as periphrasis for the simple future indicative (e.g., Exod. 4:12; Isa. 15:7). The present infinitive is found with μέλλω in the LXX where the focus is more on the impending character of the event; e.g., αὐτὸς ἀποθνήσκειν μέλλων ἔφη, “. . . since he was about to die, he said. . .” (4 Macc. 12:15). See also μέλλειν ἔσεσθαι (future infinitive) in Acts 11:27 (cf. 2 Macc. 8:11).

¹⁰The LXX statistics are: P = 8; A = 49 for a total of P = 13; A = 65. This data was given in a table earlier.

kind of intuitive grasp of these features someone fluent in ancient Greek would have had through a trial and error process. (And, sadly, without the aid of Greek mothers!)

Corresponding to the demands of some constructions for a present form complement, an aorist infinitive may be default in infinitive constructions. For instance, the μετὰ τό construction occurs only with aorist infinitives in the New Testament.¹¹ Hence to write μετὰ τὸ βάλλειν would be unusual, perhaps even a solecism—μετὰ τὸ βαλεῖν would be default.

As Appendix One shows, of course, not all constructions are as rigid in their demands as are ἄρχομαι, μέλλω, or μετὰ τό.¹² In some cases the “flexibility” of these various constructions indicated by the statistics represents the influence of the atelic/telic character of the lexeme (discussed already) on the tense form choice of the infinitive. In other cases the statistics reveal the relatively small size of the New Testament corpus for this kind of research. And one must keep in mind that some infinitives in various constructions are *lexically determined*. Εἶναι, for instance, occurs some 124 times in the New Testament and the presence of this verb and of others like it skew these brute statistics. You must use the statistics in Appendix One as a *starting point* for orienting your analysis of a particular infinitive tense form.

Relative Time

All of the foregoing discussion and analysis established our understanding of the intuitive factors which acted upon Greek authors to guide their selection of default or unmarked tense forms in the infinitive. Lexical determination, inherent lexical influence, and requirements of some constructions are the key factors. I should at least mention also possible *relative time* (“tense”) considerations for infinitives in indirect discourse. Relative time is clearly not a semantic value of tense forms in the “dynamic” infinitives we have so far examined.¹³ Yet it is well known that the tense form of an infinitive in indirect discourse usually represents the tense form of an indicative (or other mood) original in direct speech, which the infinitive mirrors.¹⁴

¹¹The statistics are: P=0; A=14; Pf=0. A quick scan of the LXX showed only one present infinitive in the μετὰ τό construction, and the verb used was κάθημαι which has no aorist form; this compares with over 90 occurrences of the aorist infinitive.

¹²The perfect “tense” does not seem to be required by any construction in the same way. As you can see from Appendix One, the perfect infinitive was most commonly employed in indirect statement where temporal concerns may have played a key role.

¹³For “dynamic infinitive” Stork writes: “In order to neutralize the interference of this factor [tense] a distinction must be made between (a) the *oblique* infinitives that are part of *indirect speech* in the strict sense of the word, and (b) the infinitives that are *not* part of indirect speech in the strict sense of the word. These two types of infinitives are called here (a) the *declarative* infinitive as opposed to (b) the *dynamic* infinitive,” Stork, *Aspectual Usage*, 11 (all emphasis is original).

¹⁴This is disputed by Porter (*Verbal Aspect*, 388–90) yet this is, in my opinion, one more example of the inflexibility of his systemic aspect theory, which makes it less compelling in places. The infinitive cannot have this exceptional, “contradictory” temporal function—it is not even possible for Porter it seems—because it betrays his underlying aspect theory. Our theories

For instance, if the original speech was: εἶδον τὸ ζῷον, “I saw the animal,” then the indirect form is: εἶπεν αὐτὸν ἰδεῖν τὸ ζῷον, “He said that he saw the animal.” Likewise if a present tense is original: βλέπω τὸ ζῷον, “I see the animal,” then the indirect infinitive would use a present tense form: εἶπεν αὐτὸν βλέπειν τὸ ζῷον, “He said that he saw the animal.” (English usage does not allow this distinction.)

To my mind, the tense form was adapted to this use because of the peculiar characteristics of indirect discourse, and relative time is restricted to this construction for the Greek infinitive.¹⁵ What becomes particularly interesting for interpretation is when the indirect statement represents something like an original imperative. For instance, when Peter says to Jesus, κέλευσόν με ἔλθειν πρὸς σε ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα, “Command me *to come* to you on the water” (Matt. 14:28), then the original command (as Peter envisioned it) would be: ἔλθε πρὸς με (aorist) not ἔρχου πρὸς με (present). Now the analysis of the *aspectual* force of ἔλθειν in Matt. 14:28 really becomes a matter of understanding the function of the aorist tense form *in the imperative mood*, a mood in which tense forms never have temporal semantic value, only aspectual value. By the way, Jesus responded with ἔλθέ not ἔρχου (Matt. 14:29), confirming the propriety of Peter’s tense form choice!

Author’s Descriptive Choice

Granted that we have established the critical factors influencing the choice of the *default* form of an infinitive in most situations, we are finally in a position to put this knowledge to exegetical use. That is, after all, the whole point of our study! With my focus on tense form choice factors, we can now say: That form is not the expected default form, therefore the author is making an aspectually nuanced point. We have known for a long time that a certain present tense form might have a conative nuance or an aorist form might have an inceptive (or, ingressive) nuance, but we have not given students clear guidelines to know *when* they probably do and when they probably do not (beyond vague references to context). Thus the discussion of samples below will hopefully reveal the *how* of knowing that a nuance was intended by the Greek author.

The most obvious place where we may find certain nuances is where the general pattern of: atelic verb → present infinitive; telic verb → aorist infinitive, is broken. Hence an atelic verb in its aorist form (if there is one available in Greek for that verb) or a telic verb in its present form (if there is one) should be carefully noted and interpreted. However, we have already seen that the requirements of certain constructions, explains why some occurrences of infinitives break the atelic → present / telic → aorist expectation. In these cases, no particular nuance can be imputed to the author’s choice of infinitive form, since the syntax of Greek required one form or another.

As mentioned above, there are some places where the infinitive use allows either the present or the aorist to be used without rigid syntactical constraints. And if in such

must be more supple than this, “for man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion” (Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*).

¹⁵An exception is the future infinitive (Chapter Six). The infinitive tense forms in temporal constructions (πρὸ τοῦ, ἐν τῷ, μετὰ τό, πρὶν, κτλ.) still do not have temporal semantic value; that resides in the preposition or conjunction itself and the context.

places, the atelic → present / telic → aorist expectation is not followed, we can conclude that the author had some special nuance in mind. The possible “nuances” I have in mind are the standard ones (“continuative,” “iterative,” “inceptive,” etc.) found in our grammars. The following samples include discussion of the principles used to discern factors in tense form choice and each author’s intended nuance.¹⁶

How Do You Do?

- ✧ πιστεύετε ὅτι δύναμαι τοῦτο ποιῆσαι. “Do you believe that I can *do this thing*?” (Matt. 9:28).
- ✧ οὐδεὶς γὰρ δύναται ταῦτα τὰ σημεῖα ποιεῖν ἃ σὺ ποιεῖς, ἐὰν μὴ ἦ ὁ θεὸς μετ’ αὐτοῦ, “For no one can *be performing* these signs which you are doing, if God were not with him” (John 3:2).

When viewed in isolation, ποιέω may refer to an atelic activity: “to be engaged in a certain activity,” “to be doing something.” In the first example, “to do” (ποιῆσαι) refers to the performance of a specific act of healing in the context of Matthew 9. The aorist infinitive was chosen in Matt. 9:28 in opposition to the present infinitive (ποιεῖν) because the event was a performance of a discrete act. Hence we may regard ποιέω either as having both atelic and telic meanings or as having one meaning shaped in some places by aspect. In Matt. 9:28, it is clearly understood that after “this thing” was done, it was finished or terminated. The question is not a general question: “Do you believe that I can *do these kinds of things*?” In Greek, that idea would present the “doing” as an activity or characteristic behavior going on without any inherent termination, and it would thereby require the present infinitive: πιστεύετε ὅτι δύναμαι ταῦτα ποιεῖν. In this light, look at the second example where present ποιεῖν is found.

To Do The Law

- ✧ μαρτύρομαι δὲ πάλιν παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ ὅτι ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι, “Now I testify again to everyone who is about to be circumcised [impending nuance], that he is a debtor *to (completely) perform* the whole law” (Gal 5:3).
- ✧ Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν, ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν· γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά, “For as many as are from works of law are under a curse, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not remain in all those things written in the book of the law *to do* them’” (Gal 3:10).¹⁷

The first example has important doctrinal implications. Paul is alluding to the personal obligation imposed on Israel by the Mosaic law covenant to fulfill the

¹⁶See also the Excursus on ἀμαρτάνειν in 1 John 3:9 in my *First John Reader*, pp. 50–52.

¹⁷See also: μόνον τῶν πτωχῶν ἵνα μνημονεύωμεν, ὃ καὶ ἐσπούδασα αὐτὸ τοῦτο ποιῆσαι, “. . . except that we should remember the poor, and I was eagerto *do* this very thing” (Gal 2:10).

stipulated terms of the covenant under a sanction of death.¹⁸ This works element is expressed in the second example above (see also Gal 3:10) which contains ποιῆσαι.

Now, in my translation, I have interpreted ποιῆσαι in Gal 5:3 as carrying a “resultative” nuance. This means that by choosing the aorist infinitive here, Paul communicates to his readers that the man who receives circumcision must *fulfill* all the terms of the law—not just be engaged in doing portions of it as a process. This idea of engaged in law-deeds as a process would have been communicated by the present form ποιεῖν. (See the previous example for brief discussion of the inherent lexical nature of ποιέω.)

This provisional conclusion about the aspectual nuance of ποιῆσαι in Gal 5:3 could be challenged if it could be shown that an epexegetical infinitive with the noun ὀφειλέτης (“a *debtor* to do”) requires the aorist infinitive. This would be the factor of construction demands explained earlier. The New Testament data is admittedly small, but in the only other place where an infinitive is used with this noun, the atelic present infinitive ζῆν is used: Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ὀφειλέται ἐσμεν οὐ τῇ σαρκὶ τοῦ κατὰ σάρκα ζῆν, “So then, brethren, we are *debtors to live* not by the flesh according to the flesh” (Rom 8:12).¹⁹ Hence, we may tentatively conclude that ὀφειλέτης in Gal 5:3 did not force Paul to choose the aorist infinitive ποιῆσαι.

Finally, the NA²⁷ reports that the reading πληρῶσαι, “to fulfill” is found as a variant in some later manuscripts for ποιῆσαι in Gal 5:3. Even though it is probably not original, this variant, to my mind, provides us with an important clue as to how early Greek readers understood aorist ποιῆσαι to have a resultative nuance, since “to fulfill” is virtually the same as *having performed* (resultative aorist) all the Law’s commandments.

To Worship and Bow Down

- ✧ καὶ ἀνελάβετε τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ Μόλοχ καὶ τὸ ἄστρον τοῦ θεοῦ [ύμῶν] Ῥαιφάν, τοὺς τύπους οὓς ἐποιήσατε **προσκυνεῖν** αὐτοῖς, “You have lifted up the shrine of Molech, and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made *to worship*” (Acts 7:43; NIV).
- ✧ εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ ἦλθομεν **προσκυνῆσαι** αὐτῷ, “For we saw his star in the east and we came *to do homage* to him” (Matt. 2:2).

In the first verse, the προσκυνεῖν can be regarded as an activity (“to be worshipping”). Certainly a particular act of worship may be regarded as a performance, but “worshipping” in abstract is a behavior like “walking,” “reading,” or “teaching” that

¹⁸This was, of course, typological, not as the meritorious cause of their eternal redemption. Although there is some confusion among Reformed theologians today on this issue, this is the standard interpretation of classic covenant theology (e.g., Owen, Cocceius, Witsius); cf. the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 7.2 and its proof texts. A law covenant obligates one to “personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience” (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. 20).

¹⁹ὀφειλέτης does not occur in the LXX. We can possibly also relate the verb ὀφείλω from which ὀφειλέτης is derived to this question and point out that this verb is completed 19 times by a present infinitive in the NT and only 6 times by an aorist.

are typical of the “activity” class of atelic verbs. Now note how this activity verb is transformed into a performance of a discrete act of worship in the second example. The Magi are not referring to their on-going worship of the Christ-child, but to a specific performance of religious worship which I tried to bring out in English with the translation: “to do homage.” The activity verb is now a performance verb because of the aspectual function of the aorist.

To Be Circumcised

- ✧ ἄλλ’ οὐδὲ Τίτος ὁ σὺν ἐμοί, Ἕλλην ὄν, ἠναγκάσθη **περιτμηθῆναι**, “But not even Titus who was with me, even though he is Greek, was required *to be circumcised*” (Gal. 2:3).
- ✧ Ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκί, οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς **περιτέμνεσθαι**, “As many as want to make a good showing in the flesh, these are the ones who require you *to be circumcised*” (Gal. 6:13).

The word περιτέμνω (“I circumcise”) denotes literally what is clearly a telic (performance) action. In the first of one of this verb’s three uses in Galatians (Gal. 2:3), it has this telic significance and is therefore expressed in its aorist form (example one). However in this verb’s next infinitive occurrence (example two), in the same construction, it is found in its present aspect form.²⁰ English cannot easily bring out the difference between these two uses in Greek without paraphrase. ἀναγκάζω περιτμηθῆναι (aorist infinitive) is the normal use of the aorist infinitive with a telic verb, but ἀναγκάζω περιτέμνεσθαι (present infinitive) refers to circumcision as a kind of *state*. It no longer refers to the ceremonial act itself but to the religious status of those who have gone through the rite. It is the equivalent of Paul’s statement in Gal. 2:14: πῶς τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις **ἰουδαΐζειν**; “How is it that you are requiring the Gentiles *to be Jews*.”²¹

The Healing Touch

- ✧ καὶ δύναμις κυρίου ἦν εἰς τὸ **ἰᾶσθαι** αὐτόν, “And the power of the Lord was (present) for him *to perform healings*” (Luke 5:17; NASB).
- ✧ ἀπέστειλεν αὐτοὺς κηρύσσειν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ **ἰᾶσθαι**, “He sent them to preach the kingdom of God [activity] and *to perform healings*” (Luke 9:2).
- ✧ ἦλθον ἀκούσαι αὐτοῦ καὶ **ἰαθῆναι** ἀπὸ τῶν νόσων αὐτῶν, “They came to hear him and *to be healed* from their diseases” (Luke 6:18).

“Healing” is a performance in specific situations—“He healed my arm.” (In Jesus’ case, healing was often a miraculous punctual!) Here, the present infinitive suggests that

²⁰As a complement for ἀναγκάζω which allows either the present or aorist complementary infinitive (see Appendix One).

²¹Cf. Moisés Silva (*Explorations*, 78–79) for his remarks on my interpretation here.

the Lord's power resulted in Jesus' healing as a characteristic activity. This would be the "iterative" use of the present aspect communicating a series of discrete acts.

All three infinitive uses of *ιάομαι* are found in Luke, and the other present infinitive (example two) has the same iterative significance as in Luke 5:17. Note however the aorist infinitive in example three. The present infinitive (*ιάσθαι*) refers to *multiple* occurrences of healing, but so does this aorist infinitive (*ιαθήναι*) in Luke 6:18, because there were many diseases to be healed. The difference is that the aorist aspect refers to the action not as a characteristic activity in Luke 6:18 as the present does, but the aorist presents the actions in summary fashion as a *simple* purpose for the people coming.

- ✧ λοιπὸν περιηρέϊτο ἐλπίς πᾶσα τοῦ **σῶζεσθαι** ἡμᾶς, "Henceforth, all hope *that we were going to be saved* was removed" (Acts 27:20).

The telic verb *σῶζω* prefers aorist infinitive forms as we expect (P = 3; A = 23). Here, the present form *σῶζεσθαι* is unusual (the aorist *σωθήναι* occurs 5 times in Acts itself). In my translation, the present infinitive is interpreted as having an *impending* (or "futuristic") significance. One must discern the exact force of the nuance from the context, which was intuitively communicated to Greek readers.

Bearing of Gifts

- ✧ Πᾶς γὰρ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰς τὸ **προσφέρειν** δῶρά τε καὶ θυσίας καθίσταται· ὅθεν ἀναγκαῖον ἔχειν τι καὶ τοῦτον ὃ προσενέγκῃ, "For every high priest is appointed *for the offering* of gifts and sacrifices, hence it is necessary that this one also have something which he offers" (Heb. 8:3).

To offer a sacrifice is a telic act.²² Although we are not examining subjunctives, aorist *προσενέγκῃ* at the end of the verse portrays this as a telic event. In the first part of the statement, however, present *προσφέρειν* is a description of a *customary* or traditional series of events marking high priests in general. (Notice also atelic *ἔχειν* in this verse.)

Coming to Faith

- ✧ ὥστε **πιστεῦσαι** Ἰουδαίων τε καὶ Ἑλλήνων πολὺ πλῆθος, ". . . so that a great crowd both of Jews and of Greeks *came to believe*" (Acts 14:1).

The atelic verb *πιστεύω* occurs almost equally in its present (5x) or aorist (7x) infinitive forms, though one would naturally expect the present to predominate (sometimes the infinitive construction caused the aorist to be used for this verb). The *ὥστε* construction shows a preference for present infinitives, so there is some reason to expect the present infinitive here: *πιστεύειν* rather than the aorist. The translation "came to believe" brings out the *inceptive* nuance which I think was intended by the use of the aorist infinitive *πιστεῦσαι* in this verse.

²²Cf. Mark 2:4 where some men could not *προσενέγκαι* ("bring to") Jesus a paralytic because of the crowds.

An Inquiry

- ✧ ἔπεμψα εἰς τὸ **γνῶναι** τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν, “I sent *to find out* about your faith” (1 Thess. 3:5; NIV).

The NIV translation brings out the inceptive character of the aorist for the stative verb γινώσκω. However, interestingly, γινώσκω occurs 15 times as an aorist infinitive but only *two* times as a present infinitive in the New Testament. Either there are a number of inceptive nuances (or some other aspectual meaning) or the Greeks did not regard this verb as atelic. This example shows that further reflection in this area cannot rely on statistics alone.

Summary

Tense form selection for the Greek infinitive was guided by four main considerations: (1) the verb was lexically determined, so no choice existed; (2) the inherently atelic/telic character of the event; (3) the demands of some constructions for one tense form or the other; and (4) communication of relative time (tense) in indirect discourse. Conformity to one or another of these rules of Greek usage comprises default tense forms which vary from context to context. Only after consideration of these four factors can a modern reader of ancient Greek conclude that a New Testament author intended to convey some aspectual nuance. The examples given at the end of the chapter illustrate places where both default and nuanced uses of infinitive tense forms are found.

The next mood to be covered is the subjunctive. We will find that this mood follows the same basic principles as the infinitive for the most part.

CHAPTER THREE: Subjunctive Tense Form Choice

Introduction

As in the previous chapter, we are here addressing only the narrow question of Greek tense form choice with the subjunctive. Consult the standard grammars for the syntax of the subjunctive mood in purpose clauses, conditional constructions and so forth.¹ Secondly, I will cover the hortatory and the prohibitory uses of the subjunctive in the next chapter, since they act as virtual imperatives. The tense form choice for these two uses conforms to imperatival principles rather than to those which govern the subjunctive. Hence, you should keep in mind that the following discussion of tense form choice factors does not relate to hortatory or prohibitory subjunctives.

The determinants for tense form selection for the subjunctive mood are essentially the same as those which guide the choice in the infinitive as reported in the previous chapter: (1) The verb is lexically determined, so no choice exists; (2) the inherently atelic/telic character of the event; and (3) the demands of some constructions for one tense form or the other.² Only after these considerations have been evaluated may we interpret a particular tense form of the subjunctive to be communicating an aspectual nuance.

And also like the infinitive, the choice for the Greek subjunctive tense form lay primarily between the present and the aorist forms. The perfect subjunctive is quite rare in the New Testament (only 12 occurrences), and because it conveys a specialized meaning we will discuss it separately in Chapter Six.

Lexically Determined Forms

Some few verbs have only one subjunctive form, so they are “lexically determined.” The two verbs which come to mind are the same two which also only occur in one infinitive form: εἰμί (ᾠ) and οἶδα (εἶδᾠ). It is perilous to impute a special nuance to the mind of a biblical author who uses one of these, because there was no other form in Greek to use for that verb. There are not many verbs like this in Greek, but the few there are tend to be common words like εἰμί.

Lexical Influence: Atelic/Telic Events

Atelic events prefer present subjunctive forms. As with the infinitive, some Greek verbs occur predominantly in their present subjunctive form. This was felt to be “natural” and anyone using Greek in that day would have normally heard and read these particular verbs as present subjunctives; the aorist was unusual and notable. This table illustrates the trend:

¹E.g., Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 461–80; cf. my *Primer*, §§22.6-7; §23.6; and §25.7.

²However, we will find below that construction demands are more influential on the subjunctive forms than the atelic/telic factor.

	<i>Present</i>	<i>Aorist</i>
<i>Atelic Subjunctives:</i>	<i>NT/LXX</i>	<i>NT/LXX</i>
ἀγαπάω	13/0	1/1
δύναμαι	2/34	1/6
ἐργάζομαι	2/1	1/3
ἔχω	34/12	8/1
θέλω	20/10	5/10
καθεύδω	3/2	0/0
ζάω	4/44	6/6
–πορεύομαι	0/14	0/3
περιπατέω	8/1	3/1
ὑπάρχω	1/4	0/4
Total	209	59

There is a greater tendency for atelic verbs (e.g., ζάω or θέλω) to be expressed in their *aorist* subjunctive form than we found with the infinitive. A possible reason for this will be discussed in a moment. Nevertheless, the atelic → present forms pattern is seen to be a guiding factor from these statistics.

Telic events prefer aorist subjunctive forms. The telic verb preference for aorist subjunctive forms is more pronounced than the atelic verb's affinity for present tense forms. The following illustrates:

	<i>Present</i>	<i>Aorist</i>
<i>Telic Subjunctives:</i>	<i>NT/LXX</i>	<i>NT/LXX</i>
ἀγοράζω	0/1	6/0
ἀποθνήσκω	2/0	14/107
βάλλω	0/0	23/4
δίδωμι	0/0	24/101
ἐτοιμάζω	0/0	5/2
–λαμβάνω	1/2	24/33
–πέμπω	0/1	3/1
πίπτω	0/0	7/15
–στρέφω	0/2	6/80
σώζω	0/2	10/16
Total	11	481

These statistics are in need of some qualification; nevertheless, they do show the atelic/telic tendencies with good reliability.³ We see in both sets of data that the aorist,

³Qualifications to the statistics include: (1) I only sorted through the occasions when a form occurred under 50 times to remove the hortatory or prohibitory subjunctives from the statistics; (2) I found some parsing errors in the GRAMCORD database in the LXX in particular (e.g., aorist παραδώσιν in Jer 45:20 was returned as a present subjunctive), and more such errors may have slipped by me. Nevertheless, these qualifications would probably only alter the data by +/- 5% at most.

even for some atelic verbs, is often the preferred form. As with the infinitive, the construction which governs the subjunctive will often influence the choice of tense form, although in the case of the subjunctive, this influence is usually in the direction of the aorist form (below).

Here are a few examples of the atelic/telic verb influence to consider:

- ✧ ἰδοῦ ἀκήκοα ὅτι ἔστιν σίτος ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ κατάβητε ἐκεῖ καὶ πρίασθε ἡμῖν μικρὰ βρώματα ἵνα **ζῶμεν** καὶ μὴ **ἀποθάνωμεν**, “Look, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy a little food for us that *we might live* and not *die*” (Gen 42:2).
- ✧ . . . ἵνα **κριθῶσι** μὲν κατὰ ἀνθρώπους σαρκὶ **ζῶσι** δὲ κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι, “in order that *they may be judged* according to man in the flesh, but *live* according to God in the spirit” (1 Pet 4:6).
- ✧ ἐὰν ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ γυμνοὶ **ὑπάρχωσιν** καὶ λειπόμενοι τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς, **εἶπη** δὲ τις αὐτοῖς ἐξ ὑμῶν· **ὑπάγετε** ἐν εἰρήνῃ, θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάξεσθε, μὴ **δῶτε** δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος, τί τὸ ὄφελος; “If a brother or sister is naked and they lack daily food, and (if) one of you *says* to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be satisfied,’ and *you do not give* them what is necessary for their body—what is the profit in that?!” (James 2:15–16).
- ✧ ὃς δ’ ἂν **ἔχη** τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου καὶ **θεωρῇ** τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ χρεῖαν ἔχοντα καὶ **κλείσῃ** τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, πῶς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν αὐτῷ; “Whoever *has* the world’s resources and *sees* his brother with needs and *shuts off* his compassion from him, how is it that the love of God remains in him?” (1 John 3:17).
- ✧ Ἐὰν οὖν **συνέλθῃ** ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ πάντες **λαλῶσιν** γλώσσαις, **εἰσέλθωσιν** δὲ ἰδιῶται ἢ ἄπιστοι, οὐκ ἐροῦσιν ὅτι μαίνεσθε; “If then the whole church *gathers together* in one place and all *are speaking* in (different) languages, and (if) visitors or unbelievers *enter* (the assembly), will they not say that you are deranged?” (1 Cor 14:23).

These samples show the influence of the atelic/telic factor in tense form selection. Each verse or passage shows both present and aorist subjunctive forms in the same constructions in the same context. For instance, aorist *συνέλθῃ*, present *λαλῶσιν*, and aorist *εἰσέλθωσιν* in 1 Cor 14:23 are all parallel future conditional protases marked with *ἐὰν*. In all the samples, the atelic events (*ζῶω*, *ὑπάρχω*, *ἔχω*, *θεωρέω*, and *λαλέω*) are all placed in present subjunctive forms, and the telic events (*ἀποθνήσκω*, *κρίνω*, *λέγω*, *δίδωμι*, *κλείω*, *συνέρχομαι*, and *εἰσέρχομαι*) are expressed in aorist forms.

The following two verses illustrate how a flexible verb which can express either an atelic or a telic event operates:

- ✧ ὃ ἐὰν **ποιῆτε**, ἐκ ψυχῆς ἐργάζεσθε ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, “Whatever you *do*, perform it from the heart as to the Lord” (Col. 3:23).

- ✧ πᾶν ἀμάρτημα ὃ ἐὰν ποιήσῃ ἄνθρωπος ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος ἐστίν, “Any kind of sin which a man may *commit* is outside of his body” (1 Cor. 6:18).

Notice first that both examples use the subjunctive in the same construction (ὃ ἐὰν, indefinite relative pronoun). In Col. 3:23, the present subjunctive of ποιέω refers to an atelic activity: “whatever kind of activity in which you are engaged.” The present subjunctive was appropriate for and marks an activity event. While in 1 Cor. 6:18, the aorist of ποιέω was used because the reference of the verb is to a specific, telic performance of an act. The aorist presents the discrete action as a whole.

The atelic/telic factor is important for the subjunctive mood, but it does not exist in isolation, especially since the uses of the subjunctive which we are here examining are all used in subordinate clauses. This leads to the third prime element directing the tense form choice: the influence of the construction.

Demands of the Construction

The statistics on subjunctive usage in certain constructions are given in Appendix Two below. The table found there shows that the aorist is the “normal” or default form in the subjunctive in a ratio of almost three to one.⁴ In fact, notice that, although the present is found quite often in some constructions (e.g., after ἵνα, ἐὰν, and ὅς ᾗ), there are no subjunctive constructions found where the present tense form outnumbers the aorist (as we have seen for the infinitive).

Perhaps the rationale for this disproportionate employment of the aorist, was its common significance for expressing an event “simply,” without any added nuance. The event is simply said to transpire without any more said about it. For instance, to say: “I came *in order to see* Jesus” is a simple purpose. The purpose is expressed without any connotation such as: “beginning to see” (inceptive), “trying to see” (conative), “seeing (over and over)” (iterative), “beholding” (characteristic, general, or habitual), etc. Rather the idea is a non-complex (simple) one: “I came *in order for ‘seeing’ to take place.*” The “simple” idea is found in this example: ἀνέβη ἐπὶ συκομορέαν ἵνα ἴδῃ αὐτόν, “[Zaccheus] climbed up a sycamore tree in order *to see* him” (Luke 19:4).

Therefore, you should carefully consider the demands of a particular Greek construction when examining the verbal aspect of a particular subjunctive verb. In particular, note that there seems to be a preference for the aorist subjunctive, even heavily so in constructions with οὐ μή (“no way”), ἕως / ἕως ᾗς (“until” or “while”), and ἄχρι(ς) / μέχρι(ς) (“until”).⁵ The underlying logic of this requirement for οὐ μή seems to be that the emphatic negation says that the event (whether atelic or telic) will not take place *at all* or *simply*. For the temporal constructions, the idea is that the event is

⁴Note also that about 66 of the present subjunctives in the Appendix Two statistics are lexically determined εἰμί. If we remove the forms which have only one form available, the preference for the aorist subjunctive forms would be even more pronounced.

⁵The case of οὐ μή is particularly interesting. The NT evidence (P = 0; A = 85) makes it seem that the aorist subjunctive will be found exclusively in the LXX also. However, there are 33 times when a *present* subjunctive follows οὐ μή in the LXX, 26 of which are realizations of δύναμαι. Nevertheless, there are still around 487 occurrences of the aorist following οὐ μή in the LXX, so the pattern is followed often enough!

viewed in its entirety. The occurrence of the event is presented as a “package” from beginning to end without reference to its progress. This “summary” idea is a common feature of the aorist aspect.

Note the influence of the construction in the following samples, which have possible *atelic* verbs in their *aorist* tense forms because of the influence of the construction. Here the construction has overridden the *atelic/telic* tendency.

- ✧ ὁ ἀκολουθῶν ἐμοὶ οὐ μὴ περιπατήσῃ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, “The one who follows me will not *walk* in the darkness” (John 8:12). Compare: Ἐὰν . . . ἐν τῷ σκοτεινῷ περιπατῶμεν, ψευδόμεθα, “If we *walk* in the darkness, we are lying” (1 John 1:6).
- ✧ καθίσατε ὧδε ἕως προσεύξωμαι, “Sit here until *I have prayed*” (Mark 14:32). (In English, the *perfect* [“have prayed”] expresses an event as a whole unit from beginning to end. In Greek, that is the significance of the aorist as in this passage.)
- ✧ ἐνωτίζεσθέ μου τὰ ῥήματα ἐρῶ γὰρ ὑμῶν ἀκουόντων ἄχρι οὗ ἐτάσῃτε λόγους, “Hearken to my words, for I will speak while you listen, until you *search out* words” (Job 32:11).

These samples illustrate that tense form analysis in the non-indicative moods is a fine art which requires particular care and sensitivity to the underlying tendencies governing form selection. It is also part of a process of interpretation of forms in their contexts, not a rigid or mechanical application of statistically proven norms to every possible occurrence. Ancient Greek is not mathematical symbols, but a language once very much alive and refined!

Author's Descriptive Choice

If a construction allows variation for which tense form of the subjunctive to employ (e.g., after ἵνα or ὅταν), the author's choice between the present or aorist subjunctive is usually based on the *atelic/telic* tendency discussed above. If *that* pattern is not followed, we may then safely postulate that the author intends to communicate some aspectual nuance available for that form (iterative, connotative, inceptive, etc.).

In just one case, the issue of tense (or time) proper may be important. Sometimes with ὅταν, an author may choose one form of the subjunctive over another in order to express the relative time relation of the subjunctive verb's event with the lead verb. With the present subjunctive, ὅταν may be translated “while” or “during” in order to indicate that the event of the subjunctive is contemporaneous with that of the lead verb. When ὅταν is followed by the aorist subjunctive, this clause may refer to an event prior to that of the main verb; ὅταν should then be rendered “after” (see BAGD ὅταν 1a and 1b; p. 588). There are exceptions to this schema, but it accurately describes some New Testament uses of the subjunctive with ὅταν. For instance, these two verses illustrate this use of ὅταν with the same verb (τίκτω, “I bear” or “give birth to”):

- ✧ ἡ γυνὴ ὅταν τίκτῃ λύπην ἔχει, “*While* a woman is *giving birth*, she has pain . . .” (John 16:21). The *telic* verb τίκτω would normally be aorist according to

tendencies of inherent meaning, but the present subjunctive was chosen here in order to communicate that the ὅταν clause's action is contemporaneous with the main verb (ἔχει).

- ✧ . . . ἵνα ὅταν **τέκη** τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς καταφάγη, “In order that *after she has given birth* to her child, [the devil] might consume (him)” (Rev. 12:4). The ὅταν clause refers to an event prior to the lead verb of the clause (καταφάγη), so the aorist subjunctive of τίκτω was employed.

The following examples and discussion do not provide an *exhaustive* treatment of authorial nuances in the New Testament in the subjunctive mood, but are merely illustrative of places where a nuance may be found. I also try to clarify the considerations in making the exegetical conclusions regarding verbal aspect.

Seeing and Believing:

- ✧ καταβάτω νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἵνα **ἴδωμεν** καὶ **πιστεύσωμεν**, “Let him come down from the cross now that *we might see* (it) and *come to believe*” (Mark 15:32).
- ✧ τί οὖν ποιεῖς σὺ σημεῖον, ἵνα **ἴδωμεν** καὶ **πιστεύσωμέν** σοι; “So, what sign are you doing that *we might see* (it) and *come to believe* you” (John 6:30).

The subjunctive (ἴδωμεν) is aorist, expressing the simple occurrence of a specific action, but the aorist (πιστεύσωμεν) is inceptive with a stative verb. Hence I translated “come to believe.”

Receiving the Spirit:

- ✧ προσηύξαντο περὶ αὐτῶν ὅπως **λάβωσιν** πνεῦμα ἅγιον, “(Peter and John) prayed for [the Samaritans converts] that *they might receive* the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:15).
- ✧ δότε καμοὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην ἵνα ᾧ ἐὰν ἐπιθῶ τὰς χεῖρας **λαμβάνη** πνεῦμα ἅγιον, “[Simon the magician:] ‘Give me also this power, so that whomever I lay my hands upon *may receive* the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 8:19).

The reception of the Spirit is a telic action occurring in a specific setting for a number of people in Acts 8:15 (i.e., not a single reception by one person). The aorist is normal for summarizing this group of discrete actions. The present form in Acts 8:19 (λαμβάνη) is the only occurrence of a present subjunctive with this telic verb in the statistics given above. That the action is telic is undoubted, especially when we compare it with the same phrase in Acts 8:15 above.⁶ Why was the present form, λαμβάνη, chosen? The answer may be that the magician is asking for power to confer the Holy Spirit *repeatedly* (“iterative” nuance) to the same people as need may arise. He regards this conferral as an especially effective piece of magic or healing rather than a definitive event in the life of a believer.

⁶Note also the aorist subjunctive of another telic verb in v. 19: ἐπιθῶ [ἐπιτίθημι] “lay upon.”

What Should We Do?

- ✧ Καὶ ἐπηρώτων αὐτὸν οἱ ὄχλοι λέγοντες· τί οὖν ποιήσωμεν; . . . τελῶναι . . . εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτόν· διδάσκαλε, τί ποιήσωμεν; . . . ἐπηρώτων δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ στρατευόμενοι λέγοντες· τί ποιήσωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς; “And the crowds were asking [John the Baptist], saying, ‘What then should *we do*?’ . . . Tax collectors . . . asked him, ‘Teacher, what should *we do*?’ . . . and soldiers also asked him, saying, ‘What about us? What should *we do*?’” (Luke 3:10-14).
- ✧ εἶπον οὖν πρὸς αὐτόν· τί ποιῶμεν ἵνα ἐργαζώμεθα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ; “Then they said to [Jesus], ‘What should *we do* in order to be engaged in the works of God?’” (John 6:28).

The examples of ποιέω, even though it quite often has an atelic significance (“to be doing” something), are all aorist in the Luke 3 passage. The reference seems in context to be to atelic activities. Different groups of people were asking John the Baptist what kind of things they should be doing in light of their baptism. They are asking about their *behavior*, an atelic idea. Why was the aorist used then? We usually expect atelic verbs to be placed in their present subjunctive form. The answer is found in the construction. This is the “deliberative subjunctive” construction which has a preponderance of aorists in the New Testament according to Appendix Two statistics (P = 5; A = 97).

The second example from John 6:28 uses the present subjunctive of the same ποιέω verb in the same deliberative subjunctive use in a very similar context. Followers of Jesus are asking him what sorts of things they should do in light of his teaching. There are two plausible reasons for the use of the present subjunctive here:

(1) John simply felt that ποιέω as an atelic verb fit the present subjunctive better than the aorist, despite the demands of the construction. Luke’s use was based on the construction rather than the atelic demands. If this is true, there is no particular nuance to either author’s use. (2) John’s use is unusual and signifies a stress on the ongoing activity of “works” which they want to “be working” (ἐργαζώμεθα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ - note the present subjunctive here too). Thus, there is some emphasis in the use of the present subjunctive on the activity as an ongoing process. Perhaps this is why Jesus’ response points to a *single* “act” (ἔργον) that they should perform: “That you put your trust in him whom [God] has sent” (John 6:29).

To Learn and To Know:

- ✧ εἰ δὲ ποιῶ, κἂν ἐμοὶ μὴ πιστεύητε, τοῖς ἔργοις πιστεύετε, ἵνα **γνώτε** καὶ **γνώσκητε** ὅτι ἐν ἐμοὶ ὁ πατήρ κάγῳ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ (John 10:38).

In this interesting passage, we find the same verb in a parallel construction. Obviously one of them has a nuance, but which one? The answer is probably related to the atelic/telic distinction. Why don’t you figure this one out? Here are some statistics of interest for you: γινώσκω in NT/LXX: P = 4/0; A = 15/55. Use of γινώσκω as subjunctive in John: P = John 10:38; 17:3, 23; 1 John 5:20; A = John 10:38; 11:57; 14:31; 19:4.

Conclusion

As with the infinitive in the previous chapter, we found that the atelic/telic tendency was relevant for subjunctive tense form analysis—assuming that the form is not lexically determined. We also saw that subjunctive constructions influenced the choice of tense form. The subjunctive, however, seems to prefer aorist forms as a general rule, so this tense form seems less “marked” than the present. This is not true in every case, but it is a factor to consider in the nitty-gritty work of tense form interpretation. In the next chapter we consider the imperative mood usage, which differs in important ways from the previous two moods. I have labeled this discussion “imperatival,” because I have included both the hortatory and the prohibitory uses of the subjunctive with this analysis of imperatives, since they function in the same way as imperative mood verbs.

CHAPTER FOUR: Imperative Tense Form Choice

Introduction

The imperative mood in Greek was used in a wide variety of situations where the speaker or writer expressed an exhortation, command, request, prohibition, etc.¹ The term “imperative” is used here to cover verbs in the imperative mood as well as any other verb form which communicates an exhortation, prohibition, etc. in Greek. These other forms include the hortatory subjunctive, the prohibitory subjunctive, and a participle acting in parallel with an imperative form, all three of which function as virtual imperatives.² This means that what is said about the imperative tense form choice factors applies to these uses in other moods as well.

Recall that in prohibitions, the imperative mood was normally used for statements with the present tense form (μὴ λύε [*not*: μὴ λύης]) and the prohibitory subjunctive was used in statements when the aorist tense form was desired (μὴ λύσῃς [*not*: μὴ λύσον]). There are only a few exceptions to this pattern in the New Testament.³

Before we look at the general factors governing tense form selection for imperatives, two singular points of imperative use can be summarily described. First, sometimes the future indicative is used with an imperative sense; however, because it is simply the future indicative in form, there is no need to discuss its tense form any further. The future indicative states the event simply and categorically. Whether the verb is atelic or telic makes no difference, the verb’s future indicative form is used regardless:

- ✧ οὐ φονεύσεις, οὐ μοιχεύσεις, οὐ κλέψεις, οὐ ψευδομαρτυρήσεις . . . ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false testimony . . . you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 19:18–19).⁴

¹James L. Boyer (“A Classification of Imperatives: A Statistical Study,” *Grace Theological Journal* 8 [1987]: 35-54) identifies the different nuances of imperatives as: commands and prohibitions, requests and prayers, permission, exclamations, greetings, and conditions (pp. 36-38).

²For imperatives in general see: Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 336-34; *Primer* §§25.6–7. The imperative use of the infinitive is too rare to be discussed here. The future indicative functions as a categorical type of imperative. For “parallel” participles, see my *Reader*, pp. 114–15, §79; Porter, *Idioms*, 185-86.

³See Boyer, “A Classification of Imperatives,” pp. 46-47. For a chart of the usage see Baugh, *Primer* §25.7.

⁴The parallel texts (Mark 10:19 and Luke 18:20) have, interestingly, (aorist) prohibitory subjunctives: μὴ μοιχεύσῃς, μὴ φονεύσῃς, κτλ.

This expression has the flavor of a dominical “categorical imperative” and is a carryover from the LXX rendering of a Hebrew idiom.⁵

Secondly, there are only two imperatives used in their perfect tense form in the New Testament: *πεφίμωσο* (from *φίμω*), “Be quiet!” (Mark 4:39); and, *ἔρρωσθε* (from *ῥώννυμι*), “Farewell” (Acts 15:29). The interpretation of these verses is not significantly affected by these perfect imperatives, so they need no elaboration. Therefore, as with the infinitives and subjunctives earlier, we will only be dealing with the choice between the present and the aorist tense forms of imperatives. And note that this distinction cannot communicate the *time when* the event occurs (“tense”). How could it be? How could you exhort someone to do something in the past (aorist)? The fulfillment of the exhortation is always in the *future* from the moment of speaking or writing, even if it occurs immediately after that moment.

The Construction?

In our previous treatment of infinitives and subjunctives, one of the prime considerations for tense form selection was the *construction* in which these forms could be placed. For instance, *ἄρχομαι* regularly takes a complementary infinitive in its present tense form only. That means that some constructions require a default form in Greek. Verbs expressed in the imperative mood and as imperatival subjunctives (hortatory and prohibitory), however, always occur as main verbs in their context. Hence, the Greek imperatives operate according to different principles from those which govern infinitives and non-imperatival subjunctives. There is no “construction” controlling imperatives, since they are the core of an independent expression.

At the risk of being pedantic, let me illustrate this last point. If we found the following construction: *οὐ μὴ ζήσωμεν*, “no way will we live,” we interpret the aorist subjunctive as the default form in the *οὐ μὴ* construction, even with an atelic (stative) verb like *ζάω*.⁶ However, if we found the aorist hortatory subjunctive *ζήσωμεν*, there would be no *syntactical requirement* influencing the author’s choice of this aorist form. This means, and please note this well, that imperatival tense form choice must be analyzed according to different principles from those affecting other moods and even from other uses of the same mood. A subjunctive with *οὐ μὴ* cannot be compared with a hortatory subjunctive for the purposes of tense form analysis.

Let us turn, then, to the main principles which governed the choice of imperatival tense forms for New Testament writers. As always, these principles were merely guidelines—the “rules” of Greek grammar—for the choice between a present or aorist imperatival form. The author may choose a non-default form in order to communicate some nuance, and there were times when the “rules” were flexible enough to allow idiomatic variation. In the case of an aspectual nuance, the tense form is of particular interest to us as Bible interpreters. The benefit of our analysis is to put us on more

⁵Boyer (“A Classification of Imperatives”) identifies 53 such uses of the future indicative with 4 questionable (pp. 50-51). Many of these imperatival futures are direct quotations from the ten commandments in the OT (e.g., four in Matt 19:18).

⁶See Appendix Two; *οὐ μὴ* is followed by the aorist over the present subjunctive 85 to 0 times in the NT.

secure footing when we read a nuance into a form when we know it is not the one normally expected in a particular situation.

Lexical Determination

There are a few imperatives (e.g., ἰδέ, ἰδοῦ, “look,” “behold,”; second aorist active and middle imperative of βλέπω) which have lost their verbal nature to the point that they are considered as particles and not as verbs anymore (cf. BAGD, p. 370). There are not many of these forms, and they tend to be stock expressions, so this is not a very important factor for imperatives. And as we saw for the previous moods covered, the imperative forms for verbs like εἰμί and οἶδα occur in only one tense form each, so no aspectual conclusions can be drawn from these verbs as well.

One related phenomenon does occur quite often in the New Testament and in Greek in general. Some verbs which refer to traveling or movement (πορεύομαι, ὑπάγω, περιπατέω, ἔρχομαι, ἀκολουθέω, ἄγω, φέρω, κτλ.) as well as other verbs like ἐγείρω and θάρσω occur almost exclusively in their *present* imperative tense forms. This is simply an idiomatic usage for some reason. It is tempting to see this as related to the atelic/telic event tendency (below), but I am not quite sure this explains these particular verbs all the time. Whatever the reason, you should simply note that verbs denoting travel or movement are normally expressed in their present tense imperatival forms.

Lexical Influence: The Atelic/Telic Factor

Atelic: Present Tense Forms. As we have already seen in other non-indicative moods, there was a tendency for Greek users to express atelic verbs in their *present* imperatival forms. For instance, consider these statistics from the New Testament (including prohibitory and hortatory subjunctives):

	<i>Present</i>	<i>Aorist</i>
<i>Atelic Events:</i>		
ἀγαπάω	8	1
ἀκολουθέω	16	2
γρηγορέω	10	1
ἐργάζομαι	4	0
ἔχω	12	1
μνημονεύω	8	0
περιπατέω	14	1
πιστεύω	13	2
προσεύχομαι	15	2
φεύγω	9	0
φοβέομαι	25	8
Total	134	18

While this data shows that the pattern is not absolutely rigid, it does adequately show that atelic verbs (including verbs of traveling or movement mentioned earlier) tend to occur in their present tense forms in imperatival uses.

Telic: Aorist Tense Forms. Along the same lines, telic imperatives tend to be expressed in their aorist forms as we saw in previous chapters. Here are some New Testament statistics in support:

	<i>Present</i>	<i>Aorist</i>
<i>Telic Events:</i>		
ἀγοράζω	0	3
ἀφίημι	2	25
βάλλω	0	14
δείκνυμι	0	8
δίδωμι	4	33
ἐνδύω	0	6
ἐτοιμάζω	1	8
-λαμβάνω	4	17
πωλέω	0	5
σφάζω	1	9
Total	12	128

The principle of atelic/telic inherent lexical influence evidenced by the statistics in the two previous tables is illustrated by New Testament examples below, but first consider this example from a late first century text just to show that the ideas in this paper represent Greek usage in general.

- ✧ When Florus inquired of Agrippinus whether he should enter a festival put on by Nero, Agrippinus replied: *κατάβηθι*,⁷ “go ahead and enter”; but Agrippinus would not participate (whether as an actor or sponsor of a play is not certain). After some discussion, Florus decides that his alternative is to enter the festival or be beheaded. Agrippinus answers: *ἄπελθε* τοίνυν καὶ *τραγῳδεῖ*, ἐγὼ δ’ οὐ τραγωδήσω, “Go on then and play a part, but I’m not going to part any part” (Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.2.16-17). The first imperative *ἄπελθε* is telic and aorist, the second *τραγῳδεῖ* (“to act”; “to play a part”; “to produce plays”) is a present imperative for an atelic verb.

Now follow some New Testament examples which illustrate the atelic/telic pattern:

- ✧ ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῆ, *μενέτω* ἄγαμος ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ *καταλλαγήτω*, “But if she is separated (from her husband), let her remain unmarried or let her be reconciled with her husband” (1 Cor 7:11).
- ✧ σοὶ λέγω, *ἔγειρε ἄρον* τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ *ὑπάγε* εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου, “I say to you, ‘Get up, pick up your mat and go to your home’” (Mark 2:11).

⁷καταβαίνω 2A A Impv 2 sg. An irregular form found in the NT also.

- ✧ ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς λέγει αὐτῷ· **ἀκολούθει** μοι καὶ **ἄφες** τοὺς νεκροὺς θάψαι τοὺς ἑαυτῶν νεκρούς, “Then Jesus said to him, *Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead,*” (Matt 8:22).
- ✧ **χαίρωμεν** καὶ **ἀγαλλιῶμεν** καὶ **δώσωμεν** τὴν δόξαν αὐτῷ, “*Let us rejoice and let us be glad and let us give glory to him,*” (Rev 19:7).
- ✧ εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἐλθεῖν, **ἀπαρνησάσθω** ἑαυτὸν καὶ **ἀράτω** τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ **ἀκολουθείτω** μοι, “If anyone wants to follow me, *let him deny himself and let him take up his cross and follow me!*” (Matt 16:24).
- ✧ **μείνατε** ὧδε καὶ **γρηγορεῖτε** μετ’ ἐμοῦ, “*Stay here and keep watch with me*” (Matt 26:38)
- ✧ ἀλλ’ οὐχὶ ἐρεῖ αὐτῷ· **ετοίμασον** τί δειπνήσω καὶ **περιζωσάμενος διακόνει** μοι ἕως φάγω καὶ πίω; “But will [a master] not say to [his slave], *Prepare something for me to eat, and get dressed and serve me until I (finish) eating and drinking*” (Luke 17:8). (The participle *περιζωσάμενος* is adverbial, functioning as a parallel imperative here. The slave had just come in from a long day in the fields in Jesus’ story and had to get properly dressed before serving the meal.)
- ✧ ἀλλὰ **ἐνδύσασθε** τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ **ποιεῖσθε** εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν, “But *put on the Lord Jesus Christ and do not perform the plans of the flesh leading to lusts*” (Rom 13:14).

Notice in the previous examples that the imperative forms alternate between the present and aorist forms in the parallel statements in the same contexts. This shows that the variation of forms was not caused by a change in context, but by the inherent character of the verbs used.

General Situation Factor

As mentioned above, because imperatives are not expressed in subordinate constructions like the infinitive and non-imperative subjunctive, there is no syntactical factor to discuss as there was in those two verb categories. And, as K. L. McKay says, “Because personal desire is intrinsic to expressions of will the subjective element in the choice of aspect [for imperatives] is even more important than in statements.”⁸ This means that a writer choosing whether to use a present or an aorist imperative, say, *σώζετε* (present; Jude 23) or *σῶσον* (aorist; Matt. 14:30), had a great measure of freedom from syntactical constraints, although the atelic/telic factor was always exerting its influence. Beyond the inherent character of the verb, why, then, did Greek authors choose one form over the other? An answer can be supplied, but there are important qualifications to follow.

Expectations of the Situation. On the whole, present imperatives were used to enjoin or to forbid a general behavior, a characteristic state, or a repeated action

⁸K. L. McKay, *New Syntax*, 77.

(iterative) which was to characterizes one’s conduct whenever the situation demanded it. This can be called a “general precept.” If a Greek writer calls for a certain kind of behavior from his readers, then the present tense form was the natural choice. “Here is how you should conduct yourselves: Do this!” “Be sure that you never do that!” “Whenever the occasion arises, do such and such.” You can see immediately that this is close to the “customary” or “iterative” idea regularly communicated as an aspectual nuance of the present tense form.

Thus, we can expect, and do find, a significant number of present imperatives in exhortation passages, particularly in the Gospels and Epistles. For instance:

- ✧ μὴ κρίνετε, καὶ οὐ μὴ κριθῆτε, “Do not *go around judging* (others), then you will not be judged” (Luke 6:37 | Matt. 7:1). (Note that κριθῆτε is aorist because of the demands of the οὐ μὴ construction.)

The present imperative κρίνετε here expresses “judging” as a behavior characterizing someone. The verbal idea is telic (performance), since “passing judgment” or “condemning” describes a finite act of speech or a complex of attitudes that require only a limited time period to perform. In this case, the prohibition relates to repeated (iterative) performances of the action as a characteristic behavior.

The aorist imperative, in contrast, enjoins or forbids an action or state on a specific occasion. The action may require some duration (“activity”) or not, but the aorist is used simply because of the specificity of the commanded or requested event. The writer is not trying to direct one’s general behavior, but simply addressing a particular situation. For example:

- ✧ κατὰ τὸν νόμον ὑμῶν κρίνατε αὐτόν, “You *judge* him according to your law” (John 18:31).

In this verse, Pilate is telling the Jews with the aorist imperative κρίνατε to conduct a specific trial on a specific case, rather than setting their general behavior. “You render this decision,” rather than the more preceptive use of κρίνετε in Luke 6:37 we have just discussed.

To summarize this point then, the present tense forms of the imperatives were chosen when the author wished to communicate a general command or exhortation to direct his readers’ general behavior whenever appropriate. An aorist imperative, in contrast, may call for the readers to perform more than one action—the aorist is *not* the “once for all” tense!—but it was a call to do something in a specific, limited context, not as a general maxim governing one’s lifestyle. I have labeled this factor, the “general situation.”

Prayers. It is a feature of common Greek usage that the aorist is by far the predominant tense form used in prayers to God (or to the gods by pagan Greeks). Particularly, the influence of the atelic preference for present tense forms was hardly ever observed in prayers. There are a few notable exceptions, but they are very few. Perhaps the reason is that prayers are quite often requests for specific things (aorist), rather than for general or characteristic things (present). See the Lord’s Prayer for example:

- ✧ Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς: **ἀγιασθήτω** τὸ ὄνομά σου· **έλθέτω** ἡ βασιλεία σου· **γενηθήτω** τὸ θέλημά σου, ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς· τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον **δος** ἡμῖν σήμερον· καὶ **ἄφες** ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν· καὶ **μὴ εἰσενέγκης** [prohibitory subjunctive] ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, ἀλλὰ **ρύσαι** ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ (Matt. 6:9–13). (I assume you don't need me to translate the Lord's Prayer for you!)

The request for daily bread might especially be regarded as a repeated request. Matthew has: “Give to us . . . today” (δος ἡμῖν σήμερον); the aorist imperative (δος) was viewed to be appropriate in this prayer. But Luke does not have “today” (σήμερον) but “day by day” (καθ' ἡμέραν) as follows: **δίδου** ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν, “Give to us *day by day*” (Luke 11:3). Because of this difference, Luke used the present imperative (δίδου) with an iterative nuance. (Luke has aorist imperatives for the other requests in the prayer.) This is one of the few exceptions to the tendency for Greek prayers to use aorist imperatival forms.

A Caution. Some interpreters take present imperatives as almost exclusively communicating constant or repeated actions, and the aorist imperative as enjoining a one-time action.⁹ As in the other dependent moods, an overly simplistic description of the present imperative as denoting constant action and the aorist as one-time action is not accurate in a significant number of cases.

This last statement is shown to be true when we notice that there are Greek present imperatives that express a specific, one-time act and aorist imperatives that signify one's general (repeated) behavior. For example:

- ✧ παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον . . . καὶ **φεύγε** εἰς Αἴγυπτον, “Take the child . . . and *flee* into Egypt” (Matt. 2:13).
- ✧ Julius Caesar counseled by a friend (who considered himself an expert in divination) to abandon his associations with Mark Anthony: ὦ ἄνθρωπε, τί σοι πρᾶγμα πρὸς τοῦτον ἔστι τὸν νεανίσκον; **φεύγ'** αὐτόν· ἐνδοξότερος εἶ, πρεσβύτερος εἶ . . . “Sir, what business have you with this youth? *Avoid* him! Your repute is greater, you are older . . .” (Plutarch, *De Fortuna Romanorum* [Mor. 320A]; LCL trans.).

⁹For example, Nigel Turner: “For Greeks of all periods, a present imperative was an order to do something constantly or to continue. . . . The *Aktionsart* of the present must be clearly distinguished from that of the aorist, which is not durative or iterative and expresses no more than one specific instance of the action of the verb, involving usually a single moment of time. One will readily appreciate that an aorist command does not envisage a general precept but is concerned with conduct in specific instances. . . . The same principle holds in negative commands. If the tense is the present, prohibition will be against continuing an action which has already begun. If it is aorist, prohibition is against beginning it” Turner, *Grammatical Insights Into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965): 29–30. Notice how Turner uses the term *Aktionsart* as roughly synonymous with “aspect”; this is not its proper meaning, and such incautious use of terms has contributed to significant confusion in the whole discussion of Greek verbal aspect.

The first imperative in Matt. 2:13, *παράλαβε*, is aorist of a telic verb and follows our general principle: it is a specific command in a specific situation. However, the second imperative, *φεύγε*, is also a specific command, yet it is a *present* form rather than an aorist. It would certainly be wrong to take this as “constant” or repeated action: “*Be constantly fleeing* into Egypt!” That this phenomenon is not restricted to the NT, can be seen in the passage from Plutarch (early 2nd cent. AD), where *φεύγε* (*φεύγ'*) in the present imperative refers to a *specific* act also. Looking back to our previous discussion, you will discover that *φεύγω* is a verb of movement and these tend to be expressed in their present tense forms, even in specific injunctions.

Look also at this example:

- ✧ *χαίρετε, καταρτίζεσθε, παρακαλείσθε, τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖτε, εἰρηνεύετε . . . ἄσπασασθε ἀλλήλους ἐν ἁγίῳ φιλήματι*, “Be joyous, be complete, be encouraged, be in agreement, be at peace . . . *greet* one another with a holy kiss” (2 Cor. 13:11–12).

The aorist imperative *ἄσπασασθε* is preceded by five present imperatives of general behavior; the aorist imperative itself is also an exhortation for general behavior. The difference probably lies in the lexical nature of the verbs: “rejoice,” “agree,” etc. are atelic verbs and thus present in form; whereas “greet with a kiss” is a telic act and hence aorist, even though this is part of a string of “general precepts” where the present tense form is favored. *The moral of the story is not to simplistically take every present tense imperatival as denoting a continuous action and every aorist as a one-time event as so many in the past have done.* The tense form selection guidelines in Greek were much more subtle than that!

In your analysis of particular imperatival tense forms, you must consider the impact of the various factors we have discussed so far: lexical determination (including verbs of travel and movement), the atelic/telic preferences, and the general situation (including prayer). Only after considering the interaction of these influences on the author’s tense form selection, and only if you find that an author has placed the form in a *non-default* (or “marked”) tense form, only then can you assume that he is communicating an aspectual nuance of some sort. To short-circuit this process will lead to dubious exegetical conclusions.

Author’s Descriptive Choice

If you have considered the factors sketched out above (i.e., the atelic/telic character of the event; the situation; prayers), and you are satisfied that a form you are examining is not the default form, then you can confidently interpret the form as conveying some aspectual nuance. The progressive, iterative, conative, inceptive, resultative, etc. ideas are sometimes conveyed in imperatival forms as in the other moods. It takes a certain sensitivity to and experience with Greek to perceive these nuances in many cases, especially when you are aware of the important but subtle role of the factors which control the selection of default imperatival tense forms. But the nuances are there in some cases!

What follows is certainly not an exhaustive set of examples of the various possible nuances. Instead it is merely illustrative of some nuances joined with a brief

consideration of the method used in evaluating the various factors interacting in specific passages.

Keep the Guest-Room Ready

- ✧ **ἐτοιμάζε** μοι ξενίαν, “*Keep a guest-room ready for me*” (Philem. 22)

Ἐτοιμάζω refers to an inherently telic event occurring once in its present imperatival tense form (here) and eight times in its aorist forms in the New Testament. As an aorist imperative it was used for specific acts: “*Prepare the Passover for us*” (Luke 22:8) or, “*Get 200 soldiers ready*” (Acts 23:23). However, why does Paul tell Philemon **ἐτοιμάζε** μοι ξενίαν? This would seem to require the aorist imperative if the meaning were: “*Prepare a guest-room for me.*” Instead, it seems, in my opinion, to mean something more like: “*Hold a guest-room in readiness for me.*” This gives insight into the fact that Paul (who was in prison at the time) did not know when he would be able to come, so he asks Philemon to expect him at any time. This is the “progressive” nuance of the present tense form.

The progressive notion, of course, is related to the whole idea of “general precepts” that mark the basic distinction between present and aorist imperatival usage. In some cases it is difficult to judge between the two ideas, but we must still say that Paul was not giving Philemon a “general precept” to govern his life! It was not that he was always to have a guest-room ready for any eventuality.

Consider an analogous example in this light:

- ✧ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, **ἀκούετε** αὐτοῦ, “This is my Beloved Son, *heed him!*” (Mark 9:7).

Ἄκούω occurs 13 times in the present and 19 times the aorist form as imperativals. Here the exhortation is not to listen to a specific message (“*Hear [ἀκούσατε] what the unjust judge says*” Luke 18:6), but to a response which should extend beyond the specific occasion. Or here is another example:

- ✧ Πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἐὰν θέλητε ἵνα ποιῶσιν ὑμῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς **ποιεῖτε** αὐτοῖς, “So, all the things that you want men to be doing for you, so also *you do for them*” (Matt. 7:12).

Here, ποιεῖτε (which occurs about equally in its present and aorist imperative forms in the New Testament) refers to the iteration of actions. This could be considered either a “general precept” or the present used for an atelic (activity) type verb.

Keep on Keepin’ On

- ✧ ὁ κλέπτων μηκέτι **κλεπτέτω**, μᾶλλον δὲ κοπιάτω, “Let the thief steal no longer, but rather let him work” (Eph. 4:28).
- ✧ ἄφετε τὰ παιδιά καὶ μὴ **κωλύετε** αὐτὰ, “Leave the children alone and *quit hindering them*” (Matt. 19:14).

A present imperative may imply that the action is already in progress and the injunction is to continue the action or to forbid its continuance. This is more common in the case of prohibitions, where the command is to stop an action already in progress communicated by the present tense form.¹⁰

The continuative nuance is made explicit in Eph. 4:28 by the μηκέτι particle. Note that if the present tense form itself necessarily implies that the action is always viewed as underway, the second imperative (κοπιᾶτω) would have the same nuance and make a contradictory statement; i.e.: “Let him steal no longer but rather keep on working.” He has not been working already but stealing. (I would analyze κοπιᾶω as an atelic activity verb which explains the present form here, and it is a “general precept” situation as well.)

The second imperative, κωλύετε, in Matt. 19:14 understands that the action of hindering was in process and thus “quit” or “stop” can be added in English. (Compare Luke 6:29 below where μὴ κωλύσης occurs in a general exhortation, “*Don’t hold back your coat from the one who asks for your shirt.*”)

Try and Try Again

A conative nuance may be communicated by the present aspect form of an imperative. The translation of the present imperative, καταρτίζεσθε in 2 Cor. 13:11 given in the UBS Greek-English Dictionary, is: “strive for perfection.” This translation communicates a conative nuance lexically with the English word “strive.” The Greek verb itself does not have an inherent notion of “striving” or “trying” to effect the perfect, restored, or prepared state.

The conative nuance is also possible in the following: μὴ κωλύετε αὐτόν, “Do not *try to stop* him” (Mark 9:39); although it may be that the action is already in progress, so the nuance would be the “continuative”: “*Quit preventing* him.”

An example which seems clearer to me is: τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε, “*Don’t try to quench* the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19). The test of the conative nuance is whether the event in question is resisted in context or generally impossible to fulfill. In this case, to frustrate God’s Spirit is—we may gladly be assume—impossible.

Inception of a State

- ✧ ἀποκτείνωμεν αὐτόν καὶ **σχωῶμεν** τὴν κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ, “Let’s kill him and *get* his inheritance” (Matt. 21:38).
- ✧ **πίστευσον** ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν καὶ σωθήσῃ, “*Set your trust* upon the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

The most common special nuance for the aorist is the inceptive idea with stative verbs (or “ingressive”). This notion can be expressed in English with the assistance of “begin to” or “become” or lexically with an English verb whose meaning implies inception.

¹⁰Note carefully Wallace’s caution (*Greek Grammar*, 336-38) not to overdo this nuance!

In the parable in Matt. 21:38, a specific situation is envisioned where evil stewards are counseling the acquisition of the son's inheritance. The inceptive idea is expressed with the aorist hortatory subjunctive, *σχωμεν*. "Having an inheritance" is a (atelic) stative idea of relationship. The English translation, "Let's *get* or *acquire* his inheritance" expresses the inceptive idea lexically, but the notion is "Let's *begin to have*" or "Let's *come into possession of it*."

Our inceptive interpretation of *σχωμεν* is strengthened by the general usage of *εχω* in the imperative mood itself: it occurs 11 times in present imperative forms and *none* in the aorist, so the present tense is normal (as for other statives) when the general possession of something is enjoined ("Have faith in God," "Let each woman *have* her own husband," "Hold such a one in honor"). The only other imperatival use of *εχω* in the New Testament, is this present hortatory subjunctive: *Διὸ βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες εχωμεν χάριν*, "Therefore, since we are going to receive an unshakable kingdom, *let us be thankful*" (Heb. 12:28; cf. NIV). Here the present exhortation simply enjoins a thankful attitude as the most appropriate response to God's gift.

In the second example here (Acts 16:31), I have analyzed *πιστεύω* as a stative verb, roughly meaning "to be in a trusting relation with someone." Here, I take *πίστευσον* as inceptive with the rendering, "Set your trust on." *Πιστεύω* is expressed more often in its present imperatival forms (P = 13; A = 2), and this helps strengthen the opinion that the aorist imperative of this stative verb has an inceptive nuance here.

Further Examples

The following are some more imperatives with brief discussion to serve which further illustrate the principles discussed in this chapter.

- ✧ ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵροντός σου τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ τὸν χιτῶνα μὴ **κωλύσης**, "Don't hold back your coat from the one who takes your shirt" (Luke 6:29).

The prohibitory subjunctive (always aorist, remember) with the same verb as in the previous example, speaks to a specific, hypothetical occasion, and the action is not understood to be in process.

- ✧ Σὺ δέ, ὦ ἄνθρωπε θεοῦ, ταῦτα **φεύγε· δίωκε** δὲ δικαιοσύνην¹² **ἀγωνίζου** τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα τῆς πίστεως, **ἐπιλαβοῦ** τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς, "But *you*, O man of God, *flee* these things! And *chase after* righteousness . . . *fight* the good fight for the faith, *take hold* of eternal life!" (1 Tim. 6:11).

The first three imperatives (*φεύγε, δίωκε, ἀγωνίζου*) are present imperatives of general behavior, and they are also atelic activities which occur in the present imperatival forms with only few exceptions. The last imperative, *ἐπιλαβοῦ*, is an aorist of a performance (or punctual), metaphorically referring to a specific action: "lay hold of," "grasp." *λαμβάνω* and its compounds occur 4 times in present imperatives in general exhortation passages (Rom. 14:1; 15:7; Phil. 4:3; 2 John 10), and 17 times in the aorist elsewhere.

- ✧ **Ἐνδύσασθε** οὖν . . . σπλάγχνα οἰκτιρμοῦ χρηστότητα ταπεινοφροσύνην . . . ¹³ **ἀνεχόμενοι** ἀλλήλων καὶ **χαριζόμενοι** ἑαυτοῖς, “Therefore, *put on* merciful compassion, kindness, humility . . . (and) *bear with* one another and *forgive* each other” (Col. 3:12-13).

Here the one imperative form is aorist of a telic performance: “clothe yourself with.” This verb only occurs in the aorist imperative (Luke 15:22; Rom. 13:14; Eph. 6:11), even, as here, in a general exhortation. It is aorist, because it is assumed that once you “put on compassion” you will remain compassionate. The two participles, ἀνεχόμενοι and χαριζόμενοι, are acting as imperatives in parallel with the lead imperative mood form; hence, their tense form should be analyzed as governed by imperative tense form rules. They are part of this “general precept” and atelic verbs, so the present participle form was chosen for both.

- ✧ ἐκράυγασαν οὖν ἐκεῖνοι· **ἄρον ἄρον, σταύρωσον** αὐτόν, “Then they shouted, ‘*Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!*’” (John 19:15).

The aorist imperatives are used here in a specific situation, not general precepts. This shows the importance of knowing the general situation of the imperative in context.

- ✧ **φέρε** τὴν χεῖρά σου καὶ **βάλε** εἰς τὴν πλευράν μου, “*Bring* your hand (here) and *put* it into my side” (John 20:27).

This is a specific situation; the first imperative, φέρε, is present tense because φέρω is one of those verbs of motion that idiomatically appears in the present imperative. The second imperative, βάλε, is a second aorist (from βάλλω) expressing a simple action in accordance with the general usage outlined above.

- ✧ **ἰδοὺ** ἀφίεται ὑμῖν ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν ἔρημος, “*Look*, your house is going to be left deserted for you!” (Matt. 23:38).

ἰδοὺ (aorist middle imperative of βλέπω) eventually became a particle, since its verbal force was lost. This is lexically determined, and no aspectual nuance can be read into this form.

- ✧ **ἐγείρεσθε ἄγωμεν**, “*Get up, let’s get going*” (Matt. 26:46).

The present imperative, ἐγείρεσθε, and the hortatory subjunctive, ἄγωμεν, refer to single acts of getting up and going, not to a general behavior or repeated acts. Ἐγείρω and ἄγω are two of those verbs of motion which occur almost exclusively in present imperatival forms, even in specific commands like here.

Summary

To summarize then, we can say in general that present imperatives were used in Greek to enjoin or to forbid general behavior, and that the aorist forms were used for events in specific situations. And one particular situation we should also keep in mind is

that aorist imperatives characterize Greek prayers. This “general situation” factor interacts in a complex way with the pattern of atelic preference for present forms and the telic preference for aorists form. As a result, it is not always easy to distinguish which of these two factors is uppermost in determining the choice of tense form for an imperative. But happily, it is not that important to make this distinction in every case. We should just know that when these factors are interrupted by the use of a form which goes counter to our expectation, an aspectual nuance may have been intentionally communicated by the Greek writer.

In the next chapter we will discuss the tense form value in participles. We will find that the participles work quite differently from the previous moods and require us to look at them in their own peculiar light.

CHAPTER FIVE: Participle Tense Form Choice

Introduction

The factors which guide tense form selection for Greek participles differ overall from those which play key roles in the other non-indicative moods. I cannot stress this point too much. This means that to compare the value of a tense form in one mood with that of a participle, *even with the same lexeme*, cannot be done hastily, and sometimes not at all. Let me illustrate with these two verses:¹

- ✧ Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται, “Everyone who has been born from God does not practice sin, because his seed remains in him, and he cannot *live in sin*, because he has been born from God” (1 John 3:9).
- ✧ Ἐάν τις ἴδῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἁμαρτάνοντα ἁμαρτίαν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, αἰτήσῃ καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ ζωὴν, τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν μὴ πρὸς θάνατον, “If someone sees his brother *as he sins* a sin which does not lead to death, he shall ask and (God) shall grant him life, *to those who sin* not to death” (1 John 5:16).

In 1 John 3:9, the present infinitive, ἁμαρτάνειν, is used as a complement of δύναμαι. The second passage, 1 John 5:16, contains two present participle forms of the same verb, ἁμαρτάνοντα and τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν. To the novice, it seems that the present tense form of the infinitive and these two participles may be compared for an analysis of their aspectual value. After all, these are all forms of the same lexeme, ἁμαρτάνω, and they are used by the same writer in the same epistle. But the wrench in the gears is the set of rules which govern tense form choice in Greek. We have already seen that *even within infinitive usage*, certain elements may force an author to choose one infinitive form over another because of the construction in which the infinitive is expressed. Hence, in μέλλω ἁμαρτάνειν, we do expect the present infinitive because the present tense is the default form for the infinitive in this construction; but, in fact, after δύναμαι we expect the *aorist* form to be used (see Appendix One). This means, *a fortiori*, that if we cannot even compare two uses of an infinitive when the same verb is involved, we certainly cannot compare an infinitive with a participle of that same verb. It is the classic comparison of apples with oranges.

Back to our examples, we can further observe that the two participles in 1 John 5:16 are used differently. ἁμαρτάνοντα is adverbial in use, while τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν is substantive. I will make the case momentarily that even these two uses cannot be simplistically compared. What is communicated by the present tense form of an adverbial participle, may be different from what is communicated by the present tense form of a substantive participle. Hence, if we are to make any sort of comparison of the

¹For analysis and examples of scholars who illegitimately compare these two verses, see the excursus on 1 John 3:9 in my *Reader*. Other examples of this sort of problem are easy to discover.

value of tense forms in different places, we absolutely must first take into account the principles of tense form selection which govern the particular moods.

One exception to this difference between participles and the other moods, of course, is with lexemes which are *lexically determined*. εἶμι, οἶδα, ὑπάρχω, and other such verbs which have only one form in all the non-indicative moods do not allow a Greek writer any choice in form to use. Hence, all these verbs are used alike because of this lack of choice.

Now that we are thoroughly warned against a simplistic approach, here are some initial observations to keep in mind. Overall, we can say that the inherent atelic/telic pattern I have identified for the other non-indicative moods usually has little to do with tense form choice for participles. There are times when the lexical nature must still be considered; in particular, a stative verb expressed as an aorist participle may have an inceptive nuance. Otherwise, though, that a verb is inherently atelic or telic is not a decisive factor for expressing a participle in its present, aorist, or perfect form. There are other reasons, especially since the participle was often used in Greek to communicate either the relative or absolute *time* of the event as we shall see.

Furthermore, as I just mentioned, we must distinguish between adverbial participles and substantive and attributive participles in our analysis of tense form semantics. The latter two uses, the substantive and attributive, can be grouped together, since they are essentially the same function of the participle. In the substantive participle, the noun or pronoun which the participle modifies (as does an attributive) is simply elided. Hence there is no essential difference between ὁ δαμονιζόμενος ἄνθρωπος (attributive) and ὁ δαμονιζόμενος (substantive). Both modify a noun either expressed or understood.² On the other hand, the adverbial participle differs substantially from the substantive and attributive uses, and this will cause tense form choice differences.

We will not discuss here the periphrastic use of participles, since the participle itself when used, say, in γεγραμμένον ἐστίν (perfect passive indicative periphrastic) is only a component in a unified verbal idea (γεγραμμένον ἐστίν = γέγραπται). The participle itself does not carry any tense value separate from the indicative form. A Greek author chooses a particular participle tense form in this instance because it is an integral component of a unified verb phrase.³

We will, however, need to discuss the perfect tense form in this chapter, which we conveniently put off in our look at the other non-indicative moods. In the other moods, the perfect forms are not common. But there are over 600 perfect tense participles in the Greek New Testament, so they warrant our attention. On the other hand, we will put off mention of the future participle until Chapter Six, since it is rare in the New Testament (12 occurrences).⁴

²Note, however, that a substantive participle may differ from the attributive when it passes over into a true noun: ὁ κρίνων, “the judge”; ὁ βαπτίζων, “the Baptist”; ὁ ἄρχων, “the ruler”; οἱ πιστεύοντες, “believers”; etc. The substantive participles here lose their verbal force, and the tense form has no residual semantic value. This phenomenon is illustrated when authors use a substantive participle in parallel with a substantive adjective; e.g.: οἱ πιστεύοντες (“believers”) . . . οἱ ἄπιστοι (“non-believers”) (1 Cor. 14:22).

³Cf. *Primer*, §21.5.

⁴Cf. *Reader*, “Syntax Sketch,” §§82–83.

Our procedure, then, will be first to discuss the value of the present, aorist, and perfect tense forms of the substantive and attributive uses treated together. Next comes the same tense forms for the adverbial participle. We will conclude with some general observations and special cases of participle tense form usage.

Substantive and Attributive Use

Both a substantive and an attributive participle normally refers to an event which characterizes or describes the implied or expressed substantive which it modifies. Thus these participles are normally the rough equivalent of an adjective except that they add a verbal element to the description. For instance:

- ✧ εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν **δίκαιον** καὶ **δικαιοῦντα** τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ, “that he might be *righteous* and *the one who justifies* the person who believes in Christ” (Rom. 3:26).

In this phrase, both the attributive participle, *δικαιοῦντα*, and the adjective, *δίκαιον*, modify *αὐτόν*. The adjective describes a feature of God’s being or character (“righteous”), while the participle expresses an action which God performs, perhaps as a characteristic type of event (below): ‘He is one who justifies.’ There is no *syntactical* difference between *δίκαιον* and *δικαιοῦντα*, but the participle has a verbal element and, as such, it has a direct object (τὸν ἐκ πίστεως).⁵

A further comparison of the attributive participle in particular can be made with a relative pronoun clause.⁶ The participle adds some detail of an event which describes the subject noun or pronoun in some way. Here are two examples which illustrate this feature of the participle’s function. They were selected because the attributive participle is used in tandem with a relative clause which modifies the same substantive in each case.

- ✧ ἔχων ὄνομα **γεγραμμένον** δ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ αὐτός, “[. . . and] he has a name *written which* no one knows except himself” (Rev. 19:12; see also Rev. 2:17). ὄνομα has two characteristics: it was recorded (*γεγραμμένον*) and (ὅ) no one knows it but himself.
- ✧ Ὑποτύπωσιν ἔχε **ὕγιαιόντων** λόγων **ᾧν** παρ’ ἐμοῦ ἤκουσας, “Follow the pattern *of health-giving* words *which* you heard from me” (2 Tim. 1:13). Both the participle and the relative clause modify *λόγων*.

The following example is similar in concept to the previous two; however, the participle is substantive. Merely adding the noun *ἄνθρωπος* shows how the participle

⁵See also: ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς **ἀσφαλῆ** τε καὶ **βεβαίαν** καὶ **εἰσερχομένην** εἰς τὸ ἑσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος, “We have an anchor for our soul, *safe, steadfast, and one which penetrates* into the other side of the veil” (Heb. 6:19).

⁶Hence, I have suggested that beginners translate attributive and substantive participles with English relative clauses in my *Primer*, §§19.6–7.

adds a qualifying event to this implied noun in the same way as does a relative pronoun qualifier.

- ✧ ἀπέλυσεν δὲ τὸν διὰ στάσιν καὶ φόνον **βεβλημένον** εἰς φυλακὴν [ἄνθρωπον] **δν** ἤτοῦντο, “And he released the (man) *who had been thrown* into prison because of revolt and murder *whom* they requested” (Luke 23:25).

Therefore, if the attributive and substantive pronoun and its argument is virtually the same in function as a qualifying relative clause, it is reasonable to suppose that these kind of participles may be put to use as *virtual indicative verb clauses*. Notice in the three examples just given, the relative clauses used in parallel with the attributive or substantive participle contain indicative verbs: οἶδεν (Rev. 19:12), ἤκουσας (2 Tim. 1:13), and ἤτοῦντο (Luke 23:25). Hence, the following working conclusion may be set forth: *The factors which normally determined the selection of attributive and substantive participle tense forms are analogous to those factors at work in the indicative mood.* There are some exceptions to this rule, but it is generally validated by what we find in ancient Greek usage.

We have not covered the factors which guide tense form choice in the indicative mood in this paper, because this is the area where much has already been written and well described. For a good general description, I direct the intermediate student to the treatment in Daniel Wallace’s *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. In essence, we can say that the element of the *time* of the event’s fulfillment in the indicative as well as in these two uses of the participle, often became the dominant element guiding tense form selection. This is *tense* proper. This is especially true of aorist substantive and attributive participles, but less so of those in the present tense form.

What follows is a general characterization of the predominant range of meanings of the tense forms in these participles. The main thing to observe is that *there are no default forms* in these participle constructions. An author chose a tense form by how he desired to portray the event (“aspect”) or because of a time relation between his time of writing and the participle’s event (“tense”), not because there were strict factors endemic to the Greek language which guided usage, such as the atelic/telic character of the event or the demands of the construction. Let me illustrate with these examples which involve the same verb used in both present and aorist forms.

- ✧ ἐγὼ ὁ κατασκευάσας φῶς καὶ ποιήσας σκότος ὁ ποιῶν εἰρήνην καὶ **κτίζων** κακὰ ἐγὼ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα πάντα, “I am he who has founded light and made the darkness, who makes peace and (*who*) *creates* hardships, I am the LORD God who does all these things” (Isaiah 45:17). For the aorist of the same verb: ἐγὼ εἰμι κύριος ὁ **κτίσας** σε, “It is I the LORD *who created* you” (Isaiah 45:8).
- ✧ Πᾶς ὁ ἐρχόμενος πρὸς με καὶ **ἀκούων** μου τῶν λόγων καὶ ποιῶν αὐτούς, ὑποδείξω ὑμῖν τίνι ἐστὶν ὅμοιος. . . . ὁ δὲ **ἀκούσας** καὶ μὴ ποιήσας ὅμοιός ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος οἰκοδομήσαντι οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν χωρὶς θεμελίου, “Everyone who comes to me and (*who*) *hears* my words and does them, I will show you what he is like. . . . But

he who has heard and has not acted (on the words) is like a man who has built his house on ground without a foundation” (Luke 6:47, 49).⁷

Present Attributive and Substantive Participle

GENERAL. In most cases, an attributive or substantive participle in its present tense form presents the event as generally or universally true of the referent, a characteristic state or action, or an habitual action. The event may be “timeless” or “omnitemporal.” This is in contrast to a reference to a specific number of occurrence(s) of the action or state in a particular setting (as in the next section). The point to stress here is that the participle’s event is not necessarily presented as “in process” at the time of the main verb. For instance, after his death, John is still called “the Baptist” (ὁ βαπτίζων) (e.g., Mark 6:14); the participle does not mean “John, who is currently baptizing.” And after a former demoniac was healed, he was still called ὁ δαμονιζόμενος “the demoniac” (Mark 5:15-16); i.e., the state of being demon-possessed was not “in process,” but characterized the man.

The “general” use may be the equivalent of the ὅς ἄν “whoever” construction (e.g., 1 John 3:17), or even the εἰς τινος “if someone” construction (e.g., 1 John 2:15), especially when used in conjunction with πᾶς (e.g., πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων) (cf. BDF §413).

- ✧ ἠλπίζομεν ἐπὶ θεῷ ζῶντι, “We have fixed our hope in a *living* God” (1 Tim. 4:10). “Living” is an attribute of God, inherent to his nature, an “omnitemporal” reference for the participle.
- ✧ θεὸς ὁ δικαιοῦν· τίς ὁ κατακρινῶν; “God is *the justifier*; who is it *who condemns*?!” (Rom. 8:33–34).
- ✧ οὕτως γὰρ ποτε καὶ αἱ ἅγιοι γυναῖκες αἱ ἐλπίζουσαι εἰς θεὸν ἐκόσμουσαν ἑαυτάς, “For so also, holy women *who used to hope* in God used to formerly adorn themselves” (1 Pet. 3:5). The translation accessories “used to” brings out the “characteristic” nature of the hope.
- ✧ Πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἀμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνομίαν ποιεῖ, “The one *who practices* sin is also practicing lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). Like πᾶς ὁ ἀμαρτάνων (v. 6), the participle expresses characteristic actions.
- ✧ Διὰ τί τὴν γαμουμένην οὐκ ἔδωσαν αὐτὴν ὑπερβῆναι τὸν οὐδὸν τῆς οἰκίας, ἀλλ’ ὑπεραίρουσιν οἱ προπέμποντες; “Why do they not allow *the bride* to cross the threshold of her home herself, but those *who are escorting* her lift her over?”

⁷Max Zerwick (*Biblical Greek* §249) says: “Lk 6:47, 49 seems to distinguish two ways of hearing the word of God: ὁ ἀκούων he who hears (as a characteristic or a matter of principle, i.e. present) is he who hears effectively and keeps what he hears, but ὁ ἀκούσας he who hears (as a simple matter of fact, i.e. aorist) is he who hears indeed, but to no effect.” In fact, though, the aorist ὁ ἀκούσας in v. 49 simply points back to the previous (“past”) event of hearing in v. 47. The distinction is one of tense here, not primarily of aspect, though the present tense forms in v. 47 are the “general” use described below.

(Plutarch, *Quaest. Rom.* [Mor.] 271D; LCL trans.). The first is general, the second “in process” (below).

PROGRESSIVE. The present attributive or substantive participle can also refer to an action or state that is “in progress” (contemporaneous) at the time of the main verb. The context must indicate that the event is underway. The English translation may employ a past tense form, since the participle’s time reference is always dependent on the main verb.

- ✧ ἐν ταύταις κατέκειτο πλῆθος τῶν ἀσθενούντων, “Among these (porticoes) were laying a number of people who were sick” (John 5:3).
- ✧ ἄλλος ἐστὶν ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ ἐμοῦ, “There is another who is testifying concerning me” (John 5:32).
- ✧ Καὶ εὗρεν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοὺς πωλοῦντας βόας καὶ πρόβατα καὶ περιστερὰς . . . “And he found in the temple those who were selling oxen, sheep, and doves . . .” (John 2:14).

IMPENDING (FUTURISTIC). Because the future participle was phasing out of use by NT times, some present substantive and attributive participles refer to an impending or futuristic event. As always, the context must make this nuance clear.

- ✧ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, “This is he who will baptize in the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33).
- ✧ τελείως ἐλπίσατε ἐπὶ τὴν φερομένην ὑμῖν χάριν ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Set your hope completely on the grace which is going to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13).
- ✧ Ἰούδας ὁ παραδιδούς αὐτὸν εἶπεν· “Judas, who was going to betray him, said . . .” (Matt. 26:25). In John 6:64, the same futuristic meaning was expressed through a future participle of this verb: “Jesus knew who it was who would betray him” (ὁ παραδώσων).

CONATIVE. In a few places, especially when the context shows opposition to or impossibility of the event’s fulfillment, the substantive or attributive participle may connote that the event was only attempted. The determination that this nuance was intended is always a matter of the interpreter’s judgment from contextual elements.

- ✧ Ταῦτα ἔγραψα ὑμῖν περὶ τῶν πλανώντων ὑμᾶς, “I am writing these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you” (1 John 2:26).

- ✧ ὑμεῖς γὰρ οὐκ εἰσέρχεσθε, οὐδὲ **τοὺς εἰσερχομένους** ἀφίετε εἰσελθεῖν, “For you are not entering (the kingdom), neither do you allow *those who are trying to enter* (it) to enter” (Matt. 23:13).
- ✧ ὁ **καταλύων** τὸν ναὸν καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις **οἰκοδομῶν**, σῶσον σεαυτὸν, “You *who wanted to destroy* the temple and *wanted to build* it in three days, save yourself!” (Matt. 27:40). It is difficult to decide whether this is conative or futuristic: “You who were going to destroy. . . .”
- ✧ γυναῖκα γὰρ αὐτόθι τὴν θεὸν σεβομένην **βιαζόμενός** τις ὑπὸ τῶν κυνῶν διεσπάσθη, “For, a man *attempted to violate* a woman who was here worshipping the goddess, and was torn to pieces by the dogs” (Plutarch, *Quaest. Rom.* [Mor.] 264C; LCL trans.).

Aorist Attributive and Substantive Participle

RELATIVE PAST TIME EVENT. Contrary to expectations (because of the lack of the augment), aorist substantive and attributive participles most often (but not always!) refer to an event that is *past* in respect to the main action, whether the main action is past, present, or future from the writer or speaker’s perspective. The most common aspectual significance is that the event is presented “simply” (“constative”) in the past relative to the main verb. The following illustrations have main verbs in different indicative tenses (underlined).

Past Main Verb:

- ✧ ὁ **ποιήσας** με ὑγιή ἐκεῖνός μοι εἶπεν . . . “*The man who made* me healthy, he said to me . . .” (John 5:11).
- ✧ Καὶ ἦν Ἄννα προφήτις . . . **ζήσασα** μετὰ ἀνδρὸς ἔτη ἑπτὰ ἀπὸ τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς, “Now there was a prophetess, Anna, . . . *who had lived* with her husband seven years after her marriage” (Luke 2:36). Summary of a state of some duration.

Present Main Verb:

- ✧ ὁ μὴ τιμῶν τὸν υἱὸν οὐ τιμᾶ τὸν πατέρα **τὸν πέμψαντα** αὐτόν, “The one who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father *who sent* him” (John 5:23).

Future Main Verb:

- ✧ οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ **οἱ ἀκούσαντες** ζήσουσιν, “The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and *those who hear* will come to life” (John 5:25). The aorist participle is the same future event as expressed through the future indicative ἀκούσουσιν, which is prior to ζήσουσιν.

Gnomic, Timeless, or Omnitemporal Main Verb:

- ✧ ὁ γὰρ **ἀποθανὼν** δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας, “For a *dead man* is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:7).

- ✧ ἄλλ' ἐν τούτοις πᾶσιν ὑπερνικῶμεν διὰ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος ἡμᾶς, “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through *him who loved us*” (Rom. 8:37).
- ✧ θεὸς ὁ δικαίων· τίς ὁ κατακρινῶν; Χριστὸς [Ἰησοῦς] ὁ ἀποθανών, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐγερθείς, ὃς καὶ ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ, “God is the one who justifies; who is it who condemns? Christ Jesus is *he who died*, I should say, *who was raised*, who is also at God’s right hand” (Rom. 8:33-34). The main verb is understood ἐστίν. (Notice the distinction between the present participles and the aorist and also how the attributive participles are parallel with a relative clause.)

INCEPTIVE. With stative verbs, the aorist substantive and attributive participles may express inception into the state. Like all such nuances, contextual factors influence this interpretation of the tense form.

- ✧ τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν περὶ τοῦ πνεύματος ὃ ἔμελλον λαμβάνειν οἱ πιστεύσαντες εἰς αὐτόν, “Now he said this regarding the Spirit whom *those who would come to faith* in him were going to receive” (John 7:39).
- ✧ ἄρα καὶ οἱ κοιμηθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ ἀπόλοντο, “(If Christ has not been raised) then too *those who have fallen asleep* in Christ have perished” (1 Cor. 15:18).
- ✧ ἡ δὲ γαμήσασα μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου, “And *she who has gotten married* is worried about worldly affairs” (1 Cor. 7:34).

MINOR USES. The other, minor aorist nuances can also be inferred in aorist substantive and attributive participles.

- ✧ ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ Τέρτιος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, “I, Tertius, *who wrote* this epistle, greet you” (Rom. 16:22). An *epistolary* aorist.
- ✧ ὅτι ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς, “(Moses wrote) that the man *who has (finished) doing* these things will live by them” (Rom. 10:5). *Resultative* use of the aorist.

Perfect Attributive and Substantive Participle

The perfect attributive and substantive participle has the same range of meanings and aspectual value as a perfect indicative. One must analyze the intended focus of the event based on the inherent meaning of the verb and contextual factors given the perfect tense form’s range of meanings. The following illustrate the standard description.

RESULTING STATE. Like the perfect indicative, the perfect substantive and attributive participle may communicate the state or condition that results from a completed action. An English present tense verb is often the best translation choice.

- ✧ τοῖς δὲ γεγαμηκόσιν παραγγέλλω, “Now to those who are married I command . . .” (1 Cor. 7:10). There is no perceivable difference from οἱ γαμοῦντες.
- ✧ συκῆν εἶχεν τις πεφυτευμένην ἐν τῷ ἀμπελῶνι αὐτοῦ, “A certain man had a fig tree *planted* in his vineyard” (Luke 13:6).
- ✧ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος, “This is my *chosen* Son” (Luke 9:35).
- ✧ ἦλθεν γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ζητῆσαι καὶ σῶσαι τὸ ἀπολωλός, “For the Son of Man came to search out and to save *the lost*” (Luke 19:10).

PERFECTIVE. Like the indicative, some perfect substantive and attributive participles focus upon the completion of the event that results in a state or condition. If the main verb refers to a past time event, an English *pluperfect* may be used in translation, since the perfect participle refers to something completed before a past event.

- ✧ ὁ λελουμένος οὐκ ἔχει χρεῖαν εἰ μὴ τοὺς πόδας νίψασθαι, “*The one who has been washed* does not need more than to wash his feet” (John 13:10). The focus is on the completion of the act of washing.
- ✧ ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, “But we preach Christ *crucified*” (1 Cor. 1:23).
- ✧ διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ . . . οὐκ ἀκυροῖ, “A covenant *which has been previously ratified* by God . . . is not invalidated” (Gal. 3:17).
- ✧ ἔλεγεν οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὸς τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ Ἰουδαίους, “Then Jesus was speaking to *those Jews who had believed him . . .*” (John 8:31). The perfect participle functions like an English pluperfect in relation to the past event (ἔλεγεν). Compare this present participle: ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ κἀν ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται, “*The one who believes* in me, even though he dies, he will live!” (John 11:25).
- ✧ ἐξῆλθεν ὁ τεθνηκώς, “*He who had died* emerged (from his tomb)” (John 11:44). A pluperfect is needed in English.
- ✧ ἔλεγον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τῷ τεθεραπευμένῳ, “Then the Jews talked to *the man who had been healed*” (John 5:10). Another virtual pluperfect.

COMPLEX. The perfect may express both a completed act and the state which results from it. Normally the implications of this fact is communicated in context.

- ✧ οὐδείς τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκείνων **τῶν κεκλημένων** γεύσεταιί μου τοῦ δείπνου, “None of those *who were invited* shall taste my banquet” (Luke 14:24). The invitation was sent (completed), the people were consequently invitees (resulting state or relationship).
- ✧ μηδὲν πλέον παρὰ **τὸ διατεταγμένον** ὑμῖν πράσσετε, “Do nothing more than *what was commanded* you” (Luke 3:13). The act of commanding was finished, the commandment remained to be obeyed.
- ✧ οὕτως ἐστὶν πᾶς **ὁ γεγεννημένος** ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος, “Such is *everyone who is born* from the Spirit” (John 3:8).

Adverbial Participle Use

The adverbial participle⁸ has a predominant pattern: the present tense form communicates that the event of the participle is *contemporaneous* with the main verb. The aorist communicates that the participle’s event is *prior to* the main verb (with exceptions noted below). And the perfect communicates either that the participle’s event has been completed *prior to* that of the main verb, and/or that the completed act’s resulting state is *contemporaneous* with the main verb. The present, aorist, or perfect form of the adverbial participle, then, was usually selected because of the relative time of the participle in relation to the main verb. This distinguishes participle verbal aspect from that of other moods where relative time is not usually a function of those forms.

You have also learned that there are a significant number of places where an adverbial participle has a relationship to the main verb implied beyond simultaneity or antecedence of the events (the temporal relationship). This relationship might be causal, conditional, concessive, etc.⁹ The participle does express a temporal relationship in most of its occurrences, but that is only because the temporal use of participles is the most common one. If one of these logical relationships takes precedence, then the temporal meaning recedes into the background or is lost altogether. Furthermore, since the tense form itself does not seem to determine these supplementary, non-temporal meanings—they are evident from the context—these meanings are not reciprocally determinative of tense form choice. Hence, we should not stress the tense forms in these particular instances.

Let me illustrate the point in the last paragraph by this one example:

- ✧ ὁ δὲ **θέλων** δικαιῶσαι ἑαυτὸν εἶπεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν· καὶ τίς ἐστὶν μου πλησίον; “But he, *because he wanted* to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And just who is my neighbor?’” (Luke 10:29). (This participle is adverbial not substantive as might be

⁸Remember, the term “adverbial participle” includes **genitive absolutes** which always function adverbially as an adjunct event in relation to the lead verb(s). Hence all that is said here applies to genitive absolutes also, and some occur in the examples. Cf. *Primer*, §21.6.

⁹Cf. my *Reader*, “Syntax Sketch,” §78.

assumed at first glance. The article here is pronominal ὁ δέ, “But *he*,” and does not modify the participle directly.)

The adverbial participle θέλων relates to the main verb, εἶπεν, in a causal sense: “*because* he wanted . . . he said.” However, the causal idea of this participle is not determined by its being expressed in its present tense form. An adverbial participle in its aorist or perfect tense form could also communicate a causal idea. No, the causal nuance is determined from the context as the natural relation of the two events, not from the tense form.¹⁰ Hence, tense form analysis is irrelevant in this connection.

Examples of the Adverbial Participle

The following examples illustrate a few uses of adverbial participle in the present, aorist, and perfect tense forms. Some exceptions to the general pattern explained above and some possible aspectual nuances are also included.

Present Adverbial Participle

- ✧ οὐ γὰρ ἄδικος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιλαθέσθαι τοῦ ἔργου ὑμῶν καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης ἧς ἐνεδείξασθε εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, **διακονήσαντες** τοῖς ἁγίοις καὶ **διακονοῦντες**, “For God is not so unjust as to forget your labor and the love which you demonstrated for his name when *you ministered* to the saints (in the past) and *are still (currently) ministering* to them” (Heb. 6:10). Note that the aorist and present participles of the same verb are conceived of as different and as conveying a temporal reference.
- ✧ ὁ δὲ **στυγνάσας** ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ ἀπῆλθεν **λυπούμενος**, “And at this response *he became gloomy* (and) went away *grieving*” (Mark 10:22). The first participle is aorist adverbial with an inceptive connotation; the second designates manner.
- ✧ ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα **συγκλειόμενοι** εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι, “We were imprisoned under the law, *locked up* for the sake of the faith which was yet to be revealed” (Gal. 3:23). The participle denotes the same action from a different perspective. Being “imprisoned” and “locked up” are the same (cf. Burton §447).
- ✧ ἡ γὰρ ὑπανδρος γυνὴ τῷ ζῶντι ἀνδρὶ δέδετα νόμῳ . . . ἄρα οὖν **ζῶντος** τοῦ ἀνδρὸς μοιχαλὶς χρηματίσει ἐὰν γένηται ἀνδρὶ ἑτέρῳ, “For a married woman is bound by law to her husband who is alive . . . So then, *while her husband is alive*, she will become an adulteress if she marries another man” (Rom. 7:2–3). Note also the attributive participle in the first phrase (τῷ ζῶντι ἀνδρὶ).
- ✧ διαμαρτυρόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, **πειθῶν** τε αὐτούς, “(He) was testifying about the kingdom of God and *trying to persuade* them” (Acts 28:23).

¹⁰English usage is comparable here; e.g., “*Seeing* a mouse, she jumped up on a chair,” where “seeing” has a causal sense: “*Because she saw* a mouse, she jumped up on a chair.”

Aorist Adverbial Participle

- ✧ ἡδιό λέγει· **ἀναβάς** εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. ⁹τὸ δὲ **ἀνέβη** τί ἐστίν, εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ **κατέβη** εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς; ¹⁰ὁ **καταβάς** αὐτός ἐστίν καὶ ὁ **ἀναβάς** ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, “This is why it says: ‘*When he ascended* on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.’ (What does ‘*he ascended*’ mean except that *he also descended* to the lower, earthly regions? *He who descended* is the very one *who ascended* higher than all the heavens)” (Eph. 4:8–10; NIV). Note in particular that the aorist participles here (both adverbial and substantive), are paraphrased by aorist (past) indicatives. This shows that the aorist participle was sometimes viewed as conveying relative past time.
- ✧ διότι **γνόντες** τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν ἢ ἠγαρίστησαν, “Therefore, *even though they knew God*, they did not honor him as God or give thanks” (Rom. 1:21). This is the concessive meaning.
- ✧ **ἔλθούσης** δὲ τῆς πίστεως οὐκέτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν ἐσμεν, “And *now* that this faith *has come*, we are no longer under a paedagogos” (Gal. 3:25). Remember, all *genitive absolutes*, such as this one, are merely adverbial participles. Here the English perfect form “has come” is required to bring out the fact that the action precedes a present main verb (ἐσμεν).
- ✧ **ἀποκριθεὶς** (καὶ) εἶπεν, “*He answered* and said . . .” (Gospels, *passim*). This frequent Hebrew/Aramaic narrative formula illustrates an aorist participle of identical action (Burton §§139–41).
- ✧ τότε **ὀργισθεὶς** ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης εἶπεν τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ· ἔξελθε ταχέως . . . “Then, the master *became very angry* (and) said to his slave, ‘Come quickly . . .’” (Luke 14:21). The aorist has an inceptive nuance.
- ✧ **εἰδότες** ὅτι Χριστὸς **ἐγερθεὶς** ἐκ νεκρῶν οὐκέτι ἀποθνήσκει, “For *we know* that Christ, *because he was raised* from the dead, is not going to die anymore” (Rom. 6:9). The second participle is causal.

Perfect Adverbial Participle

- ✧ ὡς εἶδον ἤδη αὐτὸν **τεθνηκότα**, “When they saw that he *had* already *died*” (John 19:33). The adverb ἤδη clarifies the pluperfect meaning of the participle.
- ✧ Rom. 4:19 καὶ μὴ **ἀσθενήσας** τῇ πίστει κατενόησεν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σῶμα ἤδη **νενεκρωμένον**, ἑκατονταετῆς που **ὑπάρχων**, καὶ τὴν νέκρωσιν τῆς μήτρας Σάρρας, “And *he did not grow weak* in faith, (but) he disregarded his own body, *already as good as dead*, since he was 100 years old, and the deadness of our mother Sarah” (Rom. 4:19). This illustrates the use of all three tense forms: aorist, perfect, and present (ὑπάρχω is lexically determined).

Adverbial Participle in Parallel Use

An adverbial participle (whether present, aorist, or perfect), frequently acts in parallel with the main verb and therefore takes on the main verb's function. In these cases, the participle(s) and the main verb are expressed with or without a conjunction, and one must translate the participle as though it were the same mood as the main verb. *The tense form of the participle is usually based upon what form would be appropriate if it were expressed in the main verb's mood.* Let me restate this important point. The factors which guide the tense form choice of the main verb will also guide the parallel participle's tense form also. For instance, if the main verb is an imperative, then the imperatival tense form factors will shape the tense form used in the parallel participles. This makes the analysis of these participles quite interesting in some cases. The following examples illustrate.

- ✧ **πορευθέντες** οὖν **μαθητεύσατε** πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, **βαπτίζοντες** αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, **διδάσκοντες** αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν, “Go then, *disciple* all the nations, (and) *baptize* them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (and) *teach* them to keep all the things I commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). The participles in this well-known passage have received more than their share of comments, usually over-interpretive. They simply serve as parallel imperatives much as if Matthew had written: πορεύθητε καὶ μαθητεύσατε καὶ βαπτίζετε καὶ διδάσκετε. Such a string of imperatives would seem too “choppy” in Greek.¹¹
- ✧ Μετὰ δὲ τὸ παύσασθαι τὸν θόρυβον **μεταπεμψάμενος** ὁ Παῦλος τοὺς μαθητὰς καὶ **παρακαλέσας**, **ἀσπασάμενος ἐξῆλθεν** πορεύεσθαι εἰς Μακεδονίαν, “When the uproar had ended, Paul *sent* for the disciples and, *after encouraging* them, *said good-bye* and *set out* for Macedonia” (Acts 20:1; NIV). The participles are simply virtual aorist indicatives which convey actions performed in conjunction and prior to the main verb's event.
- ✧ Καὶ **περιῆγεν** ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ **διδάσκων** ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ **κηρύσσων** τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ **θεραπεύων** πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν ἐν τῷ λαῷ, “And *as he travelled* throughout all Galilee *he was teaching* in their synagogues, *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom, and *healing* every disease and sickness in the people” (Matt. 4:23). Here, the lead indicative verb (περιῆγεν) sets the stage while the three participles explain particular actions that took place on the trip.

Indirect Discourse

The term “indirect” signifies that the writer is not quoting the thoughts or words of someone directly, but paraphrasing. This often involves a change of person in the reported statement. For instance, *direct discourse* occurs in 1 John 2:4: ὁ λέγων ὅτι

¹¹See Rom. 12:9-19 or Col. 3:12-13 for more examples of participles in parallel with imperatives; cf. Porter, *Idioms*, pp. 185-86.

Ἔγνωκα αὐτόν, “The person who says, ‘*I have known him*’” where first person ἔγνωκα represents a direct reference to the person’s speech.¹² *Indirect discourse*, on the other hand, would have changed the verb to the third person in this instance: ὁ λέγων ὅτι **ἔγνωκεν** αὐτόν, “The person who says *that he has known him*.” In Greek, indirect discourse is frequently communicated much like in English; with ὅτι “that” and an indicative verb.¹³ In a few places, though, Greek allows the use of a participle for indirect discourse in the accusative case (because it is virtually the direct object of the verb of speaking, thinking, perception, etc.). Examples are:

- ✧ Ὅτι πολλοὶ πλάνοι ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸν κόσμον, οἱ μὴ ὁμολογοῦντες Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν **ἐρχόμενον** ἐν σαρκί, “Because many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not profess that Jesus Christ *is come* in the flesh” (2 John 7).
- ✧ πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ **ἐληλυθότα** ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, “Every spirit which professes that Jesus Christ *has come* in the flesh is from God” (1 John 4:2).

As with the infinitive in indirect discourse explained in Chapter Two, the tense form of the participle chosen in this construction will mirror the tense of the original statement if it had been expressed as direct discourse. Hence, there is no default tense form in this construction; the form is guided by a representation of the original statement.

Complementary Participle

In a few cases, a participle is used as the complement for another verb in much the same way as is more normally done with an infinitive. This idiom is particularly found with two verbs, παύω “stop” (usually expressed as middle παύομαι) and ἐπιμένω “continue.”¹⁴ In all cases except one (see example two below), the participle is expressed in its present tense form in the New Testament. This makes sense because both “to stop *doing something*” and “to continue *doing something*” presents the complementary event as an atelic kind of process fitting the present tense form. Hence, the present tense form should be considered the default form in this participle construction.

- ✧ πᾶσάν τε ἡμέραν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ κατ’ οἶκον οὐκ **ἐπαύοντο διδάσκοντες** καὶ **εὐαγγελιζόμενοι** τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, “And every day in the temple and from house to house *they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Gospel* that Jesus (is) the Messiah” (Acts 5:42).

¹²What may be confusing at first is that ὅτι in Greek may mark *either* direct or indirect discourse. With direct discourse, ὅτι functions as quotation marks and is not translated into English; with indirect discourse it is translated as “that.”

¹³The other main way Greek communicates indirect discourse is with an infinitive clause as in 1 John 2:9; see Wallace, pp. 603–5.

¹⁴This idiom is found about 13 times in the New Testament with these two verbs.

- ✧ εἴ γε ἐπιμένετε τῇ πίστει τεθεμελιωμένοι καὶ ἑδραῖοι καὶ μὴ μετακινούμενοι ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “If indeed you *continue to be founded* in faith, steadfast and *not moved* from the hope of the Gospel” (Col. 1:23). Notice the perfect form τεθεμελιωμένοι (from θεμελιόω “lay a foundation [for a building]”). The perfect conveys that the foundation has already been laid, but the Colossian Christians are to remain founded on this base. The *state* of being founded continues even though the *act* of laying the substructure is completed; one does not lay a foundation again (1 Cor. 3:11).

An Extended Example

Needless to say, when it comes to Greek, some interesting and sometimes important differences of interpretation arise because of different readings of the relation of adverbial participles to their main verbs. Here is a prime example.

- ✧ ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, “But emptied Himself, *taking* the form of a bond-servant” (Phil. 2:7; NASB).

The so-called “kenotic” theory of the incarnation arose from an erroneous interpretation of this verse.¹⁵ This theory says that the Son of God abandoned all or most of his divine attributes at his incarnation.¹⁶ The question arises, though, whether “he emptied himself” (leaving that open for the moment) took place at the incarnation or not. The answer comes through careful evaluation of the relation between the main verb (ἐκένωσεν) and the adverbial participle (λαβών).

First, the kenotic theory seems to be dependent on the English word order to establish a temporal relationship between the main verb and the participle. It works best if we take “he emptied” as the first event to occur and “he took up the form” as the second, subsequent action. But the Greek word order does not communicate that here; the fact that the participle is *aorist* sets the temporal priority, if any, in reverse order: the ‘becoming a servant’ occurred first, then the ‘emptying.’

In my opinion, the reference to Jesus “emptying himself” is a reference to his self-sacrificial death, rather than to his incarnation.¹⁷ If this is correct, the kenotic theory is ruled out altogether. The “taking the form of a servant” is the reference in this verse to the incarnation. This phrase implies the opposite of the kenotic theory; the Son of God retained his full divinity during his earthly existence. That divinity was veiled in the guise of a *servant* (δούλος), though not in the form of a *man* (in a docetist sense), for he was and is both true God and true man.

¹⁵“Kenotic” comes from κενόω, the main verb in this verse.

¹⁶See for instance, the popular hymn by Charles Wesley, “And Can It Be,” which has the line: “He left his Father’s throne above . . . Emptied himself of all but love.”

¹⁷The other possibility is that the participle is modal. Cf. R. B. Strimple, “Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Studies,” *WTJ* 41 (1979): 247-68. Compare Porter’s (unconvincing) interpretation as *means* “by taking the form of a servant” (*Idioms*, 192).

Conclusion

We have seen that tense form choice with the participle was not guided by construction demands or the atelic/telic factor in most cases. Exceptions are the participle used as a complement to verbs like *πύω* and *ἐπιμένω* which have a default present tense form and the parallel use of the adverbial participle which—because it operates like a chameleon—is shaped by the tense form factors guiding the mood of the main verb. In most cases, however, the participle suffered from the interference of either relative or absolute *tense* requirements, making it less subject to aspectual nuance and default patterns, even though we saw that some aspectual nuance (conative present, inceptive aorist, etc.) may still be conveyed at times. In the next and final chapter, we will cover the rarer material put off to the end.