

GREEK VERB TENSES (Intermediate Discussion)

"No element of Greek language is of more importance to the student of the New Testament than the matter of [tense](#). A variation in meaning exhibited by the use of a particular tense will often dissolve what appears to be an embarrassing difficulty, or reveal a gleam of truth which will thrill the heart with delight and inspiration. Though it is an intricate and difficult subject, no phase of Greek grammar offers a fuller reward. The benefits are to be reaped only when one has invested sufficient time and diligence to obtain an insight into the idiomatic use of tense in the Greek language and an appreciation of the finer distinctions in force." ([Dana & Mantey](#), pgs 176-7). These comments by Dana and Mantey are to be taken seriously if the student of the New Testament desires to get any benefit from the study of Greek; this is an area that offers much reward. Never neglect to notice the tense of each Greek verb and note its significance and bearing upon the meaning of each passage.

In English, and in most other languages, the tense of the verb mainly refers to the 'time' of the action of the verb (present, past, or future time). In Greek, however, although time does bear upon the meaning of tense, the primary consideration of the tense of the verb is not time, but rather the 'kind of action' that the verb portrays. The most important element in Greek tense is kind of action; time is regarded as a secondary element. For this reason, many grammarians have adopted the German word 'aktionsart' (kind of action) to be able to more easily refer to this phenomenon of Greek verbs.

The kind of action (aktionsart) of a Greek verb will generally fall into one of three categories:

- 1) **Continuous (or 'Progressive')** kind of action.
- 2) **Completed (or 'Accomplished')** kind of action, with continuing results.
- 3) **Simple occurrence, (or 'Summary occurrence')** without reference to the question of progress. (This is sometimes referred to as 'Punctiliar' kind of action, but it is a misnomer to thus imply that, in every instance, the action only happened at one point of time. This can be true, but it is often dependent on other factors such as the meaning of the verb, other words in the context, etc.).

It is an important distinction to understand, as discussed below, that the only place in which 'time' comes to bear directly upon the tense of a verb is when the verb is in the [indicative mood](#). In all other moods and uses the aktionsart of the verb tense should be seen as primary.

See the chart below for a brief summary of the kind of action shown by each Greek verb tense and its corresponding time of action when it occurs in the indicative mood:

Kind of Action and Time of Action for Each Verb Tense

Tense Name	Kind of Action	Time Element (In Indicative Mood)
Present	Progressive (or 'Continuous')	present
Aorist	Simple (or 'Summary') Occurrence	past
Perfect	Completed, with Results	past, with present results
Imperfect	Progressive (or 'Continuous')	past
Future	Simple Occurrence	future
Past Perfect	Completed, with Results	past
Future Perfect	Completed, with Results	future

Aktionsart versus Time

The 'time' aspect of the tense of a verb really only comes into affect when the verb is in the indicative mood. When a

verb is outside of the indicative mood, then the aktionsart ('kind of action') of the tense is usually emphasized and should be carefully noted, and its bearing upon the passage should be considered. (In referring to 'verbs outside of the indicative mood' in this context, it means both actual finite verbs in the imperative, subjunctive, and optative moods, and participles (verbal adjectives) and infinitives (verbal nouns)). The participle may have temporal significance in relation to the time of the finite verb in the sentence. See the section on participles for a discussion of this aspect.

For instance, outside of the indicative mood it is often customary to use the tense that implies a 'simple occurrence', the aorist tense. The aorist places no emphasis on the progress of the action, but only shows a simple occurrence (or summary occurrence), the action viewed as a whole. If the writer does not wish to emphasize or focus on the progress of the verb's action (whether continuous or completed) he will use the aorist tense. The term 'aorist' means 'unspecified' or 'unlimited'. It signifies nothing as to the progression or completeness of an action, it just indicates 'happenedness' or simple occurrence. If one has the mistaken concept that aorist tense means past time, many passages of the New Testament will be very confusing if not altogether nonsensical. (Only in the indicative mood does the aorist indicate past time). Many times the action of a verb in the aorist subjunctive or aorist imperative forms, for instance, will actually take place at a future time, not a past time.

For example, in Matthew 14:29, when Jesus was walking on the water, He told Peter "Come", which is in the aorist imperative form in Greek. Although Jesus used a verb in the aorist tense, He surely was not telling Peter to come at some time in the past, as 'came' would indicate; but He was telling him to do something at the present time. If Jesus would have desired to put some special emphasis on the progress of Peter's coming to Him, He could have said "Be coming" in the present imperative. Since the present tense indicates progressive or continuous kind of action, using the present would have indicated something to the effect that each and every step Peter took would have been a task or accomplishment in itself. This is one of the many examples which show that outside of the indicative mood, oftentimes the aorist tense is used (although the present tense is used quite frequently also). The diligent seeker of New Testament truth will take careful note of this most crucial aspect of Greek verb usage.

An Overview of Aktionsart with Time with the Different Tenses

If the writer is referring to an action that happened in past time, he could refer to it as either progressive (by using the [imperfect](#) tense) or as merely a simple occurrence, with no emphasis on the action's progress (by using the [aorist](#) tense).

For action happening at the present time, only the '[present](#) tense' is available. Whether the writer is wishing in any particular instance to emphasize the progressive aspect of the verb or just indicate a simple occurrence at the present time, there is only one choice of tense to use. Therefore, one must consider the context and the basic meaning of the verb to determine whether the emphasis is on the continuous aspect of the action or merely on the present time element. It may be that no real emphasis on progressive action is intended but, for a statement requiring the element of present time, there is no choice but to use the 'present tense'. (Of course outside the indicative mood the emphasis almost certainly will be on the progressive element of the verb, since the aorist tense could readily be employed).

The [future](#) tense is mainly found in the indicative mood and therefore primarily refers to the future time. Since the future tense functions very much like a potential mood (because the action is only as of yet conceived), there is no reference to the progress of the action. In this sense the aktionsart of the future tense closely resembles that of the aorist, being merely a simple occurrence.

The [perfect](#) tense has to do with the completed progress of an action and its corresponding finished results. That is, it shows a present state of affairs (from the writer's perspective), based upon an action in past time (when using the indicative mood). There is no tense in English that has this same meaning. Oftentimes the student of English will fail to realize the importance of the perfect tense and will tend to blend it with the aorist in translation. This is mainly due to English idiom and the customary practice of translating the Greek perfect as the English perfect. This can be a big mistake and can blur the point or emphasis of a New Testament passage. Since the perfect tense is used less frequently than other tenses, it is exegetically more significant. When it does occur, there is usually a definite and deliberate reason it was chosen by the writer. The emphasis may be on the culmination of the action's progress or on the resulting state of affairs brought about by the action.

The aktionsart of the [past perfect](#) (pluperfect) is the same as in the perfect tense. The difference is that it refers to this 'completed' condition at some time in the past. It may seem strange, based upon the foregoing discussion of aktionsart versus time, to define his tense as something that happened in past time. This is due to the fact that the pluperfect is used exclusively in the indicative mood - thus the past time element - and the discussion of the perfect tense explains the aktionsart of the past perfect also. The use of the pluperfect is rare in the New Testament.

The explanation of the [future perfect](#) (which is only formed by [periphrasis](#) in the New Testament) is much like the [past perfect](#), only the completed state will exist at some time in the future rather than in the past. Its use is also very rare in the New Testament.

By Corey Keating at <http://www.ntgreek.org/>

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Greek Verbs (Shorter Definitions)

Just like Greek nouns, the Greek verb also changes form (the Greek 'spelling', so to speak). The form changes based upon the [subject of the verb](#) and the [kind of action indicated](#). As was mentioned earlier, Greek is a fully "inflected language." Each Greek word actually changes form (inflection) based upon the role that it plays in the sentence. The stem of the verb shows the basic meaning or action of the word, but the ending (or 'suffix') changes to show various details. Not only the ending of the verb may change, but the verb form may have a 'prefix' added to the beginning of the verbal stem. Sometimes the actual stem of the verb may change or may add an 'infix' to indicate certain other details.

The prefix, suffix, and verbal stem all combine together to define a certain form of a verb. Each verb form indicates a specific meaning. There are five basic parts (or aspects) that are clearly defined or indicated by every Greek verb form. These five parts are: [Person](#), [Number](#), [Tense](#), [Voice](#), and [Mood](#). See below for details of these five aspects of Greek verbs.

Grammatical Person of Verbs

There are three main classes of grammatical person in both English and Greek. Person indicates the form of the verb (and also pronouns) which refer to:

- 1) the person(s) speaking (**First Person**)
- 2) the person(s) being spoken to (**Second Person**) and
- 3) the person(s) being spoken of or about (**Third Person**).

For example: "Because I *live*, you shall *live* also." John 14:19b "He *lives* by the power of God." II Cor 13:4

First Person: 'I live' - the person speaking (i.e. 'I') is the subject of the verb.

Second Person: 'you live' - the person being spoken to (i.e. 'you') is the subject of the verb.

Third Person: 'He lives' - the person being spoken about (i.e. 'He') is the subject of the verb.

Grammatical Number of Verbs

The concept of grammatical number is quite straightforward in both English and Koine Greek. It is the property of a [verb](#) (and [nouns](#) and pronouns also) which indicates whether the reference is to one (**singular**) or to more than one (**plural**). (Classical Greek at one time had a 'dual' number which made a distinction for 'two', besides the customary singular and plural.)

Each grammatical [person](#) (First, Second, and Third) can be either singular or plural in number.

For example: Singular Number: "For I *am persuaded* that neither death, nor life,...shall be able to separate us from the love of God," (Rom. 8:38-39).

Plural Number: "For we *are* His workmanship," (Eph. 2:10a).

Grammatical Voice of Verbs

Active Voice

Grammatical voice indicates whether the [subject](#) is the performer of the action of the [verb](#) (active voice), or the subject is the recipient of the action ([passive voice](#)). If the subject of the sentence is executing the action, then the verb is referred to as being in the active voice.

For example: "Jesus *was baptizing* the people" (paraphrase of John 3:22; 4:1,2). "Jesus" is the subject of the sentence and is the one that is performing the action of the verb; therefore the verb is said to be in the "Active Voice".

Passive Voice

Grammatical voice indicates whether the [subject](#) is the performer of the action of the [verb](#) ([active voice](#)), or the subject is the recipient of the action (passive voice). If the subject of the sentence is being acted upon, then the verb is referred to as being in the passive voice.

For example: "Jesus ... *was baptized* by John in the Jordan" (Mark 1:9). "Jesus" is the subject of the sentence, but in this case He is being acted upon (i.e. He is the recipient of the action), therefore the verb is said to be in the "Passive Voice".

Middle Voice

The Greek middle voice shows the [subject](#) acting in his own interest or on his own behalf, or participating in the results of the verbal action. In overly simplistic terms, sometimes the middle form of the verb could be translated as "the performer of the action actually acting upon himself" (reflexive action).

For example: "I *am washing myself*." "I" is the subject of the sentence (performing the action of the verb) and yet "I" am also receiving the action of the verb. This is said to be in the "Middle Voice". Many instances in the Greek are not this obvious and cannot be translated this literally.

Verbal Moods

The aspect of the grammatical "mood" of a [verb](#) has to do with the statement's relationship to reality. In broad terms, mood deals with the fact of whether the asserted statement is actual or if there is only the possibility of its actual occurrence. "Whether the verbal idea is objectively a fact or not is not the point: mood represents the way in which the matter is conceived" (Dana & Mantey). If the one asserting the [sentence](#) states it as actual, then the mood reflects this, regardless of whether the statement is true or false.

The [indicative mood](#) is the only mood conceived of as actual while with the other three moods ([imperative](#), [subjunctive](#), and [optative](#)) the action is only thought of as possible or potential.

Indicative Mood

The indicative mood is a statement of fact or an actual occurrence from the writer's or speaker's perspective. Even if the writer is lying, he may state the action as if it is a fact, and thus the [verb](#) would be in the indicative mood. It may be action occurring in past, present, or future time. This 'statement of fact' can even be made with a negative [adverb](#) modifying the verb (see the second example).

This is in contrast to one of the other moods (see below) in which the writer/speaker may desire or ask for the action to take place.

For example: "And they *overcame* him by the blood of the Lamb."
Rev. 12:11 "God *is not mocked*." Gal. 6:7

Imperative Mood

The imperative mood is a command or instruction given to the hearer, charging the hearer to carry out or perform a certain action.

For example: "*Flee* youthful lusts." 2 Tim. 2:22

Subjunctive Mood

The subjunctive mood indicates probability or objective possibility. The action of the [verb](#) will possibly happen, depending on certain objective factors or circumstances. It is oftentimes used in conditional statements (i.e. 'If...then...' clauses) or in purpose clauses. However if the subjunctive mood is used in a purpose or result clause, then the action should not be thought of as a possible result, but should be viewed as a definite outcome that will happen as a result of another stated action.

For example: "*Let us come forward* to the Holy of Holies with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Heb 10:23
"In order that now the manifold wisdom of God *might be made known* through the church..." Eph 3:10

Optative Mood

The optative is the mood of possibility, removed even further than the [subjunctive mood](#) from something conceived of as actual. Often it is used to convey a wish or hope for a certain action to occur.

For example: "And the very God of peace *sanctify* you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body *be preserved* blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." I Thess 5:23

Verb Tenses

Time & "Kind of Action" in Greek Verbs:

In English, and in most other languages, the tense of the [verb](#) mainly refers to the 'time' of the action of the verb (present, past, or future time). In Greek, however, although time does bear upon the meaning of tense, the primary consideration of the tense of the verb is not time, but rather the 'kind of action' that the verb portrays. The most important element in Greek tense is kind of action; time is regarded as a secondary element. For this reason, many grammarians have adopted the German word 'aktionsart' (kind of action) to be able to more easily refer to this phenomenon of Greek verbs.

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Present Tense

The present tense usually denotes [continuous kind of action](#). It shows 'action in progress' or 'a state of persistence.' When used in the [indicative mood](#), the present tense denotes action taking place or going on in the present time.

For example: "In Whom you also are *being built together* into a dwelling place of God in spirit." Eph 2:22
"Not *forsaking* the assembling of ourselves together." Heb 10:25

Aorist Tense

The aorist is said to be "[simple occurrence](#)" or "summary occurrence", without regard for the amount of time taken to accomplish the action. This tense is also often referred to as the 'punctiliar' tense. 'Punctiliar' in this sense means 'viewed as a single, collective whole,' a "one-point-in-time" action, although it may actually take place over a period of time. In the indicative mood the aorist tense denotes action that occurred in the past time, often translated like the English simple past tense.

For example: "God...*made* us *alive together* with Christ." Eph 2:5
"He who *has begun* a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus." Phil 1:6

Imperfect Tense

The imperfect tense shows [continuous](#) or linear type of action just like the [present tense](#). It always indicates an action continually or repeatedly happening in past time. It portrays the action as going on for some extended period of time in the past.

The idea of continual action in the past does not apply when the verb "to be" is in the imperfect tense. There it should be considered a simple action happening in past time, without regard to its "on-going" or "repeated happening" in the past.

For example: "For you *were* once darkness, but now light in the Lord." Eph 5:8

Perfect Tense

The basic thought of the perfect tense is that the progress of an action has been [completed](#) and the results of the action are continuing on, in full effect. In other words, the progress of the action has reached its culmination and the finished results are now in existence. Unlike the English perfect, which indicates a completed past action, the Greek perfect tense indicates the continuation and present state of a completed past action.

For example, Galatians 2:20 should be translated "I *am* in a present state of having been crucified with Christ," indicating that not only was I crucified with Christ in the past, but I am existing now in that present condition. "...*having been rooted and grounded* in love," Eph 3:17

Future Tense

Just like the English future tense, the Greek future tells about an anticipated action or a certain happening that will occur at some time in the future.

For example: "We know that if he is manifested, we *will be* like Him, for we *will see* Him even as He is." 1 John 3:2

Pluperfect Tense

The pluperfect ('past perfect') shows action that is complete and existed at some time in the past, (the past time being indicated by the context). This tense is only found in the [indicative mood](#) and is rarely used in the New Testament.

For example: "...and they beat against that house; and it did not fall, for it *was founded* on the rock." Matt 7:25

Future Perfect Tense

There is also a future perfect tense in Greek which is very rare in the New Testament. It is only formed by [periphrasis](#) in the New Testament is much like the [past perfect](#), only the completed state will exist at some time in the future rather than in the past.

Non-Finite Verb Forms

Participles

A participle is considered a "verbal adjective". It is often a word that ends with an "-ing" in English (such as "speaking," "having," or "seeing"). It can be used as an [adjective](#), in that it can modify a [noun](#) (or substitute as a noun), or it can be used as an [adverb](#) and further explain or define the action of a [verb](#). (For a more complete explanation of participles, please go to the [advanced section on participles](#).)

For example:

Adjectival use: "The *coming One* will come and will not delay." Heb 10:37

Adverbial use: "But *speaking truth* in love, we may grow up into Him in all things." Eph 4:15

(Please be sure to see the list of '[Reference Sheets](#)' where the participle and other uses and classifications can be printed out for quick reference.)

Infinitives

The Greek infinitive is the form of the [verb](#) that is usually translated into English with the word "to" attached to it, often used to complement another verb. It can be used to function as a [noun](#) and is therefore referred to as a "verbal noun".

For instance, "For to me *to live* is Christ" (Phil 1:21). In this sentence, the words "to live" are an infinitive in Greek and are functioning as the [subject](#) of the [sentence](#) (a noun).

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Imperfect Tense

The imperfect tense shows [continuous](#) or linear type of action just like the [present tense](#). It always indicates an action continually or repeatedly happening in past time. It portrays the action as going on for some extended period of time in the past.

The idea of continual action in the past does not apply when the verb "to be" is in the imperfect tense. There it should be considered a simple action happening in past time, without regard to its "on-going" or "repeated happening" in the past.

For example: "For you *were* once darkness, but now light in the Lord." Eph 5:8

Perfect Tense

The basic thought of the perfect tense is that the progress of an action has been [completed](#) and the results of the action are continuing on, in full effect. In other words, the progress of the action has reached its culmination and the finished results are now in existence. Unlike the English perfect, which indicates a completed past action, the Greek perfect tense indicates the continuation and present state of a completed past action.

For example, Galatians 2:20 should be translated "I *am in a present state of having been crucified* with Christ," indicating that not only was I crucified with Christ in the past, but I am existing now in that present condition. "...*having been rooted and grounded* in love," Eph 3:17

Future Tense

Just like the English future tense, the Greek future tells about an anticipated action or a certain happening that will occur at some time in the future.

For example: "We know that if he is manifested, we *will be* like Him, for we *will see* Him even as He is." 1 John 3:2

Pluperfect Tense

The pluperfect ('past perfect') shows action that is complete and existed at some time in the past, (the past time being indicated by the context). This tense is only found in the [indicative mood](#) and is rarely used in the New Testament.

For example: "...and they beat against that house; and it did not fall, for it *was founded* on the rock." Matt 7:25

Future Perfect Tense

There is also a future perfect tense in Greek which is very rare in the New Testament. It is only formed by [periphrasis](#) in the New Testament is much like the [past perfect](#), only the completed state will exist at some time in the future rather than in the past.

Non-Finite Verb Forms

Participles

A participle is considered a "verbal adjective". It is often a word that ends with an "-ing" in English (such as "speaking," "having," or "seeing"). It can be used as an [adjective](#), in that it can modify a [noun](#) (or substitute as a noun), or it can be used as an [adverb](#) and further explain or define the action of a [verb](#). (For a more complete explanation of participles, please go to the [advanced section on participles](#).)

For example:

Adjectival use: "The *coming One* will come and will not delay." Heb 10:37

Adverbial use: "But *speaking truth* in love, we may grow up into Him in all things." Eph 4:15

(Please be sure to see the list of '[Reference Sheets](#)' where the participle and other uses and classifications can be printed out for quick reference.)

Infinitives

The Greek infinitive is the form of the [verb](#) that is usually translated into English with the word "to" attached to it, often used to complement another verb. It can be used to function as a [noun](#) and is therefore referred to as a "verbal noun".

For instance, "For to me *to live* is Christ" (Phil 1:21). In this sentence, the words "to live" are an infinitive in Greek and are functioning as the [subject](#) of the [sentence](#) (a noun).

(Please be sure to see the list of '[Reference Sheets](#)' where the infinitive and other uses and classifications can be printed out for quick reference.)

By Corey Keating at <http://www.ntgreek.org/>

Go to the page for [Learning New Testament Greek](#) at NTGreek.org

GREEK VERB CHART (Relational)

Yung-Suk Kim

<p>Present, Act, Ind.</p> <table border="1"> <tr><td>----ω</td><td>---ομεν</td><td rowspan="3">➔</td></tr> <tr><td>----εις</td><td>---ετε</td></tr> <tr><td>----ει</td><td>---ουσι(ν)</td></tr> </table> <p>*sing a song!</p>	----ω	---ομεν	➔	----εις	---ετε	----ει	---ουσι(ν)	<p>Future, Act, Ind.</p> <table border="1"> <tr><td>----σω</td><td>---σομεν</td><td rowspan="3"></td></tr> <tr><td>----σεις</td><td>---σετε</td></tr> <tr><td>----σει</td><td>---σουσι(ν)</td></tr> </table> <p>*This is cool! Just add σ before the present, act, ind. endings.</p>	----σω	---σομεν		----σεις	---σετε	----σει	---σουσι(ν)								
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Perfect, Midd/Pass, Ind.

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*compared to Perfect, act, ind., endings are different, which are secondary endings.

*Parsing order: part of speech, **T V M P N**, Lx form, meaning

*elements of verb: augment, stem, tense suffix, personal endings; for example, ε λυ σα μεν.

*Look at 2 different personal endings type (act, midd/ pass).

BY PRINCIPALS

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