

## THE CLASSIFICATION OF OPTATIVES: A STATISTICAL STUDY\*

JAMES L. BOYER

*The optative mood is relatively rare in the NT and follows usage patterns of Classical Greek. Though most NT occurrences are volitive, some are clearly potential; the oblique optative, however, does not occur in the NT. Careful analysis suggests that the optative implies a less distinct anticipation than the subjunctive, but not less probable.*

\* \* \*

THE student who comes to NT Greek from a Classical Greek background notices some differences in vocabulary, i.e., old words with new meanings and new words, slight differences in spelling, and some unfamiliar forms of inflection. But in syntax he is on familiar ground, except that it seems easier. He may hardly notice one of the major differences until it is called to his attention, and then it becomes the greatest surprise of all: the optative mood. Its surprise, however, is not that it is used differently or strangely; it just is not used much.

Many of the old optative functions, particularly its use in subordinate clauses after a secondary tense, seemingly do not occur at all in the NT. On the other hand, the optatives which do occur follow the old patterns rather closely. What changes do occur are in the direction of greater simplicity.

Grammarians have pointed out that "the optative was a luxury of the language and was probably never common in the vernacular. . .

\* Informational materials and listings generated in the preparation of this study may be found in my "Supplemental Manual of Information: Optative Verbs," Those interested may secure this manual through their library by interlibrary loan from the Morgan Library, Grace Theological Seminary, 200 Seminary Dr., Winona Lake, IN 46590. Also available are manuals of information supplementing previous articles of this series covering participles, infinitives, subjunctives and imperatives.

a literary mood.”<sup>1</sup> In the NT it is found almost solely in the writings of Luke and of Paul, with the more complex literary patterns in Luke. Paul's use is almost limited to the expression of a wish. There are four instances in the epistles of Peter, two in Jude, and one each in Mark and John. Surprisingly there is only one in the literary epistle to the Hebrews.

### INFLECTIONAL COMPARISONS

The optative is so rare that most grammars of NT Greek do not include the paradigms for the optative forms. The inflectional elements of the Greek verb in all the moods consist of three basic parts: (1) the verb or tense stem, (2) a thematic or connecting vowel, and (3) a set of inflectional endings indicating person and number. The optative uses the same verb or tense stems as the other moods. It adds a mood suffix (**i** or **ih**) to the thematic vowel, **o** / **e**, resulting in a distinctive **i**-sound (**-oi-**, **-ei-**, **-ai-** or **-oih-**, **-eih-**, **-aih-**) before the ending. The optative uses the secondary endings in all its tenses (just as the subjunctive uses the primary endings). The actual resultant endings may be found in the major grammars.<sup>2</sup>

### FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

#### *The Optative of Wish (Volitive)*

The name optative (from the Latin *optari* = to wish) points to one major use of the mood, to express a wish or a choice. It accounts for the majority of NT optatives (39 out of 68, or 57%). These may be grouped into six categories.

#### **Mh>genoito**

Best known of optative uses, and one of the most frequent,<sup>3</sup> the phrase **mh>genoito** is an example of the volitive optative. In form it is a wish, "may it not happen." But it has become a stereotyped, idiomatic exclamation indicating revulsion and indignant, strong rejection. For this reason it is given a separate classification. The common English translation, "God forbid!" (King James Version) is

<sup>1</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 935-36.

<sup>2</sup> For Classical forms, see W. W. Goodwin, *Greek Grammar*, rev. by C. B. Gulick (Boston: Ginn, 1930); for NT forms see J. H. Moulton and W. F. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek, Vol. II Accidence and Word Formation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920).

<sup>3</sup> It occurs 15 times, all but one is in Paul: Luke 20:16; Rom 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Cor 6:15; Gal 2:17; 3:21; 6:14.

not, of course, a literal translation (there is no word for God, and the verb does not mean "forbid"), but it expresses the sense accurately.<sup>4</sup> Gal 6:14 is the only place where this phrase occurs as part of a longer sentence rather than standing alone as a two-word exclamation. In every other Pauline usage, it is an appropriate negative answer to a rhetorical question. In Luke 20:16 it is also a strong reply, this time to a threat of judgment.

This phrase indicating strong rejection is not limited to NT writers. It was used in classical,<sup>5</sup> and in LXX.<sup>6</sup> Some have identified it as the only remnant of the optative in modern Greek.<sup>7</sup>

### Formal Benediction

This group and the next are actually indirect prayers, since, although addressed to someone else, they express a wish that God might do something. They are rather formal "benedictions" in which the spiritual leader, here Paul, invokes divine favor upon his readers.

Their formal character is indicated also by two somewhat standardized patterns of expression: (1) God (**o|qeo|** or **o|kurio|** or both) is named first, usually rather formally described in terms appropriate to prayer, with the aorist active optative following: for example, Rom 15:5, **o|de-qeo| th| upomenh| kai>th| parakl hsewj d&h upiñ.** "Now the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you. . . ."<sup>8</sup> (2) The optative is in the passive voice, the items wished for constitute the subject, and the agent or doer is unnamed, although clearly understood as God; 1 Pet 1:2, **xarij upiñ kai>ei|thnh pl eiqunqeih** "May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure" (also 2 Pet 1.2, Jude 2, and 1 Thess 5.23b).

Attention needs to be called here to the very large number of such benedictions in the NT where the verb is unexpressed and needs

<sup>4</sup> The NASB uses "May it never be!" The New King James version uses "Certainly not!" in every instance except one, where it preserves the KJV "God forbid!" The NIV uses a variety of phrases: "Not at all!" (4 times), "By no means!" (4), "Absolutely not!" (2), and once each, "May it never be!," "Certainly not!," "Far from it!," "Never!" and "May I never. . . !."

<sup>5</sup> W. W. Goodwin, *Grammar*, 279 (#1321).

<sup>6</sup> F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. by Robert Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961) 194.

<sup>7</sup> J. T. Pring, *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Greek* (Oxford, 1982) 43; Robertson, *Grammar*, 939. But others have doubted this; cf. J. H. Moulton; *Grammar of New Testament Greek, Vol. 1 Prolegomena* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906) 240; Vincent A. Heinz, "The Optative Mood in the Greek New Testament," unpublished Master of Theology thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1962, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Also, Rom 15:13, I Thess 3:11, 12 (two optatives involved), 5:23 (first optative), 2 Thess 2:17 (two optatives), 3:5, 16; Heb 13:21. English translations are given from the NASB unless otherwise stated.

to be supplied. In most cases that verb, if it were used, would be the optative of the copulative verb, **eiē**.

### Non-formal Blessing

A second group of indirect prayers is less formal, expressing a wish for some specific blessing for someone else (Acts 26:29, 2 Tim 1:16, 18, 4:16) or for oneself (1 Thess 3:11, Phlm 20). In these the optative stands before the reference to the Lord, and no descriptive words are used; 2 Tim 1:16, **d&h eēoj o|kurioj**. "The Lord grant mercy" (also 1:18, Jude 9).

### Simple Request

Not all wishes are specifically addressed to God; sometimes they relate to providence. Only two optatives are included in this category: 2 Tim 4:16 is a gesture of Paul's forgiveness reflected in his wish that others will do the same; and Philemon 20 is a simple personal request. However, several of the wishes in the categories following might also be included here.

### Imprecations

The optative mood can be used for an adverse wish, or a curse. Only two that use the optative are usually listed for the NT, Mark 11:4, Acts 8:20; another, Jude 9, probably also belongs here. In imprecatory sentences Classical Greek normally used the optative, but in the NT the imperative is used more often (cf. Gal 1:8, 9 **ahagema eētō**. "Let him be accursed," also 1 Cor 16:22 (with a colloquial form, **hētō**); in Acts 1:20, Luke uses the imperative **labetw** instead of the LXX optative **hl aboi** quoting from Ps 108[109]:8). The close kinship between the optative of wish and the imperative of command is seen also in Mark 11:4.

### Permission

One example uses the optative in a passage which seems to express permission or acceptance rather than the eager hope which the English word 'wish' conveys. Luke 1:38 **genoito mi kata to rhēma sou** "Be it done to me according to your word." It is possible that Mary's attitude toward the announcement she had just received may have been strong anticipation and desire, but it seems more plausible that these words express deliberate choice and willing submission on her part.

*The Potential Optative*

The term "potential" is used in grammar to describe action which is dependent on circumstances or conditions, that which would or might happen if circumstances are right or if conditions are met. In Greek there is a potential indicative used to express a past action as dependent on past circumstances or conditions, and the potential optative used to express such actions in the future, as well as potential uses of the subjunctive in third class conditions and deliberative questions. Usually these constructions use the modal particle **an**. Concerning the potential optative, the Classical grammarian Wm. W. Goodwin says,

The limiting condition is generally too indefinite to be distinctly present to the mind, and can be expressed only by words like *perhaps, possibly, or probably, or by such vague forms as if he pleased, or if he should try, if he could, if there should be an opportunity, etc.* Sometimes a general condition, like in any possible case, is felt to be implied, so that the optative with **an** hardly differs from an absolute future. . . .<sup>9</sup>

The NT potential use of the optative is in accord with the Classical usage, except it is much less frequent and does not include all the facets found in Classical Greek. These have been summarized into four groups.

## Potential Optative in Questions

Certainly one of the characteristics of the NT use of the optative mood is its strong tendency to occur in questions and in connection with questions. As noted above, 13 out of 15 occurrences of **anh>genoito** serve as answers to rhetorical questions. Even more surprising is the fact that 20 of the 29 potential optatives in the NT occur within questions.

No indication has been found of such a tendency in older Greek,<sup>10</sup> nor any suggestion as to the reason for and significance of this phenomenon in the NT. It may be that it is related to the basic idea of potentiality that belongs to the mood. At a time when the optative was becoming archaic and other forms of expression were replacing it in ordinary speech, the added "potentiality" which

<sup>9</sup> Goodwin, *Grammar*, 282 (#1327).

<sup>10</sup> H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1976) 407-8 mentions the use of the optative in questions, but no indication is given that this is a special feature of the mood.

inherently is involved in a question may have made it more likely that the optative should survive there.

*Potential Optative in Direct Questions.* Two examples are found in this category: Acts 8:31 and 17:18. Both have the particle **αἰ** and the sense is clearly potential. They express puzzled curiosity. Like those following, they are within a quotation, but it is a direct quotation, which would require that the original forms be preserved.

*Potential Optative in Indirect Questions.* The difference between these and the preceding category is that they are in indirectly quoted questions rather than direct. This raises the question (to be discussed below) whether they should rather be classified as "oblique" optatives. They are grouped here, however, on the basis of their sense.

This group is the largest, with 17 examples. All but one are in the writings of Luke.<sup>11</sup> The indirect question is introduced by the interrogative pronoun **τίς, τίς** 11 times, 8 of them<sup>12</sup> with the particle **αἰ** by the interrogative **εἰ** (= whether) 4 times, by **ἢ** (= whether) and **ποταποῖς**, once each. When **αἰ** is present the potential quality is obvious. Those introduced by **εἰ** are not conditional in meaning; rather they are interrogative, reflecting a direct question that is potential.<sup>13</sup> Most are introduced by governing verbs which suggest the element of uncertainty and perplexity, **διαλογίζομαι** (3), **διaporew** (2), **διαλέω**, **επερωτῶ**, **πυρῶμαι**, **συσχετῶ**. They may be subdivided into several types, illustrating different potential factors:

- 1) What does it mean? (Luke 1:29,8:9,15:26,18:36, Acts 10:17)
- 2) Which of many? (Luke 1:62, 6:11, 9:46, 22:23)
- 3) Yes or No? (Luke 3:15, Acts 17:11)
- 4) Who are you? / Who is he? (John 13:24, Acts 21:33)
- 5) What will come of this? (Acts 5:24)
- 6) Are you willing? (Acts 25:20)
- 7) Shall we try? (Acts 17:27 twice)

A crucial question here is whether or not these questions would be in the optative if they were standing alone or quoted directly.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 1:29, 62; 3:15; 6:11; 8:9; 9:46; 15:26; 18:36; 22:23; John 13:24; Acts 5:24; 10:17; 17:11, 27 (two optatives), 21:33; 25:20.

<sup>12</sup> One, Luke 18:36, has **αἰ** as a textual variant, as noted in Nestle's Greek Testament, edition 26.

<sup>13</sup> There may be another example in Acts 27:12 if we understand the sense to be that they put to sea [to see] whether they could spend the winter in a safe harbor (the direct question involved would be "Can we possibly do it?"). But it seems better to understand it to mean that they went "thinking that they might reach. . .", or "in order to, if possible, reach. . .". If that is the meaning it becomes an example of a parenthetical fourth class protasis.

Whether they are optative because they are potential, or because they are being quoted indirectly after a past tense main verb (i.e., oblique optatives), will be discussed below.

#### Potential Optative in Protases

There is no complete example in the NT of the Classical Future Less Vivid condition (often referred to as fourth-class conditions), which used the potential optative in both the protasis and the apodosis. In a few places, the protasis uses the potential optative, but the apodosis does not follow the pattern. Either it is incomplete, with the verb left to be understood (1 Pet 3:14, 17), or it takes a different form (Acts 24:19), or it is totally absent (Acts 20:16, 27:39, 1 Cor 14:10, 15:37).

One group poses no problem of identification: some form of the verb **eihi** is to be supplied and the whole is a mixed condition. If, as is likely in 1 Pet 3:14, the indicative **este** is supplied, the fourth-class protasis is combined with a first-class apodosis. In 1 Pet 3:17, if an indicative **estin** is supplied, the result is the same. If, as is presumably possible, an optative **ei** is supplied, it becomes a full fourth-class condition. In both cases, the optative in the protasis is a potential optative.

Acts 24:19 has a potential optative in the protasis, and an imperfect indicative in the apodosis, **edei**. Classical grammar provides a suggestion: "The imperfects **edei**, **xrhñ** or **erhn**, **ehn**, **eihoj hñ**, and other impersonal expressions denoting obligation, propriety, possibility, and the like, are often used without **an** to form an apodosis implying that the duty is not or was not performed, or the possibility not realized."<sup>14</sup> Thus **edei**, even without **an** is in effect a potential indicative and this example comes close to being a full fourth-class condition.

Another group is quite different. There is no apodosis, nor is one to be mentally supplied. The sentences are not conditional sentences at all. In each case a brief stereotype phrase<sup>15</sup> in the form of a protasis is attached almost as a parenthesis to some element of the sentence, not to the sentence itself. This seems especially clear in 1 Cor 14:10 and 15:37, where **eihtuxoi** is translated "perhaps" in

<sup>14</sup> Goodwin, *Grammar*, 297 (#1410a).

<sup>15</sup> Horn several times calls attention to the frequent appearance of the optative in set phrases or expressions; "The optatives that do occur frequently (wishes, potential, possible protases) occur for the most part in certain well defined phrases and expressions", and "certain fixed phrases occur, some of which. . . are rather parenthetical." (R. C. Horn, *The Use of the Subjunctive and Optative in the Non-Literary Papyri*, Westbrook Publ. Co., [Philadelphia, 1926] 143, 161.

NASB; "it may be" and "it may chance" in KJV; literally, "if it should turn out so". The other examples are very similar. In Acts 20:16 the phrase **ei dunaton eib** does not go with **espeuden** ("he was hurrying if he were able"), but with **genesqai** ("he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible"). In Acts 27:39, essentially the same phrase, **dunainto**, goes with **epwsai** ("they resolved to drive, if they could, the ship onto it"). Probably Acts 27:12, using the same phrase, belongs here also (cf. footnote 13). In all these the optative is potential.

### The Oblique Optative

One of the commonest of Classical usages of the optative was the change of the mood of a verb in a subordinate clause from indicative or subjunctive to optative following a governing verb in a secondary or past tense, or the change to optative when the sentence was included in indirect discourse after a secondary tense. This use has been referred to by various terms;<sup>16</sup> here it will be called the Oblique Optative.

The almost total absence of this construction in the NT may in part reflect that in the NT, direct discourse is preferred over indirect, and that even in the Classical the change was not required. It is apparent that the general decline of the optative was more severe in this usage than in the volitive and potential. This is not surprising, for the extreme complexity of the practice, as reflected by the multiplicity of "rules" generated by the Classical grammarians in their effort to describe it, would have tended toward its abandonment.

In discussing this usage Blass-Debrunner includes the examples listed above under the heading, Potential Optatives in Indirect Questions. It is true that indirect questions could in Classical Greek use this oblique optative. The optative then could be representing an indicative or subjunctive in the direct question. But an examination of the actual examples points strongly to the conclusion that the optative is what we should expect in the original question. Blass-Debrunner recognizes this in at least some of the examples, saying "[Luke's] examples usually have **ai** with the optative and accordingly correspond to the potential optative of the direct question."<sup>17</sup> Robertson expresses the same evaluation, speaking about Acts 17:18,

<sup>16</sup> Blass-DeBrunner (*Grammar*, 195) calls it the Oblique Optative. Several grammarians, for example, Robertson (*Grammar*, 1030), Smyth (*Grammar*, 379), Goodwin (*Grammar*, 314), refer to it as Optative in Indirect Discourse. This designation, however, only partially describes the practice, which includes not only clauses in indirect discourse but many other subordinate clauses after secondary tenses, and is therefore somewhat misleading.

<sup>17</sup> Blass-Debrunner, *Grammar*, 195.



"Why not rather suppose a "hesitating" (deliberative) direct question like **τιὰ τοῦτο οἱ σπέρμολογοὶ οὐδὲν λέγειν**; . . . As already remarked, the context shows doubt and perplexity in the indirect questions which have **αἰ** and the opt. in the N. T."<sup>18</sup> If that is the case they should be so classified, rather than assigned to the oblique category. The same may be said of all the examples, as has been shown in the discussion above.

Aside from these indirect questions there is only one other example claimed of the oblique optative. It is in Acts 25:16, involving two optative verbs in a temporal clause after a secondary tense, thus in form fitting the definition of the oblique optative. But again, it need not be so if there is reason to think that the mood would have been optative in the direct form. Here again Classical grammar helps. **Prīñ** was used with an infinitive chiefly when it meant before, and when the leading clause was affirmative. It was used with the indicative, and with the subjunctive and optative only after negatives.<sup>19</sup> Several examples are given where **prīñ** is followed by the optative. So it is possible that the optative verbs after **prīñ** are not the oblique form, but the original form. The potential character of the sentence is obvious. It should then be listed as the only example of another category, Potential Optative in Subordinate Clauses.

Therefore, it may be concluded that there are really no oblique optatives to be found in the NT. All the possible instances are explainable as potential optatives apart from the fact that they occur in a subordinate clause after a secondary tense.

#### DEGREES OF POTENTIALITY

The concept of degrees of potentiality has been discussed elsewhere<sup>20</sup> as it relates to the comparison of third and fourth class conditional sentences. There the claims and comments of the grammarians on the concept in general as well as its application to that specific question were reviewed. That discussion is assumed when application of it is made to the optative mood and its two major NT functions.

The optative is generally, and properly, called a potential mood, as are also the subjunctive and the imperative. It speaks of something as being contingent, depending on conditions or circumstances, involving some degree of uncertainty or doubt. The problem arises when the choice of moods is made whether some well-defined scheme

<sup>18</sup> Robertson, *Grammar*, 940.

<sup>19</sup> Goodwin, *Grammar*, 311 (#1485 a.,b; #1486 b.).

<sup>20</sup> See James L. Boyer, "Third (and Fourth) Class Conditions," *GTJ* 3 (1982) 167-70.

of graduated degrees of potentiality is reflected, so that the subjunctive becomes the mood of probability, the optative of improbability. As the earlier study showed, the subjunctive in third class conditions does not fit into any such pattern, but rather runs the whole spectrum from certainty to impossibility with the vast majority showing no indication at all as to probability. The same is also true with the optative. There are degrees of potentiality within the moods, but not *between* the moods.

Goodwin's comment on the potential optative cited above<sup>21</sup> continues:

The potential optative can express every degree of potentiality from the almost absolute future. . . to the apodosis of a future condition expressed by the optative with *an*. The intermediate steps may be seen in [a number of] examples. . . ."<sup>22</sup>

He uses almost the same words to describe the potential indicative:

The potential indicative may express every degree of potentiality from that seen in [# 1336: 'what would have been likely to happen, i.e., might have happened (and perhaps did happen) with no reference to any condition.'] to that of the apodosis of an unfulfilled condition actually expressed. . . . The intermediate steps to the complete apodosis may be seen in [a number of] examples. . . ."<sup>23</sup>

As indicated elsewhere, this same latitude is present in the subjunctive third class conditions and in other uses of the subjunctive as well. Also, the imperative expresses ideas ranging from commands to requests, from ultimatums to permissions.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, degree of potentiality is a factor within all the moods, but it is not a distinguishing factor between the moods. It is not correct to say that the subjunctive is "more probable" or that the optative is "less probable." The mood used does not in any sense indicate how confident one can be that something will or will not happen. A fairer explanation of the distinction is to be found in the terminology used in Classical grammars to distinguish between conditional protases with the subjunctive and with the optative, calling them respectively "Future More Vivid" and "Future Less Vivid."<sup>25</sup> The distinction is not in an evaluation of the degree of potentiality, but in the distinct-

<sup>21</sup> Footnote 9 above.

<sup>22</sup> Goodwin, *Grammar*, 282 (#1328).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 284 (#1339).

<sup>24</sup> See James L. Boyer, "A Classification of Imperatives: A Statistical Study" *GTJ* 8 (1987) 36-40.

<sup>25</sup> Goodwin, *Grammar*, 298-99 (#1418); Smyth, *Grammar*, 522-23 (#2322). Smyth expresses it especially well: "The difference between the More Vivid Future and the Less Vivid Future, like the difference between if I (shall) do this, and if I should do

ness and vividness with which the speaker or writer chooses to express the potentiality.

#### ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF EXPRESSING A WISH

While one of the most common uses of the optative is to express a wish, it should not be concluded that this was the only, or even the most common, way of doing so. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine these other ways, but it may be helpful to mention some of them. Particularly, it will be helpful to compare NT Greek with the Classical patterns to see what changes actually occurred.

One very obvious way to express a wish is a simple statement using the word "wish" or "want" or "desire." Many NT wishes are expressed by using the verb **qelw** or **boulomai**. These words are capable of expressing many degrees of appeal to the will, from the slightest expression of hope or desire (as the English word "wish" does) to a strong request or demand.

There was a tendency in NT Greek to use the imperative mood where the older Greek would probably have used the volitive optative. For example, in imprecations or adverse wishes, for which the Classical used the optative, the NT sometimes substitutes the imperative: Gal 1:8, 9 **apagema estw** "let him be accursed," also 1 Cor 16:22. In Acts 1:20 the imperative **labetw** is used in quoting from a text which in the LXX (Ps 108[109]:8) had the optative **laboi**.

**o@elon** with the indicative is used four times in the NT to express a wish, in a construction which in Classical used an infinitive instead of an indicative following.

The protasis of a conditional clause, with the apodosis omitted, may be a way of expressing a wish, as in Luke 19:42 **eilegnwj** . . . , "If you had known . . . !"

*this*, depends on the mental attitude of the speaker. With the Vivid Future the speaker sets forth a thought as prominent and distinct in his mind; and for anyone or more of the various reasons. Thus, he may (and generally does) regard the conclusion to be more likely to be realized; but even an impossible (2322c) or dreaded result may be expressed by this form if the speaker chooses to picture the result vividly and distinctly. The More Vivid Future is thus used whenever the speaker clearly desires to be graphic, impressive, emphatic, and to anticipate a future result with the distinctness of the present.

"The Less Vivid Future deals with suppositions less distinctly conceived and of less immediate concern to the speaker, mere assumed or imaginary cases. This is a favorite construction in Greek, and is often used in stating suppositions that are merely possible and often impossible; but the form of the condition itself does not imply an expectation of the speaker that the conclusion may possibly be realized. The difference between the two forms, therefore, is not an inherent difference between probable realization in the one case and possible realization in the other. The same thought may often be expressed in either form without any essential difference in meaning. The only difference is, therefore, often that of temperament, tone or style."

**Ei@e**, a dialectic variant of **ei** and **ei@ar**, which was used in Classical Greek with the optative to express a wish, is not found in the NT.

### CONCLUSION

Of the 28,121 verbs in the New Testament there are 68 optatives, less than one quarter of 1%. The optative had practically disappeared from the common language, and only later received a temporary revival by Atticizing purists who were attempting to restore the literary language of Greece's golden age. Why did it appear at all in a book written in the **koinh** of the people? It is a needless question, and probably unimportant. But Turner<sup>26</sup> makes a very interesting suggestion:

. . . the old potential optative--admirably suited to Christian aspiration and piety! Indeed, one must not reject too lightly the possibility that the optatives in the NT owed their preservation in some measure to their incidence in the pompous and stereotyped jargon of devotion. These optative phrases are decidedly formal. . . . The retention of the optative at a time when everywhere they were diminishing need not surprise us in view of their value for the liturgy, Jewish [in the LXX] and Christian.

<sup>26</sup> Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3; Syntax (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 131-32.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Grace Theological Seminary  
200 Seminary Dr.  
Winona Lake, IN 46590  
www.grace.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: [thildebrandt@gordon.edu](mailto:thildebrandt@gordon.edu)