Mastering New Testament Greek Textbook

Ted Hildebrandt

CHAPTER 12
Imperfect Verbs

You will be able to—

1. recognize the various forms (augments, stems, endings) of the imperfect active and middle/passive verbs;
2. predict how the augment will change with the various consonants, vowels, diphthongs, and prepositional prefixes;
3. translate imperfect verbs;
4. gain more practice in translating and working with Greek;
5. master ten more high-frequency vocabulary words; and
6. memorize the beginning of the Lord's Prayer in Mat. 6:9 in Greek.

Introduction

In English we have one simple past tense (Tanya <u>drove</u> the car). This refers to time in the past. If we want to refer to a continuous or repetitive act in the past, we may add a helping verb to a participle: "Tanya <u>was driving</u> the car." Other past tenses are also formed with helping verbs.

Imperfect tense/aspect

In Greek, the aorist tense refers to action of the verb that is complete/whole as a background form, without regard to the exact time involved. The imperfect is used for showing progressive, continuity or dwelled upon action in the past. Porter says a narrator will use the imperfect "when an action is selected to be dwelt upon" (aspect: how a writer uses it to portray the action; Porter, Idioms, 34). Mathewson uses terms like "progressive" and "continuity" to describe its aspectual nuance. He goes on to admit that the imperfect often is used for past (time/tense) events although not exclusively.

Greek Imperfect

The Greek imperfect tense is used of continuous, repeated or dwelt on action. In English, it will usually be translated with the helping verb was/were + the participle form of the verb (e.g., was singing). If a verb lacks an active form in the present it will also lack an active form in the imperfect which is built off the stem.

To get a sense of the freqeuncy usage, the present indicative is used 5,534 times, the aorist about 5,877; the imperfect only 1,682 times and the future only 1,608 times with the perfect following with only 837 and the pluperfect only 83 times (Stevens, 44). So the present and especially the aorist are the most frequent and the imperfect and future are used about the same.

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Form

The imperfect is built from the present verb stem. It is prefixed by an ε augment and followed by secondary active personal endings.

Augment	Verb stem	Connecting vowel	Secondary active endings	I was loosing
ε +	λυ +	ο +	ν =	ἔλυον
Aug	Stem	CV	Ending	

The connecting vowel is—

> ➤ ο before μ and ν, and
> ➤ ε elsewhere.

Imperfect Active Indicative of λύω

Singular			Plural	
1.	ἔλυον	I was loosing	ἐλύομεν	We were loosing
2.	ἔλυες	You were loosing	ἐλύετε	You were loosing
3.	ἔλυε(ν)	He/she/it was loosing	ἔλυον	They were loosing

Secondary Active Endings

	Singular	Plural
1.	-ν	-μεν
2.	-ς	-τε
3.	-ε	-ν

Learn the endings: ν, ς, ε, μεν, τε, ν (n s e men te n)
Learn the chant: ἔλυον, ν, ς, ε, μεν, τε, ν

Secondary Tense endings are used by: Imperfect, Aorist, Pluperfect
Primary Tense ending are used by: Present, Future and Perfect.

Imperfect Middle/Passive Indicative of λύω

Singular			Plural	
1.	ἐλυόμην	I was being loosed	ἐλυόμεθα	We were being loosed
2.	ἐλύου	You were being loosed	ἐλύεσθε	You were being loosed
3.	ἐλύετο	He/she/it was being loosed	ἐλύοντο	They were being loosed

Secondary Middle/Passive Endings

Singular	Plural

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1. -μην   -μεθα
2. -ου   -σθε
3. -το   -ντο

Learn Chant: ἐλυομην, ου, -ετο, -ομεθα, -εσθε, -οντο

The above paradigm is translated for the passive voice. The middle uses exactly the same forms, which would be translated as follows: I was loosing (for myself), you were loosing (for yourself), he was loosing (for himself), etc. The context will determine whether the form should be translated middle or passive.

Augments

The augment (prefix) is added in four ways:

1. Before consonants it is ε.

2. Before vowels the augment contracts with the vowel according to the following rules:

Vowels	**Diphthongs**
ε + α = η	ε + αι = η
ε + ε = η	ε + ει = η
ε + η = η	ε + οι = ῳ
ε + ι = ι	ε + αυ = ηυ
ε + ο = ω	ε + ευ = ηυ
ε + υ = υ	

    Four patterns:

    1. α and ε lengthen to η
    2. ο lengthens to ω
    3. ι ending a diphthong subscripts
    4. υ ending a diphthong stays strong

3. Compound verbs with prepositions ending in a consonant: Insert the augment between the prepositional prefix and the verb stem. ἐκβάλλω becomes ἐξέβαλον.

4. Compound verbs with prepositions ending in a vowel: The final vowel of the preposition is dropped and the ε augment inserted in its place. ἀποκτείνω becomes ἀπέκτεινα in first aorist form which also uses an augment.

Contraction Examples

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Here are examples of contraction in forming the imperfect active indicative, first person singular:

ε + α = η	ἤκουον	ε augment + ἀκούω
ε + ε = η	ἤγειρον	ε augment + ἐγείρω
ε + ο = ω	ὠρχούμην	ε augment + ὀρχέομαι
ε + αι = η	ἦρον	ε augment + αἴρω
ε + οι = ῳ	ᾠκοδόμουν	ε augment + οἰκοδομέω

εἰμί Imperfect Indicative

	Singular			Plural	
1.	ἤμην	I was	ἦμεν		We were
2.	ἦς	You were	ἦτε		You were
3.	ἦν	He/she/it was	ἦσαν		They were

Be able to chant this frequent form:

Chant Imperfect Indicative of εἰμί (by columns)

ἤμην   ἦμεν

ἦς   ἦτε

ἦν   ἦσαν

The imperfect tense of εἰμί appears frequently. You should try to master these forms well.

ἔχω Imperfect Active Indicative (Irregulars)

	Singular			Plural	
1.	εἶχον	I was having	εἴχομεν		We were having
2.	εἶχες	You were having	εἴχετε		You were having
3.	εἶχε(ν)	He/she/it was having	εἶχον		They were having

Note: This is an exception. The augment is a contraction of ε + ε = ει. Another exceptional augmented form is θέλω, which takes a prefixed η, becoming ἤθελεν in Mat. 18:30. Just be aware that there are such exceptions.

Translation Examples

ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ αὐτῶν.
He was teaching them in their synagogue (Mat. 13:54).

ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔλεγεν περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ.
But that one was speaking concerning the temple of his body (Jn. 2:21).

αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐγίνωσκεν τί ἦν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ.
For he was knowing what was in man (Jn. 2:25).

Vocabulary

ἀποθνήσκω	I die (111)
ἐκεῖ	there (105)
ἕως	until (146)
ἰδού	behold (200)
ἵνα	in order that (663)
Ἰωάννης, -ου, ὁ	John (135)
μέν	on the one hand, indeed (179)
ὅλος, -η, -ον	whole, entire (109)
ὅτε	when (103)
σύν	with (128)

Memory Verse: Mat. 6:9, the Lord's Prayer

Check out the MP3 rap on the CD or web site.

Πάτερ	ἡμῶν	ὁ	ἐν	τοῖς	οὐρανοῖς·
Father	our,	the one	in	the	heavens;
ἁγιασθήτω		τὸ	ὄνομά	σου·	
hallowed be		the	name	your	