

Mastering New Testament Greek Textbook

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CHAPTER 24

Imperative Verbs

You will be able to—

1. understand how imperatives work in English and Greek as commands, prohibitions, or entreaties;
2. recognize and write the imperative forms in the present and aorist tenses for the active, middle, and passive voices;
3. gain more practice in translating and working with Greek; and
4. master ten more high-frequency vocabulary words.

Introduction

The imperative mood is used to express a command, entreaty, or prohibition. In English the imperative is used only with the second person (e.g., [You] get in the car!). The Greek imperative occurs in the present and aorist tenses. Both second and third person (“Let him/her/it do something”) forms may be used.

Tense/Aspect

The imperative mood is built from both the present and the aorist stems. The present denotes action as a process in progress (“continue loosing”) and does not necessarily refer to the present time. The aorist form portrays action as a complete whole ([you] loose)(Mathewson, 34). The two tense forms (present/aorist) will often be translated the same way in English but one should be aware of the untranslatable differences between the two.

Form

The form of the second person singular must be learned for each tense. The second person plural form is the same as the present active indicative. You will have to use context to distinguish the two. The third person singular replaces the final ε of the second person plural with an ω. The third person plural replaces the second person plural ε with ωσαν. A handy way to learn the imperative endings is by learning them in a rhythmic manner: (do as a rap softshoe) (E-toe-ti-toe-san, ou -stho, sthe, sthosan [with a lisp], etc.).

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Chant: Imperative Endings tap-dance

	2 sg	3 sg	2 pl	3 pl
Present Active	ε	τω	τε	τωσαν
Present Mid/Pass	ου	σθω	σθε	σθωσαν
First Aorist Active	ν	τω	τε	τωσαν
First Aorist Middle	αι	σθω	σθε	σθωσαν
First Aorist Passive	τι	τω	τε	τωσαν

Present/Process Action in Progress Imperative of λύω

Active

Singular

2. λύε You loose!
3. λυέτω Let him loose!

Plural

- λύετε You loose!
λυέτωσαν Let them loose!

Middle/Passive

Singular

2. λύου You be loosed!
3. λυέσθω Let him be loosed!

Plural

- λύεσθε You be loosed!
λυέσθωσαν Let them be loosed!

Pedantically one may translate it “you continue loosing,” or “let her continue loosing.”

Note: The third person singular form replaces the final ε of the second person plural form with an ω, while the third person plural form replaces it with ωσαν.

First Aorist/Wholistic Complete Action Imperative of λύω

-- you loose, let her loose

Active

Singular

2. λύσον
3. λυσάτω

Plural

- λύσατε
λυσάτωσαν

Passive

Singular

- λύθητι
λυθήτω

Plural

- λύθητε
λυθήτωσαν

Middle

Singular

2. λύσαι (= Inf.)
3. λυσάσθω

Plural

- λύσασθε
λυσάσθωσαν

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Second Aorist/Wholistic Complete Action Imperative of λείπω

(I leave)

Active		Passive	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
2. λίπε	λίπετε	λείφθητι	λείφθητε
3. λιπέτω	λιπέτωσαν	λειφθήτω	λειφθήτωσαν
Middle			
Singular	Plural		
2. λιποῦ	λίπεσθε		
3. λιπέσθω	λιπέσθωσαν		

Imperative of εἰμί

Singular	Plural
2. ἴσθι	ἔστε
3. ἔστω	ἔστωσαν

Translated: you be, she must be...

Various Functions

Imperatives are used in several ways:

1. As a command:

ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν.
Love your enemies! (Mat. 5:44).

2. As a prohibition:

Μὴ φοβοῦ, τὸ μικρὸν ποίμνιον.
Fear not, little flock! (Lk. 12:32).

Mounce (Basics, 307f.) observes that a prohibition may also be made in several other ways:

- (1) οὐ + indicative (you shall not . . .)
- (2) μὴ + aorist subjunctive
- (3) οὐ μὴ + aorist subjunctive (strong negation)

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3. As an entreaty, especially when speaking to a superior (Dana and Mantey, Manual Grammar, 175f.; Summers, Essentials, 127):

Πάτερ ἅγιε, τήρησον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου.
Holy Father, keep them in your name (Jn. 17:11).

Translation Examples

λέγει αὐτοῖς, Ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε. ἦλθαν οὖν καὶ εἶδαν.
He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” They came therefore and saw (Jn. 1:39).

λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Πορεύου, ὁ υἱός σου ζῇ. ἐπίστευσεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος.
Jesus said to him, “Go, your son lives.” The man believed (Jn. 4:50).

λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐγείρε ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει.
Jesus said to him, “Arise, take your bed and walk” (Jn. 5:8).

Vocabulary

ἀγαπητός, -ή, -όν	beloved (61)
γραμματεὺς, -έως, ὁ	scribe (63)
δαιμόνιον, -ου, τό	demon (63)
δοκέω	I think (62)
δοξάζω	I glorify, honor (61)
ἔξω	outside (63)
ἐρωτάω	I ask (63)
θέλημα, -ατος, τό	will (62)
θρόνος, -ου, ὁ	throne (62)
ὄρος, -ους, τό	mountain (63)