

Mastering New Testament Greek Textbook

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CHAPTER 3

Present Active Verbs

You will be able to—

1. understand the English verbal system and its parallels to Greek (tense, voice, mood, person, and number),
2. recognize and write the present active indicative forms of Greek verbs, and
3. master ten high-frequency vocabulary words.

Introduction

Verbs are words of action or state of being:

Zachary drove the car.
Elliott is a good kid.

We use verbs to make statements, give commands, or express wishes:

Come here (command).
May Zach play basketball this year (wish).
Tanya is working tonight (statement).

Tense=time in English

Tense in English refers to the time of the action of the verb:

- Present: Annette swims.
- Past: Annette swam.
- Future: Annette will swim.
- Perfect: Annette has swum.

Tense/Aktionsart/Aspect

In Greek, the tense form is not used so much as to coordinate with time (**when** the event happened, usually indicated by the context through adverbs, prepositional phrases and other temporal indicators), or to **how** (type,duration [Aktionsart]; usually implicit in the lexical meaning of the verb or broader context) the action takes place but, and most of all, its aspect which is the author's portrayal of an action (foregrounding/immediacy/ descriptive/progress [present tense form]; background/wholistic/complete [aorist] and foregrounding/state of being [perfect]). In short, while we will generally translate the present tense in this course with an English present one must realize that there is not really a connection of the present tense form with the present time and the present tense form can be used for past, present,

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future, timeless or omnitemporal types of verbal actions. Thus, aspect, or how the author portrays an activity, seems to be a more adequate way to describe the present tense form (foregrounding/immediacy/ descriptive/progress) but for now we will simply translate it in these exercises which are out of context as an English present tense. Be aware, however, that the actual time will more often than not be indicated by adverbs, prepositional phrases and conjunctive modifiers than from the tense form on the verb.

Voice

English has two voices, to which Greek adds a third:

1. **Active voice:** The subject does the action of the verb.

Active voice examples:

Terry hit the ball.
Joy kissed Andy.

2. **Passive voice:** The subject receives the action of the verb.

Passive voice examples:

The ball was hit by Terry.
Andy was kissed by Joy.

3. **Middle voice:** The subject's participation in the action of the verb is emphasized, the action is done for the subject's benefit, or rarely the subject acts on him/herself (reflexive) or members of a group interact among themselves (reciprocal).

Middle voice examples:

Terry himself kicked the ball (emphasizing participation; frequent).
Terry kicked the ball for himself (interest/benefit).
Terry kicked himself (reflexive; rare).
The players patted each other (reciprocal; rare).

Some describe many middle verbs in Greek as deponent (75 percent of the time). This means they are middle in form but translated as active with the active form missing ("deponent"). In this program, the middle will be translated as active unless otherwise indicated (Mounce, Basics, 149). Such "deponent" verbs are easily found in the lexicon as having an -ομαι ending (e.g. ἔρχομαι, γίνομαι) rather than the normal active ending ω (e.g. βλέπω, ἀκούω). While the term "deponent" is debated it may be best just to translate them as middles emphasizing the subject's participation in the action of the verb (hence active).

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Mood

Mood refers to the kind of reality of the action, or how the action of the verb is regarded.

1. **Indicative mood:** The verb simply states or portrays that something happened.
Elliott prays.
2. **Imperative mood:** The verb gives a command, exhortation or entreaty.
Pray, Elliott!
3. **Subjunctive mood:** The verb expresses a wish, possibility, or potentiality
Elliott may pray.
4. **Optative mood:** The verb expresses a wish, remote possibility.
Oh that he would stand.

Person

There are three persons in Greek.

1. First person indicates the person(s) speaking (I [singular] or we [plural]).

First person examples:

I studied Greek.
We studied Greek.

2. Second person indicates the person(s) spoken to (you [singular or plural]). Some would say “you-all”, “ye,” or “you’uns” (dialect) for the plural, thus distinguishing it from “you” or “thou” as singular.

Second person examples:

You studied Greek.
You both studied Greek.

3. Third person indicates the person(s) or thing(s) spoken about (he, she, it [singular]; they [plural]).

Third person examples:

She studied Greek.
They studied Greek.
It made them happy.

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Number and Agreement

Both English and Greek distinguish between singular (I, you, he, she, it) and the plural (we, you, they).

Verbs must agree with their subjects in both person and number.

He rides the wave.

They ride the wave (not “They rides the wave”).

Introduction to the Greek Present Active Indicative (PAI)

The present active indicative (PAI) will be our first verb paradigm. It is a frequently used “tense” in the New Testament (over 4,400 times). Active means that the subject does the action of the verb as opposed to the middle or passive voices. The indicative mood portrays the action as reality (liars also use the indicative so what is being portrayed as reality may not be in fact) making a statement, as opposed to the imperative (command) or subjunctive (possibility) moods, which we will study later.

Each form will be composed of a:

Stem + Pronominal ending

λό + ω

Translation

The present tense may be used of either undefined Aktionsart (event simply happens) or continuous Aktionsart (event was a process).

Thus for our grammatical practice sentences they will be translated as follows:

1. Undefined: I loose. I run.
2. Continuous: I am loosing. I am running.

The context will determine which should be used. One should be aware that in sentences in contexts the present tense form can be used to designate action in the past, present, future, omnitemporal or timeless happenings.

Historical Present

Greek will **often** use the present tense to reference an event that actually happened in the past. The historical present is used to add vividness or dramatic effect to the narrative or, most often, it is an idiom. It often occurs in narrative in the third person. In these cases the present tense is simply translated by our past tense (“he says” becomes “he said”).

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This present active paradigm is very important. You should be able to chant through it in your sleep. Learn these “primary” pronominal endings also since they will be useful when we do the future tense.

| | | |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Stem + pronominal suffix: | λύ + ω | λύ + ομεν |
| | λύ + εις | λύ + ετε |
| | λύ + ει | λύ + ουσι |

Present Active Indicative (PAI) Paradigm

| Singular | | Plural | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| 1. λύω | I loose/am loosing. | λύομεν | We loose/are loosing. |
| 2. λύεις | You loose/are loosing. | λύετε | You loose/are loosing. |
| 3. λύει | He/she/it looses/is loosing. | λύουσι(ν) | They loose/are loosing. |

Primary Pronominal Suffixes

| | | | |
|-----|-----------|---------|---------------|
| ω | I | ομεν | we |
| εις | you | ετε | you (you-all) |
| ει | he/she/it | ουσι(ν) | they |

Movable Nu (ν)

Most frequently a nu (ν) is added to the end of words ending in σι or ε. In English we do something similar with “a book” and “an item.” Most often the third plural form will be: λύουσιν instead of λύουσι (cf. βλέπουσιν καὶ, Mat. 13:13). Rarely the nu (ν) will be dropped before words beginning with consonants (cf. βλέπουσι τὸ . . . Mat. 18:10).

Second Person Plural

In English, we make no distinction between a “you” singular and a “you” that is plural (“you all”). Some grammars, following King James English, use “thou” for the singular and “ye” for the plural. Such usage is archaic, and hence we will use “you” for both second person singular and plural. You should be aware, however, that in Greek a sharp distinction is made.

Parsing Format

Verbs are parsed or conjugated in the following format:

Tense, voice, mood, person, number, lexical form, English meaning.

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E.g., λύω Present active indicative (PAI), 1st person singular, from λύω, meaning “I loose, destroy.”

Shorter form: λύω PAI, 1 sg., from λύω, “I loose, destroy.”

λύετε PAI, 2 pl., from λύω, “you loose, destroy”

Chant #1: Present Active Indicative (PAI) of λύω (I loose/am loosing).

Recite the first column then the second. Practice until it is as natural as breathing.

| | |
|-------|-----------|
| λύω | λύομεν |
| λύεις | λύετε |
| λύει | λύουσι(ν) |

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Vocabulary

| | |
|-----------|------------------------|
| ἀλλά | but, yet (638) |
| ἀπόστολος | apostle, sent one (80) |
| βλέπω | I see (133) |
| γάρ | for, then (1041) |
| γινώσκω | I know (222) |
| Ἰησοῦς | Jesus (917) |
| λαμβάνω | I take, receive (258) |
| λύω | I loose (42) |
| οὐρανός | heaven (273) |
| πιστεύω | I believe (241) |