

Tense & Verbal Aspect

Chapter 7

1

Verbal Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος

Definition

Verbal Aspect: The **subjective perspective** or **viewpoint** from which an author communicates the action of a given verb.

Notice, this is NOT the objective way in which the action is performed, but the way the action is **portrayed**.

2

Verbal Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος

Author's Perspective on the Action

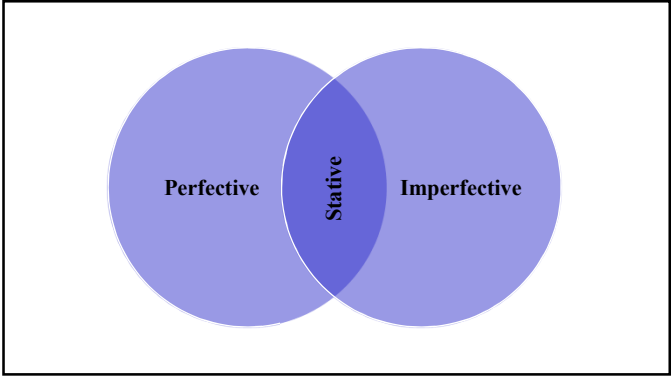
It is generally agreed that there are three aspects in the Greek verbal system.

Imperfective Perfective Stative

3

VERBAL ASPECT		
Aspect	Definition	Tense-Form
Imperfective	Action viewed as in process, ongoing	Present or Imperfect
Perfective	Action viewed as complete (not necessarily completed), as a whole	Aorist
Stative	A state of affairs that exists from a previous action	Perfect

4



5

Aspectual Category	Past-time Indicator	Imperf Aspect Prefix	Lexical Core	Perf Aspect Suffix	Personal ending
Perfective (past)	ε	—	λυ	σ	αμεν
Perfective (non-past)	—	—	λυ	σ	ομεν
Imperfective (past)	ε	—	λυ	—	ομεν
Imperfective (non-past)	—	—	λυ	—	ομεν
Stative (past)	ε	λε	λυ	κ	ειμεν
Stative (non-past)	—	λε	λυ	κ	αμεν

6

Imperfective	Perfective	Stative
λύω Non-Past Imperfective (Present Tense-Form)	λύσω Non-Past Perfective (Future Tense-Form)	λέλυκα Non-Past Stative (Perfect Tense-Form)
ἔλυον Past Imperfective (Imperfect Tense-Form)	ἔλυσα Past Perfective (Aorist Tense-Form)	ἔλελύκειν Past Stative (Pluperfect Tense-Form)

7

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Time of Action

The presence of an **augment** with the imperfect, aorist, and pluperfect indicative forms generally communicates that the action of the verb is in the past.

The augment is only found on the **indicative forms**, indicating that only in the indicative mood is the element of time a factor.

8

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Type of Action

Traditionally, the **present** tense form was thought to signify a “continuous” or “linear” action, whereas the **aorist** tense-form signified a “punctiliar” or “once-for-all” action.

This distinction is overly-simplistic because the tense-form itself does not communicate the type of action (*Aktionsart*) but only the author’s perspective of the action (aspect).

9

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Type of Action

Aspect: the perspective of the author based on the unaffected meaning (i.e., the tense-form alone).

Aktionsart: takes into consideration the (1) lexical, (2) grammatical, and (3) contextual factors. The tense-form itself does not communicate the type of action.

10

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Type of Action: Lexical Factors

Lexical Determination: When a verb is limited to a particular tense form. For example, with non-indicative verbs, **εἰμί**, **κείμαι**, **κάθημαι**, and **φημί** are always **present**.

With imperatives, **ἴδε** and **ἰδοῦ** are always **aorist**, whereas **εἰμί** and **οἶδα** occur only in the **present**.

11

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Type of Action: Lexical Factors

Lexical Influence: The influence of the verb’s inherent meaning on its usage in the various tense-forms.

Telic verbs have a **natural terminus** = prefer **aorist**.
 Atelic verbs have **no natural terminus** = prefer **present**.

Thus, a verb’s tense-form is sometimes influenced by the verb’s inherent semantic nature.

12

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Tense & Aspect

Type of Action: Lexical Factors

Telic verbs are often expressed in **orist** forms.

Atelic verbs are often expressed in **present** forms.

καλὸν μοι **ἀποθανεῖν** (A A Inf) εἰς Χριστὸν,
ἢ **βασιλεύειν** (P A Inf) τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς

“It is better for me **to die** in Christ than **to be king** over the ends of the earth” (Ignatius, *Romans*, 6.1).

13

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Tense & Aspect

Type of Action: Lexical Factors

Telic

Performance (bounded actions with perceived duration)

Punctual (bounded actions with little perceivable duration)

Atelic

Stative (states and relationships)

Activity (actions with no inherent termination)

14

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Tense & Aspect

Telic Verbs

Performance: An action that is limited in that it conveys a climax, conclusion, or termination, and yet still conveys some perceived duration.

Examples: **ἀνοίγω** (“I open”), **δίδωμι** (“I give”), **ἐνδύομαι** (“I get dressed”), **ἐτοιμάζω** (“I prepare”), and **καλέω** (“I call”).

15

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Tense & Aspect

Telic Verbs

Punctual: An action that is done in a moment without taking any perceived or significant time duration for the action.

Examples: **ἀγοράζω** (“I buy”), **βάλλω** (“I throw”), **εὕρισκω** (“I find”), and **πίπτω** (“I fall”).

16

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Tense & Aspect

Atelic Verbs

Stative: Conveys a condition or relationship (personal, temporal or local). That is, a stative verb refers not to what someone *does* but what someone *is*.

Examples: **ἀγαπάω** (“I love”), **ἀσθενέω** (“I am sick”), **εἰμί** (“I am”), **ἔχω** (“I have”), **ζάω** (“I am alive”), **μισέω** (“I hate”), **οἰκέω** (“I am dwelling”), **πιστεύω** (“I believe”), **πλουτέω** (“I am rich”), and **φοβέομαι** (“I am afraid”).

17

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Tense & Aspect

Atelic Verbs

Activity: Viewed as having no set limit for their completion (“unbounded”).

Examples: **ἀναγινώσκω** (“I am reading”), **ἐσθίω** (“I am eating”), **κηρύσσω** (“I am preaching”), **λέγω/λαλέω** (“I am talking”), **περιπατέω** (“I am walking”), and **ποιέω** (“I am doing”).

18

Telic Events	Present Impv	Aorist Impv
ἀγοράζω	0	3
βάλλω	0	14
δείκνυμι	0	8
ἐνδύω	0	5
ἐτοιμάζω	1	8
λαμβάνω	1	11
πωλέω	0	5
σώζω	1	9
Total	3	63

19

Atelic Events	Present Impv	Aorist Impv
ἀγαπάω	8	1
γρηγορέω	10	1
ἐργάζομαι	3	0
ἔχω	11	0
μνημονεύω	8	0
πιστεύω	13	2
προσεύχομαι	15	2
φοβέομαι	25	3
Total	93	9

20

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος

Type of Action: Lexical Factors

Lexical Influence: Verbs of motion are almost always found in the **present** tense-form when used as imperatives (e.g., ἀκολουθέω, ἐγείρω, ἔρχομαι, περιπατέω, πορεύομαι, ὑπάγω, φεύγω, and φέρω).

However, **-μι** verbs overwhelmingly prefer the **aorist** (e.g., ἀφίημι, δίδωμι, ἵστημι, and τίθημι).

21

Verbs of Motion	Present Impv	Aorist Impv
ἀκολουθέω	16	2
ἐγείρω	18	2
ἔρχομαι	15	5
περιπατέω	14	0
πορεύομαι	23	4
ὑπάγω	38	0
φεύγω	9	0
φέρω	10	1
Total	143	14

22

-μι Verbs	Present Impv	Aorist Impv
ἀφίημι	3	26
δίδωμι	4	31
ἵστημι	0	7
τίθημι	1	2
Total	8	66

23

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος

Type of Action: Grammatical and Contextual Factors

Present Imperatives: Preferred in epistles. Paul uses the present imperatives 3x more than the aorist. One exception is 1 Peter which has 25 aorists but only 10 present imperatives.

Aorist Imperatives: Preferred in historical narratives and prayers.

24

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

λύσατε αὐτὸν καὶ **φέρετε**

Untie it [a young donkey] and **bring** it here
(Mark 11:2).

... **ἀπαρνησάσθω** ἑαυτὸν καὶ **ἀράτω** τὸν
σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ **ἀκολουθεῖτω** μοι

“... he must **deny** himself, **take up** his cross,
and **follow** Me” (Matt 16:24).

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

σοὶ λέγω, **ἐγείρε** **ἄρον** τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ
ὑπάγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου

“I tell you: **get up**, **pick up** your stretcher, and
go home” (Mark 2:11).

χαίρωμεν καὶ **ἀγαλλιῶμεν** καὶ **δώσωμεν** τὴν
δόξαν αὐτῷ

“**Let us be glad**, **rejoice**, and **give** Him glory”
(Rev 19:7).

25

26

Tense & Aspect

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν
ὁ λόγος

Summary

Once the lexical, grammatical, and contextual factors
have been considered, then the interpreter is in a place
to determine if the form is the expected (default) form.

If it is not the default form, then it is possible that the
unexpected form is conveying a special nuance.
Otherwise, no special nuance should be read into the
tense-form used.

27