

9. Second Declension

Lesson in a Nutshell

Second declension nouns are usually **masculine** or **neuter** and end in **ο**.

We saw that first declension nouns are generally end in **α** or **η**, were usually feminine and followed a single pattern.

The stem of second declension nouns generally end in an **ο**, may be masculine or neuter, and follow two patterns, which differ slightly from each other.

Noun Endings											
		Masculine (2nd declension)		Feminine (1st declension)		Neuter (2nd declension)		Masc / Fem (3rd declension)		Neuter (3rd declension)	
Singular	Nominative subject	ος	λογος word	α or η	αρχη beginning	ον	εργον work	ς	σαρξ flesh	—	φως light
	Genitive possession	ου	λογου of a word	ας or ης	αρχης of a beginning	ου	εργου of work	ος	σαρκος of flesh	ος	φωτος of light
	Dative in, with, to, by	ω	λογω to a word	α or η	αρχη to a beginning	ω	εργω to work	ι	σαρκι to flesh	ι	φωτι to light
	Accusative object	ον	λογον word	αν or ην	αρχην beginning	ον	εργον work	α	σαρκα flesh	—	φως light
Plural	Nominative subject	οι	λογoi words	αι	αρχαι beginnings	α	εργα works	ες	σαρκεις fleshes	α	φωτα lights
	Genitive possession	ων	λογων of words	ων	αρχων of beginnings	ων	εργων of works	ων	σαρκων of fleshes	ων	φωτων of lights
	Dative in, with, to, by	οις	λογοις to words	αις	αρχαις to beginnings	οις	εργοις to works	οις	σαρκιν to fleshes	οις	φωσιν to lights
	Accusative object	ους	λογους words	ας	αρχας beginnings	α	εργα works	ας	σαρκας fleshes	α	φωτα lights

Two Essential Things You Must Know About Every Noun

1. Its Gender

Every Greek noun will be either masculine or feminine or neuter.

2. Its Declension

Every Greek noun will be either first or second or third declension.

You do not know a Greek noun until you know its gender and declension, but once you know its gender and declension you know exactly what to expect in all of its eight forms.

Here are examples of two **second declension, masculine** nouns:

θεός and κόσμος.

Notice how the endings are “tacked on” to the words to show you the case, number, and gender.

Second Declension Masculine Noun		Masculine (2nd declension)	
Singular	Nominative subject	ος	θεός god
	Genitive possession	ου	θεοῦ of a god
	Dative in, with, to, by	ῳ	θεῷ to a god
	Accusative object	ον	θεόν god
Plural	Nominative subject	οι	θεοί gods
	Genitive possession	ων	θεῶν of gods
	Dative in, with, to, by	οις	θεοῖς to gods
	Accusative object	ους	θεούς gods

Second Declension Masculine Noun		Masculine (2nd declension)	
Singular	Nominative subject	ος	κόσμος world
	Genitive possession	ου	κόσμου of a world
	Dative in, with, to, by	ῳ	κόσμῳ to a world
	Accusative object	ον	κόσμον world
Plural	Nominative subject	οι	κόσμοι worlds
	Genitive possession	ων	κόσμων of worlds
	Dative in, with, to, by	οις	κόσμοις to worlds
	Accusative object	ους	κόσμους worlds

Here are examples of two **second declension, neuter** nouns:

εὐαγγέλιον and ἱερόν.

Notice again how the endings are “tacked on” to the words to show you the case, number, and gender.

Second Declension Neuter Noun		Neuter (2nd declension)	
Singular	Nominative subject	ον	ἱερόν temple
	Genitive possession	ου	ἱεροῦ of a temple
	Dative in, with, to, by	ῳ	ἱερῷ to a temple
	Accusative object	ον	ἱερόν temple
Plural	Nominative subject	α	ἱερά temples
	Genitive possession	ων	ἱερῶν of temples
	Dative in, with, to, by	οις	ἱεροῖς to gods
	Accusative object	α	ἱερά temples

Second Declension Neuter Noun		Neuter (2nd declension)	
Singular	Nominative subject	ον	εὐαγγέλιον gospel
	Genitive possession	ου	εὐαγγελίου of a gospel
	Dative in, with, to, by	ῳ	εὐαγγέλιῳ to a gospel
	Accusative object	ον	εὐαγγέλιον gospel
Plural	Nominative subject	α	εὐαγγέλια gospels
	Genitive possession	ων	εὐαγγελίων of gospels
	Dative in, with, to, by	οις	εὐαγγέλοις to gospels
	Accusative object	α	εὐαγγέλια gospels

The patterns Greek nouns follow to show you case, number, and gender are marvelously consistent.

Savor the wonder!

Now observe how some second declension endings function in a Greek sentence.

ἄγγελος θεοῦ κηρύσσει εὐαγγέλιον ἀνθρώποις
(an)¹ angel of God announces good news to men.²

word	ending	case	function in sentence
ἄγγελος	ος	nominative	subject
θεοῦ	ου	genitive	possession
εὐαγγέλιον	ον	accusative	object
ἀνθρώποις	οις	dative	indirect object

The word order of the preceding sentence matched English word order exactly. Before you look at the answer, see if you can figure out how to translate the next sentence, which seems scrambled up.

¹ We will learn later, that there is no indefinite article (“a,” “an”) in Greek so we must supply it where it makes sense to do so.

² Greek uses the masculine gender to refer generally to all people.

νόμοις δουλοῦσιν τὸν κόσμον λόγοι ἀνθρώπων
 to laws (they) enslave the world words of men

word	ending	case	function in sentence
νόμοις	οις	dative	indirect object
κόσμον	ον	accusative	object
λόγοι	οι	nominative	subject
ἀνθρώπων	ων	genitive	possession

The word “words” is in the **nominative** case, so it is the subject of the sentence.
 The word “men” is in the **genitive** case so it indicates possession.
 The word “world” is in the **accusative** case so it is the object of the verb.
 The word “laws” is in the **dative** case so it is the indirect object.

To translate this sentence into English we have to do two things:

1. We have to rearrange the words since English relies on word order to tell us what role each word plays in the sentence (case).
2. We have to add helping words (“of,” “to”).

So here it is:

Words of men enslave the world to laws.

Isn't Greek amazing?

Lexical Form of Nouns

How will you know if a noun is masculine, feminine or neuter? How will you know what declension it follows? You must learn all this when you learn the word.

A “lexicon” is a Greek dictionary. I’m not sure why we have to use fancy words. But most people call Greek dictionaries “lexicons.”

“Lexical form” just refers to the way you will find it in the dictionary. Obviously, a Greek lexicon can’t list every form of every word. It would be far too bulky. Instead, Greek lexicons list the word in its nominative singular form and tell you which pattern of inflection it follows.

Here is how this works:

If I were to look up the word λόγος (word) in the lexicon I would find it listed like this:

λόγος, ου, ὁ

What are the ου and the ὁ for?

ὁ is the masculine form of the article. It tells me that λόγος is a masculine noun.

The Article			
	M (2)	F (1)	N (2)
Nominative "the"	ὁ	ἡ	τό

The “ου” is the genitive ending of λόγος. It shows me which column to follow as λόγος goes through its eight changes.

Case Endings										
	M ^{asculine} (2nd declension)		F ^{eminine} (1st declension)		N ^{euter} (2nd declension)		M ^{asc} / F ^{em} (3rd declension)	N ^{euter} (3rd declension)		
Nominativ e subject	ος	λογος word	α or η	αρχη beginning	ον	εργον work	ς	χειρ hand	—	φως light
	ου	λογου of a word	ας or ης	αρχης of a beginning	ου	εργου of work	ος	χειρος of a hand	ος	φωτος of light
	ω	λογω to a word	α or η	αρχη to a beginning	ω	εργω to work	ι	χειρι to a hand	ι	φωτι to light
	ον	λογον word	αν or	αρχην beginning	ον	εργον work	α	χειρα hand	—	φως light
Nominativ e subject	οι	λογοι words	αι	αρχαι beginnings	α	εργα works	εις	χειρες hands	α	φωτα lights
	ων	λογων of words	ων	αρχων of beginnings	ων	εργων of works	ω	χειρων of hands	ων	φωτων of lights
	οις	λογοις to words	αις	αρχαις to beginnings	οις	εργοις to works	οις	χειρσιν to hands	οις	φωσιν to lights
	ους	λογου ς words	ας	αρχας beginnings	α	εργα works	ας	χειρας hands	α	φωτα lights

The lexicon doesn't list all eight endings. That would be a long list!

λόγος, ου, ω, ον, οι, ων, οις, ους, ό

The lexicon assumes that if you know the genitive form, you will be able to supply the remaining endings. So “λόγος, ου, ό” gives you the information (in yellow above) and assumes you are smart enough to supply the rest of the column. You are, of course!

Now, let's look up ἀρχή in the lexicon. We find:

ἀρχή, ἥς, ἡ

ἡ is the feminine form of the article. It tells me that ἀρχή is a feminine noun.

The Article			
	M (2)	F (1)	N (2)
Nominative "the"	ὁ	ἡ	τό

ἥς is the genitive ending of ἀρχή. This shows me that I should follow the first declension.

Case Endings										
	Masculine (2nd declension)		Feminine (1st declension)		Neuter (2nd declension)	Masc / Fem (3rd declension)	Neuter (3rd declension)			
Nominative subject	ος	λογος word	α or η	αρχη beginning	ον	εργον work	ς	χειρ hand	—	φως light
Genitive possession	ου	λογου of a word	ας or ης	αρχης of a beginning	ου	εργου of work	ος	χειρος of a hand	ος	φωτος of light
Dative in, with, to, by	ω	λογω to a word	α or η	αρχη to a beginning	ω	εργω to work	ι	χειρι to a hand	ι	φωτι to light
Accusative object	ον	λογον word	αν or ην	αρχην beginning	ον	εργον work	α	χειρα hand	—	φως light
Nominative subject	οι	λογοι words	αι	αρχαι beginnings	α	εργα works	εις	χειρες hands	α	φωτα lights
Genitive possession	ων	λογων of words	ων	αρχων of beginnings	ων	εργων of works	ων	χειρων of hands	ων	φωτων of lights
Dative in, with, to, by	οις	λογοις to words	αις	αρχαις to beginnings	οις	εργοις to works	οις	χειρσιν to hands	οις	φωσιν to lights
Accusative object	ους	λογου ς words	ας	αρχας beginnings	α	εργα works	α	χειρας hands	α	φωτα lights

Once again, the lexicon does not give me all eight endings.

ἀρχή, ης, η, ην, αι, ων, αις, ας, ἡ

The lexicon gives me the gender and the genitive form (in yellow above). I use my chart to figure out the rest. Soon I won't need a chart because I will remember this simple and consistent pattern.

Now, let's look up ἔργον in the lexicon. We find:

ἔργον, ου, τό

τό is the neuter form of the article. It tells me this is a neuter noun.

The Article			
	M (2)	F (1)	N (2)
Nominative "the"	ὁ	ἡ	τό

ου tells me that I should follow the second declension.

Case Endings								
	Masculine (2nd declension)		Feminine (1st declension)		Neuter (2nd declension)		Masc / Fem (3rd declension)	Neuter (3rd declension)
Singular	Nominative subject	ος λογος word	α or η αρχη beginning	ον εργον work	ς χειρ hand	— φως light		
	Genitive possession	ου λογου of a word	ας or ης αρχης of a beginning	ου εργου of work	ος χειρος of a hand	ος φωτος of light		
	Dative in, with, to, by	ω λογω to a word	α or η αρχη to a beginning	ω εργω to work	ι χειρι to a hand	ι φωτι to light		
	Accusative object	ον λογον word	αν or ην αρχην beginning	ον εργον work	α χειρα hand	— φως light		
Plural	Nominative subject	οι λογοι words	αι αρχαι beginnings	α εργα works	ες χειρες hands	α φωτα lights		
	Genitive possession	ων λογων of words	ων αρχων of beginnings	ων εργων of works	ων χειρων of hands	ων φωτων of lights		
	Dative in, with, to, by	οις λογοις to words	αις αρχαις to beginnings	οις εργοις to works	οις χειρσιν to hands	οις φωσιν to lights		
	Accusative object	ους λογου ς words	ας αρχας beginnings	α εργα works	α χειρας hands	α φωτα lights		

By listing the article and the genitive form, the lexicon makes it possible to know every noun in every form.