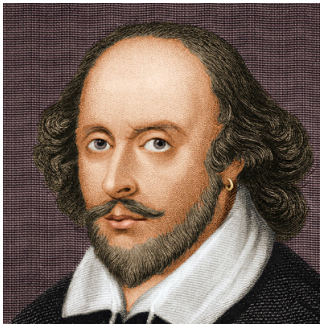


33. Infinitives

Lesson in a Nutshell

Infinitives are the “to-be” verbs. They are easy to recognize but they can be challenging to translate since they are sometimes used in ways that are not like English. Infinitives do not have person and number. They may be present, aorist, or perfect tense.



To be or not to be. That is the question.

Infinitives are the “to be” verbs.

To run, to dance, to sing, to swim, to learn,

to be or not to be.

Infinitives are verbal nouns. They can function just like nouns in a sentence.

To finish this class will be a great relief.

I like to dance but my wife won't let me because I look goofy.

In both cases, the infinitive is behaving like a noun in the sentence, even though it is a verbal idea, hence the designation “verbal noun.”

Infinitives are simple because *they do not have person and number*, only tense and voice.

As you might guess by now, **the tense of infinitives has nothing to do with time, only aspect**. Infinitives come in three tenses, which capture the three Greek aspects.

Present Infinitives

describe ongoing aspect.

Aorist Infinitives

describe undefined aspect.

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Perfect Infinitives

describe perfected aspect.

▪ _____

Since infinitives lack person and number and are found in only three tenses, there are very few forms.

Infinitive			
	active	middle	passive
Pr	λύειν to loose	to loose (for self)	λύεσθαι to be loosed
Ao	λύσαι to loose	λύσασθαι to loose (for self)	λυθῆναι to be loosed
2 Ao	λαβεῖν to take	λαμβάνω (I take)	λάβεσθαι to take (for self)
Pf	λελυκέναι to have loosed	to have loosed (for self)	λελύσθαι to have been loosed

Forms

Present Tense

As usual, the clue for the aorist is that there is no clue. The lexical form will pop out at you.

Aorist Tense

The Aorist infinitive has our old friend σα (active and middle) and θη (passive).

Second Aorist

The second aorist endings are exactly like the present tense. The only difference will be the stem change.

Perfect Tense

The perfect tense will be reduplicated. In the active there will be a κ. In the middle/passive there will be no connecting vowel.

Infinitives are easy to spot. Notice that the present active and second aorist active end in ειν. All other forms end in αι.

As we saw with the subjunctive and imperative, the aspect of the Greek infinitive is very difficult to capture in English. The present and aorist translation, for example, is identical: “to loose.” But they mean something different. The aorist describes undefined aspect. The present describes ongoing aspect.

You could translate the present “to continue loosing” but that is pretty clumsy English! Better just to learn Greek.

Translation

Often, the Greek infinitive behaves exactly like the English infinitive and is very easy to translate. Here are a couple of examples.

δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγεῖραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ.
He is able * God from * stones these to raise children to Abraham.

πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας
all people He wishes to be saved and into knowledge of truth

ἔλθεῖν.

to come.¹

The Greek infinitive can also behave in ways that are not like English at all. This takes some getting used to. Do not panic! We will get used to these as we begin to read more Greek.

1. Sometimes the Greek infinitive has the article.

Since the infinitive is a verbal **noun**, this makes sense. When the infinitive has the article the article will always be singular, neuter. Its case will be determined by the role the infinitive plays in the sentence.

Here is an example.

ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν² Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος.
to me for to live (is) Christ and to die (is) gain.

Notice that the article defines the “case” of the infinitive in the sentence. In this example it would be nominative.

¹ Notice the shift between the first (σωθῆναι) and second (ἔλθεῖν) aorist.

² Remember that ζάω is a contract verb. ζα + εἰν contracts to ζῆν.

2. Sometimes the Greek **infinitive** is used with an **article** and a **preposition** to mean something you would never guess.

This usage is called “idiomatic” which means there is no clear way to draw a path between the original Greek and the English translation. You have to know what it means in Greek, then step back and say it in English.

This chart (found on page 8 of your master chart) summarizes these usages.

<u>Prepositions with Infinitives</u>
εἰς τό = <i>in order that</i>
μετά τό = <i>after</i>
διὰ τό = <i>because</i>
ἐν τῷ = <i>when/while</i>
πρὸ τοῦ = <i>before</i>
πρὸς τό = <i>in order that</i>

The easiest way to begin to grasp this is to take some examples.

εἰς τὸ βλέπειν αὐτόν
into the to see him

A literal transliteration makes no sense at all. This construction has to be recognized. The correct translation of εἰς τὸ βλέπειν αὐτόν is:

In order that he sees.

Huh?? Yep. That’s it. In order to translate this idiom, you have to recognize the preposition with the infinitive and see it like this:

εἰς τὸ means “in order that.”

βλέπειν means “sees.”

αὐτόν means “he” (the “subject” of the infinitive).

The strangest part of this construction is that the subject of the preposition will be in the accusative case but will be translated as if it were in the nominative.

This is tricky since we have trained ourselves to expect accusatives to receive the action of the verb. In this construction they produce the action.

Here are two examples of each construction. Please don’t worry and have nightmares about this. Just look these examples over and try to get a feel for this idiomatic use of the infinitive.

εἰς τό _____
in order that

εἰς τό πιστεύειν αὐτόν
= in order that he believes

ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται εἰς τό σταυρωθῆναι.¹
The Son * of Man is handed over in order to be crucified.

μετὰ τό _____
after

μετὰ τό πιστεύειν αὐτόν
= after he believes

μετὰ τό ἀποθανεῖν τὸν πατέρα
= after the father dies

διὰ τό _____
because

διὰ τό πιστεύειν αὐτόν
= because he believes

διὰ τό εἶναι αὐτόν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαβὶδ
= because he was of the house and family of David.

¹ In this instance there is no expressed “subject” of the infinitive. The subject is obviously the Son of Man.

ἐν τῷ _____
when/while

ἐν τῷ πιστεύειν αὐτόν
= while he believes

ἐν τῷ σπείρειν¹ αὐτόν
= while he sows

πρὸ τοῦ _____
before

πρὸ τοῦ πιστεύειν αὐτόν
= before he believes

τὸ πάσχα φαγεῖν μεθ' ὑμῶν πρὸ τοῦ με παθεῖν²
the Passover to eat with you before I suffer

_____ = to eat the Passover with you before I suffer

πρὸς τὸ _____
in order that

πρὸς τὸ πιστεύειν αὐτόν
= in order that he believes

πρὸς τὸ δύνασθαι ὑμᾶς στήναι
= in order that you are able to stand

¹ σπείρω = I sow

² πάσχω = I suffer