

The Aorist Tense

The Greek aorist expresses action primarily as the English simple past tense. The aorist is sometimes called a timeless tense because the time aspect is only found in the indicative and the participle. The aorist denotes the action simply as occurring without reference to its progress. The aorist denotes the action as an event without defining the manner of its occurrence or its completeness. It expresses the fact of the action or event without regard to its duration.

Dr. Young presents the aorist this way: “It would be better to view the aorist as grammaticalizing the speaker’s perception of an event in its entirety or as a single whole... the difference between the perfective aspect (aorist) and the imperfective aspect (present and imperfect) is the difference between viewing an entire parade from a helicopter (perfective) and viewing one float at a time pass by from the curb or grandstand (imperfective). The event does not have to be objectively completed in order to be perceived as a whole (e.g., futuristic aorists).”¹

Uses of the Aorist

Constantive aorist. The constantive aorist describes the action or event as a whole without regard to the internal working of the action. That is to say, it takes the occurrence as a single whole without regard of its duration. This is the basic usage and idea of the aorist.

Examples are found in Rom. 5:14: ἀλλὰ ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπο Ἄδαμ μέχρι Μωυσεως και ἐπι τους μη ἁμαρτησαντας ἐπι τῷ ὁμοιωματι τῆς Ἄδαμ ὅς ἐστιν τυπος τοῦ μελλοντος. (But the death **reigned** from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam).

Acts 11:26: και εὗρων ἤγαγεν εἰς Ἄτιοχειαν. ἐγενετο δε αὐτοῖς και ἐνιαυτον ὅλον συναχθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησια και διδασξαι ὄχλον ἱκανον, χρηματισαι τε πρωτως ἐν Ἄτιοχεια τους μαθητας Χριστιανους. (And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they **assembled** with the church and **taught** a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch).

Acts 18:11: Ἐκαθισεν δε εἰαντον και μῆνας ἕξ διδασκων ἐν αὐτιῶς τον λογον τοῦ θεοῦ. (And he [Paul] **continued** a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them).

Ingressive aorist. The ingressive aorist expresses the action or event from its inception, from its beginning or entrance of the action or state. An example is found in 2 Cor. 8:9: γινωσκετε γαρ

¹Richard Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 122

την χαριν τοῦ κυριου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι δι' ὑμᾶς ἐπτώχευσεν πλουσιος ὢν, ἵνα ὑμεῖς τῇ ἐκείνου πτωχεια πλουτησητε. (For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes **He became** poor, that you through His poverty might become rich). Matt. 22:7: ὁ δε βασιλευς ὠργισθη και πεμψας τα στρατευματα αὐτοῦ ἀπολεσεν τους φονεῖς ἐκεινους και την πολιν αὐτῶν ἐνεπησεν. (But the king **became angry** and he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city).

Culminative aorist. The culminative aorist expresses the action from the point of view of its cessation or completion. Thus, it is normally translated as the perfect tense. The culminative aorist is normally used with verbs of effort or process where the end result is attained. Examples are found in Phil. 4:11: οὐχ ὅτι καθ' ὑστερησιν λεγω, ἐγω γαρ ἔμαθον ἐν οἱς εἰμι αὐταρκης εἶναι. (Not that I speak from want; for **I have learned** to be content in whatever circumstances I am). 1 John 2:11: ὁ δε μισῶν τον ἀδελφον αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σχοτια ἐστιν και ἐν τῇ σχοτια περιπατει και οὐκ οιδεν ποῦ ὑπαγει, ὅτι η σχοτια ἐτυφλωσεν τους ὀφθαλμους αὐτοῦ. (But the one who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness **has blinded** his eyes).

Gnomic aorist. The gnomic aorist is used to express a generally accepted fact. Examples are 1 Peter 1:24: διοτι πᾶσα σαρξ ὡς χορτος και πᾶσα δοξα αὐτῆς ὡς ἄνθος χορτου ἐξηρανθη ὁ χορτος και το ἄνθος ἐξεπεσεν (For, all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass **withers** and the flower **fades away**). Gal. 5:24: οἱ δε τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ την σαρκα ἐσταυρωσαν συν τοῖς παθημεν και ταῖς ἐπιθυμiais. (Now those who belong to Christ Jesus **have crucified** the flesh with its passions and desires).

Epistolary Aorist. An epistolary aorist is used by the author to place himself at the viewpoint of his reader to express an act or event that is present or future. Dr. Wallace clarifies, “This is the use of the aorist indicative in the epistles in which the author self-consciously describes his letter from the time frame of the audience.”² An examples is Phil 2:28: σπουδαιοτερος οὖν ἔπεμψα αὐτον, ἵνα ἰδότες αὐτον παλιν χαρῆτε καγω ἀλυποτερος ὦ. (Therefore **I have sent** him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful).

Dramatic aorist. The dramatic aorist is used as a device for emphasis to express a present reality with the certitude of a past event. The English translation can be expressed using the word “just,” or “just now.” An example is found in Mark 5:35: Ἐτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος ἔρχονται ἀπο τοῦ ἀρχισυναγωγου λεγοντες ὅτι ἡ θυγατηρ σου ἀπεθανεν τι ἔτι σκυλλεις τον διδασκαλον (While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, “your daughter **has died**; why trouble the Teacher anymore?”). Another example is Matt. 26:65: τοτε ὁ ἀρχιερευς διερρηξεν τα ἱματια αὐτοῦ λεγων ἐβλασφημησεν. τι ἔτι χριαν ἔχομεν μαρτυρων; ἰδε νῦν ἤκουσατε την βλασφημιαν (Then the high priest tore his robes, saying, “He has

² Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 562

blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, **you have** now **heard** the blasphemy.”).

Futuristic aorist. The futuristic aorist is used to describe an event that has not taken place yet is seen as already completed (sometimes called proleptic). Examples are found in John 13:31: Οτε οὖν ἐξῆλθεν, λεγει Ἰησοῦς· νῦν ἐδοξασθη ὁ υἱος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου και ὁ θεος ἐδοξασθη ἐν αὐτῷ (Then when he had gone out, Jesus said, “now the Son of Man **is glorified** and God is glorified in him.”) Rom. 8:30: οὓς δε προωρισεν, τουτους και ἐκαλεσεν και οὓς ἐκαλεσεν, τουτους και ἐδικαιωσεν. οὓς δε ἐδικαιωεν, τουτους και ἐδοξασεν. (and whom He predestined, those He also called, and whom He called, these He also justified, and whom He justified **He** also **glorified**).