

New Testament Greek 102
49. Lesson 29: Perfect Tense

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Let's come back to Lesson 29 now, just to make sure that we have not missed anything, and to reinforce what I said before.

Here are the exercise answers for Lesson 29.

1. The perfect tense is not a new voice or mood, but a new tense. So, you will not have a present perfect, or an aorist perfect, as we had present or aorist indicative, or present or aorist infinitive. Indicative and infinitive are moods; present and aorist are tenses, and perfect is now another tense, not another mood. So, we may have perfect indicative, perfect infinitive, and so on.
2. Some moods do not fit with the perfect tense, just by nature of the perfect; we will not learn perfect subjunctive or imperative. Since the perfect is present state based on past action, the perfect can't be a possibility (subjunctive) or command (imperative).
3. We will learn the perfect active and middle/passive indicative. This will not require any special effort to learn, since they are the fourth (perfect active) and fifth (perfect middle/passive) of the principle parts of the Greek verb. In other words, we won't be forming the perfect tense from the present, any more than we would form the aorist from the present. We'll just look it up.
4. The middle and passive of the perfect tense are the same, as in the present, but in the perfect tense, the division is between the active and the middle/passive, so the middle/passive will be the separate principle part, just as the aorist passive is the separate principle part from the aorist active and middle.
5. Let's review the principle parts, and what each one covers.
 - Each verb has these principle parts because we cannot assume it is possible to derive one principle part from another.
 - All the principle parts are indicative mood, first person singular. The first principle part, the present active indicative, covers the present active and middle/passive, and the imperfect active and middle/passive, in all moods. The second principle part, the future active indicative, includes only the future active and middle in all moods. The third principle part, the aorist active indicative, covers only the aorist active and middle in all moods. The fourth principle part covers the perfect active in all moods. The fifth principle part is perfect middle/passive, for all moods.

The sixth principle part is aorist passive indicative, which is also used for future passive, and, in both cases, for all moods.

All of the principle parts of λύω are:

λύω; λύσω; ἔλυσα; λέλυκα; λέλυμαι; ἐλύθη

From just these forms, all of the tenses, voices, and moods of λύω can be formed.

6. Now, in this lesson, λέλυκα, the perfect active indicative, is used also for the infinitive and participle of the perfect active. Likewise, λέλυμαι, the perfect middle/passive indicative, is used in forming the infinitive and participle of the middle/passive. But, λέλυμαι is not formed from λέλυκα. It might look like you can do that with λέλυκα and λέλυμαι, but it won't work with every verb, which is why they are separate principle parts.
7. The purpose of section 464, which is not in the old book, is not for you to try to form the perfect stem, but only so that you can recognize it in the New Testament. Machen did not deem it necessary when he wrote the book, so it probably is not worth taking time for now, either. You are free to read down through that on your own time.
8. The reduplication pretty much gives away most of the perfects. Notice in §469/446, whatever reduplication is used in the perfect active, the same is used for the perfect middle/passive.
9. I really cannot help you with strange changes that might occur, such as in §472/449. You'll need that paradigm of the perfect middle/passive of γράφω for your exercises, since one of those forms is used; without it you'll have no clue what form you are looking at. For other verbs, you can use §653. It seems to work dependably.
10. I didn't find the section on translating the perfect that helpful. If you just translate the perfect of "I loose" as "I have loosed," it's all right most of the time for verbs that express a simple act. But, it certainly will not work for all verbs all the time. For example, you won't want to translate the perfect of "I know" as "I have known." "I have known" makes it sound like you once knew, or you can remember that you did know; but, it also suggests that you do not necessarily continue to know. The problem is that, although the verb "know" may sound like simple act, it really is not. "I know" by its nature suggests a present state based on past action. In fact, "I know" is hard to use without suggesting present state based on a past act. But, what would that past action be? How do you express it?

There had to be some act you did in the past by which you can now say, “I know.” What is needed is something along the lines of “I come to know.”

This is the act after which you can say, “I know.”

It’s almost the same idea as “I learn”; only, I learn is μαθητεύω.

But, at least in the perfect tense, we have to get across the idea of a present state of knowing based on a past action, which action is hard to express other than “I come to know.”

So, the perfect would be, “I have come to know.”

Generally, “I have known” would be a simple aorist tense, as in Revelation 2:24, “have known,” which isn’t a perfect tense.

Similarly, other verbs of perception: “I see,” in the perfect, isn’t “I have seen,” but would need to be “I have come to see.”

Actually, any time such a word as, “I know,” or, “I see,” is used in the sense of now knowing or seeing based on a past act, it might better be put in the perfect tense in the Greek.

“I see the house” is present tense; but, “I see what the message of overcoming is all about,” is more like the perfect tense.

“I know what I’m thinking about right now” would certainly be present tense; but “I know the alphabet” is like a perfect.

What I am saying is, in translating Greek to English, start with a simple, “I have done” whatever the verb is. But consider, is that expressing a present state based on a past act, or not?

11. Caution about perfect participles.

The perfect passive participle is easy to translate:

From “I write,” the perfect passive participle would be, “having been written.”

The perfect active participle is not easy to translate:

From “I write,” the perfect active participle would appear to be, “having written”; but how can you distinguish that from the aorist active participle, “having written”?

In general, assume the aorist participle will serve, unless there is a very clear rationale for using the perfect active participle.

An example might be “the apostles having written Scripture are (and then you can name them).” That could be the perfect active participle. It is a present state based on a past action.

In contrast, “the apostle, having written II Timothy, was shortly thereafter put to death by the Roman authorities.” That is a participle; an aorist active participle.

12. Pluperfect tense.

The simplest thing I can say is the pluperfect is available for your consideration, but I see no major reason to spend time on it.