OVERVIEW OF USE OF VERB TENSE FORMS IN NARRATIVE

—David Brewer

**Narrative**

**Aorist.** Used to summarize and narrate the main events on the main story line.

**Imperfect.** Used to narrate events that are remote from the main story line, often supplementary or supporting material; it can also function to draw attention to a main action.

**Present.** Used to draw attention to (i.e., to “foreground”) significant events (the so-called historical present) or to signal the importance of an upcoming event.

**Perfect.** Used as another way of expressing prominence, due to the fact that the perfect tense is rare in narrative and seems to carry more meaning.

**Exposition**

**Aorist.** Used to establish background material, often past events that form the basis for more thematic material.

**Imperfect.** Used to highlight events over against the background aorist.

**Present.** Used to indicate foreground material (material that is thematically prominent and moves the discourse forward).

**Perfect.** Used also to indicate action that is prominent (IGG).

The imperfect is like a video in the sense that it is ongoing action in progress whereas the aorist is like a picture giving a complete presentation of the event without describing how it actually unfolded (GDW).

PROGRESSIVE IMPERFECT. The imperfect is like a video in the sense that it is ongoing action in progress whereas the aorist is like a picture giving a complete presentation of the event without describing how it actually unfolded.

σεισμὸς μέγας ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ θαλάσσῃ . . . αὐτὸς δὲ ἐκάθευδεν (Matt 8:24) a violent storm arose on the sea . . . but He was sleeping) (GDW).

INCEPTIVE IMPERFECT. The imperfect tense-form (past imperfective aspect) is often used to emphasize the beginning of an action (or, less common, a state).

ἄγγελοι προσῆλθον καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ (Matt 4:11) angels came and began to minister to Him (NASB) (GDW).

ITERATIVE IMPERFECT. The imperfect tense-form is also frequently used for repeated or customary action in the past.

καθ ᾽ ἡμέραν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ ἐκαθεζόμην διδάσκων (Matt 26:55) Every day I used to sit [customarily], teaching in the temple (GDW).

TENDENTIAL IMPERFECT: The tendential use of the imperfect tense-form is similar to the present tense-form (both imperfective aspect) use but refers to the past time and is more common. It is found in contexts where an action was begun, attempted, or proposed, but not completed.

**Attemped Action**. ἐδίδουν αὐτῷ ἐσμυρνισμένον οἶνον· ὃς δὲ οὐκ ἔλαβεν (Mark 15:23) They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it.

**Desired Action**. ἐκάλουν αὐτὸ ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ζαχαρίαν (Luke 1:59) they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father.

**Source Usesd**

Köstenberger, Andreas J.; Merkle, Benjamin L; Plummer, Robert L. *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament*. B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Mathewson, David L.; Emig, Elodie Ballantine. *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament*. Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.