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The Future Participle in the Greek New Testament

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As a follow up to a previous article on the future infinitive¹ this investigation of the future participle will prove to be helpful to those teaching and learning beginning Greek grammar. The study of this relatively infrequent use of this participle provides precise understanding of both forms and functions. The computer and the software package, Project Gramcord,² once again permit valuable research.

Future Participle Forms

Greek grammars using the eight case system list twenty-four active, twenty-four middle and twenty-four future passive forms of the future participle for a total of seventy-two endings (morphemes). Fortunately for the learner the future forms are built on the present participle base. The future principal part adds the *sigma* (or *theta eta sigma* in the passive) which is then followed by the same active, middle and passive endings found in the present participle. However, in addition to learning these forms the student usually is taught how to make allowance for both "irregular" verbs³ and the proper application within the future paradigm of the tense and ending morphemes. A knowledge of the exact frequency and kind of verbs with future participle forms should increase the confidence of a student involved in the learning process.

Future Participle Functions

Various grammars say little or nothing about the future participle.⁴ It is considered of later origin than the participles of other tenses and is a "clearly marked exception to the general timelessness of the participle."⁵ It is used in only a few places apart from Luke's writings.⁶ "Luke is almost alone (and in the Acts only) in sometimes using it classically to indicate the purpose of a

movement . . .⁷ The time of the participle is future to the time of the principal verb with the anarthrous examples used for purpose or aim.⁸ Such comments concur with the classical grammars, with Smyth adding that the future is used to show purpose "especially after verbs denoting *to come, go, send, summon, etc.*"⁹ The participle like the infinitive is used to "express time which is future in relation to the main verb."¹⁰

Perhaps the most helpful comments are stated by Goetichius who remarks that the participle is rather infrequent and may function adjectivally, substantively, or circumstantially. It represents an action as future from the point of view of the main verb unless it reflects the purpose of the main verb's action." However, without a clear understanding of the frequency of the three future participle uses, learning will be less than satisfactory.

Future Participle Frequency

In the New Testament only twelve uses of the future participle are found. Nine times the participle is active, twice middle (both deponent) and once passive.¹² The future forms are easily recognizable in all but one instance because they have regular future forms. Only in Acts 22:15 could confusion result since the verb base *agw* will not retain the *gamma* and the tense morpheme *sigma* but has *xi*. Rather than learn all seventy-two forms, time can be better spent learning the five endings (morphemes) which do occur.¹³ While Luke-Acts uses the participle six times, it can be found in five other books.¹⁴

The articular participle is found on six occasions. From their context it is clear that five uses are substantival.

Now the one with him after seeing *what will be* said . . . (Lk 22:49).

For Jesus knew from the beginning which ones are not believing and who is *the one who will betray* him (Jn 6:64).

. . . not knowing *the things which will happen* to me (Ac 20:22).

. . . as a servant for a testimony of *the things which will be spoken* (Hb 3:5).

And who is *the one who will harm* you if you would be imitators of the good (I Pt 3:13).

An additional substantival use is located in Hebrews 13:17 but the participle is anarthrous since it modifies a pronoun.

. . . for they are watching over your lives as *ones who will give account* (Hb 13:17).

The other articular use must be adjectival since it modifies an articular noun.

Future participles present action future of the main verb or purpose.

And what you are sowing, you are not sowing the body
which will be, but a bare seed (I Co 15:37).

All these occurrences reveal that the participle action whether substantival or adjectival must be future to the action of the main verb.

The remaining five uses of the participle occur without the article (being circumstantial) and indicate the purpose (or aim) of the action of the main verb. Consequently the action is also future in time to the main verb.

But the rest began saying, let us see if Elijah is coming *to save* him (Mt 27:49).

. . . who had gone to Jerusalem *to worship* (Ac 8:27).

From whom also after receiving letters to the brothers in Damascus, I began going *to bring*. . . (Ac 22:5).

Since you are able to know that there are to me not more than twelve days from whence I went up into Jerusalem *to worship* (Ac 24:11).

And after many years I came *to bring* for my people alms and offerings (Ac 24:17).

Future Participle Conclusions

This study of the twelve occurrences of the future participles is instructive in several ways. The twelve are distributed among six books with half in Luke-Acts and two in Hebrews. Only five distinct forms of the future participle are found in the New Testament. The forms do not need to be memorized since the ending morphemes are identical with those of the present participle. The tense morpheme (*sigma* or *theta eta sigma*) which is inserted prior to the ending morpheme is a clear indicator of the future tense. The teacher's time can now be better spent illustrating the functions from the twelve occurrences in the New Testament.

The action expressed by the participle in all instances is future to the action of the main verb. The articular participle always signals an attributive function (either substantival or adjectival). One substantival use occurs without the article. The five circumstantial uses (purpose) never have the article and best reflect their meaning by being translated as an English infinitive.

This analysis of the future participle using project Gramcord provides a simpler approach for both the teaching and the learning of the forms and functions by means of an analysis of frequency.

Notes

¹ See the author's previous article on the future infinitive in the *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal* 1:2 Fall, 1985 pp 13-15

² Project Gramcord is a software package making it possible to locate all the occurrences of a given Greek construction. All inquiries concerning this software package should be addressed to Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, which owns exclusive rights for its distribution.

³ Irregular verbs include *mi* verbs, contracts and verbs ending their base with a consonant demanding modification when positioned before a *sigma*.

⁴ J W Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) 152-53

⁵ Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in the New Testament Greek* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909) 71

⁶ Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* trans and

revised Robert W Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 36

⁷ Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* English edition Joseph Smith (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963) 95

⁸ Archibald T Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934) 877

⁹ Herbert W Smith, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard Theological Press, 1920) 458

¹⁰ William W Goodwin, *An Elementary Grammar* (Boston: Ginn and Heath, 1881) 53

¹¹ Eugene Van Ness Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965) 182-83

¹² The twelve uses are as follows: active Mt 27:49, Jo 6:64, Ac 8:27, 20:22, 22:5, 24:11, 17, Hb 13:17, I Pt 3:13; middle Lk 22:49, I Co 15:37; passive Hb 3:5

¹³ *wn, ontes, onta, omenon, omenwn*

¹⁴ Matthew, John, I Corinthians, Hebrews, I Peter