

Subjunctive Summary

Indicative mood: the mood of reality. It states what is: The book is red; Greek is fun. Hebrew is too hard; Why am I procrastinating?

Subjunctive mood: the mood of possibility or probability. It states what may or might be, *i.e.* a possibility, probability, exhortation, or axiomatic concept: I might learn Hebrew; If we were wealthy, we would buy more Greek Bibles. God is good.

- The Greek subjunctive is similar to English. However, there are several significant differences.
- Greek verbs only have time significance in the indicative. The only significance in the subjunctive is one of aspect (just like participles).
- In the New Testament we only need to be concerned with two tenses: the present (continuous) and aorist (undefined). There are nine perfect subjunctives which can be learned when they are encountered.
- It is difficult to bring out the aspect in translation. Use the key word “continuous” with the present when possible.

Forms

Present (continuous) subjunctive: uses the present tense stem and primary active endings. The only difference from the indicative is that it lengthens the connecting vowel:

	<i>subjunctive</i>		<i>indicative</i>		<i>subjunctive</i>		<i>indicative</i>	
		εἶμι			1st aor	2nd aor	1st aor	2nd aor
	<i>active</i>				<i>active</i>			
1 sg	λύω	ῶ	λύω	λύσω	λίπω*	ἐλύσα	ἔλιπον	
2 sg	λύῃς	ῆς	λύεις	λύσῃς	λίπῃς	ἐλύσας	ἔλιπες	
3 sg	λύῃ	ῆ	λύει	λύσῃ	λίπῃ	ἐλύσε(ν)	ἔλιπε(ν)	
1 pl	λύωμεν	ωμεῖν	λύομεν	λύσωμεν	λίπωμεν	ἐλύσαμεν	ἐλίπομεν	
2 pl	λύητε	ῆτε	λύετε	λύσητε	λίπητε	ἐλύσατε	ἐλίπετε	
3 pl	λύωσι(ν)	ῶσι(ν)	λύουσι	λύωσι(ν)	λίπωσι(ν)	ἐλύσαν	ἔλιπον	
	<i>middle/passive</i>				<i>middle</i>			
1 sg	λύωμαι		λύομαι	λύσωμαι	λίπωμαι	ἐλυσάμην	ἐλιπόμην	
2 sg	λύῃ		λύῃ	λύσῃ	λίπῃ	ἐλύσω	ἐλίπου	
3 sg	λύηται		λύεται	λύσῃται	λίπηται	ἐλύσατο	ἐλίπετο	
1 pl	λυώμεθα		λυόμεθα	λυσώμεθα	λιπώμεθα	ἐλυσάμεθα	ἐλιπόμεθα	
2 pl	λύησθε		λύεσθε	λύσησθε	λίπησθε	ἐλύσασθε	ἐλίπεσθε	
3 pl	λύωνται		λύονται	λύσωνται	λίπωνται	ἐλύσαντα	ἐλίποντο	
					<i>passive</i>			
				λύθῶ	γραφῶ	ἐλύθην	ἐγράφην	
				λύθῃς	γραφῃς	ἐλύθης	ἐγράφης	
				λύθῃ	γραφῇ	ἐλύθη	ἐγράφη	
				λυθῶμεν	γραφῶμεν	ἐλύθημεν	ἐγράφημεν	
				λύθῃτε	γραφῃτε	ἐλύθητε	ἐγράφητε	
				λύθῶσι(ν)	γραφῶσι(ν)	ἐλύθησαν	ἐγράφησαν	

* λειπω- to lack

Aorist (undefined) subjunctive: uses the unaugmented aorist tense stem and primary active endings. Be careful to distinguish these from the future as several look the same. However, there are *no* future subjunctives. The main clue showing the difference between tenses are the key words in the next section.

Key Words Signaling Subjunctives

The following words are usually (but not always) followed by the subjunctive:

ἵνα	in order that	εἰάν (εἰ + ἄν)	if
ἵνα μή	In order that not = lest	ὅς ἄν	whoever
ὅπως	(In order) that	ὅπου ἄν	wherever
ὅπως μή	(In order) that not = lest	ἕως	until
ὅταν (ὅτε + ἄν)	whenever	ἕως ἄν	until
		εἰάν μή	except, unless

Uses of the Subjunctive

1. *Hortatory Subjunctive*: the first person subjunctive used as an exhortation. Use “Let us” in your translation (hōr-ta-tōr-ē):

προσευχώμεθα. Let us pray.
Διέλθωμεν . . . καὶ ἴδωμεν Let us go . . . and let us see (Luke 2:15)

2. *Deliberative Subjunctive*: when a person asks a question and expects the audience to think about the answer:

μη οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες, τί φάγωμεν; ἢ· πίωμεν; ἢ· τί περιβαλώμεθα; (Matt. 6:31)
Therefore do not worry saying, “What should we eat?”, “What should we drink?”, or, “What should we wear?”

τί εἶπω ὑμῖν; What shall I say to you? (1 Cor 11:22)

3. ἵνα: is almost always followed by the subjunctive and can indicate purpose. The phrases ἵνα μή and ὅπως μή can be translated “lest” or some equivalent. They are idiomatic phrases.

ἔρχομαι πρὸς τὸν οἶκον ἵνα προσεύχωμαι.
I am going to the house in order that I may pray.

ἔρχόμεθα πρὸς τὸν οἶκον ἵνα μή ἀμαρτάνωμεν.
We are going to the house lest we sin.

4. *Conditional statement*: an “If . . . then . . .” sentence. “If I were smart, I would have taken Hebrew.” The “if” clause is called the “protasis” (prōt’-ah-sis) and the “then” clause is

called the “apodosis” (ah-pod´o-sis).

- Only the protasis is conditional. If the protasis is true, then the apodosis must be true (if the statement is in fact a factually correct statement). One problem with this form is deciding whether the speaker is making a specific or general statement. If you feel the sentence is a general statement, “may” or “might” would be inappropriate because the truth of the “if” clause is not in question. This illustrates a problem in conditional sentences. Context is always the key.
- Language is only a portrayal of reality. Whether the protasis is actually true or not regardless of what the author says (see second class conditions), is decided by context and the reader.
- Conditional sentences can overlap; see Wallace’s *Exegetical Syntax*.

Forms are classified by their structure: the word that introduces the protasis, the tense and mood of the verb in the apodosis, and sometimes the tense of the verb in the apodosis.

<i>Class</i>	<i>protasis</i>	<i>apodosis</i>
<i>First Class</i> (Reality)	εἰ + indicative any tense negated by οὐ	any mood; any tense

Also called “conditions of fact.” These sentences are saying that if something is true, then such and such will occur. Sometimes the apodosis is clearly true, and you can translate “since such and such, then such and such.” At other times the protasis is not so obvious and you *cannot* use “since.”

εἰ δὲ πνεύματι ἄγεσθε, οὐκ ἐστὲ ὑπὸ νόμον. (Gal 5:18)
But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

εἰ δὲ ὃ οὐ θέλω [ἐγὼ] τοῦτο ποιῶ, οὐκέτι ἐγὼ κατεργάζομαι αὐτὸ ἀλλὰ ἡ οἰκουσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία. (Rom 7:20)

But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

εἰ ὁ θεὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, τίς καθ’ ἡμῶν; (Rom 8:31)
If God is for us, who can be against us?

<i>Second Class</i> (Unreal)	εἰ + indicative past tense negated by μή	ἄν + indicative same tense as in the protasis
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Also called “contrary to fact.” These sentences are saying that if something is true, even though it is not, then such and such would occur. The falseness of the protasis is assumed in the argument.

εἰ ἦς ὧδε οὐκ ἂν μου ἀπέθανεν ὁ ἀδελφός. (John 11:32)

If you had been here, my brother would not have died
(Obviously you were not here, hence an unreal situation)

εἰ γὰρ ἐπιστεύετε Μωϋσεῖ, ἐπιστεύετε ἂν ἐμοί· περὶ γὰρ ἐμοῦ ἐκεῖνος ἔγραψεν. (John 5:46)

If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.
(Obviously you did not believe because you don't believe me, hence an unreal situation)

εἰ γὰρ οἱ ἐκ νόμου κληρονόμοι, κεκένωται ἡ πίστις καὶ κατήργηται ἡ ἐπαγγελία· (Rom 4:14)

For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;
(Obviously they are not heirs)

Third Class
(Probability)

ἐάν + subjunctive
negated by μή

any mood; any tense

Presents a condition that might be true in the future, or is generally true at all times. It does not necessarily suggest that it is likely to occur; sometimes the protasis is hypothetical.

Future more probable: if something might happen, then something else will definitely happen:¹

ἐάν οὖν ὁ υἱὸς ὑμᾶς ἐλευθερώσῃ, ὄντως ἐλεύθεροι ἔσεσθε. (John 8:36)

If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.

Ἐὰν τοῦτον ἀπολύσῃς, οὐκ εἶ φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος (John 19:12)

If you release this one, you are not a friend of Caesar

ἐάν τις φάγῃ ἐκ τούτου τοῦ ἄρτου, ζήσῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα,

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever

¹ The Bible has examples of future more probable conditions in which the protasis is likely to be true and others in which the protasis is hypothetical. As always, context is the key.

Present general: same form as above except the verb in the apodosis is in the present tense. This form is used to state an axiomatic truth. the subjunctive is appropriate because the truth of the statement is timeless:

ἐάν ἁμαρτάνω, ἔτι θεὸς ἀγαπᾷ με.

If I sin, God still loves me.

ἐάν γὰρ μὴ πιστεύσητε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι, ἀποθανεῖσθε ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν. (John 8:24)

for unless you believe that I am [he], you shall die in your sins

Ἐὰν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἑμαυτοῦ, ἡ μαρτυρία μου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθής· (John 5:31)

If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid.

ἐάν ὑμεῖς μένητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ, ἀληθῶς μαθηταὶ μου ἐστε (John 8:31)

If you abide in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine

Fourth Class
(possibility)

εἰ + optative

ἂν + optative

No complete illustration in the New Testament

ἐὰν μὴ - except, unless

οὐδεὶς γὰρ δύναται ταῦτα τὰ σημεῖα ποιεῖν ἃ σὺ ποιεῖς, ἐὰν μὴ ἦ ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτοῦ. (John 3:2)

For no one is able to do these signs which you are doing unless/except God is with him.

ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς, Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος, οὐ δύναται εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ. (John 3:5)

Unless/Except someone is born of water and spirit, he is not able to enter the kingdom of God

ἐὰν μὴ στραφῆτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδιά, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 18:3)

unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Negation and Questions

Negation

The basic rule is that οὐ is used to negate a verb in the indicative while μὴ is used to negate everything else.

There is one specific construction using the subjunctive that needs to be stressed. οὐ μὴ followed by the aorist subjunctive is a very strong negation, much stronger than simply saying οὐ. The two negatives do not negate each other; they strengthen the construction to say "No!" more emphatically.

ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι εἰσὶν τινες ὧδε τῶν ἐστηκότων οἵτινες οὐ μὴ γεύσονται θανάτου ἕως ἄν ἴδωσιν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐληλυθυῖαν ἐν δυνάμει.

Truly I say to you that there are some standing here who *will most assuredly not taste death* (οὐ μὴ γεύσονται) until they see that the kingdom of God has come in power.

Three Types of Questions

1. No indication is given as to the answer expected by the speaker:

Τί ἡμῖν καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ Ναζαρηνέ; (Mark 1:24)

NIV: What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

NAS: What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth?

NRSV: What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Τί ἐστὶν τοῦτο; (Mark 1:27)

What is this?

2. If the question begins with οὐ, the speaker expects an affirmative answer.

Διδάσκαλε, οὐ μέλει σοι ὅτι ἀπολλύμεθα; (Mark 4.38)

μέλει- μέλω- 3-S,Pres,Act,Ind, *it is a care or concern (to someone)*

Teacher, it is a concern to you that we are perishing, isn't it? (Mounce)

NIV: Teacher, don't you care if we drown?

NAS: Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?

Note: οὐ does not always mean the question expects an affirmative answer. But when οὐ is indicating the expected answer, that answer is "Yes." Here is an example of where no yes or no answer is expected:

Καὶ ἔρχονται καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Διὰ τί οἱ μαθηταὶ τῶν φαρισαίων νηστεύουσιν, οἱ δὲ σοὶ μαθηταὶ οὐ νηστεύουσιν; (Mark 2:18)

νηστεύουσιν- νηστεύω- M,N,P,Pres,Act,Ptc, *fasting*

3. If the question begins with μή, the speaker expects a negative answer. An easy way to remember this is that μή means "nay".

μή πάντες ἀποστολοὶ; (1 Cor 12.29)

All are not apostles, are they? [No]

Τί τὸ ὄφελος, ἀδελφοί μου, ἐὰν πίστιν λέγη τις ἔχειν, ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχη; μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν; (James 2:14)

NIV: What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? [No]

As with οὐ the first question in James 2:14 shows that μή does not always mean the question expects a negative answer. But when οὐ is indicating the expected answer (as in the second question of James 2:14), that answer is "No."