

Serendipitous Devotional Reading of the Greek New Testament

For the last couple years, I have read through the entire Greek New Testament in a year. Sometimes I would characterize my reading as *rapid reading*; other times, I slow down and *stop to smell the roses*. Particularly, because my classes spend time in analysis of the text, and parsings, and points of syntax, generally my devotional reading progresses more rapidly. I am *reading* the Greek text, rather than *decoding* it¹.

Though I desire that my students learn to *read* the Greek New Testament, my fear is that I teach them to *decode* rather than to *read*. At any rate, the Greek New Testament reading for today corresponded to one at a similar time last year when we had a winter-weather snow/ice day, which gave me a little more time than usual with the text. The text in question was the section of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13):

25 Τότε ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν δέκα παρθένοις, αἵτινες λαβοῦσαι τὰς λαμπάδας ἑαυτῶν ἐξῆλθον εἰς ὑπάντησιν τοῦ νυμφίου. **2** πέντε δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν ἦσαν **μωραὶ** καὶ πέντε **φρόνιμοι**. **3** αἱ γὰρ **μωραὶ** λαβοῦσαι τὰς λαμπάδας αὐτῶν οὐκ ἔλαβον μεθ' ἑαυτῶν ἔλαιον. **4** αἱ δὲ **φρόνιμοι** ἔλαβον ἔλαιον ἐν τοῖς ἀγγείοις μετὰ τῶν λαμπάδων ἑαυτῶν. **5** χρονίζοντος δὲ τοῦ νυμφίου ἐνύσταξαν πᾶσαι καὶ ἐκάθευδον. **6** μέσης δὲ νυκτὸς κραυγὴ γέγονεν, Ἴδου ὁ νυμφίος, ἐξέρχεσθε εἰς ἀπάντησιν [αὐτοῦ]. **7** τότε ἠγέρθησαν πᾶσαι αἱ παρθένοι ἐκεῖναι καὶ ἐκόσμησαν τὰς λαμπάδας ἑαυτῶν. **8** αἱ δὲ **μωραὶ** ταῖς **φρονίμοις** εἶπαν, Δότε ἡμῖν ἐκ τοῦ ἐλαίου ὑμῶν, ὅτι αἱ λαμπάδες ἡμῶν σβέννυνται. **9** ἀπεκρίθησαν δὲ αἱ **φρόνιμοι** λέγουσαι, Μήποτε οὐ μὴ ἀρκέση ἡμῖν καὶ ὑμῖν· πορεύεσθε μᾶλλον πρὸς τοὺς πωλοῦντας καὶ ἀγοράσατε ἑαυταῖς. **10** ἀπερχομένων δὲ αὐτῶν ἀγοράσαι ἦλθεν ὁ νυμφίος, καὶ αἱ **ἔτοιμοι** εἰσῆλθον μετ' αὐτοῦ εἰς τοὺς γάμους καὶ ἐκλείσθη ἡ θύρα. **11** ὕστερον δὲ ἔρχονται καὶ αἱ λοιπαὶ παρθένοι λέγουσαι, Κύριε κύριε, ἄνοιξον ἡμῖν. **12** ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς. **13** Γρηγορεῖτε οὖν, ὅτι οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν ἡμέραν οὐδὲ τὴν ὥραν.

(Notice the adjectives in this text that are enlarged and in bold font.)

¹ Credit for distinguishing between *reading* and *decoding* goes to Kevin Grasso of *Biblingo*, in a workshop at the conference "Greek and Hebrew for Life" at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in June of 2021.

I made some notes to the text on that day, which I re-discovered with today's re-reading of the above passage. Today (2/8/22) is not a snow/ice day, but I decided to write this little handout for the benefit of my students.

From Greek 1, we realize that most Greek adjectives come in three *terminations*, one for each gender (masculine, feminine, and neuter), as adjectives will agree with the nouns they modify in gender, case, and number. Therefore, a standard lexical entry for an adjective will take the form of *καλός, -ή, -όν*.

The adjectives modifying the word *virgin* (*παρθένος* which itself is a rare 2nd declension feminine noun²) are modified by the adjectives *μωραὶ* and *φρόνιμοι*. The form *μωραὶ* should be immediately identified as feminine nominative plural, whereas the adjective *φρόνιμοι* would *appear* to be masculine nominative plural. The fact that it modifies the virgins here immediately tells me something that I try to get my students to recognize, that the adjective *φρόνιμος* must be what grammarians call a 2-termination adjective. For example, the entry for *φρόνιμος* in BDAG is:

φρόνιμος, ον (cp. φρόνις ‘prudence’; Soph., X., Pla. et al., OGI 383, 106; PTebt 752, 7 [II BC]; LXX, pseudepigr., Philo; Jos., Ant. 9, 25; Tat. [s. below]) **pert. to understanding associated w. insight and wisdom, sensible, thoughtful, prudent, wise** Mt 13:33 syr^c apparently rendering γυνή φρονίμη (s. Nestle²⁵ app.; RRiedinger, ZNW 51, ’60, 154ff, cited by RBorger, GGA 143); 24:45; Lk 12:42 (both w. πιστός); 1 Cor 10:15. Opp. μωρός Mt 7:24; **25:2**, 4, 8f; 1 Cor 4:10; IEph 17:2. Opp. ἄφρων (as X., Mem. 2, 3, 1; Philo, Leg. All. 1, 86) 2 Cor 11:19; 1 Cl 3:3. φρόνιμοι ὡς οἱ ὄφεις (cp. Gen 3:1.— ‘Wary’; cp. LKoehler, Kleine Lichte ’45, 76–79) Mt 10:16=IPol 2:2. παρ̄ (v.l. ἐν) ἑαυτοῖς φρόνιμοι *wise in your own estimation = relying on your own wisdom* Ro 11:25; 12:16 (cp. Pr 3:7); ἑαυτοῖς 11:25 v.l. (without prep.; cp. Ps.-Demetr., El. c. 222 συνετὸς ἑαυτῶ). φρόνιμοι ἐν θεῷ (TestNapht 8:10 σοφοὶ ἐν θεῷ κ. φρόνιμοι) IMg 3:1; ἐν Χριστῷ 1 Cor 4:10. —Comp. φρονημώτερος *shrewder* (ApcMos 16; Philo; Jos., Bell. 5, 129; Tat. 7, 2; 16, 1) Lk 16:8 εἰς τὴν γενεὰν τὴν ἑαυτῶν *in relation to their own generation*. —GKilpatrick, JTS 48, ’47, 63f.—B. 1213. DELG s.v. φρήν II 2. M-M. TW.³

² Alfred Marshall's *Classified Word Book New Testament Greek—Nouns-Adjectives-Verbs: A Companion to the New Testament Greek Primer* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Limited, 1964), pp. 19-20 lists only 19 2nd declension feminine nouns used in the New Testament.

³ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1066.

What that means is that the form φρόνιμος can be either *masculine* or *feminine* nominative singular, and that the form φρόνιμον is the neuter equivalent. That is, there are two terminations to the adjective, instead of the normal three.

Now, the serendipitous discovery occurred in v. 10, where we find reference to αἱ ἔτοιμοι. I was thinking about the teaching value of pointing out that ἔτοιμος was also a two-termination adjective, but when I checked BDAG, I found the entry for that word with the normal three terminations (ἔτοιμος, η, ον). I was NOT happy. There went my serendipitous teaching moment. However, upon further review, I found a journal article by F. T. Gignac about the adjective αἰώνιος, which is normally used with two terminations in classical Greek, but which in the NT “fluctuates between two and three terminations.”⁴ Later in the same article, he says,

Similarly, the adjective *hetoimos*, which usually has only two terminations in classical Greek, is so used in the NT only in *hai hetoimoi* at Matt 25:10; elsewhere the distinct feminine is used: *hetoimēn*, with *tauten* (2 Cor 9:5) and *sōtērian* (1 Pet 1:5)⁵

The entry for LSJ is instructive, under the heading ἔτοιμος, ον⁶, and later says “also fem. ἐτοίμη Il.9.425, Hp.Art.66, -μᾶ S.El.1079 (lyr.), etc.: —in v. B. C. and later ἔτοιμος, η, ον, or ος, ον, cf. Hdn.Gr.2.938: —*at hand, ready, prepared.*”⁷

GE (now affectionately known as *BrillDAG*) confirms this switch between a two and a three-termination adjectival form: ἔτοιμος or ἔτοιμος -η -ον.⁸

Had I carefully checked LSJ, perhaps I would not have needed the article by Gignac, but I would have missed out all the fun from my serendipitous search.

⁴ Gignac, F. T. Morphological Phenomena in the Greek Papyri Significant for the Text and Language of the New Testament. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Vol. 48, 1986, p. 503.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 504. Gignac cites LSJ for the lexical note.

⁶ Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 703. Interestingly, the spelling above is taken from the print edition of LSJ, p. 703. My personal electronic copy of LSJ has the entry ἔτοιμος, ον (note the smooth breathing mark of the entry, which MUST be a typo).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Franco Montanari, ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), p. 835. The same variations are indicated in J. Diggle et al. *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon: Volume I: A-I*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 610.