

## Deponent Verbs

A question that came up yesterday was about the "middle/passive voice" of the verb ἔρχεται in the John 7 passage:<sup>1</sup>

3004 [e]	3361 [e]	1063 [e]	1537 [e]	3588 [e]	1056 [e]	3588 [e]	5547 [e]	2064 [e]
elegon	Mē	gār	ek	tēs	Galilaias	ho	Christos	erchetai
ἔλεγον ,	Μή	γάρ	ἐκ	τῆς	Γαλιλαίας	ὁ	Χριστός	ἔρχεται
said	not	indeed	out of	-	Galilee	the	Christ	comes
V-IIA-3P	Adv	Conj	Prep	Art-GFS	N-GFS	Art-NMS	N-NMS	V-PIMP-3S
3756 [e]	3588 [e]	1124 [e]	3004 [e]	3754 [e]	1537 [e]	3588 [e]	4690 [e]	1138 [e]
42	ouch	hē	graphē	eipen	hōti	ek	tou	spermatos
42	οὐχ	ἡ	γραφή	εἶπεν ,	ὅτι	ἐκ	τοῦ	σπέρματος
42	Not	the	Scripture	has said	that	out of	the	seed
42	Adv	Art-NFS	N-NFS	V-AIA-3S	Conj	Prep	Art-GNS	N-GNS
2532 [e]	575 [e]	965 [e]	3588 [e]	2968 [e]	3699 [e]	1510 [e]	1138 [e]	2064 [e]
kai	apo	Bēthleem	tēs	kōmēs	hopou	ēn	Dauid	erchetai
καὶ	ἀπὸ	Βηθλεὲμ ,	τῆς	κώμης	ὅπου	ἦν	Δαυὶδ*	ἔρχεται
and	from	Bethlehem	the	village	where	was	David	comes
Conj	Prep	N-GFS	Art-GFS	N-GFS	Adv	V-IIA-3S	N-NMS	V-PIMP-3S
3588 [e]	5547 [e]							
ho	Christos							
ὁ	Χριστός ?							
the	Christ							
Art-NMS	N-NMS							

The confusion comes when we try to assign a passive sense to the verb for “to come” – “He was come from Galilee” or “He was arrived from Bethlehem” are not only questionable English, they are probably not what the original writer (the Apostle John in this case) intended. Some verbs (called “deponent” verbs) *function* in an active sense even though their *form* uses middle/passive endings. (Presumably this is due to some long-forgotten aspect of the development of the language. Every language probably has those kinds of irregularities – it’s just the way it is.)

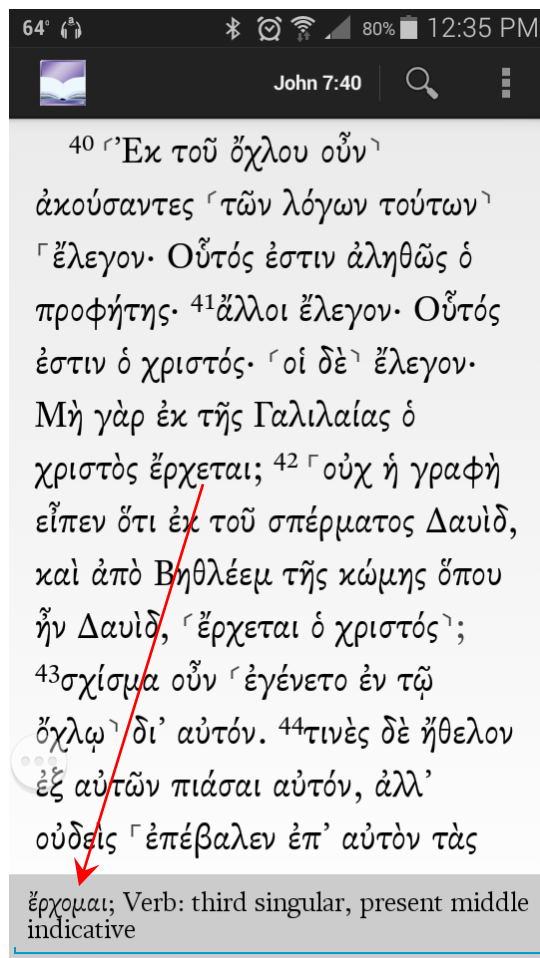
“This is a verb that is *middle or passive in form but active in meaning*.... It can never have a passive meaning.... *You can tell if a verb is deponent by its lexical form*. Deponent verbs are always listed in the vocabulary section with passive endings. In other words, if the lexical form ends in an omega, it is not deponent (e.g., ἀγαπάω). If the lexical form ends in -ομαι, the verb is deponent (e.g., ἔρχομαι). *You will have to remember that the word is deponent.*”<sup>2</sup>

The *lexical form* is the form you would use to find the word in a dictionary (or “lexicon”). Just as in English, in order to look up the meaning of the word “went” you would probably need to look under “go”, since “went” is a past tense form of that verb. (You can see that Greek has the same ironic problem as English: If I don’t know how to spell the word, or I don’t know its root form, how do I look it up?) Lists of deponent verbs are on the internet, such as a site at <http://inthesaltshaker.com/drills/deponent.htm>

<sup>1</sup> <http://biblehub.com/interlinear/john/7-41.htm> ; accessed October 13, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1993), 148; original emphasis, highlighting added.

Some useful interlinear resources (such as BibleHub in the image used above) do not identify the lexical form that Mounce mentions. Other resources (such as the Miklal Software *Greek New Testament* app<sup>3</sup>) do provide the form:



You can read more if you search the internet for “koine deponent verbs” (include “koine” or “greek” in the search since other languages, e.g., Latin, also have deponent verbs). One result of the search provides this information:

Traditionally, these have been called **deponent** verbs. The word *deponent* is from the Latin *deponere* = *to lay aside*. This term suggests that the middle or passive meaning was laid aside for these particular verbs even though the middle or passive form was used. However, for many of these so-called deponent verbs, it may well be that the Greek speaker really had a perspective on the action that made a middle voice appropriate, even though in modern English we would tend to describe the action using an active voice. . . . In any event, these are usually verbs for which no active form is found in the Greek New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

As always, use good judgment in searching the internet. One site I found began, “Deponent verbs don’t exist.” I didn’t read much further.

<sup>3</sup> *Greek New Testament*, Miklal Software Solutions, <http://www.miklalsoftware.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ntgreek.net/lesson24.htm> ; accessed October 13, 2017.