

What is the Perfect State?  
Investigating the Greek Perfect Tense-Form in the  
Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>1</sup>

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**The Perfect Conversation**

The July 2015 Tyndale Fellowship Conference, “Linguistics and the Greek Verb,” hosted by Tyndale House and sponsored in part by the Faculty of Divinity of Cambridge University and Faithlife Corporation, points up the recent fervor surrounding verbal aspect studies.<sup>2</sup> Papers there follow twenty-five years of research since the publication of Stanley E. Porter’s and Buist M. Fanning’s conflicting dissertations on verbal aspect in 1989 and 1990 respectively. In his 1993 review of Porter’s and Fanning’s dissertations, Moisés Silva concludes with wit:

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark if two fine scholars, after their thorough and well-informed research, come to such diametrically opposed conclusions. I for one am not at all persuaded by either of them. At any rate, this difference of

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<sup>1</sup> An excerpt of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta, GA, 17 November, 2015. I wish to express gratitude for comments received there, and specifically to Steven E. Runge and Constantine R. Campbell for their helpful and kind dialogue before the meeting.

<sup>2</sup> Essays forthcoming in *The Greek Verb Revisited: A Fresh Approach for Biblical Exegesis*, eds. Steven E. Runge and Christopher J. Fresch; Lexham Press.

opinion gives the strongest support to the view that exegetes and pastors are well advised to say as little as possible about aspect.<sup>3</sup>

But Porter and Fanning foray a trail of Greek language and linguistics studies that many have traversed since. It is not within the scope of this essay to restate the full conversation concerning aspect.<sup>4</sup> One noteworthy event provides a point of departure. At the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, the Greek Language and Linguistics Unit hosted Porter, Fanning and Constantine R. Campbell to present their positions on the Perfect tense-form in a session titled, “The Perfect Storm.” There it was noted emphatically that the three presenters differed not only in their conclusions but also in research methodology. Reviewing Porter’s and Fanning’s arguments, and the more recent proposals by Campbell, will establish a frame of reference for briefly analyzing aspect of the Perfect in four representative texts in Hebrews (2:8-9; 7:4-10; 7:26-28 and 9:6-10). Concerning Hebrews, B. F. Westcott wrote that, “the use of the perfect in the Epistle is worthy of careful study. In every case its full force can be felt.”<sup>5</sup> It is noted *infra* that Hebrews qualifies as an apt research locus of verbal aspect of the Perfect tense-form because of the quantity of Perfects written in an imperfective verbal matrix, surrounded mainly by Present tense-form verbals.

### **Stanley E. Porter**

Porter’s initial publication on verbal aspect<sup>6</sup> set the course for verbal aspect studies in the modern era.<sup>7</sup> Porter applies principles of

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<sup>3</sup> Moisés Silva, “A Response to Porter and Fanning on Verbal Aspect,” in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research* (eds. S. E. Porter and D. A. Carson; JSNT 80; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 82.

<sup>4</sup> For a survey, see S. E. Porter and A. W. Pitts, “New Testament Greek Language and Linguistics in Recent Research,” *CBR* 6 (2008): 214-55.

<sup>5</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: the Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (London: MacMillan, 1889), 177.

<sup>6</sup> S. E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood* (SBG 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Campbell highlights Porter’s influence, writing “since Porter, one of the most important elements of the modern period of Greek studies is its engagement with linguistics in all areas of investigation, not just lexical semantics and verbal

systemic linguistics to Greek verbs, observing that tense-forms involve legitimate choice—a speaker/writer’s employment of specific words and grammatical forms and the rejection of others—to transmit meaning of a particular verb. Here Porter’s thesis should be quoted at length:

Since systemic linguistics deals with language as it is actually evidenced in usage, systemic linguistics takes seriously the dictum of structural semantics that an element is only meaningful if it is defined wholly in terms of other elements. A given linguistic phenomenon that is wholly predetermined, i.e. there is no choice between this and some other grammatical unit, offers little for a discussion of meaning...Thus semantic choices may be defined in terms of what is not chosen, in contrast with the items that are chose, emphasizing that a distinction is made, rather than striving to find an appropriate metalanguage to define every semantic category fully.<sup>8</sup>

Porter suggests that in each instance a speaker/writer deliberately chooses a tense-form in order to encode their view of the action—perfective, imperfective or stative—without necessarily designating any temporal reference.<sup>9</sup> As it is the case that the same verbal form may

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aspect” (Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 46.

<sup>8</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 12-13. In, “In Defense of Verbal Aspect” (S. E. Porter, *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research* [eds. S. E. Porter and D. A. Carson; JSNT 80; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993], 28-29, 33), Porter argues that Biblical scholars have been slow to adopt or employ research from related fields, including linguistics, which could advance understanding of the Biblical text.

<sup>9</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 107. “I am concerned to explicate what any of the verb tenses can be made by a speaker to do. The semantic category of verbal aspect can be imposed upon a process by a speaker no matter when it may have occurred or how it may have actually occurred” (Porter, “In Defense of Verbal Aspect,” 44). Porter follows Bernard Comrie (*Aspect: An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems*, CLT [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976]) in arguing that the Perfect is distinct from the Aorist and Present in that each has its own stem and thus semantic independence (S. E. Porter, “Greek Linguistics and Lexicography,” in *Understanding the Times: Essays in Honor of D. A. Carson* [eds. Andreas J.

appear in any number of contexts and deictic spheres, the constant factor that needs to be observed concerning Greek verbs is aspect—the speaker/writer’s subjective portrayal of the action.<sup>10</sup>

Porter devotes fifty of his 545 pages to analysis of the Perfect tense-form, concluding that it semantically grammaticalizes stativity without distinct temporal reference.<sup>11</sup> He argues that because the Perfect is morphologically distinct from the Present and Aorist, having (1) consistent reduplication of the stem vowel, and (2) the lack of a connecting vowel between the stem and the personal endings (i.e. it is athematic), with the result that the Perfect semantically encodes a unique verbal aspect: atemporal stativity.<sup>12</sup> “The Perfect is used to grammaticalize a state of affairs, the Present a process in progress, and the Aorist a process seen as complete, with the Perfect the most heavily

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Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough; Wheaton: Crossway, 2011], 49). Campbell argues that Porter’s tripartite aspectual theory is in the minority position in the current debate, most scholars advocating just perfective and imperfective aspects (Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 32, 48-49; Campbell, *Advances in Greek*, 118-19). Porter counters by listing several linguists who sympathize with a tripartite aspectual frame for the Greek verb (S. E. Porter, “The Perfect Tense-Form and Stative Aspect: The Meaning of the Greek Perfect Tense-Form in the Greek Verbal System,” in *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015], 205 n. 34). Campbell argues that if stativity is a semantic value of the Perfect, as Porter suggests, then it must be expressed in every occurrence of the Perfect, translated in English by the “-ness” suffix or the like, unnatural for many exegetical decisions (Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 48-49). Porter counters that “the principal shortfall” of Fanning and Campbell’s theories “is that they fail to recognize the triaspectual structure of the Greek verbal system, which necessitates that they contrive unconvincing explanations of what is in fact more easily explainable in other ways, especially in terms of stative aspect” (Porter, “The Perfect Tense-Form and Stative Aspect,” 209).

<sup>10</sup> Porter argues the same in subsequent publications focused on not just verbal aspect but Greek grammar in general. In *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2007, 28), Porter writes: “verbs function in Greek as indicators of the speaker or writer’s view of a particular action, regardless of how that action might ‘objectively’ have transpired in the real world or ‘when’ it might have transpired.”

<sup>11</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 99-102; 254-70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-48.

marked.”<sup>13</sup> By marked, Porter means both the morphological features just noted, and the fact that the Perfect occurs much less frequently than the Present or Aorist, signaling, in a systemic-linguistics model, a speaker/writer’s deliberate choice of the Perfect tense-form.<sup>14</sup> The Perfect semantically encodes a state of affairs that the author/speaker desires the audience to see as prominent in the surrounding context.

How is the audience to understand the temporal framework of the action described by the Perfect? Porter argues that temporal reference of the verb (past, present, future, omnitemporal, timeless)<sup>15</sup> is understood by deictic contextual factors, including the tense-forms of surrounding verbs.<sup>16</sup> Thus when the Perfect is surrounded by past-referring verbs, it often describes a state or condition occurring in past time.<sup>17</sup> Porter suggests that the present-time use of the Perfect surfaces more frequently in the active dialogues of narrative NT texts than in the discursive rhetoric of the epistles.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 258. Porter elaborates elsewhere that “semantic markedness forms a cline, from the semantics of the aorist to the present to the perfect. This is the movement from the undifferentiated whole or completed action, grammaticalized by the aorist; to the contoured (whether internally or not) or progressive action of the present; to the most highly defined, complex, and contoured of the perfect, what I have labeled as the stative” (“The Perfect Tense-Form and Stative Aspect,” 212).

<sup>14</sup> Campbell questions the accuracy of Porter’s theory of markedness noting however that the Perfect “generally may be found in comparatively significant positions” (*Advances in Greek*, 128).

<sup>15</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 260-70

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 260. This becomes the rub of Fanning’s argument with Porter, Fanning suggesting that particular deictic temporal markers surface around a particular tense-form because that tense form semantically encodes that temporal frame, exceptions being explained through additional contextual factors (Buist M. Fanning, “Approaches to Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek: Issues in Definition and Method,” in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research* [JSNT 80; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993], 59).

<sup>17</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 260; Porter, “The Perfect Tense-Form and Stative Aspect,” 208.

<sup>18</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 266. Porter argues that in narrative, the aorist serves as the background tense, and the more prominent events or descriptions are described with the Present or Perfect. In exposition, the present serves as the base tense-form, supported by the aorist or further

Porter's *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament* is noteworthy in its own right but it is frequently mentioned along with the contrasting views of Fanning expressed in *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*.<sup>19</sup> Their positions have led to what is known as "The Porter/Fanning Debate."<sup>20</sup> Understanding Fanning's propositions regarding verbal aspect is foundational for interacting with the more recent arguments of Campbell, analyzed in what follows.

### **Buist M. Fanning**

Fanning's approach to verbal aspect begins from a different frame of reference than Porter. Where Porter investigates verbal aspect in light of systemic linguistics, Fanning seeks to understand aspect in light of the various contextual factors of Greek verbs in the New Testament. Fanning states that the purpose of his work "is to present a more detailed analysis of New Testament verbal aspect than is given by the standard grammars, using insights from contemporary research in linguistics and in NT studies."<sup>21</sup> He concludes that "fully subjective choices between aspects are not common, since the nature of the occurrence of the procedural character of the verb or verb-phrase can restrict the way an occurrence is viewed by the speaker."<sup>22</sup> Fanning argues that since, semantically, aspect must be understood in connection with lexical and grammatical features, pragmatically aspect has temporal implications. The pragmatics of aspect thus give rise to nuanced designations within each tense-form (e.g., historic-present, futuristic-aorist).<sup>23</sup>

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heightened by the perfect tense-form and stativity ("In Defense of Verbal Aspect," 35).

<sup>19</sup> Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> See D. A. Carson, "An Introduction to the Porter/Fanning Debate," in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research* (eds. S. E. Porter and D. A. Carson; JSNT 80; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 18-25. Campbell notes that the Porter/Fanning debate casts such a shadow over aspectual studies, that all subsequent scholarship is positioned in relation to their views (Campbell, *Advances in Greek*, 47).

<sup>21</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>23</sup> See also Fanning, "Approaches to Verbal Aspect," 46-62.

Fanning argues that aspect of the Greek verb corresponds to either the Present (imperfective aspect) or Aorist (perfective aspect), these functioning in contradiction. He gives the Future and Perfect less attention, because, “in purely aspectual terms the perfect is secondary to the primary contrast of present and aorist,”<sup>24</sup> and the Future does not encode aspect in any way. Fanning notes that like the Present, the Imperfect tense-form encodes continuous aspect—although always signifying past time—and he thus analyzes the Imperfect with the Present.

The thrust of Fanning’s argument is that to fully understand an author’s oppositional choice between the imperfective aspect of the Present tense and the Perfective aspect of the aorist, one must evaluate corresponding lexical, semantic and contextual factors of the verb. He states: “as a matter of fact, verbal aspect is part of an immensely complex system of interactions between various elements of meaning, and simple definitions are not sufficient for guiding one through such a tangle.”<sup>25</sup> It can thus be said that Fanning argues for a holistic approach to understanding aspect. In the conclusion of *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* he writes:

The primary argument of this book has been that understanding verbal aspect requires a grasp of both the basic meanings of the aspects themselves and their function in combination with other linguistic and contextual features...More particularly, it has been argued that aspect should be analyzed both at a *definition* level and at a *function* level (italics original).<sup>26</sup>

Fanning’s analysis of the historic present, which he argues is “clearly past occurrence as though it were simultaneous with the writer/reader which produces the vivid or immediate effect. In this regard it is similar to the

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<sup>24</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 421.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. Fanning thus prioritizes the pragmatics of aspect over semantics—contra Porter, discussed *supra*. Responding to Fanning, Porter argues that the system of Greek verbs he espouses “does not suffer exceptions gladly” (“In Defense of Verbal Aspect,” 34). Campbell observes that how tightly or loosely interpreters value the semantics of aspect will likely determine if Porter’s or Fanning’s argument about aspect gains their approval (*Advances in Greek*, 70).

<sup>26</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 421.

instantaneous present, in that the *temporal* meaning predominates and neutralizes the *aspectual* force<sup>27</sup> (italics original), underscores his differences with Porter.<sup>28</sup> Fanning's analysis of the Perfect gives less attention to aspect and more to the 'complexities' of the tense-form. He writes:

The perfect in NT Greek is a complex verbal category denoting, in its basic sense, a state which results from a prior occurrence. Thus, it combines three elements within its invariant meaning: the *Aktionsart*-feature of stative situation, the tense-feature of anteriority, and the aspect of summary viewpoint concerning the occurrence.<sup>29</sup>

This Fanning writes at the conclusion of just eight pages of fresh analysis of the Perfect tense-form—most of which is an argument that stativity be understood as an *Aktionsart* feature (not an aspectual one), and that the perfect generally has temporal anteriority extending to the present.<sup>30</sup> Campbell questions Fanning's conclusion regarding the Perfect, noting that Fanning does not address Perfects that are not stative or Perfects that are not present in temporal reference.<sup>31</sup>

### **Constantine R. Campbell**

Campbell is foremost among those scholars combing the trails blazed by Porter and Fanning. His initial research is presented in *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the*

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 228

<sup>28</sup> Fanning's conclusion regarding the historic present has led a few subsequent analyses of aspect to disagree with him on various levels. Besides Porter, see Rodney J. Decker, *Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect* (Studies in Biblical Greek 10; New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 119-20.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 112-13.

<sup>31</sup> Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 49-50. Campbell argues that Fanning takes up the traditional *Aktionsart* understanding that the Perfect semantically encodes past action with present effects and attempts to cast it as an aspectual, semantic value (*Advances in Greek*, 118).



*New Testament*.<sup>32</sup> Campbell identifies a default pattern in the various indicative tense-forms and strands of narrative literature: the Aorist correlates with mainline material; the Imperfect and Pluperfect with offline material; the Present, Perfect, and Future with direct discourse; and the Present and Perfect with both indirect and authorial discourse.<sup>33</sup> From these patterns Campbell employs recursive methodology, turning attention back to verbal aspect; the tense-form patterns he observes in narrative are used to define the semantic aspectual range of each tense-form regardless of genre.<sup>34</sup> Campbell argues that spatial values best describe the viewpoint (aspect) employed by the speaker/writer in choosing amongst the various tense-forms:

The aorist indicative encodes perfective aspect and the spatial value of remoteness. The future indicative encodes perfective aspect and temporal futurity. The present indicative encodes imperfective aspect and the spatial value of proximity, while the imperfect encodes imperfective aspect and remoteness. The perfect and pluperfect both encode imperfective aspect and the spatial values of heightened proximity and heightened remoteness respectively.<sup>35</sup>

Campbell's paradigm reflects Porter's in that, save the Future, Campbell does not identify temporal reference as a semantic value of verbs. He chooses rather to employ spatial categories to describe their semantic aspectual character. Though Campbell admits that remote/near spatial values often accord remote/near temporal reference, the spatial designations are semantically uncancelable, always describing the aspectual value of the Greek verb.<sup>36</sup> Campbell tests his findings from

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<sup>32</sup> SBG 13; New York: Peter Lang, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-42; See also Campbell, *Advances in Greek*, 124-25.

<sup>34</sup> Porter argues that Campbell's analysis of narrative literature, representing just half of the Perfects in the New Testament, is insufficient to arrive at a semantic value of this tense form ("Greek Linguistics and Lexicography," 50).

<sup>35</sup> Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, 241-42.

<sup>36</sup> "An event that is distant will be interrupted first spatially (it's the remote past), but will also have temporal implications for the way the language user thinks about the event (it happened a long time ago). In Greek, the verb primarily conveys remoteness or proximity and yet has temporal implications

*Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative* by investigating verbal aspect in the oblique moods, the results of which are published in *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs: Further Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament*.<sup>37</sup> In the latter volume, Campbell argues that the oblique moods demonstrate similar aspectual implicatures as the indicatives, but at the smaller, clausal level.<sup>38</sup>

Campbell notes that of all the tense-forms, the Perfect opportunes the greatest level of exegetical volatility.<sup>39</sup> “How one understands the semantic nature of the perfect indicative will affect each of its 836 instances in the New Testament.”<sup>40</sup> He argues that the correspondence between the Perfect and the Present in discourse sections of narrative text is so regular as to exhibit a fixed pattern of use.<sup>41</sup> From this pattern Campbell argues, recursively, that the Perfect semantically, always, resembles the aspectual character of the Present.<sup>42</sup>

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for our thinking” (Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 135). See also, Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, 26-27.

<sup>37</sup> SBG 15; New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> “The indicative mood by default retains the function of aspectually delineating the verbal structural shape of narrative, while non-indicatives generally function within that structural shape. Consequently, the differences between genres—such as narrative and epistolary literature—make little discernible difference to the function of verbal aspect in non-indicative verbs” (Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs*, 123).

<sup>39</sup> Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, 161.

<sup>40</sup> Campbell, *Advances in Greek*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, 184-89. Porter recognizes that the temporal frame of the Perfect is influenced by, among other deictic factors, the temporal frame of the surrounding verbal tense-forms (*Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 260), observing that “the major problem remaining for a theory of aspect of the Perfect is to account for uses of the Perfect in at least past and present-referring contexts” (*ibid.*, 252).

<sup>42</sup> In *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, Campbell states that the literary genre of discourse attracts the imperfectivity of the Perfect tense-form. But in *Advances in Greek*, he states that all tense-form patterns are established by the aspectual character of the tense-forms themselves: “the patterns of indicative verbal distribution are created through the functionality of verbal aspect” (*Advances in Greek*, 125). So initially the generic patterns lead Campbell to uncover the semantic aspectual value of the tense-forms, and then later it is proposed that the aspectual values themselves determine the generic patterns.

Thus the Perfect, due to its relationship with the Present, is aspectually imperfective.<sup>43</sup> How does the Present then differ from the Perfect? Campbell argues that a speaker/writer employs the Perfect in order to describe the viewpoint of the action as having a higher degree of spatial proximity than the Present, events unfolding in full view.<sup>44</sup> Semantically, the Perfect can be understood as an enhanced Present with pragmatic implicatures of intensification or prominence.<sup>45</sup> Campbell's thesis that at the semantic level the Perfect tense-form is aspectually imperfective thus stands in contrast to both Porter and Fanning, who see the Perfect as aspectually stative or temporally anterior with abiding effects, respectively.

How does Campbell understand the temporal reference of the Perfect? He suggests that the imperfective aspect of the Perfect allows it a high degree of flexibility in terms of temporal reference.<sup>46</sup> Campbell draws on Fanning's argument that the Perfect interacts with various factors in a verb's context so as to demonstrate predictable patterns of usage in a text,<sup>47</sup> and states that "the combination of aspect, lexeme, and context work together to create pragmatic *Aktionsart* expressions, or implicatures."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See also Trevor V. Evans, "Future Directions for Aspect Studies in Ancient Greek," in *Biblical Greek Language and Lexicography: Essays in Honor of Fredrick W. Danker*, ed. Bernard A. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 205-06.

<sup>44</sup> Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, 195-99; idem., *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 51, 103.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative*, 201-07; idem., *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 51, 110-11. He suggests for instance that the Perfects in 2 Tim 4:6-7 Ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤδη σπένδομαι, καὶ ὁ καιρὸς τῆς ἀναλύσεώς μου ἐφέστηκεν. τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα ἠγώνισμαι, τὸν δρόμον τετέλεκα, τὴν πίστιν τετήρηκα. (For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; NAU) could be translated, "the time *is coming*; *I am fighting* the good fight; *I am finishing* the race; *I am keeping* the faith" (Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 15; bold and italics original).

<sup>46</sup> Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 50-51.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>48</sup> Campbell, *Advances in Greek*, 120.

### **The Perfect in Hebrews**

It is worth repeating that Campbell's theory is the result of recursive methodology in narrative literature, not epistles. Since Campbell initially identifies the Perfect as imperfective because of its coherence with the Present in discourse sections of narrative, ideally, examining Campbell's model requires first identifying non-narrative units of text where the Perfect is used in relative proportion to the Present. Though it is nearly impossible to identify in epistles sub-generic units of text that correspond with the narrative/discourse sub-genres Campbell employed in his research, the Epistle to the Hebrews, as noted in the table *infra*, has the advantage of locating more Presents than any other tense-form. Hebrews thus qualifies as a (albeit brief) testing-ground for evaluating how the aspect of the Perfect tense-form might relate with Present.

Relevant to Campbell's argument, in Hebrews Perfect tense-form verbals are written in an imperfective verbal scheme dominated by Presents and not Aorists in Heb 2:8-10 4:14-15; 7:4-10, 11-17, 26-28; 9:6-9; 10:20-22 and 12:18-24. Due to time limitations, just Perfects in 2:8-9; 7:4-10, 26-28 and 9:6-10 will be considered in this essay. It will be observed that in Hebrews, the Greek Perfect aspectually presents a perfective state of affairs. It will then be argued that identifying the Perfect as either imperfective (Campbell) or temporally emphatic (Fanning) diminishes the robust capacity of the Perfect to convey the broad scope of the verbal action as it relates to the subject.<sup>49</sup>

### **Tense-Form Distribution in Hebrews**

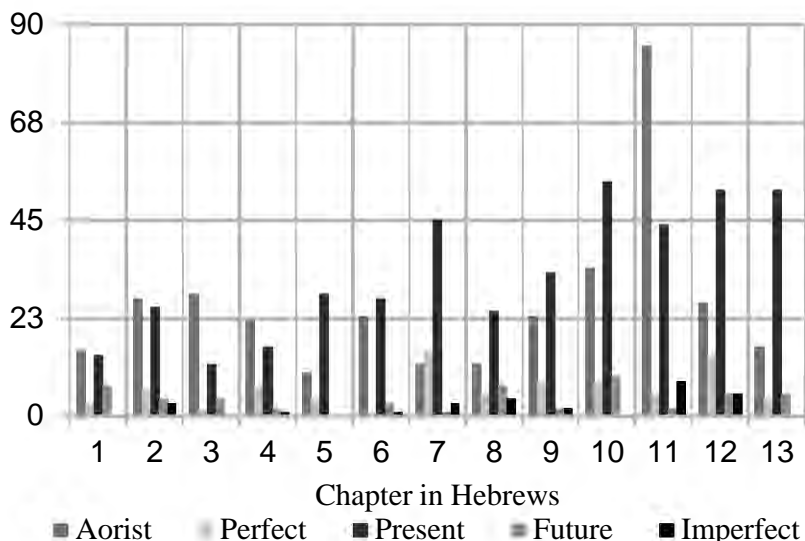
Hebrews 2:8-9

The Author employs three Perfect participles in His interpretation of Ps 8:5-7 LXX in Heb 2:6-8a. The psalm text extols the exalted place of humanity over the created order, and in Hebrews 2, the

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<sup>49</sup> So Porter: "the use by an author of the perfect tense-form encodes the action as reflecting a complex state of affairs of the subject. This may involve a previous action (although this may be true for the action encoded by any of the aspects), but the emphasis is upon this subject-related state of affairs" ("The Perfect Tense-Form and Stative Aspect"), 211.

psalm citation becomes a paradigm text for both Christology and eschatology. The eschatological hope that humanity would enjoy dominion over the earth was alien to the suffering congregation in view (cf. 3:12-14; 10:32-36; 12:1-3; 13:12-14). Their plight resembled that of Jesus.



In Heb 2:8b, the Author writes, “but now we do not yet see all things subjected to him” (Νῦν δὲ οὐπω ὁρῶμεν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα ὑποτεταγμένα).<sup>50</sup> The use of the Present ὁράω establishes an imperfective aspectual frame for interpreting the Perfect participle of ὑποτάσσω, here an attributive adjectival modifying “all things” (τὰ πάντα).<sup>51</sup> Does the Author wish for the audience to see a state of affairs

<sup>50</sup> Unless noted otherwise, the Greek text is from Nestle-Aland 28 and all English translations from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Updated Edition.

<sup>51</sup> As noted supra, Porter (Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, 260, 266), Fanning (Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek, 112-20) and Campbell (Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative, 184-89) note that the surrounding verbal matrix influences the interpretation of the Perfect. Their observation guides interpretation of all the Perfects analyzed in this essay.

in which all things (at his moment of writing) are not yet subject to humanity (so Porter)? The effects of a past action when all things became no longer subject to mankind, with the effects of that moment impacting the current distressed situation of the audience (so Fanning)? Or up-close continuously all things not subject to humanity (so Campbell)? Perhaps an answer should be suspended until investigating the Present verb and two Perfect adjectival participles in the following verse.

The contrastive conjunction “but” (δὲ) followed by the Present verbal phrase “we see Jesus” (βλέπομεν Ἰησοῦν), continues an imperfective aspectual frame into Heb 2:9. Here the author describes Jesus with two Perfect passive attributive participial phrases: “made for a little while lower than the angels” (βραχύ τι παρ’ ἀγγέλους ἡλαττωμένον), and “crowned with glory and honor” (δόξῃ καὶ τιμῇ ἐστεφανωμένον). Lexically, ἔλαττώω and στεφανώω seem contradictory, but together they aptly describe Jesus’ glorious death. Do the Perfects of ἔλαττώω and στεφανώω portray Jesus as lower than the angels within a complex state of affairs, without specific temporal reference (so Porter)? Perfective, such that Jesus was made lower than angels and then at some later point crowned with effects of that sequence of humiliation/glory extending to the present time (so Fanning)? Or, in accord with the imperfective aspect of the Present verb βλέπω, continuously viewed as lower and continuously viewed as crowned (so Campbell)?

I question whether imperfective aspect best explains the Perfect participles of ἔλαττώω and στεφανώω in Heb 2:9. Once an individual is crowned, even at the metaphorical level of being crowned “with glory and honor” (δόξῃ καὶ τιμῇ; Heb 2:9), they are crowned. And in Heb 2:9, the Perfects of ἔλαττώω and στεφανώω are coordinated, describing the ironic victory Jesus accomplished through His suffering and death. If viewed imperfectively, the Perfect participles of ἔλαττώω and στεφανώω in Heb 2:9 do not seem to make sense of the sequence, and conclusions, the Author has in mind. I suggest that identifying the Perfect as aspectually imperfective isolates one aspectual feature of the Perfect at the expense of the broader state of affairs the Perfect espouses, limiting its potency in the discourse.

Imperfectivity aside, does the Author of Hebrews portray Jesus’ humility and crowning as a completed action in the past with royal

effects applicable to the present (Fanning), or part of a complex state of affairs culminating in a description of Jesus' royal, crucified-ness (Porter)? One feature distinguishing Porter and Fanning is the issue of temporal reference, or lack thereof, in the Perfect. Fanning argues that in the Perfect, temporal reference of a past action predominates over aspectual reference.<sup>52</sup> Is a temporal reference necessary for understanding these Perfects? Though both Porter and Fanning's models might explain the Author's point with either ἐλαττώω or στεφανόω in Heb 2:9, the combination of these underscores Porter's position. Humiliation and crowning here verbalize Jesus' death, resurrection and current heavenly session—a broad state of affairs encompassing past action<sup>53</sup> that that Author will reference repeatedly in subsequent chapters.

Bypassing the combination of Presents and Perfects in Heb 4:14-15, we turn now to Hebrews 7, locating the most dense concentration of Presents and Perfects in the Epistle.

#### Hebrews 7:4-10

As the table *supra* notes, the concentration of Perfects and Presents in Hebrews 7 provides an especially apt field for examining Campbell's argument that the Perfect is imperfective, again, because the Perfect attracts to the Present so frequently in the discourse sections of narrative literature. "Would the same prove true in epistles?" this essay asks, and observes Hebrews 7 as a locus of investigation.

The Author's argument concerning Melchizedek in Hebrews 5-7 emphasizes among other points Jesus' superiority as a priest. In Heb 7:4-10, the Author writes one Perfect participle and three Perfect indicatives within a matrix of mainly Present tense-form verbals. The Present imperative "observe" (Θεωρεῖτε) in Heb 7:4 establishes an imperfective aspectual frame and calls the audience to continue considering Melchizedek's superiority to the great patriarch Abraham. In Heb 7:5-6 the Author observes that Melchizedek's greatness is demonstrated the fact that subsequent Levitical priests receive the command to tithe their brothers but Abraham spontaneously and freely paid tithes to

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<sup>52</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 228

<sup>53</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 266.

Melchizedek. The Author uses the Present tense-form to describe the action of the sons of Aaron receiving (λαμβάνοντες; Heb 7:5) the priesthood, and the command that generation after generation the priests continue tithing their brothers (ἐντολὴν ἔχουσιν ἀποδεκατοῦν τὸν λαὸν; Heb 7:5). At the end of Heb 7:5, the Author writes that the priests receive tithes from their brothers, distinguishing the sons of Aaron within the people of Israel. Yet, both priests and non-priests, the Author hastens to add, “are descended from Abraham” (ἐξεληλυθότας ἐκ τῆς ὀσφύος Ἀβραάμ).

With the Perfect of ἐξέρχομαι in Heb 7:5, is the Author calling his audience to view the action of descending from Abraham as part of a state of affairs, a ‘descended-ness’ quality that serves to emphasize the commonality of priests and non-priests as heirs of Abraham (so Porter)? To see the action of descent from Abraham as a completed action of genealogical lineage emphasizing Abraham’s patriarchal status and, by deduction, the commonality of all Israelites as Abraham’s heirs (so Fanning)? Or, to continuously view with heightened proximity the action of both priests and non-priests descending from Abraham, (so Campbell)? Here, I find Porter or Fanning’s models better able to explain the Author’s argument; stative or perfective aspects make better sense of the Perfect form of ἐξέρχομαι than seeing the action as imperfective. The Author’s argument is not that the audience continue to up-close see each successive generation in process descending from Abraham’s loins; it seems to me that as soon as the first generation descended from Abraham, it is a given that all subsequent generations would as well, including Aaron, the Levites and the remainder of Israel. Reading ἐξεληλυθότας as imperfective tapers the wider capacity of the Perfect tense-form to present the broader state of affairs in view.

In Heb 7:5 the Author emphasizes the commonality of priests and non-priests within Israel, all descended from Abraham. With an adversative δὲ (“but”) in the initial clause of Heb 7:6, the Author distinguishes the priestly figure Melchizedek from all other priestly figures in Israel. Melchizedek, the Author notes using the Present substantival participle (ὁ γενεαλογούμενος), remains outside of Abraham’s lineage. Melchizedek’s superiority to the patriarch was demonstrated by the fact that he received tithes from Abraham (δεδεκάτωκεν Ἀβραάμ). The Author writes the Perfect indicative of



δεκατόω here in Heb 7:6 again in Heb 7:9, there noting, creatively, that through Abraham even Levi himself paid tithes to Melchizedek.

Is Melchizedek's reception of tithes from Abraham, and by deduction Levi and all of Abraham's posterity, to be viewed with a stative (Porter), perfective (Fanning) or imperfective (Campbell) aspect? In Heb 7:6, the Perfect of δεκατόω is paired with the Perfect of εὐλογέω to note that Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham and subsequently blessed the patriarch (τὸν ἔχοντα τὰς ἐπαγγελίας εὐλόγηκεν). Does the Author wish for his audience to see Melchizedek's collection of tithes and blessing upon Abraham as part of a state of relational affairs that demonstrate Melchizedek's superiority to the patriarch? Porter's observation that δεδεκάτωκεν and εὐλόγηκεν are Perfects with past implicature<sup>54</sup> here resembles Fanning's schema. Melchizedek's actions upon Abraham are understood as aspectually perfective, with effects abiding to the present situation and Jesus' ministry as high priest of the new covenant.<sup>55</sup> Or should the Perfects of δεκατόω and εὐλογέω be viewed imperfectively with heightened proximity (Campbell), such that Melchizedek would continuously be seen to receive tithes and to bless Abraham? I suggest that the Author of Hebrews portrays the events of Genesis 14 with a stative aspect. Not only are these events completed as part of the broader state of affairs at the *Aktionsart* level of actual occurrence, but also in how the Author wishes for his audience to view them. The Perfects of δεκατόω and εὐλογέω aspectually dramatize the state of affairs demonstrating Melchizedek's great-ness over Abraham. Of the Perfects analyzed thus far, the indicatives in Heb 7:6-8, despite being used in coordination with Present tense-forms, perhaps most strongly challenge the theory that the Perfect semantically encodes imperfective aspect.

Hebrews 7:26-28

Again, the Epistle to the Hebrews was chosen as the locus of research for investigating aspect of the Perfect tense-form because

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>55</sup> Concerning the combinations of Perfects in 7:6 and 9, Westcott wrote, "the fact is regarded as permanent in its abiding consequences." (Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 177).

Hebrews regularly locates the Perfect in a matrix of imperfective tense forms. This arrangement structurally corresponds to the framework Campbell observes in the discourse sections of narrative literature, the basis from which he recursively argues that the Perfect is aspectually imperfective, a super-Present.<sup>56</sup>

The final paragraph of Hebrews 7 locates two Perfect participles in the midst of aspectually imperfective tense forms. As noted *supra*, in Hebrews 5-7 the Author describes Jesus, God's unique Son, as a priest like Melchizedek. Melchizedek and Jesus: (1) are priests outside of the Aaronic line, and (2) Melchizedek seemed to have an eternal priesthood, as Jesus in fact does via His resurrection and ascension to God's right hand. Throughout Hebrews (cf. 2:17-18; 4:14-16; 6:18-20; 12:22-24), Jesus' supremacy as High Priest meets the needs of His followers, and in Heb 7:26 the Author brings together again human need and God's provision in Christ, writing: "for it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens" (Τοιοῦτος γὰρ ἡμῖν καὶ ἔπρεπεν ἀρχιερεὺς, ὅσιος ἄκακος ἀμίαντος, κεχωρισμένος ἀπὸ τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν καὶ ὑψηλότερος τῶν οὐρανῶν γενόμενος). The Imperfect of πρέπω establishes an imperfective aspectual frame for interpreting the Perfect participle of χωρίζω, here passive attributive of ἀρχιερεὺς.

Does the Author use the Perfect of χωρίζω because it would semantically encode Jesus' state, His separated-ness as the unique Son-Priest (Porter)?<sup>57</sup> The fact that Jesus was separated to God's right hand via the past actions of His death and resurrection (cf. 4:14-16; 6:18-20; 12:22-24), the effect and benefit of which the Author wishes his audience to appropriate (Fanning)? Or imperfectively, to help the audience up-close and continuously see Jesus being separated from sinners (Campbell)? Though semantically distinct, I think each of these theories could explain Hebrews' point. Campbell's theory of imperfectivity may provide a heightened sense of drama to the verbal action, as the Perfect

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<sup>56</sup> Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 50-51, 103.

<sup>57</sup> Porter labels κεχωρισμένος in Heb 7:26 an example of the Perfect participle functioning without specific reference to the temporal sphere (*Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 396). Though Jesus' "separateness," His state of affairs, is emphasized, a logical antecedent action, a moment when that "separateness" began, is not necessarily out of view in the aspect of the Perfect.

participle of χωρίζω is followed by an Aorist participial phrase, the latter perhaps bringing the scene to a hard stop. But in this case Campbell's continuous aspect of χωρίζω would, at the practical level, accord Porter's theory of stativity: the Son continues on in a state of separation from humanity, forever qualified to be the high priest of the new covenant—which the Author explains more fully in Hebrews 8.<sup>58</sup>

But how should we evaluate the Perfect of χωρίζω in Heb 7:26 in light of the parallel Perfect passive attributive participle Heb 7:28, where the Author writes that God's oath appoints the Son as a high priest "made perfect forever" (τετελειωμένον)? In Heb 7:27 the Author contrasts the Son's completed work as a high priest with the continual, necessary (ἔχει καθ' ἡμέραν ἀνάγκην) sacrificial ministry of the high priest of Israel. The Son accomplished atonement once, offering Himself (τοῦτο γὰρ ἐποίησεν ἐράπαξ ἑαυτὸν ἀνενέγκας). In Heb 7:27 the Author employs imperfective aspect to describe the service of Israel's priests, but perfective aspect to describe Jesus' once-for-all self-sacrifice.

This aspectual pattern surfaces at the beginning of Heb 7:28 as well. The Author writes that the law continues to appoint (καθίστησιν) high priests who continue to have weaknesses (ἔχοντας ἀσθενειαν), reflecting the statement in Heb 7:27 that Israel's high priest first atones for his own sins then those of the people. With a contrastive δὲ (but) the Author describes the Son as the high priest "made perfect forever" (τετελειωμένον). What semantic definition of aspect best explains the Author's thoughts concerning the Son's perfection in Heb 7:28? I suggested that Porter, Fanning or Campbell's theories could each do justice to κχωρισμένος in Heb 7:26, but I do not see τετελειωμένον as offering the same flexibility. Campbell's theory of imperfectivity least explains the Perfect here. The Author does not tell his story<sup>59</sup> with a view to the Son's continuing to be perfected as a high priest; lexicography

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<sup>58</sup> Campbell concedes that stativity works as an *Aktionsart* feature of the Perfect (*Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 48-50, 106-07). Porter argues that in some ways Campbell's conclusions about aspect reflect his, though Campbell arrives at his conclusion using recursive methodology ("Greek Linguistics and Lexicography," 54).

<sup>59</sup> "When I'm telling the story, I decide which way I will tell it...This is what it means when we say that aspect represents a subjective choice" (Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 21).

aside, imperfective aspect does not do justice to the idea of the Son's perfected state as high priest of the new covenant. I am inclined that Porter's theory best explains the semantics of τετελειωμένον in Heb 7:28. The Author uses the Perfect to verbalize the state of the Son's high priestly ministry in comparison with the high priests of Israel. Fanning's position of past completed action with abiding effects would likewise explain Hebrews' point, though the surrounding temporal references (ἐφάπαξ, "once," Heb 7:27; and μετὰ τὸν νόμον, "after the Law," Heb 7:28) provide a temporal frame that is not dependent upon the semantic value of the Perfect tense-form such that the perfective aspect of the Aorists in Heb 7:27b does not diminish the stative aspect for τετελειωμένον in Heb 7:28.<sup>60</sup>

#### Hebrews 9:6-10

Hebrews 9 continues the series of comparisons the Author employs to explain the superiority of Christ *vis-à-vis* the old covenant system. In Hebrews 8, he describes the failure of Israel under the old covenant and cites Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant that would provide eternal forgiveness for its adherents. The Author then details the means of new covenant forgiveness by comparing the self-sacrifice of Christ with the Day of Atonement sacrifices (cf. Leviticus 16).

Hebrews 9:6-10 locates two Perfect participles and one Perfect infinitive in the midst of several Present indicatives and participles. The initial paragraph of Hebrews 9 is the Author's reflection upon Israel's magisterial tabernacle of worship and the functionaries of the inner and outer tents. The articles of worship were arranged therein not simply as decor but according to the duties of the priests and High Priests. In Heb 9:6 the Author transitions from his description of the inner and outer tents of worship with the phrase, Τούτων δὲ οὕτως κατεσκευασμένων (Now when these things have been so prepared). Does the Author use the Perfect, here part of the genitive absolute τούτων κατεσκευασμένων, to help the audience view progressively with heightened proximity the articles in the holy place and the Holy of Holies (so Campbell)? To see the

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<sup>60</sup> Porter writes that, "the Perfect may be used in past contexts, often parallel with other past-referring verb forms" (*Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 260).

cultic furniture as having been assembled, emphasizing the completed arrangement of the two tents such that they are prepared for the subsequent use at a later time (so Fanning)? Or to see them as a complex of items in an established state of affairs (Porter)?

Examining the rest of Heb 9:6 aids interpretation of κατεσκευασμένων. This participle is followed in the remainder of Heb 9:6 and Heb 9:7 by three Present tense-form verbals. In Heb 9:6, the Author writes that into the first tent the priests enter repeatedly (διὰ παντός εισίσκιν) continuously performing their ministries (τὰς λατρείας ἐπιτελοῦντες),<sup>61</sup> while in Heb 9:7 the Author notes that into the Holy of Holies only the High Priest enters annually with blood, ὁ προσφέρει ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ ἀγνοημάτων (which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance). Whether describing the daily work of priests (εἰσίσκιν and ἐπιτελοῦντες) or the annual ministry of the High Priest (προσφέρει), the Author uses the Present tense-form to help the audience view them imperfectly. In light of the flow of thought in Heb 9:6-7, what aspectual frame best interprets the Perfect κατεσκευασμένων at the beginning of v. 6? Identifying the Perfect as imperfective would have the audience see continuously the setting-up of the inner and outer tents, and the ministries of the priests and High Priests the same. If the Perfect is distinguished from the Present by virtue of being a super-present, semantically encoding heightened proximity, then the constitution of the holy place and the Holy of Holies would have prominence over the priestly activities therein. I suggest that interpreting κατεσκευασμένων as a super-present in Heb 9:6 inverts the Author's emphasis on the ministries of the priests and High Priest with the establishment of the tents in which they minister. In Heb 9:6-7 the Author emphasizes the ministry of the priests and High Priest: the arrangement of the inner and outer tents establishes the stative situation for their repeated work—

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<sup>61</sup> Harold W. Attridge writes, "The unspecified services probably include the regular priestly duties, the daily trimming of the lamps (Exod 27:21), the weekly placement of the breads (Lev 24:5), and the daily and Sabbath continual sacrifices. A daily incense offerings is also prescribed, but whether Hebrews understands Exod 30:7 as such a prescription is unclear" (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 239).

which the Author contrasts with the completed priestly work of Christ in what follows in Hebrews 9.

The coordination of οὗτος (this one, these) in Heb 9:6 and 8 progresses the Author's argument. In Heb 9:6-7 he uses the demonstrative to explain the work of the priests and High Priest in the holy place and Holy of Holies (Heb 9:1-5), and in Heb 9:8 οὗτος grounds his theological inference based upon the entire complex of Heb 9:1-7. Via the cumulative picture of priestly service in the inner and outer tents, the Holy Spirit signifies that entrance into the Holy of Holies<sup>62</sup> is not available so long as the outer tent remains (τοῦτο δηλοῦντος τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου, μήπω πεφανερῶσθαι τὴν τῶν ἁγίων ὁδὸν ἔτι τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς ἐχούσης στάσιν; Heb. 9:8). The Perfect of φανερώω (to make manifest) in Heb 9:8 is the first of two Perfect tense-forms in vv. 8-9, each surrounded by Present tense-form verbals.

The Present participle δηλοῦντος establishes an imperfective aspectual frame for πεφανερῶσθαι in the second clause of Heb 9:8. The Author uses the negative adverb μήπω to modify πεφανερῶσθαι, emphasizing the restricted access to the Holy of Holies while the holy place, and the daily priestly duties therein, continue. Does imperfective aspect best explain the Perfect of φανερώω in Heb 9:8, such that the audience is to view with heightened proximity the closure of the second curtain? I suggest that interpreting πεφανερῶσθαι as imperfective might initially help the audience grasp the Author's point concerning the restriction to the Holy of Holies, but as was the case with discussed ἐξεληλυθότας in Heb. 7:5 discussed *supra*, progressively viewing an action that is logically stative inserts a degree of redundancy into the aspectual flow of the discourse. Once the curtain is viewed—even with heightened proximity—as closed, it is closed; progressively seeing the curtain as closed would soon lead the interpreter to conclude that in Heb 9:8 the second curtain has a closed-ness about it, it is in that state.<sup>63</sup> The restricted-ness of the Holy of Holies, the Author writes, will continue so long as the holy place stands (ἔτι τῆς πρώτης σκηνῆς ἐχούσης στάσιν).

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<sup>62</sup> For discussion of the ways the Author writes "holy places," see *ibid.*, 232-33, 240.

<sup>63</sup> See discussion in Porter, "The Perfect Tense-Form and Stative Aspect," 210-11.

The coordination of the demonstrative οὗτος in Heb 9:6 and 8 is followed in Heb 9:9 with the relative ὅστις (which). Here the pronoun refers to ὁδός (way) in Heb 9:8, recalling the restricted-ness of the Holy of Holies so long as the holy place continued to stand. The Author invites his audience to see the inner and outer tents as a state of affairs, that from his Christian perspective, ironically inhibits access to God.<sup>64</sup> He notes that these historic daily and annual cultic ministries demonstrate the restrictedness of τὴν τῶν ἁγίων ὁδὸν (the way into the holy place; Heb 9:8) and that that state of affairs continues to the time of his writing (παραβολὴ εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα; a symbol for the present time Heb 9:9). The Perfect adjectival participle ἐνεστηκότα modifies καιρὸν, noting the continuity of Israel's cult from the time of its constitution under Moses and Aaron to the time of the current audience. The fact that the present time is described as a period when gifts and sacrifices are offered that are impotent to help the worshipper enjoy forgiveness (καθ' ἣν δῶρά τε καὶ θυσίαι προσφέρονται μὴ δυνάμεναι κατὰ συνείδησιν τελειῶσαι τὸν λατρεύοντα; Heb 9:9), becomes the Author's point of departure for explaining the perfect ministry of Christ, detailed through Heb 10:18.

What theory of verbal aspect best explains the Author's use of the Perfect of ἐνίστημι, in Heb 9:9, especially in light of the Present tense-forms of προσφέρω and δύναμαι in the context? Here again, though imperfectivity would help the audience to see the continuing ministry of Israel's cult, I suggest that seeing it once, as a state of affairs corresponding to the long historic precedence of priestly ministry, best positions the interpreter to follow the Author's argument.

## Conclusion

Again, the Epistle to the Hebrews was chosen as a locus of research concerning aspect of the Greek Perfect because in Hebrews the

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<sup>64</sup> "The access that the high priest has to that sacred realm does not signify its openness, but is only, as it were, the exception that proves the rule. The exception has typological significance that will yet be exploited, but for the present it is the exclusion that is highlighted" (Attridge, *Hebrews*, 240). See also F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 206 n. 48.

Perfect is regularly used in a verbal matrix dominated by Presents. This imperfective aspectual setting replicates, to some degree, the framework from which Campbell argues that at the semantic level the Perfect is aspectually imperfective. What then can be said about aspect of the Perfect tense-form, in light of Hebrews?

First, based upon this study, I am hesitant to advocate Campbell's position. If Campbell's theory is accurate at the semantic level, across the genres, then we would expect that it would be especially helpful in understanding Hebrews, an epistle where many Perfects are set in an imperfective environment. Though Heb 2:8-10; 7:4-10; 7:26-28 and 9:6-10 is an inadequately small locus of research to argue for a specific understanding of a grammatical phenomena common in various genres of literature, the fact that the Perfects studied in this paper are written within an imperfective aspectual matrix and yet resist imperfectivity legitimizes my hesitancy to embrace aspectual imperfectivity of the Perfect. I suggest that understanding the Perfect as aspectually imperfective isolates one possible feature of the Perfect tense-form at the expense of the broader semantic state of affairs in view. Nonetheless, Campbell's observations regarding the pragmatics of the Perfect, that authors use it to verbalize actions that are to be understood (spatially) as intensified or prominent, enhances exegesis. This being said, Porter makes roughly the same conclusion but bases his findings on the stativity, not imperfectivity.<sup>65</sup>

Second, in each of the passages studied in this paper, either Porter or Fanning would more or less explain the Author's point. Because so many of the Perfects in Hebrews have "past implicature."<sup>66</sup> Porter's argument for aspectual stativity often sounds like Fanning's model of perfective aspect. But Porter understands anteriority as only part of the larger complex expressed by the Perfect tense-form. Although now a bit dated, upon reviewing Porter and Fanning's theories, Silva identifies the interpretative strengths of Fanning's model and the theoretical strengths in Porter's, but stops short of a synthetic moment, saying, "I am not ready to suggest that we adopt Porter's explanation of the linguistic system and Fanning's interpretation of actual occurrences."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, 258-259.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-264.

<sup>67</sup> Silva, "A Response to Porter and Fanning on Verbal Aspect," 77.



The brief analysis of the Perfects in Heb 2:8-10; 7:4-10; 7:26-28 and 9:6-10 in this essay nonetheless points in that direction. Silva labels the interplay between literary context and lexical domain “the biggest conundrum of all” when studying verbal aspect.<sup>68</sup> Silva’s observation provides a fitting conclusion to the present study and calls attention to the man to whom this edition of *MJT* is dedicated. I have seen Dr. T, as he is affectionately addressed by students and friends, on bended knee pleading to students that they let the broader linguistic, historical and theological context of a passage inform exegetical interpretation of any isolated word or grammatical phenomenon in view. For two decades at MBTS Dr. T has happily resided in Silva’s “conundrum,” and called many to join him there. I for one am happy to be a part of that fellowship.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.