

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Review & Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_rande_01.php

INDICATIVE OR IMPERATIVE?

BY PROF. J. E. HARRY, PH.D.

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI.

In the Transactions of the American Philological Association XXXII, pp. 64ff., I endeavored to show that ὀρᾶτε in Aeschylus, Prometheus 119, is indicative, though commentators and translators almost universally regard the form as the present imperative. My arguments convinced many scholars. But Dr. Edwin A. Abbott, in his *Johannine Grammar* (London, 1906), in connection with his discussion of ἐραυνᾶτε τὰς γραφὰς, John v. 39, cites this very passage as an illustration of his contention that initial ὀρᾶτε in the scenic poets is probably always imperative. But my article may not have fallen under Dr. Abbott's eye. The whole context shows that Prometheus is merely acquainting the visitors, whoever they may be, with the fact that they have before them that god, who by reason of his great love for human kind, became an enemy of the high suzerain of heaven and, in consequence of his crime of bestowing the prerogatives of the gods on the creatures whose cause he had championed, was placed in ignominious bonds, precisely as the sufferer acquaints the sympathizing Io later of the same fact in the same way (612), where the ἀμφιβολία vanishes in the second person singular: πῦρὸς βροτοῖς δοτῆρ' ὀρᾶς Προμηθεῖα. If there had been an insistence on the evolution of the action, or a desire to lay stress on the various steps of what was taking place before the eyes of the beholder, as in the passage I cited from Plato's *Republic*, or if the poet had desired to emphasize the fact that there was a multitude of spectators, who pass, one after the other, in review, as it were, there would be some justification for the present imperative, or, perchance, the optative, as in the eighth book of the *Odyssey*, verse 341, εἰσορόφτε θεοὶ πᾶσαι τε θείωναι.

Greek authors did not, as a rule, darken counsel by words without knowledge. An apparently insignificant fact will often illumine a whole passage. One cannot read the sentence in John v. 39 carefully as far as *δοκείτε* without feeling that *ἐραυνάτε* is indicative, and I have no doubt that hundreds of scholars for hundreds of years have so translated it. But getting the correct version universally accepted is a different matter. Errors are perpetuated orally and by text-books, simply because the teacher and the writer will not think for themselves—the mistake is handed on from professor to pupil, and from generation to generation. So far as the passage in question is concerned, Professor Gildersleeve remarks in his review of Dr. Abbott's book (*American Journal of Philology* XXVII, 335): "That *ἐραυνάτε* is indicative here Dr. Abbott and Professor Harry are agreed." But the Authorized Version translates the verb as an imperative, the Revised Version gives us our choice, while from the majority of pulpits, I think it is safe to say (judging from the number I have heard), are read and preached the words: "Search ye the Scriptures!" Such a rendering did not go unchallenged down to our times; but, in spite of repeated corrections, the indicative never met with universal acceptance. Robert Barclay as early as 1675, in his *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (pp. 91ff.) refers to two scholars before him who had handed down the correct tradition: "Moreover, that place may be taken in the indicative mood, Ye search the Scriptures; which interpretation the Greek word will bear, and so Pasor translated it: which by the reproof following seemeth also to be the more genuine interpretation, as Cyrillus long ago hath observed."