# GREEK CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

*In the issue of* The Bible Translator *for January 1962 (pp. 39-43) an article was published entitled "'If' in the New Testament", by Dr. J. Harold Greenlee. Since then, as a result of correspondence, it has appeared desirable to restate the basic distinction discussed there, in order to avoid misunderstanding of this rather confusing point of New Testament grammar. We are grateful to both Dr. Greenlee and his colleague Dr. Robert G. Bratcher for further contributions which we have utilized in order to provide a clearer formulation of the distinction. The editor alone is responsible for the final form of this article and any errors it may contain. Ed.*

In his article Dr. Greenlee clearly shows that it is incorrect that conditions expressed by *ei* with the indicative imply that the speaker believes the condition which he is stating to be true, whereas conditions expressed by *ean* are uncertain and undependable. But on the other hand the true nature of the distinction is not made quite plain in that article. Therefore the following classification may be found helpful, although it appears that there are exceptions in New Testament usage.

When *ei* with the indicative is used, it implies that the truth or otherwise of the condition is regarded as in principle "determined", i.e. is represented as a fact (although the speaker does not commit himself as to whether he believes the condition is true or not).

When *ean* with the subjunctive is used, it implies that the truth or otherwise of the condition is regarded as in principle "undetermined", i.e. is represented as uncertain, either because the condition is conceived as a future occurrence, which may or may not ever take place, or because the condition is a general one which may be realised at any time.

It is important to remember that we are here concerned with the conditional sentence itself, and not with the context, which may suggest whether the condition is or will prove true or not, even though the construction used leaves this open.

In simpler terms one might say that when *ei* with the indicative is used, the concept in the writer's mind is, "If it is a fact that . . ."; when *ean* with the subjunctive is used, the concept is, "If it (at any time) happen that . . ."

To illustrate, note the following examples of *ei* with the indictative:

Mt. 4:3, "If (it is a fact that) you are the Son of God" (not, "If it at any time happen that you should be the Son of God").

Lk. 11:13, "If (it is a fact that) you know how to give good gifts" (not, "If it at any time happen that you would know how to give good gifts").

Now note some examples of *ean* with the subjunctive:

Mt. 5:13, "If (it at any time happen that) the salt lose its flavour" (not, "If it is a fact that the salt loses its flavour").

Lk. 15:8, "If (it at any time happen that) she lose one coin" (not, "If it is a fact that she loses one coin").

Jn. 14:3, "If (it happen that) I go and prepare a place for you" (not, "If it is a fact that I go and prepare a place for you"). Cf. the RSV rendering, "When I go.....".

There are in fact instances in which either construction may be used, according to the point of view which the writer takes. For example, compare:

Mt. 5:46, "If (it at any time happen that) you love those who love you" (*ean* with the subj.).

Lk. 6:32, "If (it is a fact that) you love those who love you" (*ei* with the indic.).

Similarly, a change in construction in the course of a passage may indicate this difference in point of view:

Mk. 3:24, "If (it at any time happen that) a kingdom is divided against itself" (*ean* with the sub.).

Mk. 3:26, "If (it is a fact that) Satan has risen up against himself and is divided" (*ei* with the indic.).

However, there are a number of cases which may form exceptions to the classification suggested here, e.g., Mt. 5:29, 18:8, 9; 2 Tim. 2:12, 2 Jn, 10, (all *ei* with the indic.); and Jn. 5:31, 8:14, 16, 9:31; 1 Cor. 9:16, (*ean* with the subj.). Those interested in pursuing the subject further are referred to the various grammars of New Testament Greek, and in particular to that of Robertson, pp. 1004-27.

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# SUPPLEMENT TO THE INDIAN WORD LIST

## SANSKRIT WORDS

When Dr. Hooper compiled his invaluable Comparative Word List of Greek New Testament Terms in Indian Languages, he deliberately omitted Sanskrit. Many translators have felt, however, that the addition of the Sanskrit background vocabulary would enhance the usefulness of the work. This opinion was expressed particularly at the Translators' Conference held in Jabalpur in 1960. The Bible Society therefore asked the Rev. W. Perston, B.D., for over 40 years a Methodist missionary in Mysore, to undertake the task. Mr. Perston has always been keenly interested in Sanskrit, and his outstanding knowledge of Kannada, together with his considerable acquaintance with other Indian languages, makes him undoubtedly the right person for the work. The Bible Society is most grateful to him for the way in which he has increased the value of an already indispensable book. Copies may be ordered from the Bible Society of India and Ceylon, Bangalore, or from the British and Foreign Bible Society, London.