

# The Preposition *εἰς* in the New Testament

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Perhaps the most interesting preposition in the New Testament is *εἰς*. Prepositions are an important class of words in the New Testament, and grammarians have rightly pointed out the need of giving careful attention to them. *εἰς* deserves especially close attention because it has meanings which at first may seem to be far removed from the translation "into", generally learned by beginning Greek students. The translator may be tempted to think that whenever the translation "into" does not make sense for this preposition, it simply indicates a careless use by the New Testament writer. Actually, *εἰς* may have any one of eight or more shades of meaning; and the careful translator must be prepared to deal properly with each.

## The Meaning of "Into"

The translation most commonly given for *εἰς* is "into" (e.g., John 1 : 9). As a matter of fact, the idea of "into" lies, we may say, at the heart of the meaning of *εἰς*. In its commonest usage it means "progress into the interior". This can be into a place, as "into Capernaum" (John 2 : 12), or into a state, as "into judgment" (John 5 : 24). A clear and common example of this meaning is the regular New Testament use of *εἰς* after the verb "to believe" (e.g., John 3 : 16), even though this expression is generally translated into English as "believe in" or "believe on". The meaning is not, of course, to get "upon" or "into" something and then believe, but rather to put one's faith *into* something or someone—usually into Christ or God.

In other instances, however, *εἰς* obviously does not mean "progress into the interior". In some of these we may, indeed, translate by "into", as "into the mountain" (John 6 : 3); in other instances "to" or a similar word must be used, as in Mark 1 : 10, "coming down *to* him" (a different preposition is translated in the AV).<sup>1</sup> These two are examples of the following use of *εἰς*: *εἰς* may have the meaning "to" instead of "into" when the context shows that the movement does not proceed into the interior.

## The Meaning of "To" or "For"

Again, *εἰς* may be translated "to" or "for" with a rather different sense. For example, Rom 5 : 8 speaks of God's love "for us"; and Rom. 5 : 15 says that grace "abounded *to* the many". This same idea, but in a hostile sense, is illustrated by John 15 : 21, "all these things will they do *to* you".

In expression of time, *εἰς* may express time during, to, or into. An example of the latter is found in Eph. 1 : 14, "*until* the redemption of the purchased possession" (AV). Here the idea is progress of time *into* a particular period of time.

<sup>1</sup> It must not be overlooked that "unto" means "to" or "toward", not "into".

## Purpose

It may at first seem strange that *εἰς* should have a meaning of purpose—"for the purpose of", "in order that", etc. Yet *εἰς* is very commonly used in this way in the New Testament, with either a noun or an articular infinitive as its object. In these instances it is practically equivalent to a *ἵνα* purpose clause. Heb. 12 : 10, with this construction, means "in order that we may partake"; and John 9 : 39, "for (the purpose of) judgment".

## Result

Related to the idea of purpose is the idea of result. Purpose is what one intends to do; result is what one actually does. Of course, if one accomplishes one's purpose, then the purpose and the result are the same. Nevertheless, it is often important to distinguish between the two. *εἰς*, moreover, can express result as well as purpose. In deciding between the meaning of purpose and result for *εἰς*, however, it should be assumed that purpose is intended unless the context makes it clear that result and not purpose is implied. An example of result is found in Heb. 11 : 3, "so that that which is seen was not made of things which appear". (Purpose here would have given the meaning, "so that that which is seen might not be made of things which appear", which is hardly congruous in the context.)

## Equivalence

If we remember the English usage as illustrated in the sentence, "Those bricks will be made *into* a house", it will be easier to understand how *εἰς* can have a further meaning of equivalence; for it is in this same sense that John 16 : 20 reads, literally, "your grief will become *into* joy"—i.e., "your grief will become joy" or "will be changed into joy". This use of *εἰς* is found also in Heb. 8 : 10, where *εἰς θεόν* and *εἰς λαόν* practically amount to simple subject complements—"I shall be to them a God and they shall be to me a people"; or, to bring out the preposition, we might suggest, "I shall be changed *into* their God and they shall be changed *into* my people". Similarly, Rom. 4 : 22 states that Abraham's faith was accounted "as righteousness".

## The Relationship of *εἰς* and *ἐν*

It is sometimes asserted that *εἰς* and *ἐν* cannot be clearly separated in the New Testament because *εἰς* often means "in" rather than "into". This view seems to result largely from a failure to grasp properly one final use of *εἰς*. *εἰς* may indeed mean "in", in the sense in which *ἐν* is regularly used; but when thus used it also implies "having previously gone into". Assuming John 1 : 18 as a comment by the author, this verse illustrates this use of *εἰς*, referring to the Only-Begotten, "who is *in* the bosom of the Father" (having entered *into* the Father's bosom before this Gospel was written). Similarly, Mark 13 : 16 refers to "him who is *in* the field" (having previously gone *into* it).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Conversely, *ἐν*, whose common meaning is "in", can also mean "into", implying a remaining "in". This is illustrated in John 3 : 35, "and has given all things *into* his hand (so that they are now *in* his hand)".

The examples which have been given in this article to illustrate the principal uses of *εἰς* are intended to be fairly obvious. Not all the occurrences of this preposition, of course, can be dealt with so simply. Sometimes two or three different meanings may be possible and logical. The careful exegete or translator will combine a knowledge of the rules of grammar with the prayerful study which is necessary to discover the full riches of each passage of the Word of God.

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## The Genitive of Quality in the New Testament

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In *The Bible Translator* for April, 1950, Dr. Harold Greenlee writes on the genitive case in the N. T., classifying the various uses of this case. He gives, among the others, the "genitive of material" (p. 69). The purpose of the present article is to suggest that there is a "genitive of quality" to be distinguished from this, which Dr. Greenlee does not appear to notice. The two are somewhat related in thought, but are none the less to be differentiated.

For one thing, with the genitive of material there can be no doubt of the meaning: "a house *of wood*" is quite clearly "a wooden house". That is to say, the genitive is equivalent to an adjective. "Feet *of clay*" equals "clay feet", and so on, where the spelling of the adjectival attributive in English is the same as for the noun.

But is it not always so obvious whether or not the genitive of quality is to be, or can be idiomatically, rendered by an adjective: "a man of courage" is indeed "a courageous man", but the matter is not always so simple as that.

Here, then, are the results of a reading of the Greek N. T. with this construction in view. In some instances the AV (King James Version) is idiomatically correct (*a*); in some the English Revised Version (*b*) has hit on the right phrase; in others the American Standard Version (*c*). We shall give the Greek, with a literal translation, then one or some or all of these three versions, and then our own remark or suggestion (not necessarily original), followed by an interrogation mark if expedient.

John 6 : 35, ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς (ho artos tês zôês), "the bread of (the) life" (*a, b, c*). This is an interesting example, because in verse 51 we find the same idea<sup>1</sup> expressed by the participle used as an adjective ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν (ho artos ho zôn), "the bread the living". Here, most certainly, we have the genitive of quality. The similar phrase "water of life" in Rev. 22 : 1 and elsewhere must be understood in the same way,

<sup>1</sup> Some scholars insist that these two phrases do not express the same idea. The first is interpreted as meaning "the bread which gives life" and the second as "the living bread". Ed.