

PROPHETIC AORIST TENSE

The **prophetic aorist tense** is a linguistic term used in biblical studies to describe a specific usage of the **aorist tense** in Greek, particularly in prophetic or eschatological contexts. While the aorist tense in Greek typically refers to a past action (often a completed one), the **prophetic aorist** is used to describe future events with such certainty that they are spoken of as though they have already occurred.

A grammatical synonym for prophetic aorist is **proleptic aorist**, the term "**proleptic**" being derived from the Greek verb [prolambano](#), meaning literally to take beforehand, to do something beforehand or before the usual time and so practically implies to anticipate something. Thus **proleptic** (prolepsis) reflects conveys the anticipatory nature of some future event or action. In other words, proleptic means to anticipate or assume that something has already happened, even though it has not yet occurred.

Key Features of the Prophetic Aorist

1. Certainty of Fulfillment:

- The action is described as if it has already happened (as "past tense") because its fulfillment is so certain in the mind of the speaker or writer.
- This usage emphasizes the inevitability of God's plans or decrees. When God says it, that settles it, whether I understand it or not and/or whether I believe it or not!

2. Future Orientation:

- While the form of the verb is in the **past tense**, the actual time reference is the **future**.
- It's often used in prophetic literature (numerous times in the Revelation) or passages discussing God's promises. It has been estimated that 20% of Scripture is prophecy and 80% of that prophecy has been fulfilled (estimated). That leaves 20% which will definitely be perfectly fulfilled.
- **THOUGHT** - The practical application is that all believers should consider studying the book of the Revelation which is filled with prophecies of future events. The Revelation of Jesus should stabilize our faith, not shake it. After you have read a chapter (avoiding any commentary and just asking your Teacher the Spirit to guide you), then read the commentary notes on this site. These notes are based on a literal interpretation of the text and avoid allegorizing, spiritualizing or inventing fanciful interpretations, all of which have made the Revelation one of the most confusing and misunderstood books in the entire Bible. The irony is that the very word first word in the Greek text is "Revelation" ([apokalupsis](#)) which means an unveiling or taking the cover off to disclose the contents, whereas sadly most commentaries accomplish just the opposite effect! See [Verse by Verse Commentary on Revelation](#).

3. Stylistic Purpose:

- The prophetic aorist is a [rhetorical device](#) to inspire confidence and trust in the fulfillment of God's prophecies and promises.
 - Prophetic aorist reflects the timeless nature of divine action, emphasizing that God's purposes and promises are as good as accomplished. Or as we might say in Texas "[It's a done deal!](#)"
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Examples in Scripture

- **Isaiah 53:5+**: "But He **was pierced through** for our transgressions, He **was crushed** for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. ."
 - Although Isaiah wrote this Messianic prophecy seven centuries before Christ, "**was pierced**" and "**was crushed**" were written in the **past tense** to emphasize the certainty of the [Messiah's suffering in our place](#) (2Co 5:21+, 1Pe 2:24+, 1Pe 3:18+) and the accomplishment of His redemptive purpose of becoming our Substitute and the Provision for our spiritual healing (cf Col 2:13b+, 1Jn 2:12+, 2Co 5:17+).
- **Romans 8:30+**: "And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified."
 - Paul uses the **aorist tense** for "**glorified**," even though glorification is a future event for believers. This reflects the certainty of God's promises and truth which is emphasized by the Biblical word for "hope," which describes our absolute certainty of future good. Hope is strong confidence that God is going to do good to us in future. It describes our firm

assurance (cf Heb 6:11+) that God will fulfill 100% of His promises. Gabriel Marcel said "Hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism." In sum, hope is not hope so but hope sure and is often the effect of the prophetic aorist on our hearts!

- **Revelation 5:9-10+** (verse 9 for context) And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 " And Thou **hast made (PROPHETIC AORIST PROMISE)** them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign (FUTURE TENSE) upon the earth."
- **Revelation 11:15+** And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world **has become (PROPHETIC AORIST)** the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."
 - **Has become** describes the future establishment of God's Kingdom as if it has already occurred, once again emphasizing the absolute certainty and immutability of God's promise to reign over all the earth. This calls for a "[Maranatha!](#)"
- **Revelation 14:8+** And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."
 - **Fallen,fallen** (Greek: πᾶσεν, "epesen") is in the aorist tense. Although the fall of Babylon is described here as a past event, the actual fall is not described until Revelation 16:19+. In short this prophetic aorist, emphasizes the certainty of a future city called Babylon and the certainty of Babylon's judgment. In Revelation 18:2+ we encounter another prophetic aorist when the angel from heaven "cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird." The city's fall is so certain and imminent it is described as if it has already been accomplished. Her destruction takes place as a result of the pouring forth of the seventh bowl of God's wrath (Rev. 16:19+).
- **Revelation 19:6-7+** "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb **has come** and His bride has made herself ready."
 - The phrase **has come** (Greek: ἤθεν, "elthen") is in the aorist tense, describing the future **marriage supper of the Lamb** as though it has already happened, reflecting its certainty. "[Hallelujah!](#)"
- **Revelation 21:6+** And He said to me, "**It is done**. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost."
 - The phrase "**It is done**" (Greek: ἔγινεν, "Gegonen") is actually in the perfect tense but functions in this context much like a prophetic aorist for it again reflects the certainty of God's completed work in establishing the new heaven and new earth, even though the full description continues in the chapter. This warrants another "[Hallelujah!](#)"

Why Is The Prophetic Aorist Tense Significant?

1. Theological Implications:

- It underscores the unshakable certainty and reliability of God's promises and His sovereign control over history. God is always behind the scenes and controls the scenes He is behind. He is truly the God of Providence. Nothing happens by chance, but only (and always) by His sovereign will and decree.
- It shows that future events in God's plan of redemption are as certain as past events. The upshot is that the prophetic aorist usages should invigorate and encourage our faith for "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." (Ro 10:17+)
- **Eschatological Perspective:** The prophetic aorist tense reflects the "**already, but not yet**" tension of eschatology, where future events are so assured in God's timeline that they are spoken of as if they have already occurred.

2. Interpretive Clarity:

- Recognizing the prophetic aorist helps readers understand that some passages describing "past" actions are actually referring to future realities.

3. Literary Beauty:

- The prophetic aorist tense highlights the richness and depth of biblical language, where grammar is used to convey profound theological truths.
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In summary, the **prophetic aorist tense** is a powerful way for biblical authors to express the certainty of future events, portraying them as if they have already happened. This usage reflects the faithfulness of God's promises and the inevitability of His plans. The prophetic and proleptic aorist uses remind believers that God's victory over evil is certain, which in turn undergirds our hope and our assurance of the future amid continuing decline of our society and the inevitable persecution and suffering that will result as the anti-God atmosphere accelerates.