

How to Study Your Bible

Discover the Life-Changing approach to
God's Word

by

Kay Arthur, David Arthur, Pete De Lacy

Appendix E

Tense, Voice, and Mood of Verbs

Because verbs express action, they are often the most significant elements in the expression of thought and key to understanding what the author is trying to communicate. Therefore, understanding the Greek verb is a key to correct interpretation and application of Scripture.

Part of the beauty of the Greek language is that the construction of its verbs clearly shows who does the action, whether the statement is a command or a suggestion, and whether the passage is speaking of reality or possibility. In doing this, the major features of Greek verbs are tense, voice, and mood.

By thinking through a simple, concise explanation of tense, voice, and mood, new vistas of insight will be opened to you. Keep in mind that the following is a simplified and nonexhaustive summarization of a complex subject. It is not intended to be a substitute for Greek grammars, but will give you an overview of terms that are frequently used in the more technical commentaries. (You will also find this information, along with the easy-to-use charts, in the appendix of the *New Inductive Study Bible*).

TENSE

Shows the Kind of Action

Greek verb tenses differ from English verb tenses in that the kind of action portrayed is the most significant element, and time is a relatively minor consideration.

Action as Continuous

- **Present tense:** continuous action. This is primarily progressive or linear; it shows action that is continuing.

Examples:

Jeff *is studying* the Bible.

“As the branch *cannot bear* fruit of itself unless it *abides* in the vine, so neither can you unless you *abide* in Me” (John 15:4b).

“If anyone *does not abide* in Me” (John 15:6).

- **Imperfect tense:** continuous action, usually in the past.

Examples:

Jeff *was studying* the Bible.

“If you were of the world, the world *would love* its own” — literally, “would have been loving” its own (John 15:19a).

Action as Completed

- **Perfect tense:** punctiliar action in the past with the results continuing into the present. (Punctiliar action is action that happens at a specific point in time.)

Examples:

Jeff is being transformed by *having studied* the Bible.

“You are already clean because of the word which I *have spoken* to you” (John 15:3).

“Just as I *have kept* My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10b).

- **Pluperfect tense:** punctiliar action in the past with the results continuing in the past.

Examples:

Jeff was transformed because he *had studied* the Bible.

“For the Jews *had already agreed*” (John 9:22).

Action as Occurring

- **Aorist tense:** punctiliar action. The aorist tense states that an action occurs without regard to its duration; that is, it denotes the fact of an action without any reference to the length of that action. The aorist tense is like a snapshot that shows (expresses) that an action occurs, while the present tense action is like a moving picture, continuing on.

Examples:

Jeff *studied* the Bible.

“Abide in Me, and I in you” (John 15:4a).

- **Future tense:** indefinite action to occur in the future. Indicates continuing or punctiliar action in the future.

Examples:

Jeff *will be studying* his Bible.

“It *will be done* for you” (John 15:7).

“So prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8).

VOICE

Shows How the Subject
Is Related to the Action

- **Active voice:** indicates that the subject produces the action.

Examples:

Jeff *hit* the ball.

“And every branch that bears fruit, He *prunes* it” (John 15:2b).

- **Passive voice:** indicates that the subject is acted upon.

Examples:

Jeff *was hit* by the ball.

“And they *are burned*” (John 15:6).

- **Middle voice:** indicates that the subject initiates the action

and also participates in the results of the action. (This voice is unique to Greek construction.)

Examples:

Jeff hit himself with the ball.

“That is the Spirit of truth who *proceeds* from the Father. He will testify about Me” (John 15:26).

One note of interest when looking up a verb in a Greek study tool: The middle and passive voices will have identical forms, but the context will show you if the subject is receiving the action (passive voice) or if the subject initiated the action and participated in it (middle voice).

Also, some verbs are *deponent verbs*. This means that their form in a Greek study tool may be listed as a passive or middle voice verb, but their function or action is active. Usually your Greek study helps will list these as deponent verbs.

MOOD

Shows the Kind of Action

- **Indicative mood:** the declarative mood or mood of certainty. This is a statement of fact which assumes reality from the speaker’s point of view. This mood simply states a thing as being a fact.

Examples:

Bible study *has changed* Jeff’s life.

“He is *thrown* away as a branch and *dries* up; and they *gather* them, and *cast* them into the fire and they *are burned*” (John 15:6).

- **Imperative mood:** usually a command or entreaty. It is the mood of volition or will. The imperative mood in the Greek makes a demand on the will of the reader to obey the command; it is used to indicate prohibition and authority.

Examples:

Jeff, *study* your homework.

“*Abide* in Me” (John 15:4).

“*Ask* whatever you wish” (John 15:7).

“*Abide* in My love” (John 15:9).

“*Remember* the word that I said to you” (John 15:20).

- **Subjunctive mood:** the mood of probability. This implies some doubt regarding the reality of the action from the speaker’s point of view. It expresses an uncertainty or an action which may or should happen. This is the mood used for conditional clauses, strong suggestions, or “polite” commands.

Examples:

Jeff *may* have done his homework.

(Jeff, if you do not do your homework, you cannot participate in the class discussion.)

“That it *may bear* more fruit” (John 15:2).

“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it *abides* in the vine, so neither can you unless you *abide* in Me” (John 15:4b).

“If anyone *does not abide* in Me” (John 15:6).

“If you *abide* in Me, and My words *abide* in you” (John 15:7).

- **Optative mood:** the mood of possibility. This mood presents no definite anticipation of realization but merely presents the action as conceivable from the speaker’s point of view. (Used less frequently than the other moods.)

Examples:

I wish my neighbor, Jeff, would take the Precept Bible Studies.

“May the Lord *direct* your hearts” (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

TENSE, MOOD, AND VOICE OF GREEK VERBS

Tense

The emphasis is on the kind of action, not the time of action.

Tense	Kind of Action	Example
Present	Continuous action	Jeff is studying the Bible.
Imperfect	Continuous action in the past	Jeff was studying the Bible.
Perfect	Punctiliar action in the past with the results continuing into the present	Jeff is being transformed by having studied the Bible.
Pluperfect	Punctiliar action in the past with the results continuing in the past	Jeff was transformed because he had studied the Bible.
Aorist	Punctiliar action (The time can be past, present, or future but is generally past.)	Jeff studied the Bible.
Future	Generally continuous action in the future, but on occasion it can be punctiliar.	Jeff will be studying his Bible.

Tenses of Greek Verbs

TENSE, MOOD, AND VOICE OF GREEK VERBS

Mood

The mood expresses the relationship of the action to reality from the speaker's point of view.

Mood	Relation to Reality	Usage or Meaning	Example
Indicative	Mood of certainty (reality)	Used to declare a statement of fact as something which is true. Expresses that which is actual, factual, or real from the speaker's point of view.	Bible study has changed Jeff's life.
Imperative	Mood of volition or will (potential reality)	Usually used to express a command or entreaty. Denotes intention, authority, permission, or prohibition.	Jeff, study your homework.
Subjunctive	Mood of probability (probable reality)	Used to express an action which may or should happen but which is not necessarily true at the present, from the speaker's point of view. Expresses conditional or uncertain actions.	Jeff may have done his homework.
Optative	Mood of possibility (possible reality)	Merely presents an action as conceivable from the speaker's point of view, with no definite anticipation of realization.	I wish my neighbor, Jeff, would take the Precept Bible Studies.

Mood of Greek Verbs

TENSE, MOOD, AND VOICE OF GREEK VERBS

Voice

The voice expresses the relationship of the subject to the action.

Voice	How the Subject is Related to the Action	Example
Active	Indicates that the subject produces the action	Jeff hit the ball.
Passive	Indicates that the subject is acted upon	Jeff was hit by the ball.
Middle	Indicates that the subject initiates the action and participates in the results of the action	Jeff hit himself with the ball.

Voice of Greek Verbs