

21. Tense, Voice, Mood, Person, Number

Lesson in a Nutshell

The goal of this lesson is to understand what tense, voice, mood, person, and number mean.

Every Greek verb will give you five important pieces of information:

1. Tense
2. Voice
3. Mood
4. Person
5. Number

The possibilities are:

Tense	Voice	Mood	Person	Number
P resent	A ctive	I ndicative	1 First	S ingular
I mperfect	M iddle	S ubjunctive	2 Second	P lural
F uture	P assive	I mperative	3 Third	
A orist		(P articiple)*		
Pe R fect		(I Nfinitive)*		

*technically, not moods, but usually classified here.

In this lesson we will understand what tense, voice, mood, person, and number mean.

Person

We have already discussed the concept of person when we looked at pronouns.

	Singular	Plural
1st Person	"I"	"We"
2nd Person	"You"	"You (all)"
3rd Person	He, She, It	They

Number

Number tells us whether the subject of the verb is singular or plural. No sweat!

Voice

The voice of a verb describes the relationship between the subject of the verb and the action of the verb.

	Meaning	Example
Active	The subject does the action of the verb	I study
Middle	The action of the verb ricochets back to affect the speaker in some way	I study (for myself)
Passive	The subject receives the action of the verb	I am studied

- In the active voice the subject does the action of the verb.
- In the middle voice the subject does the action of the verb and that action comes back to affect the subject in some way. The middle voice is one of the subtleties that was disappearing from the Greek language at the time of the New Testament. There are very few verbs in the New Testament that have a clearly "middle" meaning.
- The passive voice describes the subject receiving the action of the verb.

Mood

The mood of the verb describes the relationship of the verb to reality.

	Meaning	Example
Indicative	The mood of reality	I study.
Subjunctive	The mood of possibility or probability	I might study.
Imperative	The mood of command	Study!

Tense

In English, tense primarily has to do with time — when an action takes place. We speak of past, present, and future tenses.

Present: I fly
Future: I will fly
Past: I flew

Greek tense also gives us information about when the action took place, but it also tells us what *kind* of action took place. “**Kind of action**” is called “**aspect**.” There are three aspects in Greek. They are often represented with lines and dots.

1. Continuous aspect

2. Undefined aspect

3. Perfected aspect


- Continuous aspect describes the action as ongoing.
- Undefined aspect just says something took place without giving any information about the kind of action.
- Perfected aspect tells us that an event took place with results that continue.

The chart below illustrates the aspect and time of the five Greek tenses.

NOW	Aspect	Time
Present — ()	Continuous (or undefined)	Present
Imperfect —	Continuous	Past
Future ■	Undefined	Future
Aorist ■	Undefined	Past
Perfect ■ →	Past event with ongoing results	Past to Present

- The present tense describes continuous or undefined action in the present time. (Context will have to be used to determine if the action is continuous or undefined.)
- The imperfect tense describes continuous action in the past time.
- The future tense describes undefined action in the future time.
- The aorist tense describes undefined action in past time. It is the most common way to say that something happened.
- The perfect tense describes an action that took place in the past with continuing results. Exegetically speaking, this is one of the most interesting tenses.

That's it!
On to the wonder of morphology!