

Acts 13.48 - Is “believe” Active or Passive?

My real question is, Is the word “believe” PASSIVE VOICE or MIDDLE VOICE in Acts 13.48?”

- If it is a misinterpretation of the translators to render this word in the passive voice, a great deal of the Calvinists' support for irresistible grace evaporates.
- There are no other places in the New Testament where believe is ever rendered in the passive.
- Why do Calvinists expect Paul to use the passive voice here since it is not expected?

In over 100 verses in the New Testament the word believe is used in the active voice, never in the passive voice. But what about the solitary instance where the grammar seems to render believe in the passive voice—Acts 13.48? Aha, I'm glad you asked.

CALVIN's GREEK CONUNDRUM is not a mistranslation, but an unintended, but biased, misinterpretation.

Acts 13:48 “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”
KJV and most other versions

Every Greek scholar on the King James translation team [1611] certainly knew that there were two ways to properly translate the word, *τεταγμένοι, τεταγμένοι*: both with the passive voice & the middle voice.

If you had a rough time with 8th grade grammar [as I did] this explanation might be an enigma but it shines a bright spotlight on the seemingly strongest supports for “Irresistible Grace.” This is the “I” in T.U.L.I.P.

Many who hold to Corporate Election seem unable to rectify the passive voice in Acts 13.48 with the 100 verses which affirm that believing is an act of human will, not a passive response from an outside source. Granted, the verse in the KJV seems to say that God pre-ordained some to believe and others, by implication, not to receive eternal life. They were actively non-chosen, non-elect, not ordained to believe.

A. The most common way to translate this Greek phrase is, most commonly, by using the passive voice.

ἐπίστευσαν ὅσοι ἦσαν τεταγμένοι,

- #1 “(as many as) were ordained to eternal life believed” **PASSIVE VOICE**
good translation and accurate, but not the correct voice

B. but . . . all Greek scholars know that the very same letters will be just as accurately translated:

ἐπίστευσαν ὅσοι ἦσαν τεταγμένοι,

- #2 “as many as set themselves to eternal life believed” **MIDDLE VOICE**

Definition: middle voice—Greek grammar

- “The subject is part or all of the action. In other words, the subject is both the cause and the focus, the agent and experiencer, of a verbal action.”

<https://ancientgreek.pressbooks.com/chapter/21/>

- As one of my students once said, “It’s Greek to me.”
Let me clarify:

Passive voice: something outside of the subject acted upon the subject.
“as many as” “were ordained [acted upon]” “believed”

Middle voice: the subject is “both cause. . .and experiencer” of the action.
“As many as [subject]. . .set themselves [acted themselves]. . .believed.”

But in this particular case we have to maintain that the Calvinist group of the KJV translators had a strong disposition toward the logic of “irresistible grace.” They chose the common passive voice in spite of the overwhelming New Testament use of the active [not passive] construction in translating “believe.” Those translators who supported the Middle voice didn’t have a chance even though fit seamlessly throughout the whole of the New Testament.

For hundreds of years pastors have wondered why this unique theological wrinkle just doesn’t seem to be consistent with Paul’s other writings.

I'm sure you have noticed that Calvinists unashamedly avow that the KJV translation team of 47 men was packed with Calvinist leaning scholars. I avow that it is hard for any of us who are diligent students of the Word to "park" our theology at the door. I submit the thought that since the passive voice is much the common voice, that the Calvinist cadre simply never treated the alternate translation as a viable option.

I also avow that we have stepped out of the area of translation protocol and are now dealing with interpretation. The Corporate-election scholars had to agree that "were ordained to eternal life" was, in fact, a legitimate translation. If there was any objection the final decision was in the hand of the principle overseers of each smaller group.
Guess who?

Here's an excerpt from my blog:

[see www.PhilMyersBlog.com](http://www.PhilMyersBlog.com)
[Calvin's Misuse of Scripture](#) (mostly *CONTEXT*) 25+ pp., 60 disputed verses

Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord:
and as many as **were ordained to eternal life** believed. *KJV*

Calvinism,

- Some were ordained, chosen, hand picked, selected to eternal life and these are the ones who believed.

Corporate response,

- OBJECTION: The phrase "were ordained to" must be explained in the light of the multitudes of verses which say that anyone can believe. *See the partial list of "Whoever, any, all" verses on p. #3.*
- We in the Corporate view cannot explain why this particular verse differs from all other verses in the New Testament, from the KJV.
- Granted, at face value this one Greek word [*tetagmenoi, τεταγμενοι, from tasso*] [translated "were ordained to"] looks as though it could be paraphrased "only the elected believed," those passively selected by Someone else, God.
- "Were ordained to" is correct translation of the word. . . **IF** you could be sure that it were God chose to write it in the PASSIVE VOICE.
- **BUT, all** Greek scholars know that the very same letters, *tetagmenoi*, will be just as accurately translated "as many as **set themselves to eternal life believed**". . . **IF** this phrase were understood to be in the MIDDLE VOICE. *Spelled the very same way.*
** see notes by Dean Alford, Adam Clark, AT Robertson, Willcott, Hammond, Whitby, Dodd, Sellon, Fletcher, Waterland and Matthew Henry.*
- PRECEPT: THE UNCLEAR VERSES ARE EXPLAINED BY THE CLEAR
** If translated the way Calvin affirms, this sentence countermands all the "whosoever will" verses in the Bible.*
See p.# 3.
- The rub. Calvinists dominated the translation of the King James Bible. They brought their [*unintended*] bias to the table. These were the whiz kids of Greek and they knew both VOICES. They all knew "*tetagmenoi*" could be translated either way.
** This has taken us out of the area of translation and into interpretation.*
- 'Nuff said. It will probably convince no one to shift sides, but we want it to be one of the burrs under the Reformation saddle.
Lots of scholars adhere to Corporate Election. They just don't seem to make as much noise.

AN EXERCISE

Read the following sentence in past tense and then in present tense.

"I read the book."

Notice that both past and present tenses are spelled the same but there is a big difference, yes?

Although this illustration concerns tenses and does not address "voices," it is easy to see how important grammar can be.

"Were ordained to" is a correct translation of the word. . . IF you could be sure that it were written in the PASSIVE VOICE. . . BUT, all Greek scholars know that the very same letters can be just as accurately translated "**as many as set themselves to eternal life believed**". . . IF this phrase were understood to be written by Paul in the MIDDLE VOICE. Spelled the very same way.

The rub. Since Calvinists dominated the translation of the King James Bible. They brought their [*unintended*] bias to the table. These were the whiz kids of Greek and they knew both VOICES. They all knew "*tetagmenoi*" could be translated either way.

The KJV rendering of Acts 13.48 is not actually a translation, but an interpretation by choosing the passive in deference to the middle voice [*or vice versa*].