

VERBAL ASPECT IN MARK 6:1-13

Mark 6:1-6a

Mark 6:1

The first verb in Mark 6, ἐξηλθεν, is an Aorist. The second and third verbs, ἐρχεται and ακολουθουσιν, are both historical Presents. The use of the Present tense is significant for two reasons.

First, any time a Present tense verb is used, it should usually be considered slightly more weighted than an equivalent Aorist. Porter sees the Present tense, Imperfective aspect, in opposition to Aorist, Perfective aspect. Of the two the present is the more heavily marked

Within the Present/Aorist, the Imperfective aspect on the basis of formal markedness, a slight distributional advantage, and semantic markedness is the more clearly marked member of the equipollent opposition with the Perfective aspect.¹

Second, the Mark is clearly using what has come to be recognized as historic Presents. Many scholars have noted the significance of the historic Present verbs. Porter discusses various theories on the meaning of historic Present verbs. He concludes by noting the historical present "renders the description of a given event more vivid."² In addition Porter recognizes that the historic Present is often employed to announce the opening of a new literary unit.

In Mark 6:1 the historic Present seems to be introducing

¹Stanley E. Porter Idioms of the Greek New Testament (Sheffield:JSOT, 1994), 90.

the pericope. It is not necessarily problematic that the first verb in the verse is Aorist. The Aorist verb ἐξηλθεν can be seen as transitional, bridging the gap between two pericopes, preparing the way for the formal introduction. The historic Presents in verse one clearly carry the weight of the sentence by supplying the specifics of the situation.

Mark 6:2-6a

In verses 1-6a there is a variety of forms: Presents, Aorists and Imperfects. All three tenses are important for carrying the narrative flow along. It is a mistake to say that the use of the Aorist renders an action unimportant. All of the ideas in any passage are important or they would not be included in scripture. However, the Aorist is the least heavily marked, the most "normal" of the verb tenses, "The Perfective aspect as the least heavily marked may be called the "default" aspect, however, since it is felt to be in Greek more usual, more normal, less specific."³ In Mark 6:1-6a the Aorists provide simple "matter of fact" kinds of statements.

In 6:2 there is an interesting use of two participles. The skeptical crowd of onlookers are questioning Jesus' source of power. One of the questions asked is "What is this wisdom given, δοθεισα, to him and by what powers are [miracles] such as these performed, γινομενοι. The Present participle seems to stand in contrast to the Aorist participle. The present completes the thought introduced by the Aorist. It is because of the power that Jesus had been given (Aorist) that these miracles are being performed(Present). The present participle provides a heightened

³Ibid., 90

sense of action surrounding the central issue: miracles are being performed!

This section has an interesting use of two Imperfects. The Imperfect *ἐξεπλησσοντο* in vs. 2 seems to parallel the Imperfect *εσκανδαλιζοντο* in vs.3. First, crowd is astonished at what Jesus is teaching and doing. Then they are offended by him. This is a case where Mark has used Imperfects to draw the reader's attention to the more salient points of the narrative.

MARK 6:6B-13

Mark 6:6b-7

Mark 6:1-13 is a single literary unit composed of two parts. The first part, opened with historical presents, discusses the unbelief of the people in Jesus native region. The second half of the pericope begins in 6:6b-7. Mark employs three Present tense verbal ideas in very close proximity. One of these is historic Present, *προσκειται*. Clearly, Mark uses this concentration of Presents to introduce the second half of the narrative: the sending out of the twelve.

When a Greek speaker narrated events, the Aorist, used alongside the Imperfect, formed the basis for carrying the narrative, with the historic Present used for selecting processes for emphasis (the most heavily-marked Perfect was available as well).⁴

Sending out the twelve, Jesus gave, *εδίδου*, the disciples authority over unclean spirits. The Imperfect is not as remote as the Aorist, yet more remote than the present. The use of the Imperfect emphasizes slightly more duration than the Aorist. Porter cites Rose, "...the Aorist sums up and presents the

action as a whole; whereas the Imperfect describes and stressed the development of the action."⁵ On the other hand, the Imperfect should not be over emphasized. Porter again quotes Rose, "One writer, for instance, might relate a series of facts with Aorists, another might depict these same facts with Imperfects..."⁶ Mark probably used the Imperfect, εδίδου, to emphasize to the reader that the ministry of the disciples was specifically sanctioned by Jesus. It is Christ himself who enabled the disciples to minister throughout the countryside.

Mark 6:8

The Present subjunctive αἰρωσιν is probably a slightly marked form. Although there are other subjunctives in Jesus' instructions, this initial Present subjunctive may be especially weighted because of the many objects following it. Mark 6:8 is a lengthy and somewhat detailed instruction which hinges on this single verb. The present would seem to be a natural choice.

Mark 6:9

Mark 6:9 contains the only Perfect verbal form in the entire passage, the Perfect participle υποδεδμενος. Porter notes that

The Perfect tense(stative aspect) is the most heavily marked formally, distributionally, and semantically, and forms an opposition with the Present/Aorist (Imperfective/ Perfective) opposition.⁷

By highlighting the prerequisite state of being for the disciples to minister, wearing sandals, Mark may be emphasizing

⁵Ibid., 200

⁷Ibid., 90

the idea of going, traveling, or serving.

Mark 6:12

Mark 6:12 utilizes the rare verb form μετανοωσιν. While this Present subjunctive form is clearly marked, its significance should not be over emphasized. Porter notes that "in Mark 8:6 the Aorist indicative if the same verb is used referring to the same process..."⁸ This demonstrates the highly subjective nature, of an author's choice of words.

Mark 6:13

Mark 6:13 contains three Imperfect verbs, εξεβαλλον, ηλειθον, εθεραπευον. It is not surprising that Mark closes his pericope with Imperfects. Porter cites two examples (Mark 3:20-21, Mark 5:22-24) where Mark uses the Imperfect to provide closure to an event or argument.⁹ Porter suggests that in Mark is not uncommon to encounter the

Present introducing the sections and highlighting several significant events, the Aorist propelling the narrative forward, and the Imperfect describing several significant features of the narrative in preparation for the next pericope.¹⁰

Mark 6:1-13 seems to be an illustration of this Marcan tendency.

⁹Ibid., 208.