

**Significant Grammar in Mark 6:1-13**

The gospel of Mark is known for its direct, straightforward writing style. Mark 6:1-13 lives up to this reputation. Most of the sentences are short. The grammar seems relatively simple. The narrative action flows at an even pace. Nevertheless, Mark 6:1-13 does have a few interesting grammatical structures.

**6:2 ηρξατο διδασκειν** Jesus "began to teach, In this instance, Mark seems to be introducing a new thought. Mark uses ηρξατο as an auxiliary verb at least 26 times in his gospel. Mark frequently uses ηρξατο with an infinitive. Gundry explains, "Ηρξατο plus an infinitive, 'He began to...,' is an Aramaism or a feature of κοινή Greek which Mark likes to use and in which the notion of beginning has no independent significance but makes some ado about the new thought of the following infinitive.<sup>1</sup> Gundry's explanation seems to fit with Mark 6. The emphases of the ηρξατο phrases in verses 2 is not on the idea *beginning*. Rather, Mark is drawing attention to Jesus' *teaching* ministries.

**6:2-3 Ποθεν ταυτα...προς υμας** Verses 2-3, include a series of questions raised by Jesus' skeptical observers. Mark quotes these musings directly. The use of direct discourse in narratives has two results. First direct discourse, as opposed to indirect discourse, places the readers focus squarely on the words of those speaking. Secondly, from a reader's standpoint, direct discourse is more vivid and exciting than indirect discourse. In this passage, Mark is drawing attention to the

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<sup>1</sup>Gundry, Robert H., *Mark*(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 104.

open skepticism of the crowd.

**6:3** ο υιος της Μαρίας και αδελφος Ιακωβου... Appollonius' Canon is a grammatical construction where a head noun governs a second noun in the genitive. The key word for translation is "of." The skeptical onlookers were perplexed by the fact that Jesus was the "son of Mary, the brother of James..."

Mark 6:3 is also a good illustration of the Granville Sharp rule. According to The Granville Sharp rule, in an *article-substantive-kai-substantive* construction, the "second noun refers to the *same* person mentioned" if three conditions are met.<sup>2</sup> The three conditions are that "(1)neither is *impersonal*; (2)neither is *plural*; (3)neither is a *proper* name."<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the rule can be applied to the words ο υιος...και αδελφος. Clearly, it is Jesus who is both the son on Mary and the brother of James. Although this particular case does not seem to have high theological stakes, Mark 6:3 stands as a solid example of a theologically significant grammatical practice.

**6:4** πατριδι...συγγενευσιν...οικια Mark contains many sentences that have been accused of redundancy. Here in 6:4, Jesus is observing that a prophet is without honor in his own "country, among his own relatives, and in his own household." The alleged redundancy appears to be related to the inclusion of both the words συγγενευσιν and οικια. However, rather than being viewed as redundant, Mark's language should be understood as thorough and additionally descriptive. By way of contrast, Matthew's more concise parallel account contains only the words πατριδι and

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 272.

οικια(13:57). Luke uses only πατριδι(4:24). Likewise, John uses only πατριδι(6:44).

**6:5** ουκ εδυνατο εκει ποιησαι ουδεμιαν δυναμιν Double negatives are not infrequent in Mark. Unlike English, where two negatives cancel each other out; in Greek, a double negative intensifies the negative aspect of the assertion. In this case, Mark is reporting that Jesus was unable to perform miracles in his native region. The double negative adds an extra weight of decisiveness to the statement.

### **6:6**

και εθαυμαζεν δια την απιστιαν αυτων. Και περιηγεν τας κωμας κυκλω διδασκων. In addition to translation challenges, this verse has stimulated much discussion as to its role in the larger text of Mark. Most commentators split the verse into 2 sections, as shown by the UBS text above. The first half, may act as a conclusion to 6:1-5; and the second half may be taken as an introduction to 6:7-13. However, Guelich sees 6b not as an introduction to 6:7-13, but rather as a summary statement emphasizing Jesus teaching ministry.<sup>4</sup> Guelick posits that Mark included natural divisions in the text through the careful use of summary reports, 6:6b being one of them. A few commentators suggest that the summary statements coincide with geographical transitions within the gospel.<sup>5</sup>

While 6:6 can be seen as attached to 6:1-5, the view of Gundry seems most plausible, "Verse 6b provides the general occasion for vv 7-11 and probably implies that the events in vv

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 314.

12-13 take place while Jesus itinerates."<sup>6</sup>

**6:7 προσκαλειται τους δωδεκα** The use of the substantiving article adds a "technical nuance" to the twelve.<sup>7</sup> By substantiving the twelve, Mark is giving an indication that the twelve had become a well known, or at least well defined, group of disciples.

**6:7 ηρξατο αυτους αποστελλειν** See comments on 2:7.

**6:7 δυο δυο** This is an unusual construction. Cranfield suggests that the normal construction would be *κατα δυο* or *ανα δυο*. The "two by two" construction may be due to a Semitic influence.<sup>8</sup>

### **6:8-9**

**και παρηγγειλεν αυτοις...αλλα υποδεδεμενους σανδαλια, και μη ενδυσησθε δυο χιτονας.** In 6:8, Jesus commands his disciples to take very little on their journeys. Mark uses indirect discourse. Then, in 6:9, Mark suddenly shifts to direct discourse, quoting the very words of Jesus as he addressed his disciples. Guelich suggests that this change is evidence that Mark selected these sayings from various larger traditions and adapted them according to his own literary purposes.<sup>9</sup> Gundry concurs, "The roughness of the shift looks more like his writing up of the oral tradition than like his redaction of an earlier written source."<sup>10</sup>

Because of the general abruptness of this entire passage, Taylor classifies 6:8-9 as a case of *anacolutha*.<sup>11</sup> Taylor notes

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<sup>7</sup>Wallace, 233.

<sup>9</sup>Guelich, 319

<sup>11</sup>Taylor, Vincent. *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 50.

that this passage is illustrative of the "popular character of Mark's Greek"<sup>12</sup>

**6:11** και ος αν τοπος μη δεξηται υμας μηδε ακουσωσιν υμων The instructions for the disciples contains an abrupt change in number, "If a place(*sing.*) does not welcome(*sing.*) you or listen(*pl.*) to you..." This apparent grammatical conflict can be accounted for in two ways. It could simply be a reflection Mark's idiomatic style. The other possibility, is that the change in number could reflect a collective understanding of the singular τοπος.<sup>13</sup> If this is true, then there is no grammatical oddity here.

**6:13** ελαιω The dative case can sometimes be used to express the "material that is used to accomplish the action of the verb"<sup>14</sup> It is not a common use of the dative. In this instance, the dative form, ελαιω is specifying that the disciples anointed many sick people *with oil*.

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<sup>13</sup>Gundry, 309.