

BAPTIST BIBLE SEMINARY

SIGNIFICANT GRAMMAR IN MARK 8:27-9:1

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The grammar of any passage offers many insights and potential difficulties to the exegete. The pericope found in Mark 8:27-9:1 is not an exception. In the next few pages each passage will be discussed individually regarding its significant grammar. The conclusion will present some overall conclusions.¹

A compound subject found in verse 27 offers some significant material for exegesis. When compound subjects are presented in Greek, the first noun is usually the emphasized subject. In this case, It is important to point out that Jesus is the main character and the disciples are merely “tagging along.”²

Later in verse 27 and also verse 29 the diagram shows the phrase *me eihai tina*. Though there seems to be no exegetically significance, it was interesting that there was disagreement over the word order. Stanley Porter claimed that *tina* should be taken as the subject and that *me* should be taken as the predicate nominative. Dan Wallace advocated the view presented in the diagram.³

In verse 29, the verb *legete* is a historical present. It is also a verb of communication, which means it usually introduces indirect discourse.⁴ In this instance, the context seems to imply direct discourse. Also in verse 29, the pronoun *SU* is used to emphasize a contrast from seeing Jesus as a servant of Yahweh to a much more significant role as the Christ.⁵

¹ The diagram provided with the paper will be referred to frequently.

² Wallace, Daniel B., *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 401-2;482.

³ Porter, Stanley E., *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academics Press, 1996), 202-3; Wallace, 195.

⁴ Wallace, 604.

⁵ Wallace, 321-22.

Verse 31 presents two challenges in its grammar. First, the word *oŧi* could mark indirect or direct discourse. Though, in modern English direct discourse while referring to oneself in the third person is unusual, it was not unusual for Jesus. Despite that fact, only the context can really determine which is correct.⁶ In this case, the context does not give any clear indicators. In this pericope, there are some defined shifts between direct and indirect discourse. If one or the other were predominant, that would give a good contextual reason for choosing one or the other. The easiest answer for the exegete, not the translator, is to ignore this issue, because it makes very little exegetical significance.

The second challenge presented in verse 31 and also verse 38 is *ton uŧn tou anqrwpou*. This construction is called Apollonius Canon. Apollonius noticed that “both the head noun and genitive noun mimicked each other with regard to articularity.”⁷ In other words, this “construction involves two nouns in regimen (i.e. a noun qualified by a genitive noun) and specifically the presence or absence of the article with each term.”⁸ Typically, there is little to no significance to this construction. But according to C. F. D. Moule, who is cited by Dan Wallace in his volume, this construction is meant to direct us to the Son of Man found in Daniel 7:13.⁹ This connection will be further addressed in my homiletical paper.

The next challenge is found in verse 33. The vocative *satana* is a monadic noun, which means it is considered definite even without an article. At first glance, this may lead one to believe Jesus is saying Peter is Satan. But rather, it is probably more

⁶ Porter, 272-273

⁷ Wallace, 239.

⁸ Decker, Rodney J. *Apollonius' Canon in Mark*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

precise that Jesus is merely making a point through exaggeration.¹⁰ Also, later in that verse there are two instances of the article τὰ with no associated noun. Both these instances are appropriately understood as “the things.”¹¹

The compound verb structure in verse 34 offers its own challenges exegetically and homiletically. Though, this paper will not focus on the homiletics of this passage. All three verbs are third person imperatives. Usually these are translated “Let him...”, but in this case it is better suited to translate them as commands (“He must...”).¹² It is interesting to see how Mark uses connected lists to make certain points, as he did most apparently in verses 28 and 31, and lastly 34. Once again, this paper will not discuss the homiletical issues regarding those passages. But if exegesis is to control the homiletical approach, these three sections definitely deserve special attention.

Verse 37, according to Dan Wallace is a deliberate rhetorical subjunctive. Simply put, this means this question was not asked to be answered, but to indict the idea of gaining in this world and losing one’s soul.¹³ Unfortunately, Wallace’s grammar did not explain how one is to determine his conclusion from the grammar of the passage. He merely stated his conclusion in this case.

Lastly, in chapter 9 verse 1 οὐ μὴ γευσῶνται needs to be understood in a very particular way. This grammatical construction is an emphatic negative subjunctive, which is the strongest form of negation in the Greek. If the word were in the indicative,

¹⁰ Ibid., 249.

¹¹ Ibid., 235.

¹² Ibid., 486.

¹³ Ibid., 467.

the idea would be that the certainty of the action would be negated. But the verb is subjunctive, which means the negation affects the potentiality of the action.¹⁴ Jesus was saying that there will be some from this age that will not die, that the very notion of them dying has been made impossible. Theologically, this seems to support the idea of the rapture.

Now that the individual verses have been discussed, it is important to consider the entire pericope and the synoptic gospels. The first thing that is obvious is how Mark uses similar wording to make theological points that are sometimes not so obvious in the English. For instance, in verses 27 and 28 he uses very similar Greek when he asks “Who do people say that I am?” and “Who do you say that I am?” The best example of how the English fails to show the contrast he discusses is found in verse 33 and 34. In verse 33 the diagram shows the phrase upage opisw mou and in verse 34 he uses similar Greek when he writes $\text{akolouqew opisw mou}$. When you look at the context closely, you can see he is contrasting Satan and people who wish to follow him. It is almost as if Jesus is saying, “Satan, do not follow me,” and by implication anyone who follows Satan should not follow Him. And then in verse 34 he says, “Anyone who desires to follow me...”

The issue of parataxis and the synoptic gospels is very connected and helps understand the first project of this semester even more. Mark uses parataxis extensively in this pericope. Kai , used for parataxis, appears 8 times in 12 verses. He uses it, and other conjunctives to mark shifts in the discourse, both indirect and direct. The reason this subject relates to the synoptics is that when comparing the synoptics it can easily be

¹⁴ Ibid., 469.

seen that the primary difference between Matthew and Mark, and to some degree Luke, is parataxis. In this pericope, Mark uses kai a total of 23 times. Matthew uses kai 9 times. Out of those 9 times only once does Matthew's use of kai overlap with Mark's use of kai for parataxis. This points to two feasible conclusions. Matthew is a more refined Greek text than Mark. Secondly, this difference in style may point to Marcan priority. If Mark wrote using Matthew's gospel as a foundation, why would he make the grammar more crude?