

Mastering New Testament Greek Textbook

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CHAPTER 28

Case Revisited

You will be able to—

1. recognize and translate the various nuances of the Greek case system (genitive, dative),
2. gain more practice in translating and working with Greek,
3. translate John 1:11–20, and
4. master ten more high-frequency vocabulary words.

Introduction to Deep Case Structure

In chapter 4, the Greek five-case structure was introduced (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, and vocative). In order to translate correctly, one must be aware of the great variation in the ways these cases are utilized in Greek. This chapter will show some of the translation options for the genitive and dative cases. Context will ultimately determine which option should be employed. One of the major problems with having just one year of Greek is a “this equals that” view of translation. This section is meant to expose you to some of the wide variety and numerous possibilities that come with a deeper knowledge of Greek. This is a mere introduction to the next level of expanding your understanding of Greek.

Genitive Introduction

Until now, we have seen the genitive as a case used for possession, translated “of.” The genitive, however, is used much more widely than that. Its broader meaning is descriptive and often specifies more exactly, defines more precisely, or limits the scope of the word to which it is connected. Thus the genitive has an adjectival function. It also functions like an adverb when it specifies time and place.

Possessive Genitive

The possessive genitive may be translated “of” or as a possessive noun or pronoun (his/her). Possessive answers: whose? Descriptive answers: which?

τὴν κοιλίαν τῆς μητρός
the mother’s womb (Jn. 3:4)

τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ
his glory (Jn. 1:14)

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Relational Genitive

The relational genitive specifies a family relationship (son, parent, wife).

ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ
his mother (Jn. 2:5)

Σίμων Ἰωάννου
Simon, [son] of John (Jn. 21:15)

Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ
Mary the [wife] of Clopas (Jn. 19:25)

Descriptive Genitive

The descriptive genitive qualifies the noun, describing it in more detail.

Ὁ ζῆλος τοῦ οἴκου σου
the zeal of your house (Jn. 2:17) [specifies the focus of the zeal]

τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ
the temple of his body (Jn. 2:21)

Subjective Genitive

The word in the genitive functions as the subject or produces the action of the verbal idea implied in the noun it describes.

ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκός
the lust of the flesh (1 Jn. 2:16) [the flesh lusts]

ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν
the lust of the eyes (1 Jn. 2:16) [the eyes lust]

Objective Genitive

The genitive receives the action. It acts like an object to the action of the word it modifies. These categories are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes a genitive may be both objective and descriptive or just plain ambiguous at times.

ἡ δὲ τοῦ πνεύματος βλασφημία
the blasphemy against the Spirit (Mat. 12:31) [blaspheme the Holy Spirit]

ὁ θερισμὸς τῆς γῆς
the harvest of the earth (Rev. 14:15) [harvest the earth]

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Time Genitive

Genitives of time function like adverbs. Genitives of time express time “within which” something happens.

ἦλθεν πρὸς αὐτὸν νυκτός.
he came to him during the night (Jn. 3:2).

ἕως τῶν ἡμερῶν Δαβὶδ
until the days of David (Acts 7:45)

Agency Genitive

The agency genitive identifies the agent that has been involved in an action.

ἔσονται πάντες διδασκοὶ θεοῦ.
They shall all be taught by God (Jn. 6:45) (God is the agent teaching).

Deeper into the Dative

In chapter 4, the dative was given as the indirect object case (He hit the ball to Elliott). It is also used to express self-interest, means, location, and point of time.

Indirect Object

εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Λύσατε.
He said to them, “Destroy” (Jn. 2:19).

Perschbacher (New Testament Greek Syntax, 144–52), Wallace (Beyond the Basics, 137–75), and Dana and Mantey (Manual Grammar, 83–91) provide rich discussions that have been utilized here and that go beyond our present level of discussion. Daniel Wallace’s Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar (Zondervan, 2000) and David Black’s It’s Still Greek to Me (Baker, 1998) are the most readable and excellent introductions to the next level.

Dative of Interest

The dative of interest may express advantage or disadvantage. When expressing advantage, it may be translated “to” or “for.” When expressing disadvantage, “against” may be used (Wallace, Beyond the Basics, 142f.).

ὥστε μαρτυρεῖτε ἑαυτοῖς
so that you witness against yourselves (Mat. 23:31)

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Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.
Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth (Mat. 6:19).

Dative of Location

The dative is often used with the prepositions ἐν (in) and πρὸς (to, toward) to reference a particular physical location. However, the dative may also be used alone to indicate location.

οἱ . . . μαθηταὶ τῷ πλοιαρίῳ ἦλθον.
the disciples came in a small boat (Jn. 21:8).

ὁ δὲ δοῦλος οὐ μένει ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ.
But the slave does not remain in the house (Jn. 8:35).

Dative of Sphere

The dative of sphere refers to an abstract realm, whereas the dative of location refers to a specific physical location.

ἕκαστος καθὼς προήρηται τῇ καρδίᾳ
Let each one as he has purposed in [the sphere of his] heart (2 Cor. 9:7)

καὶ εὐθὺς ἐπιγνοὺς ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ
And immediately Jesus knew in [the sphere of] his spirit (Mk. 2:8).

Instrumental Dative

The dative often indicates the means by which something happens. It can designate the instrument (impersonal) or agent (personal) that performs the action.

εἰς ὑπακοὴν ἐθνῶν, λόγῳ καὶ ἔργῳ
to the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed (Rom. 15:18)

χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι.
You have been saved by grace (Eph. 2:5).

Dative of Time

The dative may be used to refer to a particular point in time, in contrast to the genitive, which describes time as time within which or time during which.

Καὶ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ γάμος ἐγένετο.
And on the third day there was a wedding (Jn. 2:1).

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Ἦν δὲ σάββατον ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ.
And it was the Sabbath on that day (Jn. 5:9).

The nominative and accusative could also be explored in this deeper way in any of the intermediate or advanced grammars (Robertson, Wallace, Moulton, Burton, Dana/Mantey, or the many Grace Theological Journal articles by James Boyer [vid. web site or digital disk], etc). One interesting study which needs to be embarked on is also the various uses of the article (cf. S. M. Baugh, A First John Reader (P. & R. Publishing 1999; 83-92; Dan Wallace is the king of the article as seen in pages 93-128 of his shorter intermediate grammar--The Basics of New Testament Syntax, or 206-290 of his massive grammar Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics).

Vocabulary

ἀσπάζομαι	I greet (59)
δέχομαι	I take, receive (56)
διδάσκαλος, -ου, ὁ	teacher (59)
ἐπερωτάω	I ask (56)
θεωρέω	I look at (58)
λίθος, -ου, ὁ	stone (59)
συνάγω	I gather (59)
τοιοῦτος, -αὕτη, -οὔτον	such (57)
ὑπάρχω	I am, exist (60)
χαρά, -ᾶς, ἡ	joy (59)