

Englishman's Greek

Chapter 5

THE GREEK ARTICLE

1A. CHART OF THE GREEK ARTICLE.

	Singular			Plural		
	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Nominative	ὁ	ἡ	τὸ	οἱ	αἱ	τὰ
Genitive	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ	τῶν	τῶν	τῶν
Dative	τῷ	τῇ	τῷ	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς
Accusative	τὸν	τὴν	τὸ	τούς	τάς	τὰ

2A. THE GENERAL RULE.

It is important to remember that the way the article was used in Greek is not always the same as the way we use the article in English. In English a word may have a definite article (the), an indefinite article (a, an) or no article at all. In Greek there is no indefinite article, so a word either has the article or it does not.

Here's an example of how the Greek usage (or non-usage) of the article can be misinterpreted: Jehovah's Witness writers have argued that there is no article before "God" in John 1:1 and therefore it must be indefinite: "The Word was a god" (see the *New World Translation*). Is this what the non-use of the article really means?

Here is the GENERAL RULE:

1) The use of the article identifies (points out, marks out), particularizes (specifies) and draws attention to an object, or a person. As Daniel Wallace observes: "The article was originally derived from the demonstrative pronoun. That is, its original force was to *point out* something. It has largely kept the force of drawing attention to something...In terms of predominant *function*, it *identifies*" (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 208, 209). When the article is used, just think of a pointing finger:



2) The absence of the article describes, defines, characterizes and qualifies.

EXAMPLE 1

If you said “river” (no article) to a Greek he would ask “What is a river?” He would want a definition or a description. He would want you to tell him what a river is like: “A river is a flowing body of water, etc.”

If you said “the river” (article) to a Greek he would ask “Which river? Are you talking about the Nile or the Jordan?” He would want you to identify and specify which river you were referring to.

EXAMPLE 2

The word “king” had a special meaning in Greek literature. If the Greeks were speaking of a particular king, whether it be this king or that king, they would say “the king” (article). But when they spoke of “king” (no article) they thought of what a king was really like, and the one person above all others who was “king” to them was THE KING OF PERSIA (their great enemy!). The very word “king” itself seemed to describe him!

In a similar manner, the Greeks would “the Lord” (article) in the LXX (Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament) to point out someone who was a master, such as the master of a slave (see Exodus 21:4-6). But when they wanted to speak of JEHOVAH (the LORD) they would say “LORD” (no article) because He was the one Person above all others who deserved to be described and characterized by that term “Lord.” Thus Isaiah 43:1 literally reads (in the LXX): “Thus saith LORD...” and Isaiah 43:10 literally reads (in the LXX) “saith LORD...”, etc.

EXAMPLE 3

John 1:1

“The Word was with [the] God” (the article is used)

When the article is used with “God”, then divine personality is in view. In our example, the Person of God the Father is here being considered. The article **points out** which Person of the Godhead Christ was with from eternity past.

“And the Word was God” (no article is used)

When the article is not used, divine essence is signified (all that God is). The Word (Christ) is here described as being GOD (with the emphasis upon all that God is and all

that God is like). If the article had been used here, then the phrase would be theologically incorrect: "The Word was the God (God the Father)." This is false. Christ is not God the Father. He is a distinct Person of the Trinity--and He is God!

Compare John 1:18--"God" (no article). God is here described as to His invisible character. He is defined as being the invisible God.

Jehovah's Witnesses wrongly translate John 1:1 as follows: "Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was a god**" (*New World Translation*, 1960 edition, emphasis mine). In their Appendix they have an article explaining why they translate it this way and they quote from *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* by Dana and Mantey to justify their translation.

Julius Mantey, upon learning that he had been quoted, wrote a two page article showing that it is not proper to translate this verse as the Jehovah Witnesses had done. He entitled his article *A Grossly Misleading Translation*. Mantey skillfully explains the grammar of this verse and the significance of the absence of the Greek article in the last phrase of verse 1. Dr. Mantey's article is reproduced below in full:

A GROSSLY MISLEADING TRANSLATION

John 1:1 which reads "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God," is shockingly mistranslated, "Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god," in a *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*, published under the auspices of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Since my name is used and our *Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* is quoted on page 744 to seek to justify their translation, I am making this statement.

The translation suggested in our Grammar for the disputed passage is, "the Word was deity." Moffatt's rendering is "the Word was divine." Williams' translation is, "the Word was God himself." Each translation reflects the dominant idea in the Greek. For, whenever an article does not precede a noun in Greek, that noun can either be considered as emphasizing the character, nature, essence or quality of a person or thing, as **theos** (God) does in John 1:1, or it can be translated in certain contexts as indefinite, as they have done. But of all the scholars in the world, as far as we know, none have translated this verse as Jehovah's Witnesses have.

If the Greek article occurred with both Word and God in John 1:1 the implication would be that they are one and the same person, absolutely identical. But John affirmed that "the Word was with (the) God" (the definite article preceding each noun), and in so writing he indicated his belief that they were distinct and separate personalities. Then John next stated that the Word was God, i.e., of the same family or essence that characterizes the Creator. Or, in other words, that both are of the same nature, and that nature is the highest in existence, namely, divine.

Examples where the noun in the predicate does not have an article, as in the above verse, are: John 4:24, "God is spirit" (not **a** spirit; 1 John 4:16, "God is love" (not **a** love); and Matthew 13:39, "the reapers are angels," i.e., they are the type of beings known as angels. In each instance the noun in the predicate was used to describe some quality or characteristic of the subject, whether as to nature or type.

The apostle John in the context of the introduction to his gospel is pulling all the stops out of language to portray not only the deity of Christ but also His equality with the Father. He states that the Word was in the beginning, that He was with God, that He was God and that all creation came into existence through Him and that not even one thing exists which was not created by Christ. What else could be said that John did not say? In John 1:18 he explained that Christ has been so intimate with the Father that He was in His bosom and that He came to earth to exhibit or portray God. But if we had no other statement from John except that which is found in John 14:9, "He that has seen me has seen the Father," that would be enough to satisfy the seeking soul that Christ and God are the same in essence and that both are divine and equal in nature.

Besides, the whole tenor of New Testament revelation points in this direction. Compare Paul's declaration in Colossians 1:19 for instance: "That all the divine fullness should dwell in Him," or the statement in Hebrews 1:3, "He is the reflection of God's glory and the perfect representation of His being, and continues to uphold the universe by His mighty word" (Williams' translation). And note the sweeping, cosmic claim recorded in Matthew 28:19, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."

And, if we contrast with that the belittling implication that Christ was only a **god**, do we not at once detect the discord? Does not such a conception conflict with the New Testament message both in whole and in part? Why, if John, in the midst of the idolatry of his day, had made such a statement would not the first century hearers and readers have gotten a totally inadequate picture of Christ who we believe is the Creator of the universe and the only Redeemer of humanity?

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3A. THE ARTICLE OF PREVIOUS MENTION.

Often the article is used to refer back to something the writer has just mentioned. Here are some examples of this common usage of the article:

Matthew 1:24. “**the** angel of the Lord” (see v.20)

Ephesians 2:8 “**the** grace” (see v.5)

Revelation 5:2 “**the** book” (see v.1)

James 2:14. “Can **the** faith save him?” (What kind of faith is he talking about? See v.14a)

John 4:11 “**the** living water” (see v.10)

2 Timothy 4:2. “Preach **the** word.” What “word” is he referring to? See 2 Timothy 3:16.

Revelation 15:6 “**the** seven angels” (see v.1)

4A. THE GRANVILLE SHARP RULE:

Two nouns connected by kai (καί), the first with the article and the second without it, are by the article identified as one and the same individual or class.

Example from English:

When I talk about **the lettuce and the tomatoes**, I am speaking about two groups (classes) of vegetables. But when I talk about **the lettuce and tomatoes**, I am speaking of mixed salad (they are both grouped together in one salad bowl!). This is not as apparent in English, but it is a confirmed rule in Greek (having been demonstrated in thousands of cases).

In many passages the Granville Sharp Rule is of great theological significance:

THE DEITY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 5:5

2 Peter 1:1

2 Timothy 4:1

2 Peter 1:2 (compare 3:18)

Titus 2:13

Jude 4

SALVATION

Acts 20:21

ELECTION

2 Peter 1:10

Acts 2:23

THE BIBLE

Luke 24:44

DEATH FOR THE BELIEVER

Philippians 1:23

THE SECOND COMING

Matthew 24:3

Assignment (involving the G-S Rule):

1. Ephesians 4:11. Who are these teachers? Can a man be gifted as a Pastor but not as a Teacher?
2. 1 Timothy 4:3. How is the believer described?
3. 1 Peter 2:25. How is Christ described?
4. John 20:17. Why didn't the Lord say "our Father"?
5. Luke 11:28. How can I qualify as a "blessed person"?

6. Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5. Who were these prophets? Were they Old Testament prophets?

7. 1 John 2:4 and 2:9. Show how the person talked the talk but didn't walk the walk.

The following is a list of every place in the New Testament where the Granville Sharp Rule occurs. There are certain situations where the G-S rule is ambiguous and may not apply. In these situations, it may apply, but there is some degree of uncertainty as to whether it does. The reasons for such uncertainty are twofold:

1) **Proper names**--these sometimes take the article and sometimes do not. This will be indicated by an asterisk* after the verse.

2) **The use of connected nouns each with its Genitive** (with such a complicated structure the rule may not apply). This will be indicated by a plus sign (+) after the verse.

In the following list, if you see an asterisk* or a plus sign+ this indicates that the G-S rule may apply, but there is some degree of uncertainty as to whether it does apply. If you do not see an asterisk* or a plus sign+ then this means that the G-S rule does apply and there is no uncertainty involved.

If there is a (2) after the verse, this indicates that the G-S rule is found two times in that one verse.

The list of verses where the Granville Sharp Rule applies are found on the following page

Matthew	Luke	Acts	Ephesians	1 Tim.	2 Peter
2:4	13:34	15:22*	1:1	4:3	1:1
3:7*	14:3*	15:23*	1:3	5:5	1:2*
4:24	14:21 (2)	16:4	2:20	5:21*	1:10
4:25*	14:23	16:6	3:5	6:13*	1:11
5:6	15:9	17:12	3:12	6:15	1:16
5:20*	16:18	18:23*	3:18		2:10
7:26	18:9	19:21*	4:6	2 Tim.	2:20
9:11	20:37	20:21	4:11		3:2
11:1	20:46	21:25	5:5*	1:9	3:16
11:28	21:12	23:7*	5:20	3:6	3:18
12:38*	24:4	27:5*	6:21	4:1*	
13:20	23:27				1 John
13:23	24:10*	Romans	Philippians	Titus	2:4
16:1*	24:44				2:9
16:6*		1:20	1:7	1:15	5:20
16:11*	John	2:3	1:19*+	2:13 (2)	(textual variant)
16:12*		4:17	1:20		2 John
16:21	1:40	12:2	1:23	Philemon	1:9
17:1*	3:29	15:6	1:25*+		
20:18	5:24	16:7*+	2:17	1:1	Jude
20:19	5:35	16:18	2:25		1:4*
21:12	6:33		3:3	Hebrews	1:6
21:15	6:40	1 Cor.	3:10*+		
23:37	6:45		4:20		Revelation
24:3*+		4:9	Colossians	3:1	
24:36	6:54	5:10		5:2	1:3
26:47	6:56	7:35	1:2	6:7	1:5
27:3	7:45*	11:22	2:3	6:9	1:6
27:12	8:50	11:29	2:8	7:1	1:9 (2)
27:40	9:8	15:24	2:19	7:18	3:7
27:41	11:2	16:16	2:22	12:2	3:14
27:56*	11:19*		4:7		3:17
	11:26			James	5:12
	11:31				6:10
Mark	11:45				9:15
2:16	12:29	2 Cor.	1 Thess.	1:5	11:9
5:37*	12:48			1:25	12:17
6:36	14:21	1:3 (2)	1:3	1:27	13:2
8:33	20:17	1:6	2:12	3:6	14:7
8:38	20:29	1:21	3:2 (2)	3:9	16:15
12:33	21:24	1:22	3:7	4:11	17:13
12:40		2:14	3:10		18:9
15:1	Acts	5:15	3:11	1 Peter	20:1
15:29		5:18	3:13		20:8*
16:14	1:8*	6:7	4:6	1:3	20:10
16:16	1:25	7:3	5:12	1:21 (2)	21:8
	2:20	8:24*+		2:18	22:8
Luke	2:23	10:1	2 Thess.	2:25	
2:52	3:14	11:31		3:10	
3:1	4:13*	12:21 (2)	1:4	4:18	
5:17	4:19*	13:11	1:12*	5:1	
5:30	7:11*		2:1*+		
6:17	8:1*	Galatians	2:4		
6:35	8:6	1:4	2:12		
6:47	8:25	1:7	2:16		
6:49	9:31*	1:15			
7:11	10:12*+	2:20			
7:32	10:35	3:5			
8:21	13:1*				
9:12	13:2*				
9:22	13:50*				
10:30	15:2				
11:28	15:3*				
12:21					
12:47					