

THE ORDER OF SOME NOUN AND ADJECTIVE PHRASES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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In the original article the references were in Hebrew and Greek, but they have been translated here, in word-for-word order, so as to benefit a wider constituency. Ed.

In Hebrew, attributive adjectives normally follow their nouns and if the noun has the article the attributive adjective has it also: *the man, the great*. This order was frequently reproduced in the Septuagint (LXX) and the New Testament with or without the article: Isa. 1: 4 *a nation sinful, a people full of sins, a seed evil, sons lawless*; 7: 20 *the razor, the great*. As a rule if the noun has the article the adjective has it, but if the noun lacks the article the adjective is without it. Where the noun is in the construct with a dependent genitive as well as an attributive adjective, the construct does not have the article and is followed immediately by the genitive, and the adjective with or without the article according to the sense comes last: *the horses of the king, the good [ones]*.

This order is taken over into Greek in the Septuagint, e.g. Isa. 2: 20 *the abominations of him, the silver and the gold*; 3: 25 *the son of thee, the best*; 8: 7 *the water of the river, the strong and the much [water]*. In I Maccabees, though the Hebrew original has perished, the Hebrew arrangement survives in the Greek: 1: 6 *the children of him, the glorious ones*; 3: 15 *a camp of godless men, a strong one*; 4: 7 *a camp of nations, a strong one*, cf. 3: 3 variant reading (v.r.); 4: 53; 7: 48; 8: 31; 9: 2. Frequently in the Greek rendering, as in the three instances just given from Isaiah, the noun has the article though it renders the Hebrew construct. As a rule both noun and adjective have the article or both lack it. Otherwise the structure and order of the Hebrew phrase has been reproduced in Greek.

They appear also in the New Testament: Matt. 6: 11 *the bread of us, the daily*; 6: 26 *the Father of you, the heavenly* (cf. 5: 48; 18: 35); Luke 2: 7 *the son of her, the firstborn*; 7: 47 *the sins of her, the many*; 22: 50 *the ear of him, the right*; Heb. 13: 20 *the shepherd of the sheep, the great*; Rev. 2: 4 *the love of thee, the first*; 10: 5 *the hand of him, the right*. Other instances occur at Matt. 5: 29; 25: 40; Luke 15: 30, 32; Rev. 10: 2; 13: 16; 14: 19. Similar expressions are to be found at Mark 5: 11 *a herd of swine, a great*; John 4: 53 *the house of him, all*; 2 Cor. 3: 3 *on tablets of heart, fleshly* (LXX). The absence of the article causes no difficulty. A participle instead of an adjective is a little less unnatural in Greek, e.g. Luke 4: 22; 22: 1. There is no difficulty

¹ *Donum Gratulatorium Ethelbert Stauffer* (on his Sixtieth Birthday, from Colleagues and Pupils) Leiden: E. J. Brill; 1962. (o.p.)

about the meaning of these phrases. Rev. 10: 5 means 'his right hand' and no one would think of rendering 'his hand, the right one', any more than they would render the Hebrew expression above, 'the king's horses, the good ones', rather than 'the king's good horses'.

We must recognize that this arrangement of phrase is unusual in Greek and would probably sound exotic, *the right hand of him* or *of him the right hand* or the like would be normal. The abnormality of the order of such phrases has had two results.

First the text has been tampered with to remove this order. In the following examples the text of the printed editions is given first followed by the abnormal order which is to be found in manuscripts: Matt. 5: 30 *the right of thee hand* [*the hand of thee, the right*; 23: 9 *of you the Father the heavenly* [*the Father of you, the heavenly*; Mark 4: 37 *a storm great of wind* [*a storm of wind, great*; Luke 5: 29 *a crowd great of tax-gatherers* [*a crowd of tax-gatherers, a great one*; 15:24 *this the son of me* [*the son of me, this*; Tit. 2:11 *the grace of God saving* [*the grace of God the saving*; Rev. 14: 18 *of thee the sickle, the sharp* [*the sickle of thee, the sharp*. These examples will give some idea of the way in which scribes have tried to introduce a more normal order.

The second result of this abnormality is the work not of scribes but of translators. For our examples we will go to the Revised Standard Version not because it is better or worse than other translations but because it represents good average practice. Despite the odd order, Rev. 10:2 *the foot of him, the right* was rendered 'his right foot'; 10: 5 *the hand of him, the right* 'his right hand'. Likewise we have the right translation at Matt. 5: 29, 48; 6: 11, 26; 18: 35; Mark 1: 11; 5: 11; Luke 2: 7; 3: 22; 22: 50; John 4: 53; Heb. 13: 20; Rev. 13: 16. Unsatisfactory are Luke 7: 47 'her sins which are many', 23: 35 'the Christ of God, his Chosen One', Rev. 2: 4 'the love you held at first', for which we should have 'her many sins', 'God's Chosen Messiah', 'your first love'. The RSV is to be congratulated on its treatment of Mark 1: 11; 9: 7 and their parallels. Renderings like 'My Son, the Beloved¹ One' do not comprehend the idiom. It is all the more surprising that the Revisers did not produce the right rendering at Luke 23: 35.

Probably the reason why *the Beloved/only* and *the chosen* are separated from the rest of their phrase in the mistranslations just noted is that much play has been made with the few occasions on which these words serve as titles. That they are used with messianic meaning all will agree, but often when they have this meaning they serve as epithets or attributive adjectives. We must remember that in the New Testament the instances where such words are demonstrably titles are very few, e.g. Matt. 12: 18; John 1: 34 v.r.; Eph. 1: 6.

J. A. Robinson (*Ephesians* 229–233)² argued that at Mark 1: 11 and the corresponding passages *the Beloved/only* is a title partly relying on the quotation from Isa. 42: 1 at Matt. 12: 18. The LXX runs: *Jacob my servant, I will help him. Israel my chosen one, my soul welcomed him*, but Matthew has

¹ One must not forget C. H. Turner's convincing argument that in these contexts *agapētos* means 'only'. Cf. *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 27 (1926), pp. 113–19, 362; Vol. 28 (1927) p. 59 f.

² There is a more recent discussion in Schlier's *Der Brief an die Epheser* p. 56 f.

Behold my servant whom I chose, my Beloved in whom my soul is well-pleased. Matthew's *my Beloved/only* has no justification against the LXX *my chosen*. Why then has he introduced it? Robinson suggested that the evangelist made the change to produce the phrasing *my servant . . . my Beloved/only* and thus to echo *my son the Beloved/only*. But as *my servant* and *my Beloved/only* are separate in Matthew, Robinson argued that this evangelist regarded them as separate in Mark also. This need not be. If the evangelist wished by re-writing the verse to show that he did not regard *the Beloved/only* as a distinct title at Mark 1: 11 and comparable passages, he would have had to break up the whole structure of the quotation and destroy the parallelism. By a relatively small change he has echoed Mark 1: 11. We cannot agree to Robinson's view that because the evangelist has refrained from making a much more drastic one he therefore understood Mark in the way that Robinson suggested.

Robinson in his argument showed no awareness of the Semitic background behind the word order of these Greek phrases. Had he done so, he might have argued otherwise.

Matt. 23: 35 *from the blood of Abel the righteous* has been reserved for special treatment. Grammatically *the righteous* can go with *from the blood* or with *Abel*. *Blood innocent, guiltless, righteous* (Prov. 6: 17 v. r.; Joel 3: 19; Jonah 1: 14; Lam. 4: 13) are Old Testament expressions, *blood righteous* occurs at Matt. 23: 35 *all blood righteous*, 27: 4 v. r. *blood righteous*, 24 v. r. *of the blood of the righteous this*. On the other hand *Abel* is nowhere described as *righteous* except at Heb. 11: 4 where the meaning is somewhat different. In view of this it seems probable that at Matt. 23: 35 we should translate 'the innocent blood of Abel' rather than 'the blood of the innocent Abel'.

If we read at 27: 24 *of the blood of the righteous this* we have a text which reproduces the Hebrew order: article, noun, article, adjective, demonstrative. The only difference is that in Hebrew the demonstrative has the article but not in Greek. There is a parallel at Mark 1: 27 v. r. *what the teaching the new this*. This is in favour of the rendering 'this innocent blood' rather than 'the blood of this innocent man'.

The treatment of this idiom is far from exhaustive. Careful reading will reveal many other passages where it occurs. We hope that we have noted the principal instances where the translators seem to have gone wrong. The passages which we have noted are sufficient to show that this word order for such phrases is widespread and not infrequent. As soon as we grasp its Semitic background the idiom becomes easy to understand.

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