

## A Short Technical Discussion of Mark 12:5

by  
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A textual problem in Mark 12:5 has caused many to scratch their heads in perplexity. There are actually two<sup>1</sup> different textual difficulties, but one causes grammatical difficulty, while the other does not.

The critical texts often read this way: *καὶ ἄλλον ἀπέστειλεν· κάκεῖνον ἀπέκτειναν, καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους, οὓς μὲν δέροντες, οὓς δὲ ἀποκτείνοντες.*

The majority texts usually read this way: *καὶ πάλιν ἄλλον ἀπέστειλεν· κάκεῖνον ἀπέκτειναν καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς μὲν δέροντες τοὺς δὲ ἀποκτείνοντες.*

The textual problem that does not cause any grammatical difficulty is that the majority texts include the word *πάλιν* before the word *ἄλλον*. While interesting, this textual issue causes no grammatical concerns. But another textual variant has resulted in many students' problems with the grammar of the sentence.

The variants are obvious: the critical text reads *καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους, οὓς μὲν δέροντες, οὓς δὲ ἀποκτείνοντες* while the majority text reads *πολλοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς μὲν δέροντες τοὺς δὲ ἀποκτείνοντες*. The critical text includes the word *οὓς* twice, where the majority text reads *τοὺς* each time.

Now, beyond the fact that the two committees who edited these texts took different approaches to their understanding of textual sources, they also took different positions on textual criticism. The critical committee continued to use the various "rules" originally laid down by Westcott and Hort (along with others). One of these rules says that the more difficult reading is to be preferred to the less difficult reading. In other words, if the reading causes grammatical or other problems, choose it, rather than the one that does not. This is a rule that, in my opinion, makes no sense.

Simply stated, the critical text inclusion of the relative pronoun *οὓς* makes the reading grammatically difficult, if not downright impossible. A relative pronoun introduces a relative clause, and in this case we are stuck with two relative clauses, each with a separate understood subject and predicate (verb), as the words within the clause that are written are both participles. In a relative clause, participles need a main subject and predicate (verb) in order to exist. This alone makes the majority text reading preferred.

This inclusion of relative pronouns throws the use of the two participles into confusion. What are they doing there? How can we faithfully translate this construction? In fact, to be honest, most translators simply ignore the problem and translate the section as though it were following English grammatical rules without any relative pronouns at all. That is to say, even the critical text translators translate the participles as though they were preceded by *τοὺς* rather than by *οὓς*.

The majority text reading is clearly to be preferred grammatically. There is still the issue of the verb to which the participles belong, but it is much easier to find it, since the participles are related back to two other words, *πολλοὺς ἄλλους*. These two words are both accusative plurals, and as such are best thought of as direct objects of a verb. But no verb is actually written, therefore, we must find one in the context. This is not a major problem, however, because it was, at the time of writing, common for authors to include statements that depend on the verb as understood from a previous clause, which is what has happened here. Let's look again at the entire construction of this verse: *καὶ πάλιν ἄλλον ἀπέστειλεν· κάκεῖνον ἀπέκτειναν καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς μὲν δέροντες τοὺς δὲ ἀποκτείνοντες*. The first clause can be translated word for word as "And again another he sent." This would be rearranged into the English pattern of subject, verb, object, as "And again he sent another."

The second clause in this verse is made up of two words, *κάκεῖνον ἀπέκτειναν*. The word *κάκεῖνον* can be translated, "that one" or "that man." The verb *ἀπέκτειναν* simply translated is "they killed." In English we would render it, "They killed that man." The first two sentences are clear, then. "And again

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<sup>1</sup> There is also a spelling variant with the participles for killing: majority text reads *ἀποκτείνοντες*, while the critical text reads *ἀποκτείνοντες*. Note the duplicated *ν*. These are of no grammatical importance.

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he sent another. That man they killed.”

Now we come to the final sentence, which is written in the majority, καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς μὲν δέροντες τοὺς δὲ ἀποκτείνοντες. The καὶ is to be taken as an introductory word rather than as a connector to the previous sentence. To make it a simple connecting conjunction renders the accusative case words πολλοὺς ἄλλους unreadable, since it would make those two words the object of the verb ἀπέκτειναν, which makes no sense. The author is clearly expecting the readers to supply a verb from the context that results in beating and killing. What verb could be supplied? This has occasioned much controversy, since no English construction allows this approach, and most translators do not supply a verb. The best answer is that the writer had in mind the verb of the first clause, *sent*. That makes πολλοὺς ἄλλους the object of the verb *sent*, and could be translated “And he sent many others.”

However, whatever verb is supplied, the final structure is easy to understand grammatically from the majority text, but is not comprehensible from the critical text. The two articles τοὺς stand in apposition to ἄλλους, and are best thought of as being used in the distributive sense. As such they may be translated “some.” They are substantive adjectives, each with an accompanying participle. Those participles are simple verbal adjectives describing each of the articles in turn.

When one first reads this last sentence, the tendency for the English speaking Greek student to attempt to translate them as adverbial participles, and to search around for some adverbial use. This is simply not necessary. If the majority text is correct, and it is much more likely than the critical text, these two participles are pure adjectives, describing two groups included in substantive adjective ἄλλους. They could be translated simply, “beating the ones, killing the ones,” though such a translation is awkward in English, though grammatically correct. Most translate the two articles “some.” Therefore we read in the NKJV (a majority text translation) “And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some.” Note that the NKJV does not supply a verb for “many others.”

One last question needs to be answered. Why are the two participles in the nominative case? They appear to modify accusative articles. The answer is relatively simple. The author fell back into the use of the absolute nominative, a simplified structure sometimes used for the pure adjective participle.

Here is a possible diagram of the last part of the verse:

### Technical Translation

And he sent many others, some being beaten, and some being killed.

