

“And In The Evening”

God, in His infinite wisdom, provided the scriptures for mankind written in a language perfectly suited for the message of redemption. The Koine Greek, which fell out of use in the centuries after the New Testament era, was a wonderfully precise and vivid language. It is certainly worth the Bible student's time to carefully investigate key Greek phrases in the scriptures. For this reason, this article will examine the phrase found in Mark 14:17. As you will see, the very structure used in the Greek denotes its uniqueness.

In this verse, the gospel writer is narrating the occasion of the Lord's Supper. He uses the phrase “and in the evening” to signify the time of the event. The phrase in the original language is *Kai ophias genomenes* and it appears before the verb of action, *erchetai*. The term *erchetai* is a bit unusual because it contains both the subject and verb within one term. English word order is generally subject-verb, but Greek is verb-subject. Normal word order is sometimes interrupted for the sake of emphasis, which I believe is the reason in Mark 14:17.

The Analytical Greek Lexicon identified *erchetai* or “he comes” as a present-middle-indicative. The present tense indicates continuous action, the middle voice signifies action completed by the subject, and the indicative mood signifies certainty in relation to reality. The Analytical Lexicon further identified *genomenes*, which is the term for “coming,” as an aorist-middle-participle. The aorist tense indicates completed action and the middle voice signifies action completed by the subject. The participle simply means that the word is a verbal adjective, making it similar to a verb and an adjective.

Thayer defines *genomenes* as belonging to the idiom phrase *Kai ophias genomenes* which means “evening comes” (p. 115). Thayer defines *erchetai* as meaning “to come from one place to another” (p. 250). He further states that “as one who is about to do something in a place must necessarily come thither, in the popular narrative style the phrases are usually placed before verbs of action.” Some significant synonyms of *erchetai* include *bainein*, which pictures a certain mode of motion, *poreuesthai*, which expresses motion confined within certain limits and *chorein*, which emphasizes the idea of separation or change of place.

After investigating the parsing of these two words, *genomenes* and *erchetai*, one can immediately see a peculiarity with these two words. Mark uses a present tense verb, *erchetai*, as representing past action. Normally, a word of this nature would not be used in this context. Dana and Mantey, who co-authored *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, explains

this unusual construction as a historical present tense. The historical present tense is employed when a past event is viewed with the vividness of a present occurrence (p. 185).

A.T. Robertson further notes that Mark used what he calls the "dramatic" present tense (p. 382). Mark may have used the historical present tense to determine a beginning point of the incident which would eventually lead to the crucifixion of Christ. His beginning point would be the evening in which Jesus assembled with the twelve to partake and institute the Lord's Supper.

Other examples of the historical present which may enlighten the investigation include Matthew 3:1, "*In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea*" and John 1:29, "*The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*" In Matthew 3:1, the historical present tense is used to vividly portray the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry. Its obvious significance is in the message of repentance because the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

Likewise, in John 1:29, John the apostle is emphasizing John the Baptist's reaction to seeing the Lord by designating the term "coming" with a historical present tense. This event is also significant because it marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the fourth gospel and an inherent acceptance of Jesus' ministry by John the Baptist.

The significance of this phrase and of the other examples point us to past events which made an impact in the narrative. In Mark 14:17, Jesus was about to institute the Lord's Supper and begin the fateful evening which would lead to His betrayal and arrest. Christians can certainly understand the significance of this event. In order for the reader to understand what was truly happening, Mark used a special variant of the present tense to signify events which had already taken place. This would naturally cause the reader to pay closer attention to the event in question.

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