

## The Genitive

The genitive is the case of description. It specifies or qualifies the word it modifies, and serves to define, describe, qualify, restrict, or limit the idea. The basic meaning comes from the Greek *γενος* meaning “kind,” “possessing the same kind.”

The genitive limits as to kind, while the accusative limits as to extent. For example, the accusative *ἐργαστο την ἡμεραν* “he worked the day,” means he worked through a portion of the day or throughout the day. The genitive, however, *ἐργαστο τῆς ἡμερας* means “he worked in the day time” and not in the night.<sup>1</sup> The genitive serves to limit or reduce the range of reference to an idea, confining the extent to specific limits.

The genitive has the meaning of attribution. Attribution comes to the English from the Latin *attribuere* meaning “to allot to,” “assign to,” and appears next to the main noun or head noun. For example, the genitive expresses an essential quality as in the expression *καρδια πονηρα ἀπιστιας* “an evil heart of unbelief” (Heb. 3:12). The descriptive genitive expresses quality like an adjective but with more clarity.

The genitive usually comes after the main noun, but it can appear first as in typical emphatic use. It is also common to find genitives lined up, two or more, in a literary string.

### Uses of the Genitives

*Genitive of Description.* The genitive of description is the usage closest to its root meaning. All genitive are more or less descriptive, but the genitive of description can be uniquely identified by replacing the word “of” with “characterized by” or “described by.” For example Mark 1:4 *ἐγενετο Ἰωαννης βαπτιζων ἐν τῇ ἐρημῳ και κηρυσσων βαπτισμα μετανοιας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν* “John came baptizing in the wilderness and **preaching a baptism of repentance** for the remission of sins.” Repentance further describes the baptism. In 2 Cor. 6:2 “in the day of salvation” means the day characterized by salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York:Macmillan, 1954), p. 73

*Genitive of Possession.* The genitive of possession conveys the idea of ownership. To denote ownership is to make one noun the attribute of another in relation of privilege of prerogative.<sup>2</sup> Saying it another way, the genitive modifies the noun by identifying the person who owns it. For example, Luke 5:3: ἐμβας δε εἰς ἐν τῶν πλοίων ὃ ἦν Σιμωνος “Then He got into **one of the boats**, which was Simon’s.” Here, the boats are clearly identified as being owned by Simon.

To identify the genitive of possession ask the question “can the word “of” be replaced by the word “belonging to” or “possessed by.” Other examples include 1 Cor. 1:12: Ἐγὼ μὲν εἰς Παυλου, Ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ “I am of Paul; and I am of Apollos,” likewise, Heb. 11:25: τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ “the people of God” refer to belonging to a particular group.

*Genitive of Relationship.* The genitive of relationship defines the “familial” relationship, either by marriage or a progenitor. For example, Acts 13:22: Δαυιδ τον του Ἰεσσαι “David, the (son) of Jesse”<sup>3</sup> The genitive expresses essential relationship as in the popular expression την βασιλειαν τοῦ θεοῦ “the kingdom of God.” The meaning is “the kingdom related to God.” Another important theological use is in the relationship of Jesus to the Father ὁ υἱός τοῦ θεοῦ “the Son of God,” and to mankind ὁ υἱός τοῦ ἀνθρωποῦ “the Son of Man,” both these expressions have the essential idea of Christ being the legal representative of God and the legal representative of man and could be expressed “the Son related to God” and “the Son related to mankind.”

*Genitive of Content.* The genitive of content modifies the main noun or verb by denoting its contents. An example is John 21:8: συροντες το δικτυον τῶν ἰχθυων “dragging the net **with fish**” (Cf. Mark 14:13; Acts 6:3; Col. 2:3). When used with the verb the idea is given by the translation “with” instead of “of” as in the following example: John 2:7: γεμισατε τας ὑδριας ὕδατος “Fill the waterpots with water.” An important theological construction is the use of being filled with the Holy Spirit as in Luke 1:15: και πνευματος ἁγιου πλησθησεται “and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit” (cf., Acts 2:4; Luke 2:40; 4:28; 6:13).

*Genitive of Material.* A genitive of material modifies the main noun by identifying the material it is made of. For example, Colossians 1:22: ἐν τῷ σωματι τῆς σαρκος αὐτοῦ “in the body of his flesh,” means His body is made of flesh.

*Adverbial Genitive.* The adverbial genitive relates a verbal idea attributing local or temporal relations. The main idea expressed is the kind of action.

1. *Genitive of time.* A genitive of time expresses when an action happens. For example John 3:2: ἦλθεν προς αὐτον νυκτος “He came to Him by night,” meaning he came to Him sometime in the night.” (cf. Matt. 25:6; John 19:39).

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<sup>2</sup> Dana & Mantly, (p. 76)

<sup>3</sup> The construction without the word “son” is common in colloquial Greek of the Koine period cf. John 21:15, Matt 4:21, Luke 24:10.

2. *Genitive of place.* The genitive of place is also called the genitive of space and identifies the where the action takes place. For example, Luke 16:24 ἵνα βαψῇ το ἄκρον τοῦ δακτυλοῦ αὐτοῦ ὕδατος “in order that he may dip the tip of his finger in water.” (cf. Matt. 1:12)
3. *Genitive of reference.* The genitive of reference limits the descriptive force to a particular frame of reference and can be translated with “with respect to,” or “in reference to.” For example, in Heb. 3:12 καρδια πονρα ἀπιστιας “A evil heart of unbelief.” ( cf. Heb. 5:13; James 1:13).

*Genitives with nouns of action.* A noun in the genitive can signify action. In this case the genitive noun indicates the thing that the action is referred and can be as the subject or the object of the verbal idea.

1. *Subjective genitive.* This construction occurs when the noun in the genitive *produces* the action. The genitive noun or pronoun acting as the subject in a genitive absolute construction with the participle functioning as the verb. An example is Mark 5:2: και ἐξεληθοντος αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πλοιοῦ “And when he came out of the boat.”
2. *Objective genitive.* The construction occurs when the noun in the genitive *receives* the action. An example is Matthew 12:31: ἡ δε τοῦ πνευματος βλασφημια οὐκ ἀφεθησεται “but the blasphemy of the Spirit shall not be forgiven.”

*Genitive of Apposition.* The genitive of apposition explains or identifies the main noun, providing additional information. The genitive stands in exact apposition with the noun it modifies. The meaning can be expressed further by the addition “that is,” “namely,” or “which is.” For example John 2:21: εκεινος δε ἔλεγεν περι τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σωματος “but he was speaking of the temple of his body,” which has the meaning “but he was speaking of the temple, that is, his body.” (cf. Rom. 4:11; 2 Cor. 5:1).

*Partitive Genitive.* The partitive genitive modifies the main noun by denoting which part it is identified with. Instead of the word “of,” you can substitute the words “which is a part of.” For example, Mark 2:6: τίες τῶν γραμματεων “certain ones of the scribes,” they are part of the group of scribes. (cf. Mark 6:23; Luke 19:8; Rom. 11:13; 11:17).