

QUESTION #22 – What is an article?

An article is the word “the” that is used to specifically point out or identify or draw attention to something specific. Articles always specifically particularize something.

Dana and Mantey say, “The function of the article is to point out an object or to draw attention to it. Its use makes the word stand out distinctly. Whenever the article occurs the object is certainly definite” (*A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 137).

The article “the” is the most used word in the New Testament. Dan Wallace observes: “It is used more frequently than any other word in the Greek NT (almost 20,000 times, or one out of seven words)” (*The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, p. 94).

Dan Wallace observed that to do complete justice to the article “the” one would have to study every use of every writer in the New Testament. But we may be certain of this fact and that is the use of the article “the” is never meaningless (*An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, pp. 207-208).

In English, the word “the” is called a definite article. The articles “a” or “an” are called indefinite articles. For example, there is “the Bible” is different in meaning than there is “a Bible.” In English, the lack of article tends to make the word it modifies lesser in importance.

But when it comes to God’s word written in Greek, there is no such thing as an indefinite article. So we do not call the article “the” a definite article but rather an article because the idea of indefinite article is non-existent.

When an article “the” is used before something, it is called an articular (no article) construction. The writer wants something specifically identified—“the Bible.” The writer means I want to draw attention to and identify this specific Bible.

When an article is not used before something, it is called an anarthrous construction. The writer is stressing the character and quality of something—“a Bible.” The writer means this Bible has all of the character and quality to it as to what a Bible is.

Dana and Mantey observed, “**The articular construction emphasizes identity; the anarthrous construction emphasizes character**” (*Ibid.*, p. 140).

It is extremely important to realize that the article “the” means one thing and the lack of an article means something else.

We will cite a critical Biblical example from **John 1:1**:

“In the beginning was **the Word** and **the word** was with **the God** and **the word** was God.”

There are four articles “the” used in this one verse, but the last proper noun God does not have an article.

Because of this some conclude (i.e. Mormons) what this means was **the word was a God and not the God**. They take the position that the missing article on the last noun “God” lessens the fact that He was “the God.”

But here is where understanding true grammar becomes important. When the article is not used, it is emphasizing the character and quality of something. So when John writes “the word was God,” what he is saying is that “the word is everything the character and quality of God was.”

In other words, not only was Jesus Christ the God, but His character and quality was fully God as well. So both in identity and quality, Jesus Christ is fully God.

Now often times the English translators of the Bible add an article “the” when it is not there or don’t include the article “the” when it is there for English purposes.

For example, in John 1:1 there is an article “the” before the first noun God and it is not translated in the KJV, NASV or NIV. The text literally reads:

“In beginning was the Word and the Word was with the God and God was the word.”

En arxh hn o logos kai o logos hn proç ton qeon kai qeoc hn o logos

For English understanding purposes, the English translators add an article “the” before beginning “In *the* beginning” and they eliminate the article “the” from the prepositional phrase “with God” and then they reverse the words “and God was the word” into “the word was God.”

The English translation that errs the most in the missing of or adding of articles is the King James Bible. Much of the King James Bible is based on the Latin Translation and there is no article in Latin. Therefore, as Dan Wallace observed, “the KJV translators frequently missed the nuances of the Greek article” (*An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, p. 208).

For example, in **Matthew 4:5**, the KJV reads the Devil took Jesus to “a pinnacle of the Temple.” The Greek text reads the Devil took Jesus to “the pinnacle of the Temple” (NASV, NIV).

In **Matthew 5:1**, the KJV/NIV reads Jesus went up into “a mountain.” The Greek text reads that Jesus went up into “the mountain” (NASV).

In **John 4:27**, the KJV reads Jesus talked with “the woman.” The Greek text reads that Jesus talked with “a woman” (NASV/NIV).

In **Luke 18:13**, the KJV/NIV reads “God be merciful to me a sinner.” The Greek text reads “God be merciful to me “the sinner” (NASV).

There are different ways the article “the” may be used:

Way #1 - The article may be used to point out a specific person or object.

Matthew 3:2 - “Repent for ‘**the** kingdom of **the** heavens’ is at hand.”

In Matthew, this phrase is used 32 times and only in Matthew. So this is a very specific Kingdom being offered from the heavens, which takes one immediately to the third heaven, the throne of God. The articles “the” are pointing this out.

Mark 1:10 - ...“He saw **the** heavens opening and **the** Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.”

This was not any Spirit descending; this was the heavenly, Holy Spirit descending upon Him. The article “the” makes that clear.

Mark 13:24 - “But in those **the** days after that **the** Tribulation, **the** sun will be darkened and **the** moon will not give **the** light of it.”

This is very specific information that God is giving by using these articles:

- 1) The specific days when this will happen will be after “The Tribulation”
- 2) The specific sun will be darkened.
- 3) The specific moon will not give its light.

We have specific days, specific times, specific places when and where this will take place.

John 1:21 - “Are you **the** prophet?”

John is being asked whether he was the specific Messianic prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15 to be sent by God. Just before God establishes the kingdom for Israel, it is predicted that a specific prophet would come. This is the question they are asking.

John 19:5 - “Pilate said to them, ‘Behold, **the** man!’”

Pilate is specifically pointing out Jesus Christ. He is the One who is on trial and that this was the specific man with whom he found no fault (v. 4).

Way #2 - The article may be used to point out a previous reference.

Sometimes an article “the” may be used to point back to something specific in the context. Usually when this construction is used, the initial first mention does not have the article.

John 4:11 - “...where then do You get “**the** living water.”

In **John 4:10**, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that He could give her living water. There is no article “the” used in connection with this living water. But in **verse 11**, the woman asks about “the living water” He just previously mentioned.

Actually there are two articles used here. One article “the” is before “living” and another article “the” is before water. Literally “the water, the living *water*.” The article “the” becomes contextually critical because Jesus just referred to this in **verse 10**. He also discusses and develops this idea in **verses 13-14**. In **verse 14**, the noun water has the article “the” with it to refer to the living water He previously mentioned.

John 4:40, 43 - “...and He stayed there two days” (v. 40). “After **the** two days” (v. 43).

When John writes Jesus stayed with the Samaritans two days in **verse 40**, he does not use an article but when he mentions He left Samara to go into Galilee, he uses the article “the” to refer to the same two days previously mentioned.

John 4:50 - “Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son lives.’ **The** man believed the word ...”.

The specific man to whom this article “the” refers is the official that was previously mentioned in the context in **verse 46**. There is no article used in **verse 46**, but it is specifically used in **verse 50** to refer back to that specific official.

This is how the article of previous reference works. Again we see the importance of context.

Way #3 - The article may be used to point out something specific about an abstract noun.

The Bible will often use the article “the” to specifically point out something about the noun. For example, the noun “grace” may contain the article “the” to show this is specific grace. The noun “love” may contain the article “the” to show that this is specific love. The noun “faith” may contain the article “the” to show that this is specific faith. The noun “truth” may contain the article “the” to show that this is specific truth.

Luke 18:13 - “God be merciful to me **the** sinner.”

Jesus uses the article “the” to show that the one who is justified is the specific individually who admits to God that he is the specific sinner who needs to be justified.

Romans 4:5 - But to **the** one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies **the** ungodly **the** faith of him is credited as righteousness.”

Specific faith in Jesus Christ means that any ungodly person will be credited as being righteous. It is not any faith that does this; it is faith that specifically believes in Christ and not works.

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I Corinthians 13:4 - “**The** love is patient; **the** love is kind, **the** love does not brag and is not arrogant.”

The use of the article here specifies that this is the specific love of God.

Ephesians 2:8 - “For by **the** grace you have been saved through faith.”

This use of the article makes it clear that this is the specific salvific grace of God that saves.

Way #4 - The article “**the**” is used to point out specific identities and names of individuals.

For example, this is “the Jesus.” This is “the Paul.” This is “the John.”

Acts 19:13 - “I adjure you by **the** Jesus whom Paul preaches.”

Paul was preaching about a specific Jesus and the Jewish exorcists knew about the specific Jesus he was preaching. Also Paul does not have an article before his name stressing the importance of identifying Jesus in this.

It is interesting that it has been observed that the article “the” appears with the name Jesus 909 times in the New Testament and the article “the” does not appear with the name Jesus some 359 times (Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 143).

Romans 9:5 - “**the** Christ is **the** one who is God blessed forever.”

The article “the” specifically identifies Jesus Christ as God.

Colossians 4:11 - “and also Jesus, who is **the** called Justice.”

This is fascinating because there was apparently a man in the Colossian church whose name was Jesus. Paul does not use the article “the” before his name, but he does use one to say this is “the one” called Justice.

I Thessalonians 1:2 - “We give thanks to the God...”

The specific God is the God of the Bible