

Notes on the Genitive of Comparison in John 7:31

Ὁ Χριστὸς ὅταν ἔλθῃ μὴ πλείονα σημεῖα ποιήσει ὧν οὗτος ἐποίησεν;

1. Start with an easy example of the genitive of comparison:

John 14:28, ὁ πατὴρ μείζων μου ἐστίν

- μείζων is the comparative adjective
- μου is the genitive of comparison
- If: “X is greater than Y,” then ‘Y’ is the gen/comparison
- Thus: “The Father [X] is greater than me [Y, the Son].”

Theology note: The reference here is to what theologians call the *economic trinity*, not the ontological trinity. The Father is greater than the Son in terms of office/function (he is the Sender, the Son is the Sent One). In ontological terms, the Father, as a person, is equal with the Son.

2. Note the *structure* of John 7:31

What is the kernel?

| | | |
|-----------|-------|--------|
| ὁ χριστὸς | ποιεῖ | σημεῖα |
|-----------|-------|--------|

What kind of statement is it? How is it punctuated?

3. Kernel modifiers

- The kernel is negated: μὴ (implies a rhetorical “no” answer)
- Subordinate temporal clause: ὅταν ἔλθῃ
- Comparative adjective: πλείονα (comparative form of πολυς, *great*, thus: *greater*)

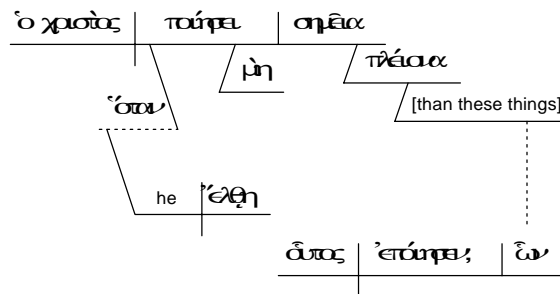
4. Relative clause

ὧν οὗτος ἐποίησεν



Normally a relative pronoun will be in whatever case is appropriate to its *function* in its clause (here we would expect an accusative to tell us what “this one” did). But sometimes the relative pronoun is *attracted* to the case of its antecedent, and other times (as here) it may be genitive if it is a comparative statement.

5. Full diagram



In the diagram, I’ve supplied the “than” from the gen. of comparison and the “these things” to clarify what is being compared; it is somewhat redundant since that also comes from the relative pronoun. Some would simply place an (x) in this slot, but spelling out the comparison makes the diagram more intelligible—and doing so in English makes it clear that I’m supplying it rather than finding this explicit in the text.

6. Formal equivalent translation:

The Messiah, when he comes, will not do greater works that these things which this one [Jesus] has done will he?

Expected rhetorical answer: No.

Their question does not state directly that Jesus is the Messiah, thus the speakers *distinguish between* Messiah (ὁ Χριστός) and Jesus (οὗτος). But the *implication* of their question (implied by the choice of the negative μή) is: this one (Jesus) has done everything that Messiah was prophesied to do, therefore it would seem to us that Jesus must be Messiah since Messiah couldn’t do/be anything more than Jesus.