

## Vocabulary (7/31/13)

- 1.) τίς, τί = who? what? which? why?
- 2.) ἄνθρωπος = man (as in mankind, human, a person; not in the sense of an adult male)
- 3.) τις, τι = someone/thing, a certain one/thing, anyone/thing
- 4.) ὡς = as, like, when, that, how, about
- 5.) εἰ = if
- 6.) οὖν = therefore, then
- 7.) κατά = down (locally), according to
- 8.) μετά = with, after
- 9.) ὁράω = I see
- 10.) ἀκούω = I hear
- 11.) πολὺς, πολλή, πολὺ = much (singular), many (plural)

There are two word "families" that express negation: the οὐ family and the μή family. We have already encountered both of these words in our vocabulary lists.

As a principle, when a question is posed that has a negative in it, if the enquirer uses οὐ it can be pure inquiry or having within it the supposition of an affirmative answer. Whenever μή (or a member of its "family") is employed, a negative answer is anticipated or entertained.

┌ Aren't you doing well in Greek class? ┐

└ You aren't doing well in Greek class. Are You? ┘

In English, the first question assumes that you are doing well in Greek class. In Greek, this would be asked with οὐ. In the second sentence, because a negative response is assumed, this would be written with a μή. Note that both questions have the same words in them. Again, what we do with word order, the Greek is doing a different way: with use of either οὐ or μή. These two questions could be worded exactly the same with the exception of the negatives employed: same words and word order. Only the negatives utilized would differ.

See your handout by A.T. Robertson for a fuller treatment of this idiom.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE NEW TESTAMENT USE OF $\mu\acute{\eta}$ WITH HESITANT QUESTIONS IN THE INDICATIVE MODE

BLASS seems disturbed by the use of  $\mu\acute{\eta}$  with questions in John 4:29; 7:26; 21:5, where  $\mu\acute{\eta}$  "hardly lends itself to the meaning, 'certainly not, I suppose,'" (*Grammar of New Testament Greek*, p. 254, note 2). Blass was a classicist and lays down the normal rule that  $\omicron\acute{\iota}$  is used where an affirmative answer is expected and  $\mu\acute{\eta}$  where a negative answer is expected. It properly lays stress on the fact that "the negative used depends on the answer expected, and not on the actual answer given." In other words, the negative used, whether  $\omicron\acute{\iota}$  or  $\mu\acute{\eta}$ , is determined by the mind of the questioner, not by that of the one who replies. If the questioner asks a rhetorical question and makes his own reply, the principle is the same.

Moulton (*Prolegomena*, p. 170, note) rightly argues that the use of  $\mu\acute{\eta}$  or  $\mu\acute{\eta}\tau\iota$  in hesitant questions "is not really inappropriate." In independent sentences in the New Testament  $\mu\acute{\eta}$  is retained only in questions, but is quite frequent in this idiom. There are fifty-six such examples of  $\mu\acute{\eta}$  in the New Testament, thirteen of  $\mu\acute{\eta}\tau\iota$ , one of  $\mu\acute{\eta}\tau\omicron\tau\epsilon\epsilon$ , and one of  $\mu\acute{\eta}\tau\iota\tau\epsilon$ , seventy-one in all. Twenty-two of the sev-

enty-one are in the Fourth Gospel and twenty-five in Paul's Epistles, but only twelve in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts, according to Moulton and Geden's Concordance. There are no instances in Hebrews, the Johannine Epistles and the Apocalypse, or the Petrine Epistles.

Most of the examples are plain enough and reflect the clear feeling of the questioner. The idiom is commonest in the Gospels in the words of Jesus, where he makes a vehement or indignant or rhetorical appeal to his hearers. The same idiom occurs in parallel passages as in Matt. 7:9 f. (= Luke 11:11), Matt. 9:15 (= Mark 2:19 = Luke 5:34), Matt. 11:23 (= Luke 10:15). Paul sometimes expresses his indignant denial by  $\mu\eta$  γένοιτο after the question with  $\mu\eta$  as in Rom. 3:3; 9:14; 11:1, 11. Paul also uses  $\mu\eta$   $\acute{\omicron}\nu$  in a question where the  $\acute{\omicron}\nu$  coalesces with the verb and the  $\mu\eta$  is the negative of the question as in Rom. 10:18, 19; 1 Cor. 9:4, 5. It is not easy to reproduce this idiom in English, though it is plain in the Greek. We may do it by the use of "fail" as in Rom. 10:18: "Did they fail to hear?" In 1 Cor. 12:29, 30, Paul has a string of questions with  $\mu\eta$ , but they are all according to form. In 1 Cor. 9:6 Paul uses  $\acute{\omicron}\nu$  —  $\mu\eta$  where  $\acute{\omicron}\nu$  negatives the question and  $\mu\eta$  the infinitive. It is slightly confusing in English, but clear in the Greek. In Romans 11:2 Paul uses  $\acute{\omicron}\nu\lambda$  ἀπώσατο as the answer to  $\mu\eta$  ἀπόσατο:

But the really troublesome hesitant questions occur mainly in John's Gospel. Here the solution lies in the psychology of the questioner rather than in the

strictly grammatical form. We must always bear in mind that in actual speech people do not bother about rules of grammar. Language is a servant, not a master. We must watch for the light and shadow that play on the face and catch the tones of the voice if we wish to gather the real meaning of the speaker. Half at least of human speech is what is not said in words, but is expressed in the flash of fire from the eye and the lips. It is for this reason that written language is a poor substitute for the spoken word. There is power in the pen of the ready writer who has learned the art of delicate and accurate expression of thought. But in conversation and in public address that is sincere there is the full play of the personality that far transcends mere words.

Hence men have so much difficulty in interpreting written language. Lawyers higggle over the technicalities of a will or a code of laws. Preachers become metaphysical hairsplitters in the explanation of a passage of Scripture because they fail to read between the lines and to visualize properly the atmosphere of the saying. The historical imagination is essential to correct interpretation and to effective preaching. The preacher who sees men as trees walking will speak to an audience that does not see them at all.

In John 4:12 we have the normal use of  $\mu\eta$ , expecting the negative answer. "Art thou greater than our father Jacob?" The Samaritan woman thus expresses, if she used Greek (or John does it for her, if she used Aramaic), her surprise at Jesus

for claiming to be able to give her "living water." So far so good. But in 4:29 the same woman uses  $\mu\eta\tau\iota$  in a question<sup>1</sup> that seems to call for an affirmative reply. She is speaking to her friends and neighbors in the city of Sychar and is seeking to interest them in Jesus, who has confessed himself to her as the Messiah both of the Jews and of the Samaritans (4:25 f). Apparently she ought to have employed  $\sigma\upsilon\chi$  or even  $\sigma\upsilon\chi\iota$ , for she cannot wish to discredit the claims of Jesus, whom she has just accepted as the Messiah. But she does not employ  $\sigma\upsilon\chi$ , because to do so would have challenged the opinion of Samaritans to a Jew as Jesus was (cf. 4:9). Besides, if she had taken a public and positive stand for Jesus as the Messiah, many would have instantly assumed an antagonistic attitude before they had seen and heard him. She evidently wishes to avoid arousing needless antagonism and to excite curiosity by raising the question in a more or less doubtful and debatable form, without being dogmatic herself. It is a dull interpreter who stumbles over this use of  $\mu\eta\tau\iota$  by the Samaritan woman. It is merely interpretation by the rule of thumb to say that the Samaritan woman was disloyal to Jesus in using  $\mu\eta\tau\iota$ , or that John misrepresents her real mood in so doing. It is a woman who is speaking, a woman who knows how to pique the interest of her neighbors in a great sensation. For it was the biggest sensation of the time if the Messiah was in reality near Sychar. The results justified her insight and her skill. The townsfolk went forth at once ( $\xi\psi\eta\lambda\theta\omicron\nu\nu$ )

<sup>1</sup>  $\text{Μηποτε οδους εστιν ο Χριστος};$

and went out in a stream ( $\eta\psi\chi\omicron\nu\nu\tau\omicron$ ) towards Jacob's Well, where Jesus was. In the end many believed on Jesus and said, "Now we believe not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (4:42). By her subtle intuition she kept herself in the background and avoided controversy and won them to Jesus as the Messiah. All this is involved in her use of  $\mu\eta\tau\iota$ . The Revised Version renders the question thus: "Can this be the Christ?" That is a fair translation, for it avoids committing her to a negative response. It is a species of linguistic camouflage, this use of  $\mu\eta$  when one declines to take a positive stand. It is not fear with the Samaritan woman, but shrewdness that leads to this form of inquiry. A similar excited and timid use of  $\mu\eta\tau\iota$  occurs in Matt. 12:23.

In John 7:26 we find  $\mu\eta\pi\omicron\tau\epsilon$  employed by the rabble of Jerusalem, as reported or translated by John, to throw ridicule on the rulers in Jerusalem: "Can it be that the rulers indeed know that this is the Christ?"<sup>2</sup> It is irony or sarcasm, as shown by the continuance in verse 27: "Howbeit we know this man whence he is." Here the syntax of  $\mu\eta\pi\omicron\tau\epsilon$  is not so subtle as that of  $\mu\eta\tau\iota$  in 4:29, but there is the quick flash of scorn at the rabbis for their cowardice in the actual presence of Jesus after their loud professions of courage before he came. One only needs nimble wit to see the beauty of the Greek idiom here.

The lightning play of emotion in  $\mu\eta$  in questions

<sup>2</sup>  $\text{Μηποτε εληθως εγνωσαν οι αρχοντες οτι ουδεις εστιν ο Χριστος};$

comes out finely in John 7:45-52. When the officers returned to the Sanhedrin without Jesus, they were met with a sharp *οὐκ* as to why they had not brought Jesus under arrest. On their reply the Pharisees sneered at them in two questions with *μή*: "Are ye also led astray? Hath any of the rulers believed on him, or of the Pharisees?" Now Nicodemus interposes with a timid point of order or legal procedure with *μή*: "Doth our law judge a man except it first hear from himself and know what he doeth?" This is an adroit question on the part of Nicodemus (cf. my *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 1168) and is in perfect form and syntax, but it rouses the Sanhedrin to fury for one of their own number to champion the cause of Jesus, even when he is in the right. So they storm at Nicodemus with *μή*: "Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." They tear a passion to tatters and tell a falsehood to bolster their prejudices, for Galilee had produced prophets. They strongly suspect Nicodemus of affinities with the Galilean, though the form of the question for propriety's sake has *μή*. They really mean *οὐ* though they use *μή*. See a similar scornful use of *μή* in John 8:22, where the Pharisees scout the claims of Jesus, about going where they cannot come. They ask if he will kill himself, using *μή*, though devoutly wishing that he would do so. This is quite in contrast to Pilate's rage at the Jews, when he blurted out at Jesus (with *μή*): "Am I a Jew?"

Once more in John 21:5 there is nothing at all the matter with the use of *μή* by Jesus: "Children, have

ye aught to eat?" Clearly *οὐ* would have been too abrupt and harsh on the part of a stranger. So he delicately employs *μή*. It is really more polite and courteous to use *μή*, when one makes an inquiry that implies asking a favor. It makes it easy for a negative answer without any strain in one's relations. The very fact of such a question implies the possibility of an affirmative reply else it would not have been made at all. And yet the use of *μή* or *μή* by no means compels a negative reply. In the case in John 21:5 the disciples promptly replied *οὐ*, for they had caught nothing all night. Now the way was clear for Jesus to offer his help, whereas before it might have seemed an impertinence. In English we manage it by saying: "You haven't had breakfast, have you?" We employ two clauses to catch the delicate nuances of *μή* in Greek.

So in John 18:17 the maid that kept the door said to Peter (using *μή*): "Art thou also one of this man's disciples?" She means that he is, but with a woman's delicate insight implies that he is not, so as to give him a hole by which to slip out. And Peter slips out with a blunt *οὐκ εἶμι*. But he was a disciple and the maid knew it, her syntax or John's to the contrary notwithstanding. In 18:25 the servants gather round Peter once more and use *μή*: "Art thou also one of his disciples?" Peter hotly retorts *οὐκ εἶμι*, but he does not convince anyone, least of all himself. But now at last a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden stepped up to Peter and used, not *μή*, but *οὐκ*: "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?"

This οβχ was like a pistol shot at Peter, and revealed in a flash his peril, and so he plunged deeper into the bog of denial and the cock crew.

There is a striking use of ὡττι in Matt. 26:22, 25, where in grief and amazement the disciples one by one began to ask: "Is it I, Lord?" It looks as if Judas hesitated till Jesus said: "But woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had not been born." Then Judas, knowing that Jesus knew, and not wishing the disciples to know, his purpose, brazenly asked (with ὡττι): "Is it I, Rabbi?" Judas had to use ὡττι to save his face, but he did not save it, for Jesus gave the affirmative reply: "Thou has said."

So we see that in the interpretation of ὡττι in hesitant questions we must go beyond mere rules of grammar into the principles of speech which have a psychological basis. Psychology is a rich field for the preacher, not only in the delivery of the message to living hearers, but also in catching on to the real meaning of the spoken or the written language which one interprets. One needs the mind of the Spirit of God if he is to understand the things of the human spirit.