

Posted 19th december 2009

Someone requested some clarifications on the use of *μενοῦν* and *μενοῦνγε* in the NT. This is my answer, which may be of some interest to other readers of my web site.

Μενοῦν and μενοῦνγε in the NT

The first word is compounded of the particles *μέν* and *οὔν*, while the second has, in addition, the particle *γε*. The following analysis is important, because the compounded words sometimes have acquired a new meaning, while at other times they preserve the individual meanings of the words of which they are compounded.

1. Asseverative Uses of μέν

The word *μέν* is both a confirmatory, asseverative particle used in solemn affirmations as well as an adversative conjunction used to indicate contrast or opposition, particularly with *δέ* (e.g. *μέν ... δέ ...*, *οἱ μέν ... οἱ δέ ...*).

What interests us at this juncture are the confirmatory, asseverative uses of this particle. As I have shown in my study «The use of Interrogative, Confirmatory, and Asseverative Particles (*εἰ - ἦ, ἦ - ἦ, ἦ μήν [ἦμήν] ἦ μέν, εἰ μήν*) in the Septuagint»¹ *μέν* is occasionally used in lieu of the somewhat stronger *μήν*, i.e. in the expression *ἦ μέν* (e.g. Homeros, *Odyseia*, X.65: *ἦ μέν σ' ἐνδυκέως ἀπεπέμπομεν* “Surely we sent you off with the best care”) for which Homeros more often uses *ἦ μήν* (e.g. *Ilias*, II. 291: *ἦ μήν καὶ πόνος ἐστὶν ἀνιηθέντα νέεσθαι* “Indeed, there is enough toil to make one come home discouraged”). This use of *μέν*, preceded by *ἦ* or *εἰ*, which cannot be distinguished from *ἦ μήν* or *εἰ μήν*, is employed to confirm, to solemnly affirm, or to introduce an oath. In this sense *μέν* is used in combination with the following particles: *ἦ μέν, οὐ μέν, μὴ μέν, καὶ μέν, γὰρ μέν, ἀλλὰ μέν, μέν δή*. In all these cases Homeros has *μήν* instead of *μέν*. It is this confirmatory, asseverative function of *μέν* (= *μήν*) that is present in the compound *μενοῦν* and *μενοῦνγε*.

2. Confirmatory and Inferential οὔν

¹ This study is to be published by Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, in the Summer of 2009 in a volume on the Septuagint, edited by Ev. Dafni.

The word οὖν is both a confirmatory and an inferential adverb (*then, therefore*, e.g. Xenophon, *Kyrou Paideia*, IV.1.20: καὶ σὺ οὖν ἡμῖν δίκαιος εἶ ἀντιχαρίζεσθαι “you, too, *therefore*, be just, showing kindness in return”). The confirmatory sense is seen in Homeros, *Ilias*, II. 350: φημὶ γὰρ οὖν κατανεῦσαι ὑπερμενέα Κρονίωνα ἡματι ... “For I *affirm* that (*in truth*) Kronos’ son, exceedingly mighty, nodded on the day ...”

3. *Emphatic γε*

Finally, γε is an emphatic enclitic particle that is used closely with a word in order to emphasize it. In speech, the word or name which is emphasized by γε is sounded more loudly: Homeros, *Odysseia*, XVII. 475: ἀλλ’ εἴ που πτωχῶν γε θεοί ... “But if for *beggars* there are gods, ...” (“*beggars*’ is emphasized). When this particle is joined to personal pronouns, its function is to emphasize the pronoun: e.g. ἔγωγε (quite often in Platon’s dialogues) “I [for my part]”, in which an implicit or explicit antithesis is intended to someone else in the sentence.

This brief analysis of the meaning of each particle in the compounds μενοῦν and μενοῦνγε, will hopefully serve to make the meaning of these compounds clearer. As was hinted at, above, sometimes a compound of μέν with various other particles is used in such a way that each element preserves its own meaning, while at other times the compound acquires a new meaning.

4. *Compounds with μέν preserving the meaning of each particle*

In Homeros, *Ilias*, II.1: “Ἄλλοι μὲν ῥά θεοί τε καὶ ἄνδρες ἵπποκορυσταὶ εὔδον παννύχιοι, Δία δ’ οὐκ ἔχε νήδυμος ὕπνος “*Now* all the other gods and men, master charioteers, were sleeping the whole night, *but* Zeus was not overcome by sweet sleep”. Here the enclitic particle ῥά (a shortened form of ἄρα) preserves its own meaning, which is not conflated with that of μέν. Μέν is used adversatively to contrast the sleep of the other gods and men with Zeus’ sleeplessness (δέ elided). Similar is the following example with οὖν: Homeros, *Odysseia*, IV. 780: νῆα μὲν οὖν πᾶμπρωτον ἀλὸς βένθοσδε ἔρυσσαν, ἐν δ’ ἰστόν τ’ ἐτίθεντο καὶ ἰστία νηὶ μελαίνῃ “First of all they drew the ship into the deep sea, and set the mast and the sails in the black ship”. There is a very fine contrast between *their first action*, whereby they drew the ship into the sea (expressed by μέν οὖν) and *then their following actions* of setting up the mast and the sails (expressed by δέ ... τε).

5. *Compounds of μέν acquiring a new meaning*

Often when used together with other particles, the compounds with μέν acquire a new meaning: μέν γε “at least” (Aristophanes, *Acharnes*, 145: τοῦτο μὲν γ’ ἤδη σαφές “this, at least, is clear”),

Μέν οὖν occurs often also in answers in order to express strong confirmation. For example in Platon, *Theaitetos*, 158 d, to Sokrates’ question to Theaitetos whether the latter understands a certain matter, Theaitetos answers: παντάπασι μὲν οὖν “I certainly do” or “altogether [*sc.* I understand]”. Other answers include: κομιδὴ μὲν οὖν (*Theaitetos*, 159 e), πάνυ μὲν οὖν (*Theaitetos*, 159b), all of which have the same meaning. Here the phrase μέν οὖν has acquired a new meaning, which is not the sum total of the meanings of each of the two component particles.

As a consequence of its frequent use, μέν οὖν came to be used also as a transitional conjunction to what follows: Thoukydides I. 15: Τὰ μὲν οὖν ναυτικὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων τοιαῦτα ἦν, τὰ τε παλαιὰ καὶ τὰ ὕστερον γεγόμενα “Now such were the sea enterprises of the Athenians, both the older and the later events”.

Μέν οὖν occurs also in answers, to give stronger confirmation to the question and at the same time to correct and complement the question. Thus, in Aristophanes, *Ekklesiazousai*, 1102: ἄρ’ οὐ κακοδαίμων εἰμί; βαρυδαίμων μὲν οὖν ἀνὴρ καὶ δυστυχής. Commiserating his plight, the wretched man asks “Am I not ill-starred?” Then, he broods and answers his own question by intensifying (and thereby) correcting his description of himself as ‘ill-starred’ (κακοδαίμων—a very frequent word that was losing its cutting edge), by using an infrequent and stronger word ‘one with a heavily evil fate’ (βαρυδαίμων). See also Euripides, *Hippolytos*, 1012: μάταιος ἄρ’ ἦν, οὐδαμοῦ μὲν οὖν φρενῶν “Therefore, I was a fool, what am I saying a fool? *Rather* I was without any senses at all”. His second evaluation of himself is much stronger than his first evaluation. So, here, too, there is not only confirmation but also correction and intensification.

6. Μενοῦν[γε] in the New Testament

It is here (in the last paragraph, above) that our example in Lk 11:28 belongs. The woman in the crowd gives free vent to her amazement at Jesus’ stupendous teaching, by crying out with a woman’s feelings and pride: μακαρία ἡ κοιλία ἡ βαστάσασά σε καὶ μαστοὶ οὗς ἐθήλασας “Happy is the womb (a metonymy for woman) that bore you and the breasts which you sucked”. To this, Jesus, in line with his non-emotional, matter of fact teaching, replies: μενοῦν μακάριοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ φυλάσσουντες “*Rather / it is more correct to say* that happy are those who hear the Word of God and observe / keep it”.

Introducing the sentence with μενοῦν is post-classical Greek (NT; in the LXX μενοῦν is preceded by another word). So is also the form μενοῦνγε. The addition of γε is merely a strengthened form of μενοῦν. As is the case with many Greek

words and phrases, in post-classical times they began losing something of their original force, which led to the use of compounded forms in order to recapture the original meaning. This fact is seen also in the manuscript transmission, which for Lk 11:18 there are manuscripts having the *vario lectio* μενοῦνγε. In the critical editions of the NT μενοῦν occurs only at Lk 11:18 (for which the majority of manuscripts have μενοῦνγε) and μενοῦνγε in Rom 9:20; 10:18; and Phil 3:8.

In Rom 9:20 Paul's imaginary interlocutor puts forward the objection (trying to show that God is unjust): τί οὖν ἔτι μέμφεται; τῷ γὰρ βουλήματι αὐτοῦ τίς ἀνθέστηκεν; "Why is he still finding fault [with us humans]? For who has stood / can stand against his will"? In view of the criticism that is here directed toward God, Paul now contrasts the littleness and insignificance of man with God. Some manuscripts introduce Paul's answer with μενοῦνγε, others have the expression μενοῦνγε after the vocative ὃ ἄνθρωπε. All the same, the phrase μενοῦνγε has the function of confirming the littleness of man, by emphasizing the phrase ὃ ἄνθρωπε. That is, "you who are a mere man and no more, how can you / who are you to question, controvert, gainsay what God has willed?" Thus, μενοῦνγε here must be understood in close connection with ὃ ἄνθρωπε, that is, qualifying the vocative, by underlining his weak, ephemeral humanness.

In Rom 10:18 μενοῦνγε has a similar sense as in Lk 11:28 and the classical examples preceding (see above), that is, emphasizing what has been asked and confirming and correcting it: ἀλλὰ λέγω, μὴ οὐκ ἤκουσαν; "But I ask, Have they not heard [the message]?" He answers his rhetorical question by a stronger and correcting answer: Μενοῦνγε· εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐζήληθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν "Certainly and more than that. [And then he quotes a Ps text]. Their word [here applied to the Gospel] has gone out in all the earth".

In Phil 3:8 after enumerating his various Jewish privileges and blameless life according to Jewish standards, Paul declares that what normally should have been looked upon as gains (κέρδη) he has considered as damage (ζημία) for Christ's sake. Then he goes on to express his opinion that considering these things a ζημία is not merely a thing of the past (of which he has forgotten), but that it is a current reality in his life. This is signaled by the strong adversative ἀλλά and the strengthening, confirmatory, μενοῦνγε, which take the declaration much further than its previous phase (vs. 7). "But whatever things were for me a gain, I considered a damage. In fact, I consider all things (that might stand in my way) a damage on account of the surpassing knowledge of Christ". Here μενοῦνγε strengthens the ἀλλά, which implies an antithesis and an advance to what is said in vs. 7.