

IS ACTS 1:11 THE PAROUSIA?

by William H. Bell, Jr.

It is quite astounding that some will retreat to the haven of every passage they can find that does not explicitly mention or include a time reference in order to escape the preponderance of evidence of an imminent return in "coming again" passages which show the Parousia as being at hand (engus), and coming in the lifetime of the first-century generation. (Matt.10:23; 16:27,28; 24:3,14,34; 26:64; Rom.13:11-12; 16:20; 1 Cor.1:7-8; 10:11; Phil.4:5; Heb.10:37; Jas.5:7-8; 1 John 2:17-18; Rev.1:1-3, 22:6,10,12). Many who do this seem totally unaware that such is a desperate effort to avoid, evade, and escape the issue. They apparently reason that using a scripture that does not have an explicit time reference cancels out the passages that include it. This is the same error the "Jehovah's Witnesses" make on their interpretation of Adam's death, Gen.2:16,17; 3:6; 5:5); that the Jews made on the raising of the temple of Christ's body (Matt.27:40; John 2:19-21); and that the premillennialists make on the establishment of the kingdom (Mk.1:14-15; Lk.21:32). In every case noted above, the failure to honor God's time statements forces an erroneous interpretation and application.

One can make a time-prophecy teach anything and anytime of fulfillment by such tactics. For example, if one were to fail to consider the time statements and facts found in other passages, the kingdom could be taught as yet future. Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come" (Matt.6:10). At the time those words were spoken, the kingdom was clearly future and therefore the propriety of praying for its arrival. Now would it not be very inexcusable exegesis to camp out on this text and make the assertion that the kingdom is yet future? Sure, this seems quite elementary, but it is exactly the reasoning and methods resorted to on "coming again" passages. Remember, one and one is two; belief and baptism equal salvation; and in time prophecies, the time and manner equals fulfillment. In the words of the Psalmist, "The sum of Thy word is truth..." (Psa.119:160, ASV). The late and eminent Foy E. Wallace, Jr. stated this principle in the following words. "The fulfillment of prophecy cannot be separated from TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCES (emp. mine, WHB) stated by the prophet." God's Prophetic Word, p.165.

One text where this obvious fallacy of reasoning is evident is in the misuse and abuse of Acts 1:11 as an "answer" or objection to coming again passages which show an imminent return of Christ. The attempt to array Acts 1:11 over against Heb.10:37, "FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY," and Jas.5:8, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming (parousia) of the Lord is at hand," staggers the imagination. The aim of this writing is to demonstrate that Acts 1:11 is in harmony with all the other time passages and that the interpretations argued for "in like manner," to circumvent such teachings raise insurmountable difficulties.

First, it is agreed by all that Acts 1:11, "...this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven," refers to the Parousia. Jesus used the term "parousia," (presence) four times in Matthew 24, speaking of his return. Two of those references, verses 3 and 27, are before verse 34 (that mysteriously invisible and so-called "continental dividing line"). "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled." Most agree that all coming before verse 34 is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.. Therefore, they are led to the inescapable conclusion that the "parousia" of verses 3 and 27 occurred in 70 A.D., within that first-century generation.

In addition, Jesus used the term "parousia" in two verses following verse 34, in 37 and 39. Are there two "parousias"? Is there no significance in the use of that definite article "the" in the Greek? Which "the" parousia is "THE" parousia? Which "the" parousia is the fall of Jerusalem, and which "the" parousia is the "second coming"? Inspiration anticipated this erroneous reasoning by placing the events before verse 34, which undeniably describe the fall of Jerusalem (Matt.24:15-17), in the same time as the day when the Son of Man is revealed (Luke 17:26-32), which is undeniably Christ's "parousia." It follows therefore, that Matthew 24 is one harmonious delineation of the fall of Jerusalem and parousia of Christ in 70 A.D..

Harmony Of The Parousia In The Epistles

Second, there is no distinction of "comings" in the epistles that justify two "parousias" taught in Matthew 24. (1 Cor.15:23; 1 Thess.2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 2 Thess.2:1,8; Jas.5:7,8; 2 Pet.1:16; 3:4,12; 1 Jn.2:18). Again, God in His infinite wisdom anticipated the errors of those who would teach that "the Lord delayeth his parousia" or did not keep his promise (2 Pet.3:4), by placing a time reference in the epistles in connection with the parousia just as He did in Matthew 24.

Observe:

"All these things shall come upon this (1st cent.) generation."

The "parousia" is included in these things, vv.3-34 (vv.3,27).

Therefore the "parousia" occurred in that (1st cent.) generation.

Parousia "At Hand"

The parousia was said to be at hand (engus) or near in respect to time, when James wrote in or about A.D.60, just 10 years before the demise of Jerusalem and the Jewish state. "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming (parousia) of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming (parousia) of the Lord draweth nigh," (is at hand, engus). Berry's interlinear literally translates, "...has drawn near" (Jas.5:7,8).

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Now, if one considers the fact that Acts 1:11 is speaking of the parousia (though the word "parousia" is not used in the text), then we have: (1) Jesus saying that Acts 1:11 would occur, be fulfilled, in "this (first century) generation," and (2) James saying that Acts 1:11 is at hand in respect to time about A.D.60. What further proof is needed to show that the parousia (Acts 1:11) was at hand than a direct scriptural reference that uses both terms, "parousia" and "engus" in the same text? Any interpretation of Acts 1:11 that fails to honor the time limitations for the parousia is not "exegesis" but "eisegesis"! The only escape is to deny that Acts 1:11 is speaking of the parousia. Are we ready for that?

In conclusion, it has been noted that the basic error of using passages which do not expressly mention time statements to refute those which do is a scriptural miscalculation and misuse of sound Biblical principles. Foy E. Wallace, Jr., in the reference noted, demolished the claims of premillennialism on the "postponement" and not-yet-come kingdom theories by using the principle of "time and circumstances" to arrive at the truth on time prophecies. This principle is catastrophic to the not-yet-come parousia theories traditionally embedded into the hearts of many today. The subject of the "parousia" in Matthew 24 is one and the same, agreeing time-wise with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.. That was the only parousia or return of Christ in the New Testament and which James said was "at hand" (Jas.5:7,8). Acts 1:11 must mark "time" with it or find itself court-martialed out of the ranks of the "parousia" or "coming again" passages.

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