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Παραπεσόντας IN HEBREWS 6:6

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The author defends the view that the participle παραπεσόντας in Heb 6:6 must be understood as an adjectival-substantival participle rather than an adverbial participle. As such, the participle cannot be taken as a conditional participle and translated as the protasis of a conditional statement. Since it is not the purpose of the author to exegete the entire pericope (Heb 6:4-6), appeal is made primarily to the grammatical structure involved and to a survey made of several prominent NT and Greek scholars in the United States, England, and Germany.

* * *

THE PROBLEM

How the participle παραπεσόντας is understood in Heb 6:6 will significantly determine how the exegete ultimately will interpret the Heb 6:4-6 pericope. Other factors (immediate context, the overall context of the epistle, theological harmonization with the other warning passages and with established theology in general) must obviously be given full weight also if the passage is to be interpreted adequately.

However, to attempt a full-blown exegesis of this pericope is not the purpose of this brief article.¹ It is the intention of this writer to defend the view that παραπεσόντας should not be taken as an adverbial (or, circumstantial) participle and, therefore, it cannot be taken as a conditional participle and translated into English as the protasis ("if" clause) of a conditional sentence.² Evidence will be presented to show that παραπεσόντας is the fifth participle in a series

¹The author is currently engaged in the preparation of a manuscript for publication entitled *The Doctrine of Perseverance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. In this work each of the warning passages in the epistle will be dealt with exhaustively and exegetically to demonstrate that the type of individual being described in these warning passages is an unbeliever (the "Apostate View").

²The participle is taken as conditional by the NIV, RSV, AV, *The Amplified New Testament*, and others. The translation defended by this writer appears in the ASV of 1901, Williams New Testament, Moffatt's translation, the NASB, the Vulgate, the

of adjectival (substantival)³ participles, beginning in Heb 6:4, all governed by the masculine, accusative, plural article τούς. Further, a diagrammatical analysis will be presented in defense of the view taken by this writer. Along with the evidence mentioned above, the author will present the results of a survey made in 1979 of several prominent NT and Greek scholars relative to the problem being discussed.

It is fully understood by this writer that many able and experienced Greek exegetes (including some of my own colleagues) will not agree with the position taken in this article. It is to be remembered that to differ with another scholar is not to impugn his ability or experience or wise counsel. Thus, it is hoped that this article will be received with the same irenic spirit it is presented.

A GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

The text of Heb 6:4-6 (UBS, 3rd ed.) appears below. Each participle in the series under consideration has been italicized.

⁴ Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας, γευσασμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου καὶ μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου ⁵καὶ καλὸν γευσασμένους θεοῦ ῥῆμα δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, ⁶καὶ παραπεσόντας, πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν, ἀνασταυροῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας.

A diagram of this section appears as Fig. 1. This diagrammatical analysis should be consulted as the following discussion is presented.

The five participles in the series are accusative, plural, masculine participles and they all function as direct objects of the infinitive ἀνακαινίζειν (v 6). All five participles are introduced by the single article τούς and they are connected to each other by a simple connective series, τε . . . καὶ . . . καὶ . . . καὶ. The series is broken after παραπεσόντας. Thus the two remaining participles in the pericope (ἀνασταυροῦντας and παραδειγματίζοντας) are not part of the series and they are rightly construed as adverbial participles expressing *cause*.

It is a well-known fact of NT Greek grammar that, while adjectival participles usually (not always) take a definite article, adverbial participles never are governed by a definite article.⁴ Further,

Armenian version, the Georgian version, C. Spicq's *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris: Gabalda, 1953), and others.

³For convenience, the terms "substantival" and "attributive" are subsumed under the term "adjectival." Similarly, the term "adverbial" will embrace what some other grammarians call "circumstantial." It is understood that the five participles under discussion in Heb 6:4-6 are substantival participles.

⁴A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 1105ff.

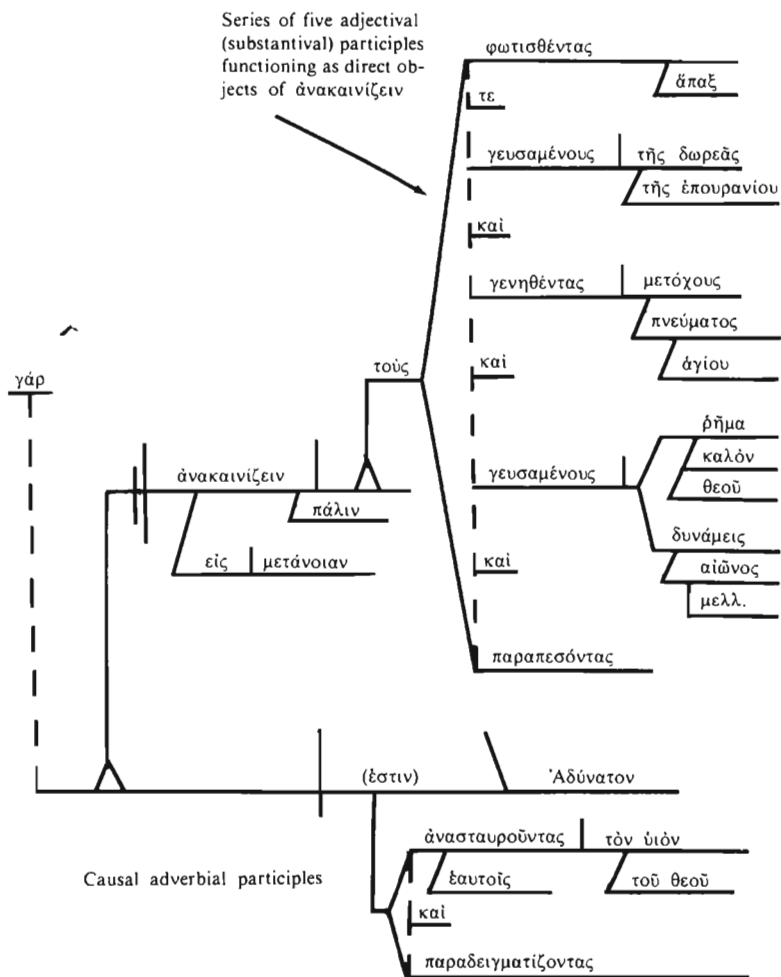


Fig. 1. Diagrammatical analysis of Heb 6:4-6.

a single article governing several adjectival participles in a series is also a legitimate Greek construction (cf. Gal 2:20, Rev 1:5).⁵ Since *παραπεσόντας* is governed by *τούς* and is part of the series of connected substantival participles, it cannot be adverbial so as to function conditionally. Thus, in the opinion of this writer, *τούς . . . καὶ παραπεσόντας* is best translated as a relative clause, “. . . and who have fallen away.”⁶

GRAMMATICAL SURVEY

Several years ago (early 1979), in researching this project, this writer corresponded with several outstanding NT Greek scholars by means of a questionnaire. Only for the sake of convenience, *general* classification terminology from Dana and Mantey's *Manual Grammar*⁷ was employed in the questionnaire. Three questions were asked of each correspondent: (1) Would you classify this participle [*παραπεσόντας*] as adjectival or adverbial? (2) For what reason do you make the classification that you indicate? (3) Is there any instance, to your knowledge, of an adjectival participle [one governed by a definite article] being translated as a conditional participle?

Included in the scholars who were sampled were Julius R. Mantey, Nigel Turner, Bruce Metzger, Stanley Toussaint, Randy Yeager, Matthew Black, Christian Hannick (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, who responded in place of Kurt Aland), Gleason Archer, J. Barton Payne, C. E. B. Cranfield, Allen Wikgren, F. F. Bruce, S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., Zane C. Hodges, and John Grassmick. Professor Grassmick (Dallas Theological Seminary), although busily engaged in his Ph.D. work at Glasgow at the time, was so kind as to offer his suggested diagram of the passage.⁸

All but three (Mantey, Turner, Cranfield) of the correspondents agreed that *παραπεσόντας* was adjectival and not adverbial. Most were *emphatic* in their response, although some hesitated to use Dana and Mantey's terminology (which is certainly not *consensus gentium*). For example, Professor Emeritus Matthew Black (Principal of St.

⁵Ibid., 777-79.

⁶The NEB seems to come closest to the best translation: “. . . and after all this have fallen away, it is impossible to bring them again to repentance.”

⁷H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1927) 224-29.

⁸My own diagram corresponds essentially to that of Professor Grassmick's. Although details of diagramming are quite subjective, I have tried to follow the methodology presented in John D. Grassmick's *Principles and Practice of Greek Exegesis* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974).

Mary's College, St. Andrews, Fife) opened his response with, "I would class παραπεσόντας without hesitation as 'adjectival.'" Most of the reasons given for preferring the classification "adjectival" were essentially those suggested in the questionnaire. F. F. Bruce simply reasoned, "Because it appears to be coordinate with the succession of aorist participles preceding it in verses 4 and 5, all of which, I think, are adjectival." S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. gave as his reason: "The participle is the last in a series governed by the τούς before ἀπαξ. Adverbial participles do not take the article." Zane Hodges responded: "It [παραπεσόντας] is part of a series of participles begun by τούς . . . φωτισθέντας and is governed by the article τούς." Allen Wikgren stated that he had suggested "several years ago" in going over Hebrews for the RSV committee that the translation be changed from a conditional statement to that which was parallel with the foregoing participles.

The three scholars who preferred to see παραπεσόντας as adverbial (and conditional) offered varied reasons for their preference. Dr. Mantey simply referred to p. 227 and par. 4 of his *Manual Grammar*. However, this reference simply describes the conditional use of adverbial participles (which no one debates), but it says nothing about Heb 6:6 or similar difficult constructions. Nigel Turner's comment was simply, "The classification is irrelevant." He goes on to say, "It would presumably refer to certain apostates, but *the author clearly has any such believers in mind as well* [*italics mine*], and therefore his statement is of general application, and 'if' certainly adequately expresses his meaning." This perhaps begs the question of how Dr. Turner has such a clear understanding of what the author of Hebrews has in mind when the problem of interpreting this epistle has challenged so many capable men throughout many generations. Dr. Cranfield's answer seemed to simply assume the "hypothetical" interpretation of παραπεσόντας without giving substantial evidence in support of it. Undoubtedly this was due to space limitations.

None of the correspondents were aware of any instance of an articular adjectival participle occurring in the NT with a "conditional" meaning.

CONCLUSION

It is the conclusion of this writer that παραπεσόντας is an adjectival-substantival participle, one in a series of five, governed by the article τούς which initiates the series. Παραπεσόντας functions as one of five substantival direct objects of the infinitive ἀνακαινίζειν. The series is limited by the connectives τε . . . καὶ . . . καὶ . . . καὶ. As such, it would seem that παραπεσόντας cannot be adverbial and thus it should not be regarded as conditional.

This conclusion was overwhelmingly supported by the majority of Greek scholars who were sampled during the survey. It is recognized that this is a limited sampling of opinions and thus the survey has an inherent inductive weakness. Time would not permit the sampling of many other fine scholars whose opinions would be inestimable. However, it is believed that the survey represents an accurate trend of opinions.