

'Apostasia' (2Thess.2:3) - Apostasy or 'Rapture'?

'Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away [apostasia] first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.'

The 'apostasia' is taken by the majority view to be a religious apostasy in general. However, in recent years I have noticed one or two able teachers promoting the idea that the 'apostasia' in 2Thessalonians 2:3 is not the falling away from the faith or 'apostasy' of the church, but rather a 'rapture' or taking out of the church by Christ.

This view is clearly traced to a series of articles by E. Schuyler English, entitled 'Re-thinking the Rapture' which first appeared in 'Our Hope' magazine from Oct./1949 to March 1950. Before this time there were only isolated references to this view as in 1859 from a J.S. Mabie during an address to an annual conference on the Lords coming, Los Angeles, Nov./1895 - which was later published. John R. Rice also suggested this view in 1945: 'I believe that this refers to the Rapture of the saints, when the invisible ties of Gravity will be broken and we will suddenly fall away into the air to meet Jesus.' (*The Coming Kingdom of Christ*, P.152).

However it was English who popularised the view which was then followed by Wuest, Walvoord, Lewis, Tan, Ellisen, Wood, Davey and House. Walvoord later recanted and abandoned it. In recent years, this view has been brought forth again. This article examines the Scriptural and historical context of such a view:

Introduction: 'Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand', (vs.1,2)

Paul here exhorts the Christians to remain firm and not lose sight of the coming of the Lord. It may be that the Thessalonians had lost their desire to look for His coming. The phrase 'by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter' could suggest that false teaching had entered in. The phrase 'is at hand' ('enistemi') is in the perfect tense/indicative mood which shows an event occurring in the past with results in the present and referring to a set time. It has been suggested by some that the Thessalonians were wrongly being taught that the day of Christ had already occurred or was present in some way.

The 'day of Christ' is considered to be synonymous with the 'day of the Lord'. This latter phrase is either taken to be the time when God again deals with Israel, or the Millennium age. In the NT, the Day of the Lord is related closely to the time of the second coming of Christ, as is the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ, (1Cor.1:8; 5:5; Phil.1:6,10; 2:16). Both expressions refer to time periods of judgment by Christ. The Day of the Lord at least includes the time of the Great Tribulation, (Cp. Rev.Chs.6-20). Zechariah 14:1-4 shows the events of the Second Advent are included in the program of the Day of the Lord. Thus, the Day of the Lord and the Day of Christ are synonymous.

The phrase in verse 3 'Let no man deceive you by any means' sums up the first two verses. Paul then states two things which must occur before the coming of the Lord - the falling away - 'apostasia' and the revealing of the man of sin. The adverb 'first' ('proton') modifies both the two conditions - in other words, the day of the Lord is not a reality until first both events have occurred.

Scripture: The only other place the Greek word 'apostasia' is used is in Acts 21:21 'And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake [apostasia] Moses, saying that they ought not to

circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs'. Here the word obviously means a falling away from a religious system! An important method of interpretation is *Scripture interprets Scripture*. The Acts 21:21 is the key to any interpretation of 2Thessalonians 2:3. Acts 21:21 is undoubtedly *religious apostasy*. Added to this, in the Old Testament the references are also negative and in the sense of a non spatial falling away and always a *religious defection*, (eg. 2Chr.29:19: 'casting away'; Jer.29:32 'rebellion').

Semantics: Some teachers have unfortunately avoided this safe hermeneutic procedure and wrongly concentrated on the root word of which 'apostasia' comes from - 'aphistemi' which is 'apo' - 'from' and 'histemi' - 'to stand; to place'. 'Aphistemi' is translated 'to put away, remove, forsake, desert'. However, even here of the 15 New Testament references most are arguably used in a negative sense for a religious falling away, (1Tim.4:1 'some shall depart ('aphistemi') from the faith'; see also 1Tim.6:5; Heb.3:12; Lk.8:13; 13:27...).

However, the point to be made here is that to build a case for a 'rapture' on this root verb 'aphistemi' rather than the actual Greek noun used ('apostasis'), is fraught with dangers and is not good hermeneutics. Though the root verb may be a help in establishing a meaning, it is only a guide. *The 'apostasia' noun meaning must first be established on its own*. Greek derivatives do not necessarily always carry the same meaning of the root words.

Historical: Apart from the above Scriptural proof, other Koine Greek literature for 'apostasia' also shows a religious falling away. Outside of Koine Greek literature a spatial departure may be a secondary meaning but it is generally not the *primary meaning*.

Some early Bibles such as the *Coverdale* and the *Geneva* rendered the word 'apostasia' as *departure*. This caused some to think of this as a *spatial* departing. However, when these versions were produced Lexical studies in Koine Greek were almost non existent. It must be stated here that a 'spatial departing' was never understood by the majority of early translators. As early as Jerome - 'apostasia' was translated as 'dissension' in Acts 21:21 which unquestionably refers to religious apostasy. The first English Bible by Wycliffe also rendered 'apostasi' as 'discencioun' ('dissension').

Another argument used by some is the use of Classical Greek instead of Koine Greek in order to establish the meaning of 'apostasia' to be a 'rapture'. Koine New Testament Greek replaced Classical Greek in about 300 BC and lasted until 300AD. Some say that 'apostasia' is a later construction of the Classical Greek which arguably was used as spatial departure. The flaw in the above argument is simple - the Scriptures were written in *Koine Greek* not Classical Greek. The Koine Greek Scriptures are innerant and God breathed! Added to this, the first literal reference to a spatial departure in Greek is not found until 5th century AD! - in an apocryphal writing titled 'The assumption of the Virgin' where the virgin Mary and the apostles are taken by a cloud from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Such fanciful apocryphal writings were rejected by the church fathers and contain chronological, geographical and historical errors and wild stories of mythical characters.

Scripture interprets Scripture (2Thess.2:3Cp.Acts 21:21). *No evidence* exists that the early church fathers understood 'apostasia' to be a 'rapture'. Nor do any of the major Lexicons and dictionaries, (Bauer, Thayer, etc) teach such. 'Apostasia' as a 'rapture' should not be considered as part of 'the faith once delivered to the saints', (Jude 3). Terry Arnold