



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

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by

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‘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*’ here 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. (1)

The History

This new 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 Angelos, 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.

The Context

‘Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That you 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* arguably 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.

The Context of vs.3 Tested

‘*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 issue of whether the *'falling away'* is an apostasy from the faith or a 'rapture' can be tested by normal hermeneutical rules of context. An important method of interpretation is *Scripture interprets Scripture*. The only other place the Greek word 'apostasia' is used is in Acts 21:21 - *'And they are informed of you, that you teach 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! Again, this important method of interpretation (*Scripture interprets Scripture*) is to look at where else this same word is used and its context. The Acts 21:21 is the first key to any interpretation of 2Thessalonians 2:3. Acts 21:21 is undoubtedly a *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').

Semantic Gymnastics

Some teachers have unfortunately avoided this safe and standard 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'. Some prophecy teachers then carefully select instances of the Greek root word where it possibly could be seen as 'spatial departure' and thus used for a 'rapture'. '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).

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.

It sadly will fool some readers who might not explore the actual Greek word used and understand the fallacies of using a root word instead. It is too easy to baffle people with Greek semantics as some have done with this without at least actually understanding Greek tools. 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.* The word used in 2Thessalonians 2:3 is not the verb ‘*aphistemi*’ but the noun ‘*apostasia*’! Greek derivatives do not necessarily always carry the same meaning of the root words. In Biblical hermeneutics this is known as the ‘*root fallacy*’. (2) The ‘*root meaning*’ is not necessarily found in all derivatives. The error is assuming that the root of the word is the meaning in all its various cognate forms. Greek derivatives do not necessarily always carry the same precise meaning of the root words. The meanings and connotations of a New Testament word are determined primarily from the immediate context itself and to a lesser extent where the same word is used elsewhere including from the Old Testament (Septuagint). And you should not have to do semantic gymnastics with Greek words to establish this.

Again, the meaning and connotation of a NT word can be first determined primarily from two sources: (A) Other appearances of *the same word* in the Greek NT; (B) The OT Septuagint. The meaning of ‘*apostasia*’ is not a spatial departure (and then a ‘*rapture*’) but a religious defection or *a departure from something that was once held* as is clearly seen in Acts 21:21 *where the same word is used.*

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 may have caused some later 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 deceptive 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 'spatial departure' and thus a 'rapture'. Koine New Testament Greek replaced Classical Greek in about 300 BC and lasted until about 300 AD. Some say that '*apostasia*' is a later construction of the Classical Greek which they argue was used as a spatial departure. This is what some Greek scholars call the '*Lexical Fallacy*'. (2) Outside of Koine Greek literature a spatial departure may be a *secondary meaning* but it is generally not the *primary meaning*. The flaw in the above argument is simple - the Scriptures were written in *Koine Greek* not Classical Greek! It is the original *Koine Greek* Scriptures which are inerrant and God-breathed. But even here the argument for a spatial departure or 'rapture' from classical Greek references is flawed. Lampe's Lexicon of the patristic period lists the '*apostasia*' as 'revolt, defection'. And in a search of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database from the second century B.C. Through the first century A.D., Feinberg did not find a single instance where '*apostasia*' means a 'spatial departure'! 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.

Conclusion

Any solid proof that 2Thessalonians 2:3 is a ‘rapture’ cannot be built by playing semantics with other languages such as classical Greek or by reverting to other derivative words in the Greek. The word is ‘*apostasia*’ and its common interpretation has been a religious falling away from truth or from beliefs previously held.

Scripture interprets Scripture. Again, the immediate comparison we have is between 2Thessalonians 2:3 and 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. This relatively new teaching of ‘*Apostasia*’ as a ‘*rapture*’ should not be considered as part of ‘*the faith once delivered to the saints*’ (Jude 3).

Terry Arnold

(1) In recent years Prophecy teachers at ‘*Herald of Hope*’ in Australia have taught this new idea. They have used the arguments refuted in this article. Several errors were made with Greek tools which the author attempted to advise them of but without any reply. They have continued to teach the errors.

(2) Grant R. Osborne, ‘*The Hermeneutical Spiral*’ (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), P.66-69. Also, D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), P.28-35

About the Author and the Ministry

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of *South Pacific Bible Institute*, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

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TA Ministries is a non-denominational and non-profit faith ministry founded in 1989 when the book '*To Catholics Whom I Love*' was written by Terry Arnold. This book went through several re-prints and served as a fruitful outreach to Roman Catholics.

In 1996 the ministry became a full-time operation with the introduction of a free newsletter, later named '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

Diakrisis is published bi-monthly to *teach, inform* and *equip* the church of Biblical truths and to warn of false teaching. It has also been a valuable reference aid to hundreds of pastors/elders.