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IS *APOSTASIA* IN 2 THESSALONIANS 2:3 A REFERENCE TO THE RAPTURE?

by
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In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul says: "Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first…"[1] The word translated "apostasy" is ἀποστασία.[2] Instead of understanding ἀποστασία as apostasy, some sort of religious departure, a number of modern interpreters (pretribulational, premillennial) have suggested that ἀποστασία refers to a spatial departure—specifically, the Rapture of the church. It is generally recognized that this view can be traced to a series of articles by E. Schuyler English, entitled "Re-Thinking the Rapture," which first appeared in *Our Hope* magazine from October 1949 to March 1950. It is the purpose of this paper to reexamine this view, especially in light of its recent championing in an extensive treatment by H. Wayne House.[3]

CONTEXT OF 2 THESSALONIANS 2:3

Before examining the arguments for and against the Rapture view, we would do well to briefly look at the surrounding context, specifically, 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3.

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[1]All Scripture references are taken from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

[2]Barbara and Kurt Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece,* 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), p. 539. This Greek text is used throughout this paper.

[3]"Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: Apostasy or Rapture?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds,* ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), pp. 261–96.

The Appeal for Calmness Concerning the Day of the Lord, 2:1–2

Subject of the appeal, v. 1

> Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him,

Paul begins chapter two with an appeal for the Thessalonians to remain calm. It is in the nature of a "request" (ἐρωτῶμεν[4]) and is directed toward Paul's Christian "brethren" at Thessalonica. Paul's request concerns ("with regard to," ὑπέρ[5]) "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him." Both posttribulationists[6] and pretribulationists[7] agree that "our gathering together (ἐπισυναγωγῆς) to him" clearly speaks of the Rapture described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17. The word translated "coming" (παρουσία) is used numerous times in the NT to refer to the return of Christ. It can be used of the Rapture (1 Thess 4:15) as well as the return of Christ to the earth at the end of the Tribulation (2 Thess 2:8). Pretribulationists separate these events by the seven-year Tribulation period, while posttribulationists do not. Because Paul clearly identifies the Rapture with the phrase "our

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[4]Some believe that ἐρωτάω is used here as practically an equivalent to παρακαλέω (cf. 1 Thess 4:1; 5:12, 14). See F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians,* Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), p. 163; D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians,* New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), p. 223; Paul Ellingworth and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians* (London: United Bible Societies, 1976), p. 156; and cf. the NRSV, "beg."

[5]The preposition ὑπέρ is here equivalent to περί. See Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 2nd ed., revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. "περί," p. 839 [hereafter, BAGD]; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), p. 632; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 65. It is often suggested that the "by" of the KJV (as if it were a formula of adjuration) was erroneously adopted from the Latin *per adventum.* See, e.g., George Milligan, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* (reprint ed.; Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), p. 96.

[6]E.g., Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), pp. 113–114.

[7]E.g., Paul D. Feinberg, "2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture," in *When the Trumpet Sounds,* ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), p. 301.

gathering together to Him," pretribulationists have sensed some difficulty in accounting for the addition of παρουσία.

The phrase "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him" involves two nouns joined by καί with the article preceding only the first noun (τῆς παρουσίας…καὶ…ἐπισυναγωγῆς). This single article joining both παρουσία and ἐπισυναγωγή has usually been interpreted to mean that there is some close connection between the two. Ward says that "the *coming* and the *assembling* are united by one Greek article. Paul was thinking of one event, not two."[8] Williams goes even further: "The two nouns, coming (*parousia…*) and being gathered (*episynagoge)* are governed by the one article and are thus depicted as the one (complex) event….Therefore, those who use this verse to make a distinction between the time of the so-called Rapture of the saints and the Parousia, do so in defiance of the syntax…."[9] This argument seeks to invalidate pretribulationism by arguing that both terms must refer to the posttribulational return of Christ.[10] Pretribulationists, like Hiebert, have countered by arguing that "the aspect of the coming in view here is made clear by the added expression 'and our gathering together unto him.'"[11] In other words, the aspect of παρουσία in view is defined by the additional phrase, "our gathering together to Him," so that just one event is in view, the pretribulational event.

This assumption that παρουσία and ἐπισυναγωγή must have the same referent is probably tied to a misunderstanding of the so-called Granville Sharp rule.[12] Sharp's rule is often understood to mean that when two nouns are joined by καί with the article preceding only the

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[8]Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1973), p. 153.

[9]David J. Williams, *1 and 2 Thessalonians,* New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), p. 122.

[10]This is precisely what F. F. Bruce argues (*1 and 2 Thessalonians,* p. 163).

[11]D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 300. See also Robert L. Thomas, "2 Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 11:318; Thomas L. Constable, "2 Thessalonians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition,* ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), p. 717.

[12]Granville Sharp, *Remarks on the Uses of the Definite Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament Containing Many New Proofs of the Divinity of Christ, From Passages Which Are Wrongly Translated in the Common English Version* (reprint of 1803 ed.; Atlanta: Original Word, 1995). Sharp presents six rules related to the use of the article in Greek; it is the first which has become known as the Granville Sharp rule.

first, both nouns refer to the same person or thing. Various studies, in recent years, by several scholars, especially Daniel B. Wallace, have now clarified Sharp's rule and shed light on the semantics of similar constructions.[13] Sharp's rule states that if two or more nouns (or participles or adjectives, used as nouns) are joined by καί and the article precedes only the first noun, then the other noun(s) refers to the same person. As Sharp himself phrased it: "the second noun…denotes a farther description of the first-named person."[14] In order for the rule to be valid, the nouns cannot be plural, cannot be impersonal nouns (e.g., love, righteousness), and cannot be proper names (e.g., Jesus).[15]

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1 the two nouns παρουσία and ἐπισυναγωγή do, in fact, fit the Granville Sharp construction, but the rule is not valid because the nouns are impersonal. Wallace has demonstrated that in the case of impersonal nouns, five semantic categories are theoretically possible: (1) distinct entities, though united (e.g., "truth and love"); (2) overlapping entities (e.g., "wisdom and knowledge"); (3) first entity subset of second (e.g., "the hour and day of his coming") (4) second group subset of first (e.g., "the day and hour of his coming"); and (5) both entities identical (e.g., the city of the great king, that is, Jerusalem).[16] There is no example of category (2) in the NT and only one of category (5), none involving concrete impersonals, like παρουσία and ἐπισυναγωγή. Category (3) would seemed to be easily ruled out since it is doubtful Paul viewed the παρουσία as a subset of the ἐπισυναγωγή—no eschatological system posits such a view. This leaves either (1) or (4), that is, the παρουσία and the ἐπισυναγωγή are distinct, though united, or the ἐπισυναγωγή is a subset of the παρουσία. Actu-

[13]Daniel B. Wallace, "The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-Καί-Noun Plural Construction in the New Testament," *Grace Theological Seminary* 4 (Spring 1983): 59–84. For an exhaustive study of these issues, see his "The Article with Multiple Substantives Connected by Καί in the New Testament: Semantics and Significance," (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995). A more concise treatment is found in his *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 270–90. For a list of studies predating Wallace, see his "The Article with Multiple Substantives," pp. 75–76.

[14]*Remarks on the Uses of the Definite Article,* p. 8.

[15]See the discussion by Wallace, "The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-Καί-Noun Plural Construction," p. 62; "The Article with Multiple Substantives Connected by Καί in the New Testament," pp. 47–48; *Greek Grammar,* pp. 271–72.

[16]"The Article with Multiple Substantives Connected by Καί in the New Testament," pp. 167–84; *Greek Grammar,* pp. 286–290.

ally, either of these could fit both pretribulationism and posttribulationism. The παρουσία and the ἐπισυναγωγή could be viewed as distinct events though united in time (posttribulationism) or distinct events though united thematically (pretribulationism), that is, two elements of one complex event.[17] If the ἐπισυναγωγή is taken as a subset of the παρουσία, the latter would be viewed in a general way, something of a complex event; but, again, neither eschatological system is favored. In summary, the attempt by some to rule out pretribulationism based on this text is founded on a misunderstanding of the grammatical structure and its semantic implications.

Content of the appeal, v. 2a

> that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us,

There is some question about the relationship between verse 1 and the clause in verse 2 made up of εἰς τό plus the two infinitives (σαλευθῆναι and θροεῖσθαι). Though this clause may give Paul's purpose,[18] here it would seem to indicate the content of Paul's "request" from verse 1.[19] The request is two-fold: first, that they would not be "quickly shaken from [their] composure." The adverb "quickly" (ταχέως) does not primarily refer to "haste." Rather, it is used here in the unfavorable

[17]Cf., e.g., Paul D. Feinberg, "The Case for the Pretribulational Rapture Position," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* ed. Richard R. Reiter, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 84–85.

[18]Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians,* New International Greek Text Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 238.

[19]James E. Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians,* International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p. 245; Ernest Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Adams and Clark, 1972), p. 275. Some commentators suggest that εἰς τό with the infinitives expresses both "the content and the purpose of the plea" (Williams, *Thessalonians,* p. 122). See also Hiebert, *Thessalonian Epistles,* p. 301. More likely, σαλευθῆναι and θροεῖσθαι are infinitives of indirect discourse after ἐρωτῶμεν in v. 1, giving the content of Paul's request (Daniel B. Wallace, "2 Thessalonians 2:1–2" [Class Notes, Grace Theological Seminary, May 1982], p. 3). For other examples of this construction, cf. Acts 13:42; Rom 4:18?; 1 Thess 2:12; 3:10. See also Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), p. 168). Burton and Robertson, though using different terminology, come to the same conclusion. See Ernest D. Burton, *Syntax of Mood and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (reprint of 1900 ed.; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), p. 162 and Robertson, *Grammar,* p. 1072.

sense of "too easily."[20] The second request is for the Thessalonians not to "be disturbed." Thus we can conclude that the Thessalonians had rashly lost their composure about end-time events.

This loss of composure was the result of some false teaching which came to the Thessalonians by one of three possible avenues: "a spirit or a message or a letter." Paul is thus saying that although he knows the Thessalonians have received a false report, he does not know the means (διά) through which it has come to them. Most commentators understand "spirit" (πνεύματος) to be some sort of prophetic utterance; "message" (λόγου), an oral report or teaching; and "letter" (ἐπιστολῆς), a written message.[21] But there is some question as to how the next phrase, "as if from us" (ὡς δι' ἡμῶν), relates to these three items. Is it to be taken only with the last term ("letter"[22]), the last two ("message" and "letter"[23]), or, as it is more commonly understood, with all three?[24] Since the language of the last two items (διὰ λόγου, δι' ἐπιστολῆς) is repeated in v. 15 with reference to Paul's own teaching ("stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us"), it may be that the false teaching was a misrepresentation of what Paul had taught orally, when he was at Thessalonica, or what he had written in a previous letter (1 Thessalonians).

It is more important, however, to determine what "as if from us" means. It is normally seen as expressing Paul's uncertainty over the

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[20]BAGD, s.v. "ταχέως," p. 806. See also Gordon D. Fee, "Pneuma and Eschatology in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–2: A Proposal About 'Testing Prophets' and the Purpose of 2 Thessalonians," in *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor or Robert H. Gundry,* ed. Thomas E. Schmidt and Moisés Silva, Journal for the Study of the New Testament—Supplement Series 100 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), p. 198.

[21]E.g., Bruce, *Thessalonians,* pp. 163–64.

[22]Ibid., p. 164.

[23]Hendricksen thinks this is the "most natural" (William Hendricksen, *Exposition of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1955], p. 168, n. 119).

[24]E.g., Hiebert, *Thessalonian Epistles,* p. 302; Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians,* 2nd ed. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 215, n. 11; Frame, *Thessalonians,* p. 246; Best, *Thessalonians,* p. 278; J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (reprint of 1895 ed.; Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 109. As Fee has noted, it seems difficult connecting "as if from us" with "spirit" since Paul had not recently been in Thessalonica to make such an utterance (Fee, "Pneuma and Eschatology," p. 205). For a contrary view, see Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles,* p. 109.

means by which the false teaching was communicated. However, as Gordon Fee has recently argued, the way in which this false teaching came to the Thessalonians is really of minor importance to Paul. It may have come through some supposed prophetic utterance at Thessalonica, or through a (deliberate?) misunderstanding of Paul's oral teaching or his first letter (1 Thess 5:1–11). What really concerns Paul is that the false teaching is being attributed to him, "as though through us" (ὡς δι' ἡμῶν), that is, from Paul and his associates.[25] Thus the phrase "as though through us" is better understood as anticipating what follows ("that the day of the Lord has come"), denying that what the Thessalonians are presently believing can be attributed to him.

Erroneous teaching which prompted the appeal, v. 2b

to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

The false teaching that was somehow being attributed to Paul was "to the effect that the day of the Lord has come." "Has come" is the perfect tense of ἐνίστημι. There is almost universal agreement that in the perfect tense it has the sense of "be present," "have come" rather than the KJV's "at hand."[26] Hiebert observes that

> the rendering "at hand" is not due to the acknowledged meaning of the word; it is due rather to a doctrinal difficulty felt by the translators. They could not conceive how anyone could really think that the "the day of the Lord" had actually arrived. The supposed doctrinal difficulty lies in the failure to distinguish between the *parousia* and the day of the Lord.[27]

Pretribulationists argue that the Thessalonians could not distinguish their present troubles from those of the Day of the Lord, and thus they concluded it must already be present.

Numerous problems surround the interpretation of the Day of the Lord. Most pretribulational writers have held that all references to the Day of the Lord in both the Old and New Testaments refer strictly to an eschatological period beginning with the Tribulation, extending through the Millennium.[28] However, not all pretribulationists believe the Mil-

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[25]Fee, "Pneuma and Eschatology," p. 199.

[26]BAGD, s.v. "ἐνίστημι," p. 266. See especially the discussion by Frame, *Thessalonians,* pp. 248–49 and cf. Rom 8:38 and 1 Cor 3:22 where it is contrasted with μέλλω.

[27]*Thessalonian Epistles,* p. 304.

[28]E.g., Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 94. This is not universally true, of course. Mayhue, for instance, says that the Day of the Lord "is a multiple fulfillment term

lennium is included in the Day of the Lord,[29] but, fortunately, the *terminus ad quem* is not a determining factor in the pretribulational/posttribulational debate nor the Rapture view of ἀποστασία. However, the *terminus a quo* of the Day of the Lord is of major importance in both of these issues. Posttribulationists begin the Day of the Lord with the end of the Tribulation. Pretribulationists have generally viewed it as commencing at the beginning, but this has not been, nor is it now, the universal opinion of all pretribulationists. Some older dispensationalists were in agreement with the posttribulational viewpoint. The old *Scofield Reference Bible* noted that "the day of Jehovah (called, also, 'that day,' and 'the great day') is that lengthened period of time beginning with the return of the Lord in glory, and ending with the purgation of the heavens and the earth…."[30] Some modern pretribulationists have returned to this view.[31] Another pretribulationist, Paul Feinberg, believes the Day of the Lord begins about the middle of the Tribulation period.[32] The Rapture view of ἀποστασία as an argument for pretribulationism has no validity unless the Day of the Lord begins with the opening of the Tribulation, that is, the fact that the ἀποστασία (i.e., Rapture) precedes the Day of the Lord does not prove a pretribulational Rapture unless the commencement of Day of the Lord also marks the opening of the Tribulation. Therefore, those who hold the Rapture view of ἀποστασία always assume as much. This article will not try to settle this issue but will assume, at least for argument's sake, that the Day of the Lord does begin with the Tribulation.

The Majority text and the second corrector of D (9th century[33])

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which is limited in occurrences only by its mention in Biblical revelation" (Richard L. Mayhue, "The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord" [Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981], p. 31. See also his "The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 [Fall 1985]: 245). Thus he holds that some of the OT references have already been fulfilled.

[29]Mayhue, "The Prophet's Watchword," Th.D. dissertation, pp. 67, 109; "The Prophet's Watchword," *GTJ,* p. 246; John A. Sproule, *In Defense of Pretribulationism* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1980), p. 35.

[30]C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 1349, n. 1. Note also Louis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology,* 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:398.

[31]Mayhue, "The Prophet's Watchword," Th.D. dissertation, 109; "The Prophet's Watchword," *GTJ,* p. 246; Sproule, *Defense of Pretribulationism,* p. 35.

[32]"Case for the Pretribulational Rapture Position," p. 61.

[33]Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece,* p. 48.

read "Day of Christ" instead of "Day of the Lord" against all earlier evidence in all forms (Greek, versions, fathers).[34] The "Day of Christ" (or "Lord Jesus," "Lord Jesus Christ," or "Christ Jesus") occurs six times in the NT (1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16).[35] "Day of Christ" and "Day of the Lord" are usually seen as being roughly synonymous.[36] However, some pretribulationists see a distinction in the terms, with Day of Christ more closely associated with the Rapture events and Day of the Lord with the those of the Second Advent. Pentecost, for instance, says that "each case in which Day of Christ is used it is used specifically in reference to the expectation of the Church, her translation, glorification, and examination for reward."[37] Some pretribulationists hold to only a difference in emphasis between the terms but no chronological distinction.[38] Thus the textual variant is viewed as not being significant to the interpretation of this verse.[39] Other pretribulationists do, apparently, make a chronological distinction between Day of Christ and Day of the Lord.[40] And because they limit the Day of Christ to events surrounding the Rapture, the reading "Day of Christ" in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 would seem to rule out pretribulationism since, according to 2 Thessalonians 2:3 the Day of Christ (and thus the Rapture) does not take place until after the revelation of "the man of lawlessness," an undisputed tribulational event. As might be expected, those

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[34]Ibid. p. 539.

[35]There are textual variations involved with each of these occurrences except for Phil 2:16.

[36]E.g., Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 43 and Peter T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians,* New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 65.

[37]J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (reprint of 1958 ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), p. 232.

[38]Ibid. Cf. also Mason: "While generally *day of Christ* and its variants are used concerning the church's translation to heaven, and *the day of the Lord* comes into the New Testament with heavy overtones from the Old Testament concerning God's dealings with Israel and the nation [*sic*] (Zech. 14:1–4, 9), the difference is not primarily one of time or of words but rather of emphasis (Clarence E. Mason, Jr., "The Day of Our Lord Jesus Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 (October–December 1968): 356).

[39]Ibid., p. 358.

[40]E. Schuyler English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture* (Travelers Rest, SC: Southern Bible Book House, 1954), p. 66; Kenneth S. Wuest, "The Rapture—Precisely When?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114 (January–March 1957): 63–64.

who hold to a chronological distinction between Day of Christ and Day of the Lord opt for the latter reading in 2 Thessalonians 2:2.[41] Thus it appears that either reading can be harmonized with the Rapture view of ἀποστασία, though, apparently, those who take the Rapture view generally point to "Day of the Lord" as the correct reading.[42] This paper will assume that "Day of the Lord" is the correct reading.[43]

Events Which Must Precede the Day of the Lord, 2:3

> Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

In order to correct the error which had been propagated among the Thessalonians, Paul seeks to prove that the Day of the Lord was not, after all, present. He does this by naming two events, in verse 3, which must precede the Day of the Lord. But before naming these two events, Paul issues a warning: "Let no one in any way deceive you." This exhortation sums up what has been said in verses 1 and 2.

"The apostasy"

The first event which must take place before the Day of the Lord is "the apostasy." That the apostasy comes before the Day of the Lord is made clear by the direct statement of the verse 3: "*it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first." However, as the italics in the NASB indicate, the words "*it will not come*" have been added. Paul has written the protasis of a third class condition[44] (ἐὰν μὴ ἔλθῃ ἡ ἀποστασία πρῶτον καὶ ἀποκαλυφθῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας,...) without an apodosis. Although the apodosis is not stated, it is almost universally agreed that it must come from verse two: "the day of the Lord has come" or "is present."[45] The adverb πρῶτον is generally understood to modify the entire

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[41]Ibid.

[42]Gordon R. Lewis does seem to speak of the "day of Christ" in his discussion ("Biblical Evidence for Pretribulationism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 (July–September 1968): 217.

[43]Fee suggests the reading Χριστοῦ "seems to be a later attempt to make sure that 'Lord' equals 'Christ' in this passage, which in fact it undoubtedly does" ("Pneuma and Eschatology," p. 198).

[44]Following the classification of Wallace, *Greek Grammar,* p. 696.

[45]Apparently, the lone exception is Charles H. Giblin, who argues that it is to be found in what follows (*The Threat to Faith: An Exegetical and Theological Re-examination of 2 Thessalonians 2* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), pp. 122–39.

protasis; thus Paul is understood to mean that the Day of the Lord is not present unless *first* both the apostasy comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed.[46]

The ἀποστασία has been understood in primarily four different ways.[47] Many church fathers took ἡ ἀποστασία as equal to ὁ ἀποστάτης ("the apostate") and thus in apposition to "the man of lawlessness."[48] The majority view today understands ἀποστασία as religious apostasy. This option is further divided according to whether the participants in this apostasy are professing believers,[49] Jews,[50] or non-Christians.[51] Then there are those who take ἀποστασία to be an actual revolt or rebellion against God. It is a rebellion against God in the sense of a revolt against the governing authorities, who have been instituted by God.[52] Finally, there are those who understand ἀποστασία as a reference to the Rapture.[53] It is this last view with which this paper is concerned.

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[46]The exception is Thomas ("2 Thessalonians," pp. 320, 323). He understands πρῶτον to be modifying only ἔλθῃ so that Paul would mean that the Day of the Lord is not present unless the apostasy comes *first* and, then, following the apostasy, the man of lawlessness is revealed. He also understands these events to take place *within* the Day of the Lord, one after the other. The position of πρῶτον is probably of little help in solving this question (cf. Luke 9:59 with 9:61; also, Giblin, *Threat to Faith,* p. 83). But it is generally thought that if Paul intended πρῶτον to be indicating a temporal order between the apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness, he would have written καί ἔπειτα before ἀποκαλυφθῇ (Giblin, *Threat to Faith,* p. 83, n. 3; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians,* p. 243).

[47]See the survey by House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," pp. 262–69.

[48]E.g., Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 15.9 and Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Thessalonians* 3.3.

[49]E.g., Hiebert, *Thessalonians,* p. 306; Constable, "2 Thessalonians," p. 718.

[50]E.g., Wanamaker, *Thessalonians,* p. 244; Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), p. 198.

[51]Frame, *Thessalonians,* p. 251; I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians,* New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 189. Actually, in my copy of the text, Marshall says "the thought is of a general increase in godliness with the world at large"; but the context indicates "godliness" should read "godlessness."

[52]E.g., Bruce, *Thessalonians,* p. 167.

[53]E.g., House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, pp. 267–69

The revealing of "the man of lawlessness"

The second event which must precede the Day of the Lord is the revelation of the "man of lawlessness." The manuscripts are divided on whether he is the "man of lawlessness" (ἀνομίας) or "man of sin" (ἁμαρτίας).[54] Since sin is essentially lawlessness with regard to God (1 John 3:4), perhaps the difference is not that great. This "man of lawlessness" is further described as the "son of destruction." This phrase is usually regarded as a Hebraism "indicating the one who belongs to the class destined to destruction."[55] The same expression is used of Judas Iscariot in John 17:12. Attempts to identify this one with someone in the past or present are futile. Paul is talking about a future "man of lawlessness" connected with events surrounding the Second Coming. He will not be revealed until that time. Most premillennialists identify him as the Antichrist.

HISTORY OF THE RAPTURE VIEW

As was noted earlier, the Rapture view of ἀποστασία is thought to have originated with work of E. Schuyler English. His series of articles, "Re-Thinking the Rapture," was later assembled in a book by the same name.[56] English cites no prior sources for his view, and so we are led to believe that it originated with him. However, this is not the case. English may have come to this view independently, but he was not the first to suggest it. Reiter has pointed out that, as early as 1895, J. S. Mabie argued for the Rapture view.[57] Apparently, this view was not unknown

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[54]Ἀνομίας is usually preferred since it is considered the harder reading, in that it is a word rarely used by Paul, which copyists would have altered to the more frequently used ἁμαρτίας. "Furthermore, γάρ…ἀνομίας in ver. 7 seems to presuppose ἀνομίας here" (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament,* 2nd ed. [Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: United Bible Societies, 1994], p. 567). However, ἀνομίας has only Alexandrian support, while ἁμαρτίας is supported by each of the three text types.

[55]Frame, *Thessalonians,* p. 254. Under Wallace's system τῆς ἀπωλείας would be a genitive of destination (*Greek Grammar,* pp. 100–01). Cf. the NIV's "the man doomed to destruction."

[56]*Re-Thinking the Rapture* (Travelers Rest, SC: Southern Bible Book House, 1954).

[57]Richard R. Reiter, "A History of the Development of the Rapture Positions," in The *Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* ed. Richard R. Reiter, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 32. Mabie suggested this interpretation during an address at the Annual Conference on the Lord's Coming, Los Angeles, in November 1895. His address was later published. See J. S. Mabie,

among pretribulationists before English. This would also explain why John R. Rice could suggest his support for the view in 1945, five years before English's work appeared.[58] However old the Rapture view is, it is clearly English who has popularized the view in recent times. English has been followed by Wuest, Walvoord, Lewis, Tan, Ellisen, Wood, Davey, and House.[59] Although Walvoord initially supported the view, he was later persuaded to the contrary by the arguments of Gundry[60] and has now abandoned the view.[61] The Rapture view of ἀποστασία has received little attention in recent years until House's article. He has produced the most thorough and well-reasoned defense of the Rapture view.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE RAPTURE VIEW

Appeal to Earlier Versions

Proponents of the Rapture view have generally followed English in his appeal to early English Bibles, noting that they translated ἀποστασία in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 as "departing." English says: "William Tyndale's version of the N.T., translated and published at Worms, c. 1526, renders *hee* [*sic*] *apostasia,* 'a departynge.' Coverdale (A.D. 1535), Cranmer (1539), and the Geneva Bible (1537) render it the same way. Beza

"Will the Church Be in the Tribulation—The Great One?" *Morning Star* 5 (November 1898): 123–24.

[58]John R. Rice, *The Coming Kingdom of Christ* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1945), p. 152. Rice gives no argumentation; he simply says about the "falling way" in 2 Thess 2:3: "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."

[59]Wuest, "The Rapture," pp. 64–67; John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), pp. 71–72; Lewis, "Biblical Evidence for Pretribulationism," pp. 216–18; Paul L. Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), p. 341; Stanley A. Ellisen, *Biography of a Great Planet* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1975), pp. 121–23; Leon J. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 87–88; Daniel K. Davey, "The Apostasia of 2 Thessalonians 2:3" (Th.M. Thesis, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982); House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," pp. 261–96.

[60]Gundry, *Church and the Tribulation,* pp. 114–18.

[61]John F. Walvoord, "Posttribulationism Today, Part X: Is the Tribulation Before the Rapture in 2 Thessalonians?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134 (April–June 1977): 110; idem, *The Rapture Question,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), pp. 239–40.

(1565) translates *apostasia* departing.'"[62] The implication of these appeals to the translation "departing" in earlier versions is that they give support or credence to the Rapture view since they can be understood to be referring to a spatial departure. House adds to the list of early translators, suggesting that the Wycliffe Bible of 1384 has the rendering "departynge" and that Jerome, in his Vulgate, used the "Latin word *discessio,* meaning 'departure.'"[63] In fact, House goes so far as to say that Jerome used *discessio* because he specifically understood ἀποστασία to mean a spatial departure.[64]

In arguing against the appeal by English to early versions, Gundry suggested that

> the appeal to early English translations unwittingly reveals weakness, because in the era of those versions lexical studies in NT Greek were almost nonexistent and continued to be so for many years. The papyri had not yet been discovered, and the study of the LXX had hardly begun. That subsequent versions uniformly departed from the earlier renderings points to a correction based on sound and scholarly reasons.[65]

House criticizes Gundry's argument at this point:

> I fail to follow Gundry's logic here. He argues that these early translations err in translating *apostasia*…as "departure" because they did not have the advantage of lexical studies in the New Testament and the LXX. He then indicates that subsequent versions deviated from this translation because they are based on sounder and more scholarly sources. How can this be? The 1611 King James Version, without any better access to more New Testament or Septuagintal studies than its predecessors, not to mention papyriological and other extra-biblical sources, changed from "departure" to "fall away." With the King James Version winning the day as the translation of the English-speaking world, translators characteristically, if not slavishly, followed its lead on *apostasia.*[66]

House has a point about the KJV. Its translation of ἀποστασία as "falling away" would not normally be understood as a spatial departure; and, if future translators followed the KJV, they would render ἀποστασία accordingly. However, his observation probably works against him

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[62]*Re-Thinking the Rapture,* p. 69, footnote *. See also Wuest, "The Rapture," p. 65.

[63]House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," p. 270.

[64]Ibid., p. 273.

[65]*Church and the Tribulation,* p. 116.

[66]House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," pp. 281–82.

since, as we shall shortly demonstrate, it is not clear that the change from "departing" to "falling away" proves that the translators of the KJV understood ἀποστασία in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 in a different sense than previous translators—that they were, in effect, changing the meaning of ἀποστασία.[67]

Actually, the appeal to early English versions is of practically no importance in settling the issue at hand. For one thing, the translation "departing" does not give any more credence to the Rapture view since the English word *departing* can be used in both a spatial and nonspatial sense. In Hebrews 3:12 the KJV says: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Obviously, this "departing" is not a spatial one. Numerous examples could be cited from the KJV.[68] Interestingly, other early versions also translate Hebrews 3:12 as "depart."[69] The use of this English word to translate ἀποστασία in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 does not mean that these versions were less disposed to the idea of "religious departure" as the correct understanding of the term. As was noted previously, House says that the first English Bible by Wycliffe rendered ἀποστασία as "departynge." However, this is probably the reading of the second Wycliffe edition. The original edition apparently rendered ἀποστασία with "discencioun,"[70] which is an older spelling of the word *dissension.*[71] *Dissension* does not refer to a spatial departing.[72] Also, House's appeal to Jerome's rendering of ἀποστασία as *discessio* does not prove that Jerome had a spatial meaning in view since the meaning of *discessio* is not limited to only spatial "departing."[73] In fact, Jerome also used *discessio* to translate ἀποστασία in Acts 21:21, which unquestionably

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[67]House suggests that the view of ἀποστασία as "apostasy" originated with the KJV (p. 273).

[68]E.g., Dan 9:5; 9:11; Hos 1:2; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:19.

[69]*The English Hexapla* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, n.d. The versions are Wyclif, Tyndale, Cranmer [Coverdale], Geneva, and Rheims.

[70]Ibid. This edition claims to represent the first Wycliffe edition of 1380 (p. 57). It is generally agreed that there were two Wycliffe versions—the first in 1380, and a second edition completed after Wycliffe's death in 1384 (see David Ewert, *A General Introduction to the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983], pp. 184–85).

[71]*The Oxford English Dictionary,* 12 vols. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1933), s.v. "dissension," 3:506.

[72]Ibid.

[73]*Oxford Latin Dictionary,* ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1982), s.v. "*discessio,*" p. 550.

refers to religious apostasy.

By translating ἀποστασία with words that can refer to a spatial departing as well as a figurative one (i.e., religious apostasy), early English translators do not provide us with any clear evidence of their understanding of the term in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Additionally, there is no other positive evidence that they would have understood the "departing" in any sense other than a figurative one. No evidence is forthcoming that anyone in the church ever understood ἀποστασία to refer to a spatial departure until rather recent times. The translation of the KJV, "falling away," probably reflects how the passage was generally understood.

Meaning of Ἀποστασία

Obviously, the crucial issue in evaluating the Rapture view of ἀποστασία is deciding how likely it is the word refers to a spatial departure in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. English built his case around the extrabiblical usage of ἀποστασία and, particularly, the usage of its cognate verb ἀφίστημι. Most interpreters, including most pretribulationists, have found the evidence wanting, especially after Gundry's critique of English.[74] House has recently sought to mitigate Gundry's arguments and to reestablish the cogency of spatial departure as the most probable meaning of ἀποστασία in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.[75] A complete review of the lexical data thus becomes essential.

The lexical evidence

Outside of our text, ἀποστασία is found only one other time in the NT—Acts 21:21: "and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses [ἀποστασίαν…ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως]…." Here it is agreed that ἀποστασία refers to religious apostasy. In the LXX ἀποστασία is found five times: Joshua 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:19; 33:19; Jeremiah 2:19; 1 Maccabees 2:15.[76] It also occurs seven times in Aquila (Deut 15:9; Judg

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[74]*Church and the Tribulation,* p. 115–16.

[75]"Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," pp. 277–86.

[76]J. Lust et al., eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint: Part I* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1992), p. 56; Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament,* 3 vols. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1895), 1:141 [hereafter, Hatch and Redpath]. Hatch and Redpath also list 3 Kgdms 20:13, but this is apparently an error. In three out of the five (Josh 22:22; 2 Chr 33:19; 1 Macc 2:15) there is some variation among the manuscripts between ἀποστασία and a cognate noun ἀποστάσις, which means "defection" or "revolt."

19:22; 1 Kgdms 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; Prov 16:27; Nah 1:11), once in Theodotion (3 Kgdms 21:13), and twice in Symmachus (1 Kgdms 1:16; 2:12).[77] In every one of these instances from the OT and Apocrypha, the meaning is religious or political defection.

In other koine literature, as illustrated by Moulton and Milligan, only the idea of religious or political defection is found.[78] No example of spatial departure is given.

Both English and House, who argue that ἀποστασία means "spatial departure" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, and Gundry, who does not, all agree that outside the koine period the idea of spatial departure is only a "secondary meaning" of the word.[79] This conclusion is drawn from the Liddell and Scott lexicon, which lists the primary meaning of ἀποστασία as "defection, revolt" and gives "departure, disappearance" as a secondary meaning.[80] However, the only example given for this secondary meaning comes from the 6th century A.D. Apparently, it is assumed that ἀποστασία can be understood to have the meaning of "spatial departure" in the earlier classical period because it is said that ἀποστασία is a later construction for ἀπόστασις, which *was* used of spatial departure in classical Greek.[81] However, one wonders if this has been proven. Ἀποστασία and ἀπόστασις are not simply spelling variations of the same word. Schlier also says that ἀποστασία is "a later construction for ἀπόστασις," but then seems to distinguish the two when he notes that ἀποστασία "presupposes the concept ἀποστάτης 'to be an apostate,' and thus signifies the state of apostasy, whereas ἀπόστασις denotes the act."[82] Ἀποστασία itself, apparently, first occurs in Greek literature outside the Bible in the first century B.C.[83]

Lampe's lexicon of the patristic period also lists "revolt, defection"

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[77]Hatch and Redpath, 1:141; 3:200.

[78]James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (reprint of 1930 ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 68–69.

[79]English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture,* p. 68; House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," p. 273; Gundry, *Church and the Tribulation,* p. 115.

[80]Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, comp., *A Greek-English Lexicon,* 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 218 [hereafter, LSJ].

[81]Ibid.

[82]Gerhard Kittel et al., eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), s.v. "ἀφίστημι, ἀποστασία, διχοστασία," by Heinrich Schlier, 1:513 [hereafter, *TDNT*].

[83]BAGD, s.v. "ἀποστασία," p. 98.

as the primary meaning of ἀποστασία; however, there is one example given of spatial departure.[84] This interesting reference does not seem to have been discussed by supporters of the Rapture view.[85] This reference to a spatial departure is found in a NT apocryphal work entitled *The Assumption of the Virgin.* In sections 31–32 we read:

> But the Holy Ghost said to the apostles and the mother of the Lord, "Behold, the governor has sent a captain of a thousand against you, because the Jews have made a tumult. Go out therefore from Bethlehem, and fear not; for behold, I will bring you by a cloud to Jerusalem…." The apostles therefore rose up straightaway and went out of the house, bearing the bed of their lady the mother of God, and went forward towards Jerusalem: and immediately, just as the Holy Ghost said, they were lifted up by a cloud and were found at Jerusalem in the house of their lady.[86]

Here we clearly have the description of a "rapture" of the apostles and mother of the Lord. The story continues in section 33:

> But when the captain came to Bethlehem and did not find there the mother of the Lord, nor the apostles, he laid hold upon the Bethlehemites,…For the captain did not know of the departure of the apostles and the mother of the Lord to Jerusalem.[87]

This "rapture" is now described as a "departure," the Greek word being ἀποστασία.[88] Here is clear evidence that ἀποστασία can refer to a "rapture"; however, *The Assumption of the Virgin* can be dated no earlier than the fifth century A.D.[89]

The cognate verb of ἀποστασία, ἀφίστημι, is found fourteen times in the NT. It is used in both a spatial and nonspatial sense. Only

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[84]G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 208.

[85]It was brought to my attention by David G. Winfrey, *An Examination of the Pretribulational Rapture Interpretation of 2 Thess. 2:7* (Hollywood, FL: Lighthouse Ministries, 1980), p. 8.

[86]J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 705.

[87]Ibid.

[88]The Greek text is found in Constantin von Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae* (reprint of 1866 ed.; Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), p. 105.

[89]Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha,* 2 vols., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 1:429.

three times is it used of religious apostasy (Luke 8:13; 1 Tim 4:1; Heb 3:12). No one questions the fact that the word most often designates a spatial departure. It is found with that meaning throughout all periods of Greek literature[90]

Evaluation

As was noted earlier, a major part of the case for understanding ἀποστασία as a spatial departure is its relationship to its cognate verb ἀφίστημι. The argument suggests that the meaning of the verb can also be applied to the noun. English says:

> It is evident, then that the verb *aphisteemi* [*sic*] does have the meaning *to depart* in the New Testament, in a very general sense which is not specialized as being related to rebellion against God or forsaking the faith. And, since a noun takes it meaning from the verb, the noun, too, may have such a broad connotation.[91]

Gundry argues that English is mistaken—one cannot say the cognate verb determines the meaning of the noun.[92] It may be that nouns often have a similar semantic range as their cognate verbs, but that must be demonstrated in each case—it cannot be assumed. Gundry points to the noun ἀποστάσιον, which is also cognate to ἀφίστημι, yet it relates only to "*divorce* or some other legal act of separation."[93] The cognate noun ἀποστατήρ means "one who has power to dissolve an assembly" or "to decide a question."[94] These derivative nouns do not carry the

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[90]LSJ, p. 291.

[91]English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture,* p. 69. Essentially the same argument is made by Wuest ("The Rapture," pp. 64–65), Lewis ("Biblical Evidence for Pretribulationism," p. 218), Ellisen (*Biography of a Great Planet,* p. 122), Wood (*The Bible and Future Events,* p. 87), Davey ("The Apostasia of 2 Thessalonians 2:3," pp. 7–10), and House ("Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," pp. 282–83).

[92]*Church and the Tribulation,* p. 116. Davey carries the root idea even further: "Since the root verb has this meaning of 'departure' from a person or place in a geographical sense, would not its derivatives have the same foundational word meaning. If, not, then word meanings may be divorced from root meanings which is contrary to the linguistic rules governing semantics" (p. 9). On the contrary, it is Davey's understanding which is contrary to the regular use of language. This is the well-known root fallacy. See, for example, D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), pp. 28–35 and Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), pp. 66–69.

[93]Gundry, *Church and the Tribulation,* p. 116.

[94]LSJ, p. 219..

meaning of "spatial departure" found in ἀφίστημι. Though the cognate verb may be a guide and help to establishing the meaning of derivative nouns, the meaning of a noun must be established by its own usage.

When the usage of ἀποστασία itself is examined, the case is not entirely clear. If ἀποστασία is understood to be the same word as ἀπόστασις, then the meaning of "spatial departure" can be found in classical Greek. In the koine period no example of "spatial departure" is to be found, unless, of course, 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is the exception.[95] But even if the classical support is found wanting, clearly, ἀποστασία did come to have the meaning of "spatial departure," but the earliest example is from the 5th century A.D. At this point one must decide how to evaluate the data for ἀποστασία.

Gundry has argued that the "meaning and connotation of a NT word are determined from four sources: (1) other appearances in the NT; (2) the LXX; (3) the *koine* (of which NT Greek is a species); and (4) classical Greek."[96] He goes on to note that the least important of these is classical Greek and observes that it is from this source that English draws his argument.[97] It is difficult to see why anyone would disagree with Gundry's procedure for evaluating lexical data. Even House, who quotes Gundry at this point, does not actually question the appropriateness of his procedure.[98] Since words change in meaning over time and since classical Greek is furthest from the NT, it is only proper that it be weighted least important. About the LXX, Gundry rightly observes:

> In matters of vocabulary and style the LXX strongly influenced the NT writers, whose Bible for the most part was the LXX. The high number of occurrences of ἀποστασία in the LXX and their broad distribution evince a well-established usage. And we ought to bear in mind that Paul was thoroughly familiar with and greatly influenced by the language of the

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[95]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 ἀποστασία means "spatial departure" ("2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture," p. 310).

[96]*Church and the Tribulation,* p. 115.

[97]Ibid.

[98]After quoting Gundry, House does say: "I find it extremely interesting that Gundry limits the determination of word meanings to four and omits (possibly by accident) the most important factor in determining the specific meaning of any given word; namely, context" ("Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," p. 279). This is an unfair criticism since it is clear that Gundry is speaking of "sources" for determining the semantic range of a word, which can then can be evaluated by the context.

LXX, for in quoting the OT he follows the LXX most of the time.[99]

Thus, the evidence from the most important sources gives no support for the meaning of "spatial departure" for ἀποστασία. This is probably why this meaning is not found in the standard NT lexicon by Bauer, nor by its predecessor Thayer.[100] The same is true for the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* and the more recent *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament.*[101] Considering all the lexical evidence, it seems unlikely that ἀποστασία means "spatial departure" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Yet, because of the evidence for such a meaning possibly before the koine period but clearly after it, it cannot be entirely ruled out. While not an impossibility, it seems improbable.

Contextual Arguments

Although the Rapture view is based mainly on the lexical argument surrounding ἀποστασία, it is also supported by several contextual arguments which are somewhat related. First, it is said that ἀποστασία "does not inherently carry the meaning of [religious] defection or revolt. It does so only because of the contexts."[102] It is, we are told, the presence of certain qualifying phrases (e.g., "from the faith," from the living God"[103]) that give the word this meaning.

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[99]*Church and the Tribulation,* p. 115.

[100]BAGD, s.v. "ἀποστασία," p. 98; John H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (reprint of 1889 ed.; Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1975), s.v. "ἀποστασία," p. 667.

[101]*TDNT,* s.v. "ἀφίστημι, ἀποστασία, διχοστασία," 1:513–14; Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–78), s.v. "Fall, Fall Away," by W. Bauder, 1:606–08; Hortst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament,* 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–93), s.v. "ἀποστασία," 1:141. House does not accurately represent the evidence in Kittel. He says: "Moreover, Kittel recognizes that *apostasia* and its cognates can carry the spatial sense" ("Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," p. 281). Then he cites the first paragraph of the discussion of ἀφίστημι to prove his statement. The article in Kittel in no way "recognizes that *apostasia* and its cognates can carry the spatial sense." There is not the slightest hint of such an idea. Ἀποστασία is discussed in a separate section which does not even hint at a connection with ἀφίστημι.

[102]House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," p. 273. Similarly, Wuest, "The Rapture," p. 65.

[103]English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture,* pp. 68–69;

It is true that qualifying phrases, as in the case of Acts 21:21 (lit. "apostasy…from Moses"), do clearly establish the meaning of the word. However, not every use of ἀποστασία in the LXX, for instance, includes a qualifying phrase, though in every case religious apostasy is in view. For example, in 1 Maccabees 2:15 we read: "The king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the town of Modein to make them offer sacrifice" (Καὶ ἦλθον οἱ παρά τοῦ βασιλέως οἱ καταναγκάζοντες τὴν ἀποστασίαν εἰς Μωδεϊν τὴν πόλιν, ἵνα θυσιάσωσιν).[104] House admits this, but argues that in the case of 1 Maccabees 2:15, it is the immediate context which gives ἀποστασία its meaning, while in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 the context does not support the idea of religious departure.[105] There is some truth to House's argument about a lack of context for religious departure, at least as far as most pretribulationists understand the apostasy. They believe the ἀποστασία in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is a religious apostasy by professing believers which precedes the revelation of the man of lawlessness. Thus, there is, in their understanding, no mention of this apostasy in the immediate context following verse 3.[106] Perhaps the force of House's argument is blunted by Gundry's suggestion that by the time of the koine, ἀποστασία had acquired the limited meaning of "religious apostasy or political defection," and so no qualifying phrases were necessary.[107] There may be some cogency to this suggestion since, as we have before noted, every known instance of ἀποστασία in the koine has this limited meaning; and again, as we have shown, all lexical authorities support only this meaning. Our next discussion will also have a bearing on this issue.[108]

The second contextual argument supporting the Rapture view is based on the observation that ἀποστασία is articular, "ἡ ἀποστασία."

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[104]NRSV. The Greek text is from Alfred Rahlfs, ed. *Septuaginta,* 2 vols. (Stuggart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1935), 1:1043. Of the four other uses of ἀποστασία in the LXX, it appears that only 2 Chron 28:19 has a qualifying phrase (ἀπὸ κυρίου), excepting for personal pronouns (contra House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," p. 273).

[105]House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," pp. 273–74.

[106]E.g., Thomas, "2 Thessalonians," pp. 321–22; Hiebert, *Thessalonians,* p. 306; Constable, "2 Thessalonians," p. 718.

[107]Gundry, *Church and the Tribulation,* p. 116.

[108]This lack of reference to apostasy in the immediate context is not a problem for Gundry (*Church and the Tribulation,* pp. 117–18) and for at least one pretribulationist (See Charles E. Powell, "The Identity of the 'Restrainer' in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 [July–September 1997: 327]). They do find a description of the apostasy in 2 Thess 2. For them it comes about as a result of the activity of the man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:4, 10–11).

It is argued that the article with ἀποστασία points to something well-known to the Thessalonians and explained in the previous context.[109] That previous context would be references to the Rapture in verse 1 ("our gathering together to Him") and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17. That the article points to an ἀποστασία previously known to the Thessalonians is probably the most likely explanation of the article.[110] Gundry seeks to mitigate this difficulty by suggesting that the article points forward to what follows, the apostasy brought on by the man of lawlessness (vv. 4, 10–11).[111] However, this use of the article, while possible, is quite rare.[112]

But ἡ ἀποστασία would not have to be a reference to the Rapture in order to point to something well-known to the Thessalonians. If ἀποστασία is a reference to religious apostasy, Paul could have easily made reference to it during his previous visit. In fact, later in verse 15, Paul makes explicit reference to his previous oral (διὰ λόγου) teaching: "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us." And, even more striking, in verse 5 he asks: "Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?" "These things" could easily include the ἀποστασία of verse 3. While it might seem unlikely that Paul would, almost out of the blue, make reference to a religious apostasy not mentioned previously in the Thessalonian correspondence, yet, in fact, he does something quite similar in verse 6 with reference to the "restrainer": "And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed." This reference to τὸ κατέχον also seems to come from nowhere, yet Paul says the Thessalonians "know" (οἴδατε) it. How do they know it since this is a topic not previously mentioned in the Thessalonian correspondence?—obviously, because of Paul's previous oral teaching.

In one way the Rapture view does fit well with the overall context of how pretribulationists understand 2 Thessalonians 2. Since the Thessalonians were apparently connecting their present troubles with the Day of the Lord, thinking that it was present, and if Paul had previously

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[109]English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture,* pp. 69–70; Wuest, "The Rapture," p. 66; Ellisen, *Biography of a Great Planet,* p. 122; House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," pp. 284–86.

[110]Following Wallace's categories, the article, as understood in the Rapture view, would probably fall more into his "anaphoric" category rather than "well-known" (*Greek Grammar,* pp. 217–220, 225). Understanding ἀποστασία as religious apostasy places the article in the "well-known" category.

[111]See footnote 109 above.

[112]Wallace calls this usage "kataphoric" (*Greek Grammar,* p. 220).

taught them pretribulationism, posttribulationists ask why did he not simply tell them that they were not in the Day of the Lord because the Rapture had not taken place?[113] Of course, the Rapture view argues that is exactly what Paul did do with his reference to the ἀποστασία.[114] Thus Paul says, according to the Rapture view, that the Thessalonians need not be fearful that they are in the Day of the Lord, for that Day must be preceded by the Rapture, followed by the revelation of the man of lawlessness. Those who hold the Rapture view also point out that this interpretation corresponds, *in sequence,* with the common pretribulational understanding of verses 6–7: the Holy Spirit indwelling the church is now restraining the revelation of the man of lawlessness until "he is taken out of the way" at the Rapture.[115]

This would seem to be a strong argument except for one problem. As has been previously noted, pretribulationists assume Paul had taught the Thessalonians a pretribulational Rapture, and now because of their present troubles, they thought they were in the Day of the Lord and thus had missed the Rapture. If Paul responds by saying that they are not in the Day of the Lord because the Rapture (ἀποστασία) must take place before the Day of the Lord, he would seem to be offering no real proof to allay their fears. That is, he would simply be telling them what he had taught them before, not really responding to their fear of having missed the Rapture. But, however, if he offers proof that the Day of the Lord cannot have commenced by pointing out that they have obviously not seen the apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness, events he had previously taught them about, then their fears should be allayed.

CONCLUSION

The case for understanding ἀποστασία as the Rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 has not been proven. The appeal to the translation of the word in versions prior to the King James has no merit whatsoever. While the English translation "departure" can refer to spatial departure, there is no evidence that this is the intended meaning of the word in these early versions in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The lexical argument that ἀποστασία itself could have that meaning in this verse seems unlikely. The strongest argument for the Rapture view is the contextual considerations. These

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[113]E.g., Douglas, J. Moo, "The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* ed. Richard R. Reiter, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 189.

[114] English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture,* p. 70. House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," p. 275.

[115]English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture,* pp. 70–71. House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3," pp. 276–77.

certainly have merit, but in my opinion do not rise to the level of probability. Ἀποστασία most likely refers to a religious apostasy, and therefore its occurrence in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 should not be used as evidence for the pretribulational Rapture.