



Clanking Chains: Exegetical Difficulties in 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3: Apostasy or Departure?; Etymology of “Apostasia”; Summary

II. What Precedes the Tribulation: Apostasy or Departure?:

2 Thessalonians 2:3 - [KJV] Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away [**ἀποστασία, apostasia**] first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.

2 Thessalonians 2:3 - [NIV] Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for (that day will not come) until the rebellion [**ἀποστασία, apostasia**] occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

2 Thessalonians 2:3 - [NASB] Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy [**ἀποστασία, apostasia**] comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.

The word that is the source of our discussion is the nominative singular of the Greek noun, **ἀποστασία, apostasia**. It is translated “falling away” in the King James, “rebellion” in the NIV, and “apostasy” in the New American Standard.

In our earlier study we translated **ἀποστασία, apostasia** with the English word Rapture. Thus the question arose, “How do you get “Rapture” out of “falling away”, “rebellion”, and “apostasy”? The answer is discovered from an exegesis of verse 3.

The verse begins with the negative conjunction:

μή, mē - This negative conjunction plus the subjunctive mood denotes a command to stop doing something that is now going on. What is now going on is indicated by the aorist active subjunctive of the verb:

ἐξαπατάω, exapataō - “To lead astray; to deceive; to delude; to beguile”

aorist:	Constativ; denotes a series of events. These events are a series of Bible classes taught by false teachers who allege they have a new letter, or corrigendum, from Paul in which he corrects the information he gave them in 1 Thessalonians regarding the Rapture and the Tribulation.
active:	False teachers produce the action by deceiving the believers in Thessalonica.
subjunctive:	With the negative μή, mē it is a command: “Do not let anyone deceive you in any way ...”

Next comes an ellipsis:

Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 67:

Ellipsis, the omission from a sentence of words that would be required for complete clarity but which can usually be understood from the context.

The ellipsis of verse 3 occurs between two words: (1) the causal conjunction **ὅτι, hoti**, which we will translate “since” and (2) the conditional particle **ἐάν, ean**, which we will translate “unless.”



The three major versions of the Bible have the following translations of these two words:

- 1- KJV: “for ... except”
- 2- NIV: “for ... until”
- 3- NASB: “for ...unless”

In between these two words each translation supplies what its translators believed to be the missing words that properly fill in the ellipsis.

The King James supplies the words “*that day shall not come*” in an italic font and refers back to the “day of Christ” in verse 2.

The NIV supplies the words (that day will not come) within parentheses and refers back to the “day of the Lord” in verse 2.

The New American Standard supplies the words “*it will not come*” in an italic font and refers back to the “day of the Lord” in verse 2.

Let’s note what the literal translation looks like so far beginning with:

2 Thessalonians 2:1 - Moreover, fellow believers, with reference to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him [Rapture], we urgently request

v. 2 - that you be not easily shaken in mind or disturbed, neither by a personality, nor by a policy, nor by a forged epistle as if from us, alleging that the day of the Lord is now present.

v. 3 - Do not let anyone deceive you in any way since ... unless ...

The words “except,” “until,” and “unless” translate the conditional particle **ἐάν, *ean*** which, when combined with the subjunctive mood, indicates a third class condition: maybe the event about to be described will happen, maybe it won’t. Whether it does or not depends upon the conditional clause following the ellipsis.

The condition has to do with a contingency: before the event contained in the ellipsis can occur something else must come first. The verb is the aorist active subjunctive of **ἐρχομαι, *erchomai*** which means “the action involved when an event occurs. It is translated:

- 1- “except there come” in the King James;
- 2- “until the rebellion occurs” in the NIV; and
- 3- “unless the apostasy comes” in the New American Standard.

Here’s our corrected translation so far:

2 Thessalonians 2:3 - Do not let anyone deceive you in any way since ... unless there comes first ...

What goes into the ellipsis? We have established from verses 1 and 2 that the subject under discussion is the timing of the Rapture in light of previous teachings in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In his first epistle, Paul makes it clear that the Rapture is imminent.

The Old Testament’s prophecies clearly document the Incarnation of Messiah and the events of the Tribulation but do not recognize any historical events between the two. The Church Age was a mystery to the Old Testament writers and did not become known until Pentecost in Acts 2.



The New Testament reveals all the details about this mystery dispensation. A distinguishing aspect about the Church Age is that it is a dispensation without any prophecy with only two exceptions: (1) the way it begins (John 14:16-17, 26) and (2) the way it ends. The latter is the prophecy of the Rapture by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 15. They reveal not only how the Church Age will end but that the event is imminent: it could occur at any moment.

On the other hand the Tribulation is mentioned all over the Old Testament by its prophets and is the subject of the Apostle John in Revelation 6-19.

Principles:

- 1- The Tribulation was known to the Old Testament writers.
- 2- Its occurrence in history is yet future.
- 3- The Church Age is obviously occurring between the Incarnation and the Tribulation.
- 4- The only remaining prophecy associated with the Church Age is the event that brings it to a close, i.e., the Rapture.
- 5- There is no prophecy that needs to be fulfilled in order for the Rapture to occur therefore it is said to be imminent.
- 6- Consequently, we arrive at a conclusion: the Tribulation cannot occur historically until the Rapture occurs first.
- 7- This is the message Paul is delivering in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3.
- 8- Thus the ellipsis references that event which cannot occur until the Rapture occurs first, namely, the “day of the Lord,” or the Tribulation, mentioned in context at the end of verse 2.

2 Thessalonians 2:2 - we urgently request that you be not easily shaken in mind nor disturbed, neither by a personality nor by a policy nor by a forged epistle as if from us, alleging that the day of the Lord [**the Tribulation**] is now present.

v. 3 - Do not let anyone deceive you in any way since the day of the Lord [**the Tribulation**] cannot occur unless there comes first ...

The word “first” is the ordinal adjective **πρῶτος, prōtos**: “first.”

Now! What must occur first before the Tribulation may begin? Your translations read “falling away,” “rebellion,” and “apostasy.” The manuscript has the nominative feminine singular of the noun:

ἀποστασία, apostasia -

This is the root for the English word “apostasy” which means “to renounce your religious faith.”

The assumption drawn from reading this passage in the English is that the translations imply the English definition, whether it is rendered “falling away,” “rebellion,” or “apostasy.” This is a mistake. We arrive at this conclusion by examining:

III. The Etymology of ἀποστασία, *apostasia*:

- 1- This noun is formed from the verb **ἀφίστημι, aphistēmi** which may be translated in two ways:



- 1) As a transitive verb: to revolt; to seduce; to remove from fellowship; to fall away; to become alienated; to defect; apostasy.
- 2) As an intransitive verb: to depart; to withdraw; to go away.
- 2- Unfortunately, all the translators chose the transitive sense of this word, thus we have the phrases “falling away,” “rebellion,” and “apostasy.”
- 3- But a transitive context demands an object. From what are these people falling away? We are not told.
- 4- This erroneous translation implies that a sign the Tribulation has arrived is widespread apostasy in the world, or a falling away from establishment truth, or apostasy toward Bible doctrine.
- 5- Such an analysis would be more appropriate to describe the impending demise of a client nation which is certainly not the subject of 2 Thessalonians 2:3.
- 6- A popular passage used to support apostasy is:

2 Timothy 3:1 - This know also, that in the last days difficult times shall come.

v. 13 - Evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

- 7- However, one must not conclude that the term “last days” refers to the last few days before the Tribulation begins. The last days refer to the Church Age and the Tribulation. Since the Rapture has been imminent since the first century A.D. we are living in the last days.
- 8- The persecutions and pressures that come our way are a part of the ebb and flow of historical trends related to the strength of the client nation’s Pivot.
- 9- We are therefore not to look on hard times as a sign of the Rapture being just around the corner but as a challenge to intensify our advance in the plan of God in order to have invisible historical impact on our client nation.
- 10- So the decision to translate **ἀποστασία, apostasia** as if it were transitive leads to compounding the problem. The accurate translation is the intransitive use and thus should read “to go away,” “to withdraw,” or “to depart.” We will use the latter:

2 Thessalonians 2:3 - Do not let anyone deceive you in any way since the day of the Lord—the Tribulation— cannot come unless the departure [**ἀποστασία, apostasia: the Rapture**] has come first ...

- 11- There are many examples in the King James Version where the translators applied the intransitive use of **ἀφίστημι, aphistēmi**: Luke 2:37; 4:13; Acts 12:10; 15:38; 19:9; 22:29; 2 Corinthians 12:8; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:19; and Hebrews 3:12.
- 12- These passages discuss other subjects but the point is that the translators accurately identified the intransitive sense, “to depart.” These same translators failed to do so in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.
- 13- Dr. Cyrus Scofield’s footnote at 2 Thessalonians 2:3 in his *Scofield Study Bible* observes the two possible translations of the verb. You will find it in each of the three major versions:

Scofield, C. I. (ed.). *The New Scofield Reference Bible: Authorized King James Version.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1294, marginal note: q.



Scofield, C. I. (ed.). *Oxford NIV Scofield Study Bible*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 1257, marginal note: a.

Scofield, C. I. (ed.). *New Scofield Study Bible: New American Standard*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1694, footnote: 3:

Gr. hē apostasia meaning the rebellion or the departure.

- 14- Here we see from exegesis that Paul is saying the Tribulation cannot begin until the “departure” comes first.
- 15- This departure is the Rapture of the church which Paul originally taught these same believers in 1 Thessalonians 4 and which he emphasized as being imminent in:

1 Thessalonians 4:17 - Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds and meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.
- 16- Paul believed when he wrote 1 Thessalonians early in A.D. 51 that he and the members of the church at Thessalonica would be alive at the rapture: “we who are alive and remain.”
- 17- Consequently, the word **ἀποστασία, apostasia** is properly translated in the intransitive sense and should be rendered “departure”: the Rapture of the church.

IV. Summary:

- 1- In conclusion, an excellent synopsis of this passage is provided by:

Pentecost, J. Dwight. *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*. (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1958), 204-205:

The Thessalonian Christians were concerned for fear that the rapture had already taken place and they were in the day of the Lord. Paul writes to show them that such a thing was impossible. First, he shows them in verse 3 that the day of the Lord could not take place until there was a departure. Second, he reveals there was to be the manifestation of the man of sin, or the lawless one, further described in Revelation 13. Paul's argument in verse 7 is that although the mystery of iniquity was operative in his day, that is, the lawless system that was to culminate in the person of the lawless one was manifesting itself, yet this lawless one could not be manifested until the Restrainer was taken out of the way. In other words, some One is preventing the purpose of Satan from coming to culmination and He will keep on performing this ministry until He is removed (vv. 7-8). As long as the Holy Spirit is resident within the church, which is His temple, this restraining work will continue and the man of sin cannot be revealed. It is only when the church, the temple, is removed that this restraining ministry ceases and lawlessness can produce the lawless one.

Thus the ministry of the Restrainer, which will continue as long as His temple is on the earth and which must cease before the lawless one can be revealed, requires the pretribulation rapture of the church.

- 2- The corrected and expanded translation then of the first three verses:

2 Thessalonians 2:1 - Moreover, believers, with reference to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together with Him [**the Rapture of the church**], we urgently request



v. 2 - that you be not easily shaken in mind or disturbed, neither by a personality [**a false teacher**], nor by a policy [**a false doctrine**], nor by a forged epistle [**a false corrigendum**] as if from us, alleging that the day of the Lord [**the Tribulation**] is now present.

v. 3 - Do not let anyone deceive you in any way since the day of the Lord cannot come [**the Tribulation**] unless the departure [**the Rapture of the church**] has come first, and then the man who is lawless—the one doomed to destruction—shall be revealed.

- 3- From this review we have confirmed four extremely important doctrines:
 - 1) The pretribulation Rapture of the church.
 - 2) The restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age against Lucifer's conspiracy to develop a global government.
 - 3) The principle that the anti-Christ cannot be revealed until the Rapture has occurred, consequently, his identity will never be known to anyone in the Church Age.
 - 4) The size of the Pivot and those believers who advance in the double-column phalanx determines the historical trends in each generation of the Church Age. A large Pivot results in greater restraint; a small Pivot results in less restraint.
- 4- We shall resume our advance on Tuesday evening.