

What is the Ἀποστασία of 2 Thessalonians 2:3?

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Abstract:

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul seeks to reassure his Thessalonian converts that they are not already in the day of the Lord because before the “day of the Lord” can be said to be present something which the DLNT calls “the apostasy” and the revelation of the man of lawlessness must first take place first and the man of lawlessness is revealed-the son of destruction (2 Thessalonians 2:2–3). In recent years, the ἀποστασία (*apostasia*) has been interpreted to mean a (pretribulational) rapture. It has even been asserted, despite the complete lack of evidence to this effect and much to the contrary, that this was the understanding of all Bible translators until the scholars who produced the King James Version (with ill-intent) abandoned the translation “departing”, understood to refer to a physical departure, and substituted it with the word “falling away”. This article argues against the rapture theory of the ἀποστασία on philological and contextual grounds.

Key words: Tim LaHaye, 2 Thessalonians 2:2–3, ἀποστασία, *apostasia*, apostasy, Rapture of the church

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul seeks to reassure his Thessalonian converts that they are not already in the day of the Lord because before the “day of the Lord” can be said to be present something which the DLNT calls “the apostasy” and the revelation of the man of lawlessness must first take place:

Let no one deceive you in any way, because *it will not be present* unless the apostasy comes first and the man *of* lawlessness is revealed—the son *of* destruction... (2 Thessalonians 2:2–2)

The original Greek word that is translated “apostasy” in the Disciples’ Literal New Testament¹ is ἀποστασία, from which we get our English word, “apostasy”, meaning a departure or falling away from the faith. It is translated *discessio* (meaning primarily, “a separation, division”,² and secondarily, “a going away, departure, removal”)³ in the Latin Vulgate; “discencioun” (an older spelling of “dissension”) in Wycliffe’s first edition of the Bible (1380); “a departynge”, or “departing”, in Wycliffe’s second edition (1384; both translations of the Vulgate) and in the earliest English versions translated directly from

¹ Also in the NASB.

² Charlton T. Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (New York, Cincinnati, and Chicago: American Book Company, 1890).

³ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1879).

the Greek New Testament;⁴ *defectio* (“defection, desertion, rebellion, revolt”),⁵ in Latin translations of 1514 (the Complutensian Polyglot), 1519 (Erasmus),⁶ and 1556 (Beza);⁷ “a falling away” in the Bishops’ Bible of 1568;⁸ “reuolt” or “revolt” in the Rheims New Testament (1582; a translation of the Vulgate);⁹ “rebellion” in the RSV (1952);¹⁰ “a definite

⁴ Also Tyndale (c. 1526), Coverdale (1535), the Matthew Bible (1537), the Great Bible (1539), and the Geneva Bible (1560, 1576).

⁵ Short, in his *Elementary Latin Dictionary*, defines *defectio* thus: *a failing, failure, want, lack, disappearance*. Lewis and Short give as its primary definition: *Defection, desertion, rebellion, revolt*. They give as its secondary definition: *A failing, failure, deficiency, want, disappearance*.

⁶ This was given in Erasmus second edition of the Greek New Testament. The first edition (1516) had contained his Greek edition and the Vulgate.

⁷ The first edition of Theodore Beza’s Latin translation of the New Testament was published together with Santes Pagninus’ translation of the Old Testament in Robert Estienne’s 1556 edition of the Latin Bible.

⁸ Also AV, ASV, AMPC, JUB, MEV, NKJV, and YLT.

⁹ Also DRA, GW, and NOG.

¹⁰ Also CEB, ESV, GNT (“the final Rebellion”), ISV, LEB, TLB, MOUNCE, NET, NIV, NLT, and TLV).

rejection of God” in Phillips (1947, 1960); and “the final rebellion against God” in the NEB (1961).

Given that the translation “dissension”, “revolt”, “falling away”, and “rebellion” given in most English versions has been contested, a closer examination of the word *ἀποστασία* is necessitated.

The normal procedure where the context does not make explicit the meaning of the word—as is in fact the case here (see below)—is to look at its use in other works by the same author, and then, where this is lacking, as it is in this case, there being no other use of *ἀποστασία* in Paul’s writings, its use elsewhere in the New Testament. In fact, the word *ἀποστασία* is used in only one other place in the NT—in Acts 21:21:

“And they were informed about you—that you are teaching all the Jews throughout the nations **apostasy** from Moses, saying *that they should* not be circumcising *their* children, nor walking in *their* customs.” (DLNT)

The words *ἀποστασίαν...ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως* (literally, “apostasy...from Moses”), are translated, “to forsake Moses” (AV), “to depart from Moses” (DRA), “*the* abandonment of Moses” (LEB), “to abandon Moses” (NET), “to turn away from Moses” (NIV), and “departing from Moses” (WYC), or words to that effect. Thus, all English versions agree on the basic meaning of the words *ἀποστασίαν...ἀπὸ Μωϋσέως*, though there are considerable differences in wording. The problem with this, however, is that a single citation of the word *ἀποστασία* in the New Testament—and this in a book by an author other than Paul himself—is not sufficient to establish Paul’s intended meaning in 2 Thessalonian 2:3. Thus, a survey of its use in Greek literature, starting with the Greek Old

Testament, then its use in the *koine*, in earlier Classical Greek, and finally its use in early Christian literature, is necessitated.

According to Liddell-Scott-Jones (LSJ), ἀποστασία is a late form of ἀπόστασις, and they give as its primary meaning, “*defection, revolt*”, providing single citations from the works of three authors of the late first century BC,¹¹ the mid to late first century AD,¹² and the late first to early second century AD.¹³ They further elaborate: “esp. in religious sense, *rebellion against God, apostasy*”, furnishing one citation from the Greek Old Testament,¹⁴ and one from the New Testament—2 Thessalonians 2:3, the precise instance which is presently being discussed. LSJ give as further definitions of the word ἀποστασία, (2), “*departure, disappearance*”, (3), “*distinguishing*” and (4), “*distance*”, providing single

¹¹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus (flourished c. 20 BC), *Antiquitates Romanae*, 7.1.

¹² Flavius Josephus (37–c. 100 AD), *Vita* 10.

¹³ Plutarch (c. AD 46–AD 120), *Galba* 1.

¹⁴ Joshua 22.22.

citations from works datable to the sixth century AD for (2),¹⁵ and (3),¹⁶ and to the third century BC for (4).¹⁷

Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker (BAGD) describes the word ἀποστασία as “a form quotable since Diodorus Siculus outside the Bible...for [the] classical ἀπόστασις” and give as its definition, “*rebellion, abandonment* in [a] religious sense, *apostasy*”, providing three citations from the Greek Old Testament, which was produced between the third and second centuries BC.¹⁸

In fact, ἀποστασία is found five times in the Greek Old Testament, though in three instances some manuscripts have the variant reading, ἀπόστασις, which means “defection” or “revolt”, for ἀποστασία.¹⁹

¹⁵ Olympiodorus Philosophus, *Aristotelis Meteora commentaria*, ed. W. Stüve (*Comm. in Arist. Graeca* xii pars ii), Berlin 1900.

¹⁶ Elias Philosophus, *Aristotelis Categories commentaria*, ed. A. Busse (*Comm. in Arist. Graeca* xviii pars i), Berlin 1900.

¹⁷ Archimedes, *Psammites* (a.k.a. (in Latin), *Archimedis Syracusani Arenarius & Dimensio Circuli*, or (in English), *The Sand-Reckoner*), 1.5.

¹⁸ Joshua 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:19; 1 Maccabees 2:15.

¹⁹ Joshua 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:19; 33:19; Jeremiah 2:19; 1 Maccabees 2:15. Variant readings are found in Joshua 22:22; 2 Chronicles 33:19; and 1 Maccabees 2:15.

In the three other principal Greek versions of the OT (or surviving fragments thereof), dating respectively to the (1) early, (2) mid, and (3) late second century AD, it is used (1) seven times,²⁰ (2) once,²¹ and (3) twice.²²

Under the voice *ἀποστασία*, James H. Moulton and George Milligan cite from papyrological and “other non-literary sources” (i.e., the *koinē*) dating to various points in the second century BC three occurrences of the word, *ἀποστάτης* (“*deserter, rebel*”, LSJ),²³ one of the “old word” *ἀπόστασις*,²⁴ which it regards as equivalent to *ἀποστασία*,²⁵ and one

²⁰ In Aquila (flourished 130 AD), in Deuteronomy 15:9; Judge 19:22; 1 Kingdoms 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; Proverbs 16:27; and Nahum 1:11).

²¹ In Theodotion (ca. AD 150), in Kingdoms 21:13.

²² In Symmachus in 1 Kingdoms 1:16; 2:12).

²³ They cite P Revill M^{él} (B.C. 130) (=Witkowski,² p. 96); *Syll* 930⁵⁰ (B.C. 112); P Amh H. 30^{33 ff} (ii/B.C.).

²⁴ They cite P Par 3613 (ii/B.C.).

²⁵ They cite 1 Maccabees 2:15, Acts 21:21, and Nägeli, p. 31.

of the adjective, ἀποστατικός.²⁶ They also note “the Hellenistic tendency to form new nouns in -σία”, of which ἀποστασία is of course an example.²⁷

Turning to the patristic period, a period encompassing the second century to the first half of the ninth century, G. W. H. Lampe provides the following definitions of ἀποστασία: (1), “*revolt, defection*, specially spiritual” (a), “of fallen angels” and “of [the] Devil and demons”, and (b), “of man, by original sin”, “by sin in general”, and “from truth”, (2), “*apostasy*”, both “from” and “of”, “*secession, schism*”, (3), “*divorce*”, and (4), “*departure*”, (a), “*removal*”, (b), “*defection* from a monastery, and, “*si vera lectio*” (“if it is the true reading”), (5), “*standing aloof*”.

Lampe provides an interesting reference for the fourth of the above definitions, “*departure*”, to be found in the *Dormitio Mariae*,²⁸ or “The Assumption of the Virgin”, an apocryphal work that can be dated to no earlier than the fifth century AD.²⁹

²⁶ They cite P Tor S68 (B.C. 119).

²⁷ James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914–1929), 68–69.

²⁸ Lampe cites Constantin von Tischendorf, *Apocalypses Apocryphae* (Leipzig, 186), 95.

²⁹ Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 1:429.

CURRENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TERM ἈΠΟΣΤΑΣΙΑ

Robert L. Thomas lists thirteen different views that have been proposed for the meaning of *ἀποστασία*, namely, that it refers to (1) a revolt of the Jews against Caligula in A.D. 40; (2) a revolt of the Jews against Claudius in A.D. 50; (3) a revolt of the Jews against Titus in A.D. 70; (4) the coming of Mohammed; (5) the French Revolution; (6) the rejection of Jesus as Messiah; (7) Gnosticism; (8) the apostasy as currently being fulfilled; (9) the Antichrist himself (abstract for a concrete); (10) the rapture; (11) a departure from God by the professing Christian church; (12) a revolt of the human race against God; and (13) a future Jewish apostasy.³⁰

The first seven views see the apostasy as having already taken place, and can easily be dismissed due to the fact that neither the Day of the Lord has come, nor has Christ returned.

H. Wayne House has identified four different ways in which English versions and biblical scholars have understood the word *ἀποστασία* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, (1) *ἀποστασία* refers to the “man of sin”; (2) *ἀποστασία* refers to a “falling away” from the faith, the “falling away” in question being, (a) a future “falling away” from within the professing church of those who never truly believed in Jesus, (b) a “falling away” of Jews from “the God of their fathers and their messianic hope in favour of a false religion (humanism) and a false messiah (the Antichrist)” during the tribulation, (c) a “falling away” of non-

³⁰ Robert L. Thomas, ed., *Exegetical Digest of the Epistle of Second Thessalonians* (The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, 1975), 63–65.

Christians as a whole; (3) *ἀποστασία* refers to a revolt or rebellion against God; and (4) *ἀποστασία* refers to the Rapture.

A more useful classification of the different ways in which the word *ἀποστασία* has been understood, perhaps, is according to (1) whether commentators are (a) pretribulationist, or (b) posttribulationist; (2) whether they see the Day of the Lord as (a) broadly coterminous with the tribulation or seventieth week, i.e., a tribulationist Day of the Lord, or (b) equivalent to what they call the *parousia*, i.e., Christ's second coming at the end of the tribulation or Daniel's seventieth week, i.e., a posttribulationist Day of the Lord; or (3) whether they see the *ἀποστασία* and the "revelation" of the "man of lawlessness" as (a) precursors of a tribulationist Day of the Lord, (b) precursors of a posttribulationist Day of the Lord and therefore as characterising the Tribulation, (c) phenomena characterising a tribulationist Day of the Lord, or (d) events marking the beginning of Daniel's Seventieth week or Tribulation.

Generally, posttribulationists (Reese, Berkhof, Gundry, Ladd, Frame, Moore, Bruce, Wannamaker), earlier pretribulationists (Hogg & Vine, Chafer), and pre-wrath rapturists (Rosenthal), see the apostasy (and revelation of the man of lawlessness) as (3b) precursors of a posttribulationist Day of the Lord and therefore as characterising the Tribulation; most pretribulationists (Ryrie; Hiebert) see the apostasy as (3a) precursors of a tribulationist Day of the Lord and the revelation of the "man of lawlessness" as marking the beginning of the tribulation; and some pretribulationists (later Walvoord; Constable) and the present author see the apostasy (and revelation of the man of lawlessness) as (3c) phenomena characterising a tribulationist Day of the Lord; some pretribulationists see the apostasy as (3d) an event (the Rapture) marking the beginning of Daniel's Seventieth week or Tribulation.

THE RAPTURE THEORY

Though popularly associated with E. Schuyler English, whose article, “Re-Thinking the Rapture”, appeared in the May 1950 (56) issue of *Our Hope*,³¹ it seems that the first to propose this view was J. S. Mabie, who “suggested ‘a most original answer’ to the interpretation of ἀποστασία at the Annual Conference on the Lord’s Coming, in Los Angeles, in November, 1895. It was the Rapture of the church, as set forth in 1 Thessalonians 4:14–18.”³² William Combs also identifies John R. Rice as one who in 1945 also embraced this view of the ἀποστασία before English’s article appeared: “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.’”³³

³¹ E. Schuyler English, “Re-Thinking the Rapture”, *Our Hope* 56 (May 1950), 663-66;

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

Richard R. Reiter points out that the replies of others appeared in the July, 1950 (56) issue of *Our Hope* and many letters in the July 1950 through March 1951 (57) edition.

³² Richard R. Reiter, *The Rapture*, 32. Reiter cites J. S. Mabie, “Will the Church Be in the Tribulation—The Great One?” *Morning Star* 5 (November 1898), 123–24.

³³ William W. Combs, “Is *Apostasia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 a Reference to The Rapture?” *DBSJ* 3 (Fall 1998): 63–87 (esp., 75). Combs cites: John R. Rice, *The Coming Kingdom of Christ* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1945), 152.

Following the publication of English's 1950 article, a number of pretribulationist scholars, including Allan A. MacRae,³⁴ Kenneth Wuest³⁵, (initially) John F. Walvoord,³⁶ Gordon R. Lewis,³⁷ Paul Lee Tan,³⁸ James Montgomery Boice,³⁹ Stanley Ellisen,⁴⁰ Leon J.

³⁴ Allan A. MacRae, "New Light on the Second Chapter of Second Thessalonians", *The Bible Today* 43 (April 1950), 201–10. Reiter points out that MacRae's article "actually preceded English's in print, for it was a reply to a letter received from English". Richard R. Reiter, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1984), 239.

³⁵ Kenneth S. Wuest, "The Rapture—Precisely When?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114 (January–March 1957), 64–67

³⁶ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 71–72.

³⁷ Gordon Lewis, "Biblical Evidence for Pretribulationism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 (July–September 1968), 216–18

³⁸ Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake, IN: Assurance Publishers, 1974), 341.

³⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Last and Future World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan: 1974), 42–43.

⁴⁰ Stanley Ellison, *A Biography of a Great Planet* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1975), 121.

Wood,⁴¹ Daniel K. Davey,⁴² H. Wayne House,⁴³ Thomas Ice, and Tim LaHaye,⁴⁴ have embraced this view.

Proponents of the “rapture theory” typically present the following arguments in support of this view.

THE MEANING OF THE ROOT VERB

Proponents of the “rapture theory” appeal firstly to the meaning of the root verb.

English writes:

⁴¹ Leon J. Wood, *The Bible and Future Events* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977),

87–88

⁴² Daniel K. Davey, “The ‘Apostasia’ of II Thessalonians 2:3”, Th.M. thesis, Detroit

Baptist Theological Seminary, May 1982.

⁴³ H. Wayne House, “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), 261–96; “Is the Rapture Found in 2 Thessalonians 2:3?” *The Popular Handbook*

on the Rapture, ed. Tim LaHaye, Thomas Ice, Ed Hindson (Eugene, OR: Harvest House

Publishers, 2011), 147–156.

⁴⁴ Tim LaHaye, “Departing” Rather than “Falling Away” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, *The*

Popular Handbook on the Rapture, 157–174.

It is from the verb that we obtain the root meaning of a noun. Apostasy, or an older form of the noun, *apostasis*, comes from the verb *aphisteemi*, which means *to remove*, or, in the causal sense, *to put away*, or *to cause to be removed*. This root verb, *aphisteemi*, is used fifteen times in the New Testament; Luke 2:27; 4:13; 8:13; 22:29; Acts 5:37, 38; 12:10; 15:38; 19:9; 22:29; 2 Corinthians 12:8; 1 Timothy 4:1; 6:5; 2 Timothy 2:19; and Hebrews 3:12. Of these fifteen occurrences of the verb, only three have any reference to religious departure. In all three of these cases, by context (Luke 8:13), and by the descriptive phrases, “from the faith” and “from the living God” respectively (1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:12), religious defection is designated. In eleven of the fifteen N.T. occurrences, the actual word “depart” is used in translating *aphisteemi*, in relation to such modes of departure as that of the angel who, having delivered Peter from prison, “*departed* from him” (Acts 12:10), and of Paul’s prayer that his thorn in the flesh “might *depart* from him (2 Corinthians 12:8).

It is evident, then, that the verb *aphisteemi* does have the meaning of *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 its meaning from the verb, the noun, too, may have such a broad connotation. “The departure” is assuredly an acceptable translation of *hee apostasia* and is, in our opinion, the proper one.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ English, “Re-Thinking the Rapture”.

Lewis makes the same point, though he enlists support from Heinrich Schlier's article in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*:

The Greek usage of departure (apostasia) is not limited to apostasy from the faith, but includes departure from a given place. Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* includes an entry for the verb and two related noun forms (aphistemi, apostasia, and dichostasia). The contributor, Heinrich Schlier from Marburg, concludes that the New Testament usage is limited to political and religious alienation from persons. But the root verb, he writes, means "to remove,' either spatially, or from the context of a state or relationship, or from fellowship with a person." The verb may mean to remove spatially. There is little reason then to deny that the noun can mean such a spatial removal or departure. Since the noun is used only one other time in the New Testament of apostasy from Moses (Acts 21:21), we can hardly conclude that its Biblical meaning is necessarily determined. The verb is used fifteen times in the New Testament. Of these fifteen, only three have anything to do with a departure from the faith (Luke 8:13; 1 Tim 4:1; Heb 3:12). The word is used for departing from iniquity (2 Tim 2:19), from ungodly men (1 Tim 6:5), from the temple (Luke 2:37), from the body (2 Cor 12:8), and from a person (Acts 12:10; Luke 4:13). With Dr. Allan A. MacRae we conclude: "Thus the New Testament instances make it abundantly clear that the verb means depart, or go away, in a very wide sense, and is only in certain instances specialized to the idea of a departure from the faith."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Lewis, 217–218.

Davey goes further than the above authors in his insistence that the fundamental meaning of ἀποστασία is “spatial departure”: “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.”⁴⁷

There are two possible errors in these authors’ reasoning here. The first is the assumption that ἀποστασία is simply a later construction for ἀπόστασις and that there is no difference in usage between the two words. The second is that because ἀφίστημι is the root verb from which ἀπόστασις is derived, the word ἀποστασία can mean spatial departure at the time Paul wrote his letters to the Thessalonians. Combs, himself a pretribulationist, though he rejects the “rapture theory”, writes concerning the first:

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. 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.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Davey, “The ‘Apostasia’ of II Thessalonians 2:3”, 9.

⁴⁸ William W. Combs, “Is *Apostasia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 a Reference to The Rapture?”

DBSJ 3 (Fall 1998): 63–87 (esp., 79). Combs cites Gerhard Kittel et al., eds., *Theological*

Combs also takes issue with the use House has made of Schlier's article in Kittel's

TDNT:

House does not accurately represent the evidence in Kittel. He says: "Moreover, Kittel recognizes that ἀποστασία 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 ἀποστασία 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.⁴⁹

In his evaluation of the argument of English *et alia* from the meaning of the root verb ἀφίστημι, Robert H. Gundry writes:

English and Wuest largely by-pass lexical evidence concerning the noun ἀποστασία in order to base their argument on the cognate verb ἀφίστημι. Of the fifteen occurrences of ἀφίστημι in the NT, only three refer to a religious departure. "And since a noun takes its meaning from the verb, the noun, too, may have such a broad connotation." The mistake comes in making the cognate verb determine the

Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), s.v.

"ἀφίστημι, ἀποστασία, διχοστασία," by Heinrich Schlier, 1:513.

⁴⁹ Combs, "Is *Apostasia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 a Reference to the Rapture?" 83.

meaning of the noun in question. Many times nouns acquire special meanings. Ἀποστασίον, another noun cognate to ἀφίστημι, means *divorce* or some other legal act of separation. Yet no one claims that this noun means *departure* in the wide, general sense of the cognate verb. By the same token ἀποστασία does not need to have the wide, general sense of the same cognate verb.

It happens, then, that ἀποστασία had acquired the special sense of religious apostasy or political defection. Whereas ἀφίστημι very many times carries the simple meaning of spatial departure, ἀποστασία appears elsewhere in the NT and many times throughout the LXX *solely* with the special meaning. Such usage counts far more than etymology. We should take the meaning which a word had during the time and in the culture in which it was written instead of making recourse to a literal definition of the root. Thus, the terms “apostasy,” “falling away,” and “rebellion” do not overlay the Greek word with a questionable interpretation. They rather represent a valid and necessary recognition of the *usus loquendi*—i.e., they are a true translations.⁵⁰

Combs also takes issue with Davey’s understanding of “the linguistic rules governing semantics”: “On the contrary, it is Davey’s understanding which is contrary to the regular use of language. This is the well-known root fallacy.” Combs cites D. A. Carson’s *Exegetical Fallacies*, though Moisés Silva’s earlier discussion of the etymology of

⁵⁰ Robert H. Gundry *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973), 116.

the word “nice” in his book, *Biblical Words and their Meaning*, is perhaps the better starting point. Silva writes:

Can the modern speaker of English sense a semantic relationship between *science* and *nice*? Hardly, though diachronically such a relationship exists. *Science* is derived from the present participle of Latin *scire*, ‘to know’; its negative *nescire* yields the adjective *nescius*, ‘ignorant,’ whence (through Old French) we find Old English *nice*, ‘foolish’ (also ‘lascivious,’ ‘lazy,’ ‘shy!’), later ‘fastidious,’ and finally ‘pleasant.’ This last acceptation is certainly the *present* semantic core of the word, yet it has nothing to do with its etymology or any supposed inherent meaning.⁵¹

In his discussion of what he calls the “root fallacy”, D. A. Carson writes: “Now it may be possible to trace out diachronically just how *nescius* generated ‘nice’...But I know of no one today who in saying such and such a person is ‘nice’ believes that he or she has in some measure labelled that person ignorant because the ‘root meaning’ or ‘hidden meaning’ or ‘literal meaning’ of ‘nice’ is ‘ignorant.’”

Perhaps more to the point is Carson’s discussion of how erroneous claims have been made for the meaning of nouns based on the meaning of cognate verbs. Discussing the meaning of the word *hypēretas*, translated “servants” in 1 Corinthians 4:1, he writes:

⁵¹ Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, Revised and Expanded edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983, 1994), 104–105.

More than a century ago, R. C. Trench popularized the view that ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) derives from the verb ἐρέσσω (*eressō*) “to row”. The basic meaning of ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*), then, is “rower.”...A. T. Robertson and J. B. Hofmann went further and said ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) derives morphologically from ὑπό (*hypo*) and ἐρέτης (*eretēs*). Now ἐρέσσω (*eressō*) means “rower” [*sic*; he means “to row”] in Homer (eighth century B.C.); and Hofmann draws the explicit connection with the morphology, concluding a ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) was basically an “under rower” or “assistant rower” or “subordinate rower.” Trench had not gone so far: he did not detect in ὑπό (*hypo*) any notion of subordination. Nevertheless Leon Morris concluded that a ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) was “a servant of a lowly kind”; and William Barclay plunged further and designated ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) as “a rower on the lower bank of a trireme.” Yet the fact remains that with only one possible exception—and it is merely possible, not certain—ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) is never used for “rower” in classical literature, and it is certainly not used that way in the New Testament. The ὑπηρέτης (*hypēretēs*) in the New Testament is a servant, and often there is little if anything to distinguish him from a διάκονος (*diakonos*).⁵²

Paul D. Feinberg, a dispensationalist scholar, though he rejects the “rapture theory”, provides two further examples of differences in meaning between underlying verbs and derivative nouns both drawn from the New Testament:

⁵² D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

In most cases the meaning of the underlying verb carries over to its derivative noun. But there are instances where this is not the case, and to do so leads to false conclusions. This is even true where the word is a compound. *Anaginōskō* is a word in the New Testament. It is a compound from the preposition *ana* which means “up, upwards” and *ginōskō* which means “to know.” To base the meaning of the compound on the meaning of its parts leaves one with a meaning for *anaginōskō* of “to know up” or “to know upwards,” when in fact the word means “to know certainly, recognize” or “to read.” There is at least another clear example of the difference between a verb and its cognate noun. There is a verb *eperōtaō* which is found a number of times in the epistles (e.g., Matt. 12:110; Luke 3:10; Rom. 10:20). The meaning of the verb, invariably, is “to ask” or “consult.” A derivative noun occurs once in the New Testament, in 1 Pet. 3:21. The noun is *eperōtēma*. The idea here is of a pledge, quite different from its cognate verb meaning. That is, water baptism is “a pledge of a good conscience toward God.” Thus, the meaning of derivative nouns must be established through *their usage*.⁵³

Thus no conclusions can be drawn as to the meaning of ἀποστασία from its cognate verb.

Before moving on, we need to examine a further statement that House makes in his contribution to the same publication. On page 280, he states:

⁵³ Paul D. Feinberg, “2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture”, *When the Trumpet Sounds*,

ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 311.

Gundry's statement that *apostasia* and its cognates occur over 40 times in the Septuagint (LXX) is perplexing to me because it is a gross understatement. In reality *apostasia* and its cognates occur over 220 times in the LXX. Moreover, contrary to Gundry's dogmatic comment that *apostasia* and its cognates occur "every time with the meaning of religious or political defection," *apostasia* and its cognates carry different senses in the LXX. At least 66 times they express spatial separation from someone or something. The terms mean religious defection approximately 53 times and political defection only about eight times. Gundry's "well-established" usage (read "political revolt" or "religious apostasy"), at least in the LXX, is simply inaccurate.⁵⁴

House's statement is highly misleading. If one classifies the word *ἀποστασία* together with its "cognates" (I assume he is referring to *ἀφίστημι*), then it is of course technically correct that at least 66 times "*apostasia* and its cognates" express spatial separation from someone or something. The problem with this statement, however, is that it completely disguises the fact that not once does *ἀποστασία* on its own have this meaning. Based on an online search of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database from the second century B.C. through the first century AD, Feinberg finds, firstly, that there are indeed at least 355 occurrences of *ἀφίστημι* and its cognates and that the verb *ἀφίστημι* is clearly used of physical departure in both testaments. He notes:

⁵⁴ House, "Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: Apostasy or Rapture?" *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 280.

In the OT (the LXX) the verb is used in Genesis 12:8 of Abram's departure from Shechem toward the hills east of Bethel. It is used of the physical separation of person as in 1 Samuel 18:13 of David's departure from Saul and in Psalm 6:8 of the physical separation of the wicked from God presence. In NT Greek there are clear examples of the use of the verb to express physical departure or separation. Forms of this verb appear 15 times. Luke uses this word 10 times (Lk. 2:37; 4:13; 8:13; 13:27; Acts 5:37, 38; 12:10; 15:38; 19:9 22:29). It is found 4 times in Paul (2 Co 12:8; 1 Tim 4:1; 6:5; 2 Tim 2:19), and it is used once by the writer of the book of Hebrews (Heb 3:12). All but Acts 5:37 are intransitive uses of the verb. The idea of physical departure is prominent in many of the occurrences. In Luke 2:37 Anna is said to have never left the temple, and in Acts 19:9 Paul was teaching in the synagogue in Ephesus for three month, but left or departed when some obstinate hearers refused to believe. Thus, it is fair to conclude that there are clear examples where the verb means to physically depart or leave in both the Greek OT and NT.⁵⁵

Turning to the noun *ἀποστασία*, however, Feinberg notes:

It is found in the Greek Old Testament and has the idea of rebellion (Josh. 22:22), wickedness (Jer 2:19) and unfaithfulness (2 Chr. 28:19; 29:19; 33:19). *Apostasia* is found twice in the NT, in our text and in Acts 21:21. In Acts the noun is used to express the teaching of Paul which was to tell the Jews who lived among the Gentiles that they should *forsake* the teaching of Moses about circumcision. *None*

⁵⁵ Feinberg, "2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture", 309–310.

of the uses of the noun in either testament indicate a physical departure of any sort. The point can be made even more strongly. If one searches for the uses of the noun “apostasy” in the 355 [*sic*] occurrences over the 300-year period between the second century B.C and the first century A.D., one will not find a single instance where this word refers to a physical departure. The uses outside biblical Greek are exactly parallel to those in it.⁵⁶

Thus, to assert that “*apostasia* and its cognates” express spatial separation from someone or something at least sixty-six times is to prove nothing and an examination of the use of the word ἀποστασία on its own “between the second century BC and the first century AD” demonstrates that not once does it have the use that House ascribes to it.

One might add here that the reader is greatly assisted in his or her evaluation of House’s claims by the fact that House himself has usefully attached a survey of the uses of “*apostasia* and its cognates” in an appendix to his contribution to *When the Trumpet Sounds*. In this appendix, he quotes in the original Greek and in English translation some thirty-six examples of occurrences of “*apostasia* and its cognates”: six from the Greek Old Testament, three from the apocrypha, twenty from the New Testament, four from the papyri, and three from Josephus. Fourteen of these (39%) refer to departure in the physical sense. When we look at a precise breakdown of “*apostasia* and its cognates”, however, an entirely different picture emerges. Of the eighteen occurrences of the verb ἀφίστημι, fifteen in the New Testament and three in the papyri, fifteen refer to departure in the spatial

⁵⁶ Feinberg, “2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture”, 310. My own search in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* revealed 144 occurrences.

sense,⁵⁷ and three (all from the NT) to religious departure.⁵⁸ (No great surprise there.) The reference of all three occurrences of the masculine noun (*ἀποστάσιον*)—all from the New Testament—is to “a certificate of divorce”.⁵⁹ (Again, no great surprise there.) The reference of the one occurrence of the masculine noun *ἀποστάται* (the plural of *ἀποστάτης*) is to “rebels”.⁶⁰ (Again, no great surprise there.) Of the fifteen occurrences of the feminine noun (*ἀποστασία*)—five from the Greek Old Testament,⁶¹ three from the apocrypha,⁶² two from the New Testament,⁶³ two from the papyri,⁶⁴ and three from Josephus⁶⁵—*all fifteen* refer to “religious departure” or “apostasy”, “rebellion”, or “revolt”. (Again, no great

⁵⁷ Luke 2:37; Luke 4:13; Luke 13:27; Acts 5:37, 38; Acts 12:10; Acts 15:38; Acts 19:9; Acts 22:29; 2 Cor. 12:8; 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 2:19; P. Grenf. II 77:9 (AD 3/4); P. Lond. 1209.12 (89 BC); P. Rein. 7:18 (141 BC?).

⁵⁸ Luke 8:13; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12.

⁵⁹ Mt. 5:31; Mt. 19:7; Mark 10:4.

⁶⁰ Isaiah 30:1.

⁶¹ 2 Chronicles 28:19; 2 Chronicles 29:19; 2 Chronicles 33:19; Joshua 22:22; Jeremiah 2:19.

⁶² 1 Esdras 2:27; 1 Maccabees 2:15; 2 Maccabees 5:8

⁶³ Acts 21:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

⁶⁴ P. Amh. II. 30:33ff. (2 BC); P. Par. 36:12 (2 BC).

⁶⁵ *Jewish Wars*, 2:39; *Antiquities*, 13.219; *Vita*, 43.

surprise there for those who base their understanding of the meaning of Greek words on their actual usage as opposed to wishful thinking.)

CLASSICAL GREEK USAGE

Proponents of the “rapture theory” appeal secondly to the use of *ἀποστασία* in Classical Greek.

Lewis writes:

The extension of the obvious meaning of the verb to the noun is justified not only by the common root, but by classical Greek usage. Liddel [*sic*] and Scott, in their authoritative lexicon of classical Greek, list as the second meaning of the noun, *departure or disappearance*. And they cite a commentary on Aristotle’s *Meteora* where the stiffening of a material is said to be caused by *apostasia* of water from it. One could hardly find a better analogy for the rapture than evaporation.⁶⁶

It is not clear whether by “classical” Greek, Lewis intends us to understand the Greek of the classical period (the Greek of the fifth and fourth centuries BC),⁶⁷ or Ancient

⁶⁶ Lewis, 218.

⁶⁷ This comprises of Attic, the dialect of Attica, including Athens, but also of Ionic, the language of Herodotus (both eastern forms of the Greek of the classical period), and of western and central forms.

Greek in general, which covers a far more extensive period and includes the forms of Greek used in ancient Greece and the ancient world from around the ninth century BC to the sixth century AD.⁶⁸ It is not clear, therefore, what precisely is being asserted: whether a Greek-speaking author of the Classical period is using *ἀποστασία* to denote *departure* or *disappearance*, which could have some bearing on the question of its meaning in the Hellenistic period, or whether an author living at some unspecified time between around the ninth century BC and the sixth century AD is doing so, which would have considerable bearing on the question of the word's meaning if he was a contemporary of Paul or practically none whatsoever if he was writing eight centuries *before* or five centuries *after* Paul's time.

Though a posttribulationist, Gundry also accepts the view that *ἀποστασία* can mean "departure" in "classical Greek", by which it is clear that he means the Greek of the Classical period, as he differentiates this from the *koinē*, the Greek of the Hellenistic period:

The meaning and connotation of a NT word are determined from four sources: (1) other appearances in the NT; (2) the LXX; (3) the *koinē* (of which NT Greek is a species); and (4) classical Greek. The last makes the least important of all sources and, significantly, it is from this least important source that English draws his

⁶⁸ Ancient Greek is often roughly divided into the Archaic period (ninth to sixth centuries BC), Classical period (fifth and fourth centuries BC), and Hellenistic period (third century BC to the sixth century AD).

argument. But even in classical Greek simple departure by no means predominates.⁶⁹

Thus, Gundry clearly accepts that in classical Greek ἀποστασία can mean “departure, though he says that its use in this sense—and consequently its bearing on the question of its meaning in 2 Thessalonians 2:3—is comparatively limited.

House, in his 1995 contribution to *When the Trumpet Sounds*, writes:

The noun form allows for *apostasia* as a simple departure in the classical period, proved by examples from Liddell and Scott. Their lexicon gives “departure” or “disappearance” as secondary meanings. If one says that this is not important because this meaning is only classical or ancient and thus lost its meaning by the time of the New Testament period, then I may turn to this same root meaning for *apostasia* in the patristic era immediately following the New Testament period, as indicated in definitions for the noun form in Lampe’s Patristic Greek Lexicon. Although the noun used in the sense of a spatial departure is not the normal meaning (though it is true for the verb) during New Testament time, the word is found with this meaning in time periods before and after the New Testament era, and it is likely to have been understood this way at least sometimes. It was also understood to have this meaning in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 by the fourth-century

⁶⁹ Gundry *The Church and the Tribulation*, 115.

translator Jerome, where in his text he translates *hē apostasia* as the Latin *discessio*, meaning “departure.”⁷⁰

Thus we have here an unequivocal statement to the effect (1) that “examples from Liddell and Scott” prove that the noun form “allows for *apostasia* as a simple departure in the classical period”, by which I assume he refers to the period antecedent to the Hellenist period, of which the New Testament period forms a part (or at any rate to a period preceding that in which the New Testament was written by an appreciable period of time); (2) that not only are “examples” to be found before the New Testament period, but also that “definitions for the noun form in Lampe’s Patristic Greek Lexicon” indicate that it had “this same root meaning...in the patristic era immediately following the New Testament period”; and (3) that “the word is found with this meaning in time periods *before and after* the New Testament era, and it is likely to have been understood this way at least sometimes” (my emphases).⁷¹

In an appendix to his 1995 contribution, House quotes the entries under *ἀποστασία* and *ἀφίστημι* in LSJ, Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, BAGD, Louw and Nida’s *Greek-English Lexicon*, Moulton and Milligan’s *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, and Lampe’s *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, giving the definitions but omitting citations of their use, and quotes the five instances of the use of *ἀποστασία* in the Greek Old Testament, 2 Chronicles 28:19, 2 Chronicles 33:19, Joshua 22:22.

⁷⁰ House, “Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: Apostasy or Rapture?” 273.

⁷¹ We will leave a discussion of the use House and others make of the rendition of ἡ *ἀποστασία* in the Latin Vulgate to a later section.

Citing Lewis' statement quoted earlier in this section as his source, House states:

The word *apostasia* is regularly translated “rebellion or “defection” in Greek literature before the time of the writing of the New Testament. In a few cases, however, it does have the sense of “departure.” The reason for this difference is the context of the passages. At times, the word does not occur in a context in which the matter of rebellion against authority, or defection from a person, ideology, or religious faith is in view. Rather the noun adheres more closely to the verbal meaning of “depart” or some other spatial sense.⁷²

Unfortunately, Lewis fails to mention that the work in question, *Aristotelis Meteora Commentaria*, is a sixth-century (AD) work by Olympiodorus Philosophus, or Olympiodorus the Younger, who was born in about AD 495 and died in 570—hardly a contemporary of the apostle Paul.

In fact, Liddell and Scott, on which Lewis' bases his statement, cites only one instance of the use of ἀποστασία in this sense, and this in a work of the sixth century AD, that is, five centuries *after* the time of the writing of the New Testament. I know of no instances where ἀποστασία has this sense in literature *before* the time of the writing of the New Testament.

⁷² House, “Is the Rapture Found in 2 Thessalonians 2:3?”, 151.

It is instructive in this respect that this definition of the word ἀποστασία is not found in Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*,⁷³ BAGD, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, and the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*.⁷⁴

Lastly, if it is indeed the case that in a few instances before the time of the writing of the New Testament ἀποστασία has the sense of “departure”, as claimed by House, one cannot help but wonder why House didn’t think to include any of them in the appendix to his 1995 contribution to *When the Trumpet Sounds*.

Combs cites another example of a work from roughly the same period in which ἀποστασία is used to denote a spatial departure:

Lampe’s lexicon of the patristic period also lists “revolt, defection” as the primary meaning of ἀποστασία; however, there is one example given of spatial departure.

This interesting reference does not seem to have been discussed by supporters of

⁷³ John H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (reprint of 1889 ed.; Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1975), s.v. “ἀποστασία,” p. 667.

⁷⁴ *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.

the Rapture view. 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.

Combs comments: “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.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 705.

Combs comments: “This ‘rapture’ is now described as a ‘departure,’ the Greek word being ἀποστασία. 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.”⁷⁶

Far from providing further evidence that ἀποστασία could be used to denote “departure” when Paul wrote his Thessalonian letters, this instance of its use instead strongly suggests that its employment in this sense was restricted to the sixth century AD.

Carson, in his *Exegetical Fallacies*, lists “semantic anachronism” as the second of the sixteen fallacies he identifies in his chapter on “word-study fallacies”, and he defines it thus:

This fallacy occurs when a late use of a word is read back into earlier literature. At the simplest level, it occurs within the same language, as when the Greek early church fathers use a word in a manner not demonstrably envisaged by the New Testament writers. It is not obvious, for instance, that their use of ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*, bishop) to designate a church leader who has oversight over several local churches has any New Testament warrant.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Combs, “Is *Apostasia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 a Reference to the Rapture?” 80. For the dating of the *Dormitio Mariae*, Combs cites Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 1:429.

⁷⁷ Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 33.

The use of ἀποστασία in sixth-century (AD) literature cannot therefore be used to establish its meaning in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

THE CONTEXT

Proponents of the “rapture theory” make much of the context in which the word ἀποστασία is to be found.

English writes:

The day of the Lord will not come then, until the man of sin be revealed. And before he is revealed, there must be “the departure.” Departure from what or to what? It must have been something concerning which the Thessalonians believers were informed, else the definite article would hardly have been employed, and without any qualifying description with the noun. *Why do we assume that this departure must be from the faith?* It has been shown that, in its verb form, the word frequently signifies separation other than religious revolt. Have we not based our interpretation upon what may quite possibly be an inappropriate rendition of the Greek noun? And since the definite article suggests strongly that the departure was something with which the Thessalonians were familiar, why do we think of the departure as apostasy? There is nothing in either of the Thessalonian epistles, to this point, about the great apostasy. To submit that, while the apostle did not write to this church about the apostasy he must have talked to them about it, is pure conjecture.

Again, how would the Thessalonians, or Christians in any century since, be qualified to recognize the apostasy when it should come, assuming, simply for the sake of this inquiry, that the Church might be on earth when it does come? There has been apostasy from God, rebellion against Him, since time began. And if it be proposed that the man of sin, sitting in the temple of God and showing Himself [*sic*] to be God, is *the* apostasy, we must ask ourselves a question: Is this act, on the part of the man of sin, apostasy, a falling away, or is it blasphemous denial by one who has never at any time acknowledged God?

There is a departure concerning which the Thessalonians had been instructed by letter. This is not conjecture but fact: it is the Rapture of the Church, described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. It was on account of the confusion in the minds of these young Christians, in the matter of events associated with the coming of the Lord, that this epistle was written—for some had sought to deceive them, as by spirit (claiming, perhaps, some new revelation from God), or by word (possibly a misinterpretation of something Paul had said), or by letter as from Paul, telling the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord was already present. And how could the apostle set their minds at rest? He could assure them, “by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him,” that the day of the Lord will not come “except there come the departure, the Rapture, first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” The day of the Lord was not present; for they themselves, members of Christ’s mystical body, were still on earth. The Rapture had not already taken place, they being left behind; for the man of sin was not revealed.

This interpretation corresponds perfectly, in sequence, with that in verses 7 and 8, if the restraining power is, as we believe to be the case, the Holy Spirit.

The Church departs, and the man of sin is revealed (vs. 3); the Holy Spirit, the restrainer, is taken out of the way, “and then shall that wicked one be revealed” (vss. 7, 8).⁷⁸

In a similar vein, Wuest writes;

With the translation of the word before us, the next step is to ascertain from the context that to which this departure refers. We note the presence of the Greek definite article before *apostasia*, of which the translation takes no notice. A Greek word is definite in itself, and when the article is used the exegete must pay particular attention to it. “The basal function of the article is to point out individual identity. It does more than mark ‘the object as definitely conceived,’ for a substantive in Greek is definite without the article” (Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 137). This departure, whatever it is, is a particular one, one differentiated from all others. Another function of the article is “to denote previous reference.” Here the article points out an object the identity of which is defined by some previous reference made to it in the context” (ibid., p. 141). Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 has just spoken of the coming of the Lord. This coming is defined by the words “our gathering together unto him,” not as the second advent, but as the rapture. The Greek word rendered “and” can also be translated “even,” and the translation reads, “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, even our gathering together unto him.”

⁷⁸ English, “Re-Thinking the Rapture”.

The article before *apostasia* defines that word by pointing to “the gathering together unto him” as that departure. This article determines the context which defines *apostasia*. The translators took the context of verses 2:10–12 as deciding the significance of the word, but they went too far afield, not grasping the function of the definite article preceding *apostasia* which points back to the rapture of verse 2, not ahead to the refusal to believe the truth of verses 10–12. The article is all-important here, as in many instances of its use in the Greek New Testament. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, Paul had given these saints teaching on the rapture, and the Greek article here points to that which was well known to both the reader and the writer, which is another use of the Greek definite article. Thus, the departure of the church from earth to heaven must precede the great tribulation period.⁷⁹

Gundry responds directly to English and Wuest’s arguments:

English and Wuest argue several points from the context in 2 Thessalonians: (1) the meaning of religious defection for *ἀποστασία* comes always from the context and qualifying phrases, not from the word itself; (2) the definite article with *ἀποστασία* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 points to something well-known to the Thessalonians and explained in the previous context; (3) the context in 2 Thessalonians does not incorporate description of an apostasy, but does contain mention of the rapture (2:1 and 1Thes. 4:16ff.).

⁷⁹ Kenneth S. Wuest, “The Rapture—Precisely When?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114:453

(January 1957) 60 – 69 (esp. 66–67).

There is a measure of truth in the statement that the idea of defection comes from the context. However, when the word appears exclusively or predominantly in such contexts—in the NT, the LXX, the *koine*, and classical Greek—defection becomes inherent to the meaning. Where a question arises, therefore, we are bound to recognize the prevailing connotation of the word.

As for the use of the article with *ἀποστασία*, Wuest contends that individual identity must be explained in the foregoing context. But that is wrong. Although a writer may have already explained individual identity, he may just as well anticipate a following explanation. Or he may provide no explanation at all: the article then bears the sense, “the well-known . . .” or “the special. . .” Hence, we have at least three possible explanations:

First, the article points to a previous explanation (v. 1; 1 Thess. 4:16ff.). But is unthinkable that Paul would use for the rapture a word the connotation of which overwhelmingly has to do with civil and religious defection.

Second, the article points to a well-known apostasy about which Paul had already informed the Thessalonians through his oral teaching. English calls this possibility “pure conjecture,” *but the apostle himself writes*, “Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?” (v. 50. The very fact that Paul inserts this rhetorical question suggests that we are not to look for an *ἀποστασία* which he delineated in 1 Thessalonians, but for an item in Paul’s initial ministry by word of mouth.

Third, the definite article points to a special apostasy which gets further explanation in the ensuing discussion. One must read the passage blindfolded not to see that the immediately following context bristles with references to and explanations of “the apostasy.” The man of lawlessness will lead a rebellion against

God by opposing and exalting himself “above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God” (v. 4). The subsequent verses abound with yet further descriptive expressions: “the mystery of lawlessness,” “the lawless one,” “the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness,” “a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false.” *The* apostasy will be a rebellion against god led by the Antichrist during the tribulation.⁸⁰

F. F. Bruce dismisses English’ argument from the context with a single terse comment: “English argues that the article ἡ marks the ἀποστασία out as something about which the readers were already informed; true: they had been informed about it by Paul when he was with them (v 5).”⁸¹

JEROME AND EARLY ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

Proponents of the “rapture theory” appeal lastly to early Latin and English versions.

In a footnote to page 69 of his book *Re-Thinking the Rapture*, E. Schuyler English writes: “William Tyndale’s version of the N.T., translated and published at Worms, c. 1526, renders *hee apostasia*, ‘a departynge.’ Coverdale (A.D. 1535), Cranmer (1539), and

⁸⁰ Gundry *The Church and the Tribulation*, 116 – 118.

⁸¹ F. F. Bruce, 167.

the Geneva Bible (1537) render it the same way. Beza (1565) translates *apostasia* ‘departing’.⁸²

Lewis reiterated English’ point in the main body of the text of a paper published in *Bibliotheca Sacra* in 1968.⁸³

House in his 2011 contribution to *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture* appeals also to the Latin Vulgate and provides a more extensive survey of early English versions:

Jerome translated the Greek New Testament into Latin in the 4th century (the Vulgate). He used the Latin word *discessio*, meaning “departure,” for the Greek word *apostasia*. This meaning was continued in the earliest English translations such as the Wycliff Bible (1384), Tyndale Bible (1526), Coverdale Bible (1535), Cranmer Bible (1539), Breeches Bible (1576), Beza Bible (1583), and Geneva Bible (1608). The King James Version deviated from this translation, translating *apostasia* as “falling away.” No explanation was given for doing this. Moreover, Theodore Beza transliterated *apostasia* as *apostasy*, rather than translating it. Since the 17th century, the consistent understanding of *apostasia* in modern translations

⁸² English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture*, p. 69, footnote *. See also Wuest, “The Rapture,”

p. 65.

⁸³ Lewis, 218.

has been rebellion (NIV, NRSV, Goodspeed, RSV, Moffatt, Phillips, Jerusalem Bible, Williams), or falling away (Berkeley, ASV, NKJV).⁸⁴

To the versions cited by English, House adds the second edition of Wycliffe's Bible (1384), the Breeches Bible (1576), and cites the 1583 edition of the "Beza Bible" instead of that of 1565, and the 1608 edition of the Genevan Bible instead of that of 1537. He also adds a remonstrance concerning the translation of *ἀποστασία* given in the Authorised version, Beza's "transliteration", and the "consistent understanding of *ἀποστασία* in modern translations".

House's remonstrance is repeated almost verbatim by Thomas Ice:

The first seven English translations of *apostasia* all rendered the noun as either "departure" or "departing." They are as follows: Wycliffe Bible (1384); Tyndale Bible (1526); Coverdale Bible (1535); Cranmer Bible (1539); Breeches Bible (1576); Beza Bible (1583); Geneva Bible (1608). This supports the notion that the word truly means "departure." In fact, Jerome's Latin translation known as the Vulgate from around the time of A.D. 400 renders *apostasia* with the "word *discessio*, meaning 'departure.'" Why was the King James Version the first to depart from the established translation of "departure"?

Theodore Beza, the Swiss reformer was the first to transliterate *apostasia* and create a new word, rather than translate it as others had done. The translators

⁸⁴ House, "Is the Rapture Found in 2 Thessalonians 2:3?" *The Popular Handbook on the Rapture*, 150–151.

of the King James Version were the first to introduce the new rendering of *apostasia* as “falling away.” Most English translators have followed the KJV and Beza in departing from translating *apostasia* as “departure.” No good reason was ever given.⁸⁵

The impression created by these authors is (1) that Jerome⁸⁶ translated *ἀποστασία* with the Latin word *discessio*, “meaning ‘departure’”, because he understood *ἀποστασία* to refer to a spatial “departure”; (2) that seven different translators independently rendered *ἀποστασία* with the English word “departynge”, or “departing”, for the same reason; (3) that the Beza Bible (1583) is an English translation; and (4) that in translating *ἀποστασία* with the words, “falling away”, the translators of the Authorised Version deviated from this more pristine understanding of the word *ἀποστασία*.

Tim LaHaye goes even further in the claims he makes for the “rapture theory” of 2 Thessalonians 2:3:

⁸⁵ Thomas D. Ice, “The Rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:3” (2009). Article Archives. Paper

82. http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/pretrib_arch/82.

⁸⁶ The precise identity of the person responsible for the revision of the Latin text of the epistles (from the *Vetus Latina*, or Old Latin version) is unknown, but since the translation of the Old Testament and the revision of the Gospels (again from the Old Latin) has been ascribed to Jerome, his name is a convenient shorthand.

What most do not realize is that from the time Jerome translated the New Testament into Latin in the fourth century to the time of the KJV, there was an unbroken record of *apostasia* being translated “departing.” To our knowledge, no one in the early church and up to the early seventeenth century saw that word as meaning anything else. We can therefore conclude that is the correct translation, and in all probability, is the original meaning of the word. This cements the idea that the rapture will precede the Tribulation and the revelation of the “man of sin, the son of perdition.” It also makes it understandable then that until the KJV translators arrived on the scene, virtually all known ancient translators believed likewise. Until someone can give a convincing reason why the first seven translators of the Greek New Testament into English were wrong to use the word “departing,” we are justified in believing they were correct to do so.⁸⁷

Thus, from a small footnote, the argument from the early translations of *ἀποστασία* in support of the “rapture theory” has been elevated to the status of a major plank of pretribulationism.

There are several points that can be made in response to these claims.

Ad. 1. Lewis defines *discessio* as, “a separation, division”. Lewis and Short give two definitions of the word, (1) “(very rarely) *a separation* of married persons”, “of the people into parties (with seditio)”, and “*separations and conjunctions*”, and (2) “*a going away, departure, removal*”. It seems to be used most frequently in a political sense, where it means “*a going over* to any one in voting”, and especially, “*to make a division, i.e. to get the vote of the house by dividing it*”. They also cite its use in ecclesiastical Latin,

⁸⁷ LaHaye, “Departing” Rather than “Falling Away” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3”, 159.

giving as its definition, “a separation, schism”, but this seems to be based exclusively on Acts 21:21, in which instance its meaning is not disputed, and 2 Thessalonians 2:3, which is the precise instance of its use that is presently under discussion.

The use of the word *discessio* elsewhere in the Vulgate does not settle the issue. In Acts 20:29, it translates the Greek *aphixin*, the usual meaning of which is “arrival”, though here “departure”, “going away” is its undisputed meaning. As already observed, it is also used in Acts 21:21 to translate *ἀποστασία*, in which instance it clearly refers to a departure from the faith. Thus it is used once in the Vulgate with reference to spatial departure and once with reference to religious apostasy. The word *discessio* can therefore be used with reference to a spatial departure, but its precise sense in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 cannot be established from the two other instances of its use in the Vulgate. All we can say here is that, if by *discessio* Jerome meant “departure” and not “revolt”, it is somewhat strange that Wycliffe rendered this word “discencion” in his first English version (1380) and that the translators of the Rheims New Testament (1582) rendered it “revolt” in their English version.

Ad. 2. While Wycliffe did indeed translate *ἀποστασία* with the word “departynge” in his 1384 version, his earlier translation “discencioun” (or dissension”) in his 1380 version, is ignored. Wycliffe also translates the one other occurrence of *ἀποστασία* (Acts 21:21) with the word “departing”:

And thei herden of thee, that thou techist *departing* fro Moises of thilk Jewis that ben bi hethene men, that seien, that thei owen not circumcide her sones, nether owen to entre by custom. (my italics)

It is evident that in this instance at least, Wycliffe did not understand *ἀποστασία* to refer to a departure in the spatial sense. Only if it can be established that Wycliffe embraced the “rapture theory” at some point between 1380 and 1384—a hypothesis so strained that it will receive no further discussion here—can it seriously be maintained that “departynge” in his 1384 version refers to a spatial departure. In his 1395 revision, Purvey restored the word “discencioun”, indicating that if Wycliffe himself ever embraced the “rapture theory”, Purvey himself did not.

It is indeed the case that Tyndale in his 1526 version translated *ἀποστασία* with the word “departynge”, but it is clear from his prologue to 2 Thessalonians that he understood the “departynge” in question to refer to “a departing...from under the obedience of the Emperor of Rome”.

It is also the case that further editions of the English New Testament published in 1535, 1537, 1539, 1565, 1576, 1583, and 1608, all render *ἀποστασία* with the word “departing”, but these were not fresh translations but essentially revisions of previous versions.⁸⁸ This immediately becomes apparent when we compare the relevant clause of the versions cited by House:

⁸⁸ Coverdale’s 1535 text was based in part on Tyndale’s 1534 edition of the New Testament; the Great Bible of 1539, also known as the Cromwell Bible, since Thomas Cromwell directed its publication, Whitchurch’s Bible after its first English printer, the Chained Bible, since it was chained to prevent its removal from churches, and Cranmer’s Bible (Cranmer’s preface appeared in the second edition), was prepared by Coverdale, but was based on Tyndale; the Geneva Bible of 1557, first printed in England in 1576,

Let no man deceave you by eny meanes, for [...] except ther come a departynge fyrst, and that that synfull man be opened, the sonne of perdition. (Tyndale, 1534)

Let no man deceaue you by eny meanes, for [...] except ther come a departynge first, and that synfull man be opened, the sonne of perdition. (Cramer, 1539)

Let no man deceaue you by eny meanes, for [...] excepte ther come a departynge fyrst and that sinfull man be opened, the sonne of perdition. (Great Bible, 1540)

Let no man deceaue you by any meanes, for [...] except there come a departing fyrst and that sinful man be disclosed, the sonne I say of perdition. (Geneva, 1557)

The only differences between these four versions is in the spelling, the substitution of “disclosed” for “opened” and the addition of “I say” in the Geneva Bible, and (unsurprisingly) the *apodosis* (represented by ellipses [...] in the above quotations): where Tyndale (followed by Miles Coverdale, 1535) has “for the lorde commeth not”, the Cranmer and the Great Bible have “for the Lord shall not come”, and the Geneva Bible has “the day of Christ shall not come”. In all other respects the 1539, 1540, and 1557

differed from earlier versions in that it contained annotations; and the Breeches Bible is an edition of the Geneva Bible in which Coverdale’s “apurns” (“aprons”) in Genesis 3:7 was substituted with the word “breeches”.

versions are revisions of Tyndale. The closest we come to a fresh translation is that of the Miles Coverdale Bible, 1535, which in any case is also heavily dependent on Tyndale:

Let no man disceaue you by eny meanes. For the LORDE commeth not, excepte the departynge come first, and that that Man of synne be opened, euen the sonne of perdition. (Miles Coverdale Bible, 1535)

There is in any case no evidence that these translators understood “departing” to mean a “departure” in the physical sense and plenty of evidence to the effect that they understood it to mean “a departing...from under the obedience of the Emperor of Rome” (Tyndale), “a departure from the faith” (1599 Geneva Bible), or “a wonderful departing of the most part from the faith” (the translators of the Bishops’ Bible).

Ad. 3. Baffling is English’s (and House and Ice’s) ascriptions of English versions to Beza dated (respectively) to 1565 and 1583, in which ἀποστασία is translated “departure” (good!) and House’s further claim that “Theodore Beza transliterated ἀποστασία as *apostasy*, rather than translating it” (bad!). Theodorus Beza, or Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605), was born at Vézelay, in Burgundy, France, but spent most of his life in Switzerland. Although he presented the *Codex Bezae* or *Cantabrigensis* to the University of Cambridge, he did not to my knowledge ever set foot in England or speak English. Beza produced an edition of Robert Estienne’s⁸⁹ Latin version together with the Vulgate, his own “new [Latin] translation”, and his annotations in 1556/57; and several editions of Estienne’s Greek text, together with his Latin translation in 1565, 1582, 1588/89, and

⁸⁹ Also known by his Latin name *Robertus Stephanus*.

1598,⁹⁰ the last being the main source for the 1611 Royal translation, or Authorised Version/King James Version, as it is better known. In his Latin version, Beza translated the word ἀποστασία with the word *defectio*. Laurence Tomson (1539–1608), who had spent the reign of Mary I in exile in Geneva, where he presumably rubbed shoulders with Beza, who was Calvin’s successor, produced a translation of Beza’s New Testament (“from the Latin of Theodore Beza...englished by L. Tomson”), which was first published (in London by Christopher Barker) in 1576, and later editions of which appeared in 1580, 1581, 1582, 1583, 1596, and 1597.

Ad. 4. That the translation “falling away” constitutes a deviation from “departyng” or “departing” is clearly predicated on the assumption that the earlier translators understood by this term something different from a “departure from the faith”. That they didn’t do so can easily be demonstrated from the fact that Wycliffe in his first (1380) English version translated the word ἀποστασία with the word “discencioun” and that this was restored in Purvey’s 1395 revision.

Furthermore, the translators of the Authorised Version were by no means the first to “deviate” from the more “pristine” understanding of the word ἀποστασία supposedly held by the majority of earlier translators. The translators of the Bishops’ Bible of 1568, rendered 2 Thessalonians 2:3 thus:

Let no man decaue you by any meanes, for [the Lorde shall not come] excepte there come a *falling away* first, & that man of sinne be revealed, the sonne of perdition. (My italics)

⁹⁰ Minor editions were also produced in 1565, 1567, 1580, 1590, and 1604.

The translators of the Catholic Rheims New Testament also “deviated” from earlier English versions:

Let no man seduce you by any meanes for vnlesse there come a *reuolt* first, and the man of sinne be revealed, the sonne of perdition. (My italics)

Moreover, if we allow the translators of the early English versions to speak for themselves, rather than allow their self-appointed spokespersons to speak on their behalf, we get a very different picture of what they themselves understood by the word ἀποστασία.

In his prologue to the 2 Thessalonians, William Tyndale writes: “In the second [chapter] he sheweth that the last day should not come till there were first a departing (as some men think) from under the obedience of the Emperor of Rome and that Antichrist should set himself up in the same place as God...”

It is evident from the above that Tyndale understood the “departyng” to refer to “a departing...from under the obedience of the Emperor of Rome”.

Similarly, in their notes to their version, the translators of the Geneva Bible write:

The Apostle foretelleth that before the coming of the Lord, there shall be a throne set up clean contrary to Christ’s glory, wherein that wicked man shall sit, and transfer all things that appertain to God, to himself; and many shall fall away from God to him. A wonderful departing of the most part from the faith...Kings and Princes fall down and worship, honouring that Antichrist as a god. He foretelleth that Antichrist, (that is, whosoever he be that shall occupy that seat that falleth away from God) shall not reign without the Church, but in the very bosom of the Church.

It is clear from the above that the Geneva translators understood the “departing” of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 to refer to “departing of the most part from the faith”. Note also that they use the expression “many shall fall away from God to him” and “falleth away from God” in the same context as the word “departing”.

In the light of the above, I think we may safely take it that the notion that late Medieval and Tudor England was pullulating with translators of the Bible who adhered to the “rapture theory” and that the translation of ἀποστασία given in the Authorised Version somehow constitutes a departure from earlier renditions has been exploded.

RECEPTION

Although a number of pretribulationist scholars and popularisers have embraced the “rapture theory”, it has by no means gained universal acceptance amongst commentators from within this school.

The noted Dallas Theological School luminary, John F. Walvoord initially espoused this view in his first (1957) edition of *The Rapture Question*,⁹¹ and it is still mooted in the second (1979) edition of this work. On pages 67 to 68, for example, he presents English’s arguments to the effect that ἀποστασία should be translated “departure” and concluded: “If this translation be admitted, it would constitute an explicit statement that the rapture of the church occurs before the Tribulation.” On pages 239 to 240, however, he concedes that “in this instance Gundry, seconded by Ladd, is probably right: the word probably

⁹¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 71–72.

refers to doctrinal defection of the special character that will be revealed in the day of the Lord".⁹²

D. Edmond Hiebert is another dispensationalist scholar who rejects it. In his 1971 commentary on the Thessalonian letters, he writes:

Within recent times certain evangelical Bible teachers have proposed that *hē apostasia*, following a secondary meaning of the term, should be rendered “the departure,” meaning the rapture of the church. But this interpretation is not in harmony with the nature of the rapture. Nowhere else does the Scripture speak of the rapture as “the departure.” A departure denotes an act of the part of the individual or company departing. But the rapture is not an act of departure on the part of the saints. In the rapture, the church is passive, not active. At the rapture, the church is “caught up” or “snatched away,” an event wherein the Lord acts to transport believers from earth into His presence (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Everything that takes place at the rapture is initiated by the Lord and done by Him. Paul has just referred to the rapture as “our being gathered to him” (v. 10; why then should he now use this unlikely term to mean the same thing? But to apply the term to the apostasy is to give it its proper meaning, since the apostasy is the action of professed believers. The biblical usage of the term points to something sinful. In

⁹² John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids, MI:

Zondervan, 1976), 125; also “Posttribulationism Today, Part X: Is the Tribulation Before the Rapture in 2 Thessalonians?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 134 (April–June 1977): 110; *The*

Rapture Question, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 239–40.

Acts 21:21, the only other place where the noun occurs in the New Testament, it definitely asserts the apostasy from Moses. In view of the Old Testament usage of the term, any reader familiar with the Greek Old Testament, or the history of the Maccabees, would understand the word when thus used by itself to mean an apostasy from the faith. This well known meaning of the noun *apostasía* is in accord with the meaning of the cognate noun *apostasion* in Matthew 19:7 and Mark 10:4, which means “a certificate of divorce.”⁹³

We have already examined Feinberg’s discussion of ἀφίστημι and its cognates earlier in this chapter. Feinberg also rejected the “rapture theory”.

In a 1998 paper, William W. Combs, another dispensationalist, subjected the “rapture theory” to a rigorous examination and concluded:

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 certainly have merit, but in my opinion do not rise to the level of probability. Ἀποστασία

⁹³ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 331–

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.⁹⁴

MY OWN VIEW

It is far more likely that Paul describes the *ἀποστασία* in the context, and this he goes on to do in the very same verse:

For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4)

It is the man of lawlessness' action in taking "his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4) that constitutes both his "revelation" and the first act of the apostasy to which Paul refers and which he amplifies in verses 9 to 12:

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them

⁹⁴ Combs, "Is *Apostasia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 a Reference to the Rapture?" 86–87.

a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

The *ἀποστασία* is also described in Revelation 13:

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea...One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

[...]

Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast

might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. (Revelation 13:1, 3–6, 11–15)

What is this if it is not a description of apostasy as commonly understood? This is “apostasy” on a worldwide scale, accompanied by personal rebellion against God on the part of the “man of lawlessness” who, in Paul’s words, “opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God”, and who, in those of John, “was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words” and who “opened [his] mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven”; by the worship on the part of the inhabitants of the earth of the dragon (Satan) and of the beast; and (in Paul’s words) by “the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing”, and (in John’s words) by the performance of “great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people”, and by which “it deceives those who dwell on earth”.

Not only does Paul in the very context in which the *ἀποστασία* is introduced go on to describe what he means by the *ἀποστασία* but, should there be any doubt on the matter, John does so also in the book of Revelation. In the light of Paul’s own description but also that of John in Revelation 13, it is surprising that any one should understand *ἀποστασία* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 in any other sense than the one that the Church has traditionally understood it.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the view that the word *ἀποστασία* refers to a (pretribulational) rapture, as advanced by English, MacRae, Wuest, (initially) Walvoord, Lewis, Tan, Boice, Ellisen, Wood, Davey, House, Ice, and LaHaye, has little to commend it, and it is rejected by other writers and scholars from within the dispensationalist school, such as Walvoord (on second and soberer thoughts), Hiebert, Feinberg, and Combs.

In order to bolster this understanding of the word *ἀποστασία*, an entirely fictional view of the beliefs of earlier translators of the Bible has been fabricated, according to which they understood the reference of the word to be to a (pretribulational) rapture and that the “deviant” reading was unheard of until the scholars who produced the King James Version (with ill-intent) substituted the word, “departing”, with the word “falling away”. Little attempt has been made to research what earlier translators actually believed with regard to the word *ἀποστασία*, and when their views are in fact examined it swiftly becomes apparent that by the word “departure” they understood a “falling away” from the faith in line with the KJV reading.

The reference of the term *ἀποστασία* can be found in the context itself (2 Thessalonians 2:9–12), and this understanding is confirmed in Revelation 13:1, 3–6, 11–15, and in view of this it is surprising that anyone could have taken any other view.

APPENDIX

A word or two also needs to be said concerning the sweeping statements of the late Tim LaHaye. He writes, firstly: “To our knowledge, no one in the early church and up to the early seventeenth century saw that word as meaning anything else.” The precise extent

of LaHaye's knowledge becomes swiftly apparent when one reads what the early fathers and Protestant reformers actually wrote on the subject.

In his "Dialogue with Trypho", Justin Martyr (100–165) writes:

Two advents of Christ have been announced: the one, in which He is set forth as suffering, inglorious, dishonoured, and crucified; but the other, in which He shall come from heaven with glory, when the man of *apostasy*, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth against us the Christians...⁹⁵

Following what is indisputably a quotation from 2 Thessalonians 2:10–12, Irenaeus (130–202) comments:

For when he (Antichrist) is come, and of his own accord concentrates in his own person the *apostasy*, and accomplishes whatever he shall do according to his own will and choice, sitting also in the temple of God, so that his dupes may adore him as the Christ; wherefore also shall he deservedly "be cast into the lake of fire".⁹⁶

⁹⁵ "Dialogue with Trypho" (110.2), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

⁹⁶ Irenaeus: Against Heresies (5.28.6), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1.

Commenting on 2 Thessalonians 2:3, John Chrysostom (c. 349–407) in his “homily”, writes:

Here he discourses concerning the Antichrist, and reveals great mysteries. What is the falling away? [*Ti estin hē apostasia?*] He calls him Apostasy [*apostasian*], as being about to destroy many, and make them fall away [*aphistan*].⁹⁷

LaHaye also contends that “until the KJV translators arrived on the scene, virtually all known ancient translators” believed that “the rapture will precede the Tribulation and the revelation of the ‘man of sin, the son of perdition’”. In fact, a survey of early versions of the New Testament reveals that they had no such understanding of the word.

The Syriac Peshitta (possibly produced as early as the second half of the second century AD) translates ἀποστασία with the word, ܡܪܕܘܬܐ (*mārōdū, mārōdūtā*). This is variously defined as “*rebellion, revolt, insurrection; refractoriness, rebelliousness, disobedience, insolence, tyranny*” (J. Payne Smith),⁹⁸ and “*rebellion, apostasy*” (William

⁹⁷ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 13, edited by Philip Schaff (Buffalo,

NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889). Original Greek (transcribed) from

Joannis Chrysostomi, Epistolas ad Philippenses, Colossenses et Thessalonicenses,

Homiliae, Frederick Field (Oxford, 1855).

⁹⁸ J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford, 1903), 300.

Jennings);⁹⁹ and is variously translated “rebellion” (Etheridge and Lamsa) and “defection” (Murdock) in English translations of the Peshitta.

The Gothic Bible, or Wulfila Bible, translated by Bishop Wulfila in the third century AD, renders ἀποστασία with the word *afstass* (Latinised as “*afstass*”), which is defined as “*Abfall*” (Streitberg),¹⁰⁰ the primary meaning of which is “waste, rubbish, garbage, litter”, but which always means “apostasy” in a religious context, and never “departure”. To Streitberg’s definition Schulze adds “*Scheidung*”,¹⁰¹ meaning “divorce”.

Jerome translated ἀποστασία with the word *discessio*, the primary meaning of which is “a separation, division”, and there is no evidence that by this word he understood the word ἀποστασία in any other sense. Wycliffe translated this word, “discencioun”, and the translators of the Rheims NT, “reuolt”.

The translator of the Latin version of the NT in the Complutensian Polyglot (1514), Erasmus (1519), and Beza (1556) all translated ἀποστασία with the word *defectio*, meaning “defection, desertion, rebellion, revolt”.

Tyndale translated ἀποστασία with the word “departynge”, but it is clear from his prologue that he understood this to refer to “a departing...from under the obedience of the Emperor of Rome”. The Geneva translators similarly understood the “departing” of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 to refer to a “departing of the most part from the faith”.

Pierre Robert Olivétan (c.1506–1538), who produced the first French version of the Bible translated from Hebrew and Greek in 1535, rendered ἀποστασία with the word

⁹⁹ William Jennings *Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament* (Oxford, 1926), 131.

¹⁰⁰ Wilhelm Streitberg, *Die Gotische Bibel*, Zweiter Teil (Heidelberg, 1910), 2.

¹⁰¹ Ernst Schulze, *Gothische Woeterbuch Nest Flexionslehre* (Züllichau, 1867), 4.

“*departement*”, but it is clear that he did not understand this to mean a spatial departure since in a marginal note he wrote: “*Ascavoir...de leglise Romaine / ou de lempire Romain*” (“To wit...of the Roman church / or of the Roman empire”).

Luther, in his 1545 German-language version, translated *ἀποστασία* with the word “*Abfall*”, the meaning of which, as we have already seen, is “apostasy” when used in a religious context.

In his commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:3 (1548), Calvin writes:

He says that the day of Christ will not come, until the world has fallen into apostasy, and the reign of Antichrist has obtained a footing in the Church; for as to the exposition that some have given of this passage, as referring to the downfall of the Roman empire, it is too silly to require a lengthened refutation...Paul, therefore, employs the term apostasy to mean—a *treacherous departure from God*, and that not on the part of one or a few individuals, but such as would spread itself far and wide among a large multitude of persons...Paul, therefore, predicts a certain general revolt of the visible Church.¹⁰²

Note that Calvin uses the phrase “a treacherous departure from God” in the context of 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

¹⁰² Jean Calvin, *Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, translated and edited from the original Latin, and colated with the French version by the Rev. John Pringle (1851; reprinted by the Christian Classics ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, MI.), 203.

The translators of the Bishops' Bible of 1568 rendered *ἀποστασία* with the phrase "a falling away".

Giovanni Diodati (1576-1649), who produced the first Italian version of the Bible translated from Hebrew and Greek in 1607 rendered *ἀποστασία* with the word "*l'apostasia*".

I consider further comment to be superfluous.