

II Thessalonians 2: 5-7

The Restrainer & the Man of Lawlessness:

But first, more on the Apostasy of v. 3

HHBC





II Thessalonians chapter 2: 5-7

5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? 6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.



The Apostasy of Verse 3

- Last week, Bob presented very deftly and accurately what this week's study will call 'Interpretation 1' or the Majority View on the word apostasy
- Proponents of Interpretation 1 are: Ryrie; Chafer; Darby; all of the Brethren writers (1820-1880-1900); Scofield; (Keathley?), (Constable?) Dwight D. Pentecost (avoids taking a position in his major work on Eschatology, 'Things to Come'), Bob Eckel
- Interpretation 2 Minority View proponents: James Swiegart, Andy Wood, Wuest, J.V. McGee, Lampe, Liddell, Scott; Roger Henderson, Andrew Molloy? (and Kathie)



The Apostasy of Verse 3

Interpretation I: the Majority view:

Paul is using the word Greek word apostasia as a ‘falling away’, a ‘rebellion’ from the faith in Jesus Christ, it comes before the Man of Lawlessness is revealed, and this son of perdition declares himself to be God in the temple at Jerusalem in the Tribulation period, a/k/a Daniel’s 70th week, a/k/a the Time of Jacob’s Trouble.

The apostasy will be great and profound.

However: biblical scholars asked the question: apostasy ”from what”? As you see the “from the faith” is supplied by the reader of verse 3



The Apostasy of Verse 3

Interpretation 2: the Minority view:

However, these Minority view (Interpretation 2) readers read the verse this way: The Day of the Lord will not come unless the apostasy comes first.

They supply this: "***from the earth***" a falling away, a departure from the earth of (1.) The Holy Spirit, and by necessity (2.) Each spirit indwelt believer in Christ. Therefore Paul is talking about the rapture of the saints from I Thes. 4:17

The word *apostasia* is a specific *apostasia*, there is a definite article meaning Paul's readers the exact one to which he refers. Interpretation 2 proponents say that the lack of context of a rebellion from the faith (like in Acts 21, Heb. 6:6, various O.T. passages). The apostasy Paul refers to in 1st Tim. 4:1 is in "later times" and not "The Day of the Lord" and is *aphistēmi* not *apostasia* [See later arguments in support of Interpretation 2]



The Apostasy of Verse 3

THE CRUX OF THE ISSUE BETWEEN INTERPRETATION 1
AND INTERPRETATION 2 IS:

- Interpretation 1: is a departure (these proponents can use the word departure, too) from a concept/ a belief / a viewpoint / a common shared mind-set among people = faith
- Interpretation 2: uses departure of things not from the mind/intellect as in faith, but SPACIALLY, it is a physical departure of people
- Both are valid depending on the reader's choice of their assumption of the conceptual vs. spacial presupposition one takes
- Following: this a.m. we will look at the Minority View argument. Specifically, Dr. John Sweigart's position paper on the matter.



The Case for Interpretation 2: on Apostasy

in 10 points *adapted from James Sweigart's 'Rebellion, Falling Away or Departure? position paper'*

1. There are no prepositional phrases or other modifiers telling the reader "*from whom*" or "*from what*" the individuals in mind are falling away...
2. The departure/falling away/rebellion "*from the faith*" that has been the prevailing interpretation for centuries is ASSUMED, or implied.
3. There is a DEFINITE article attached the The Apostasia
4. There are no other passages that Paul speaks of a Great Apostasy. In fact, he expects the Thessalonians and other regional assemblies to ENDURE steadfast in the faith, and he commends them for doing so.
5. Often ignored are cognates of *apostasia*; closely related words such as Mat. 5:31: Christ saying of two getting divorced: let him give her a certificate of divorce and send her away. This was legal separation as well as physical separation. *apostasion* is the word for Bill of Divorcement. Here, there is a falling away in mind-set/faith between spouses (Interpretation 1), however, it is followed by a physical and special separation (Interpretation 2)
6. What Sweigart and others are arguing here is that *apostasia* and its cognates have a long precedent of being used not only as religious, political separation, departure, but SPACIAL separation, departure as well



The Case for Interpretation 2: on Apostasy

in 10 points (*adapted from James Sweigart's 'Rebellion, Falling Away or Departure? position paper'*)

7. “For what it is worth... the background of this word *apostasia* is the political usage of *aphistēmi* [meaning to remove; depart from] and (*afistamai*) is earlier Greek. (*Afisthmi*) is used of uprooting a person or a community from his/their fixed habitation, as in the case of forced immigration. (*Afistamai*) is used of uprooting oneself and going elsewhere. I recall one vivid text in Demosthenes where a suppliant seated on an altar is asked (*afistaquai*), to leave the altar and his stance of supplication and accept the reconciliation offered him.” [Sweigart quoting Carl Conrad, classical Greek scholar] (Word 365 auto. spellcheck supplied the Greek transliterations in blue parentheses)
8. **It may be used of a group leaving a homeland to establish a new colony somewhere; that's the way *Peisetairos* and *Euelpides* use the verb in *Aristophanes' Birds*, where they leave Athens to establish a "trouble-free" colony in the sky between heaven and earth (!!!)**
9. The above writer, Aristophanes (5th/4th Century B.C.), was one of the principal authors from the Grecian Golden Age. His plays were widely performed for several hundred years in the Grecian world by the time the Apostle Paul reached Thessalonica.
10. Therefore, the Greek-oriented Thessalonican believers may have had this common, shared knowledge of this play, and would have known exactly Paul was describing: (departing earth)



Interpretation 1 vs. Interpretation 2: on Apostasy

So, what's the Correct interpretation?

- Departure of the Saints & H.S. to another trouble-free colony off the earth, in the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (His Parousia)?
- Or is there a Great Apostasy of the church before the Day of the Lord?
- ***My conclusion after a lot of back and forth is:***
- BOTH (in a way)
- I have found that there is no great DIVIDE here: the proponents of Interpretation 1's have a 'time-stamp' orientation of: viewing 2nd Thes. 2:1-10 as: **1 second after** the Rapture of the Church
- Interpretation 2's time-stamp: their proponents are viewing 2nd Thes. 2:1-10 as being **1 second prior to** the Rapture of the Church
- If you view the two interpretations from this time-point of view, both interpretations are valid. It is a question of defining what assumptions and definitions you take to make the case for either interpretation.
- The Proponents of Interpretation 1 are mentally within the Day of The Lord as a whole unit: they are discussing the Apostasy (the Harlot of Revelation 17; Babylon, The Mystery Religion in Revelation, etc.) as a unit as if they are within the Day of the Lord / Daniel's 70th Week / 7-year Tribulation program. Paul could be discussing it as a whole too, without being concerned about sequence, first this, then this (this is what concerns the Interpretation 2 proponents. (There are no 'THENS' in this passage; ***as in I Cor. 15:23-26's sequential resurrection program.***
- I've found proponents of Interpretation 1 never support a Rapture of the Church WITHIN the Tribulation, they view the Rapture as Pre-Tribulation, and Pre-Apostasy, they do not have the Rapture in mind at all, only the Day of the Lord; so there is no divide there between the two camps.



Onward, to The Restrainer

WUEST TRANSLATION: This is a very clear, amplified rendition of Vs. 1-7: (bold, red: supplied by Wuest; note he is a Interpretation 2 proponent):

V: 1-4:

Now I am requesting you, brethren, with regard to the coming and personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, even our being assembled together to Him, not soon to become unsettled, the source of this unsettled state being your minds, neither thrown into confusion, either by a spirit, or through a word, as from us or through a letter, falsely alleged to be written by us, to the effect that the Day of the Lord has come and is now present. Do not begin to allow anyone to lead you astray in any way because that day shall not come except the aforementioned departure **[of the church to heaven]** [or View #1: departure/rebellion/apostasy] comes first and the man of the lawlessness is disclosed **[in his true identity]**, the son of perdition, he who sets himself in opposition and exalts himself above everyone and everything that is called a god or that is an object of worship, so that he seats himself in the inner sanctuary of God, proclaiming to be deity.

V: 5:

Do you not remember that while I was still with you I kept on telling you these things?

V: 6-7:

And now you know with positive assurance that which **[namely, the departure of the Church, the saints being assembled together to the Lord]** is preventing his being disclosed **[as to his true identity]** in his strategic, appointed time, for the mystery of the aforementioned lawlessness is now operating. Only He **[the Holy Spirit]**, who is holding **[the lawlessness]** down, **[who will do so]** until He goes out from the midst **[of humanity]**



The Identity of the Restrainer

- We saw from the Wuest translation that the identity of the Restrainer is the Holy Spirit
- But, throughout the course of the centuries from when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, there have been other interpretations of His identity
- The varying positions have been:

The Roman Empire

Human Government

The Law

The Church

Satan himself

- As to the Law, Human Government & Roman empire: God throughout history has always ordained other authorities to restrain/ check evil
- The Church: is seen as salt (a preserver) and light (a purifier) of things on earth
- As to Satan: perhaps biding his time; preparing for the final apex of lawlessness before he reveals his Antichrist. However, Satan wouldn't remove himself out of the way, and he doesn't have this universal power
- However: all of these are controlled and influenced by the Spirit of God as the ultimate authority . . .
- O.T. restraining: **'So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.'** ISA 59:19
- Some translations: this reads – *"the Spirit of the Lord shall restrain him"*

Adapted from: 'Things to Come' A Study in Biblical Eschatology; J. Dwight Pentecost; Dunham Publishing 1958; Zondervan 1964



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- Vs 5: Evidently, Paul had instructed them about the H.S. and his ministry of restraining evil until the 70th Week, the apostasy (or the departure of the saints), the Antichrist, him exalting himself in the Temple a/k/a the Abomination of Desolation (from 2:1-4)
- We know that he instructed them on the ‘snatching away/ carrying off by force’ of believers into the air
- The mystery of lawlessness: note the parallel to Mat. 13’s The Parable of the Wheat & Tares. This is sons of the evil one in the present Church age destined for wrath at the Tribulation. “Already at work’ is the key phrase. And this would be a point in support of Interpretation 1’s commentators
- The mystery of lawlessness: in this age is compared to leaven in bread in Mat. 13:33-35; a very little of it has a great deal of corrupting power
- **VERY RECENT EXAMPLE OF RESTRAINING POWER** = power of 2,500 or less U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan, and the effect of when they are ‘taken out of the midst’ of the people and support personnel