

Apostasia (Falling Away)

2 Thessalonians: 2:1-4

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2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 (NIV)

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

v1 – What is this our being gathered to him?

The Rapture of the church (this establishes the context)

- The key to understanding this chapter is that it is a supplement to what Paul has already taught the Thessalonians about the catching away of the church to be with Jesus (1 Thess 4:16-18).

Does Paul make a distinction between the coming of Jesus and our gathering together to Him?

Yes... the wording here implies a difference between **the coming** and **our gathering**. This strongly suggests that there are essentially two comings of Jesus...

- One coming is *for* His church (1 Thess 4:16-18), and the other coming is *with* His church, to judge a rebellious world.

v2 – What is the day of the Lord (Day of Christ, KJV)?

This is another term for the Tribulation because it culminates in the revelation of Christ to the world.

Is there a difference between day of the Lord and Day of Christ?

No... A preferred manuscript reading of 2 Thess 2:2 has the day of the Lord rather than the day of Christ. The day of the Lord is a concept with a rich Old Testament background, and was mentioned in Paul's previous letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:2).

- It is not a single day, but a period associated with God's outpouring of judgment and the deliverance of God's people.
- A significant aspect of the day of the Lord is the Great Tribulation described in Matthew 24:1-31.

Why might the Thessalonians have been unsettled or alarmed as though the day of Christ had come?

The Thessalonians were not afraid that the **day of Christ** was coming, but that they were *in it*.

- Paul will demonstrate that they are not in the **day of Christ**; because if they were, then certain signs would be present.
- The Thessalonians would be **shaken** or **troubled** by the thought of being in the Great Tribulation *only* if they had been taught by Paul that they would *escape* that period through the rapture.
- Otherwise, they would, in a sense, *welcome* the Great Tribulation as a necessary prelude to the Second Coming.

How had the Thessalonians gotten the idea that they were in the Tribulation?

Perhaps the troubling word had come through a misguided prophecy (**spirit or by word**). Or perhaps some other leader wrote the Thessalonians a **letter** teaching that they were already in the **day of Christ**.

- Either way, they were upset at the idea that they had somehow missed the rapture.

v3 – About what should the Thessalonians not be deceived?

That the Tribulation (*Day of Christ*) would not come before the *falling away*. The *falling away* must happen first and since this has not happened, they could not be in the Tribulation.

What is this falling away (NKJV)?

This is either great apostasy (falling away of the faith) or removal of the Church (Rapture)... either way the rapture is implied because the rapture results in zero believers on earth.

- The NIV makes a judgment call here translation the Greek word "*apostasia*" as "*rebellion*" thus watering down the evidence for the pre-Trib rapture.

Why should we see the Greek word “*apostasia*” here as a physical departure and not a departure of the faith?

1. A spiritual departure is not unique to the last days of the church; it is too common to be a sign.
2. 2 Thessalonians was an early letter of Paul before he spoke of a spiritual departure as a characteristic of the last days
3. The definite article “the” before the noun “*apostasia*” denotes that this will be a definite event, not the culmination of a process.
4. The noun *apostasia* can refer to a physical departure
5. The verb form *aphistemi* is used 15 times in the New Testament, only 3 have anything to do with departure from the faith.
6. The extended context favors a physical departure interpretation
7. The immediate context favors a physical departure interpretation
8. Paul uses diverse terms for the rapture and since 2 Thess is a review, you’d expect him to use a different term.
9. Early Bible translations favor the physical departure interpretation.
10. The physical departure view is held by many credible Bible scholars

How important is the proper understanding of the translation of “*apostasia*” in rapture doctrine?

It totally makes clear that the rapture is prior to the Tribulation... no other supporting verses such as those emphasizing the imminence of the rapture would be necessary.

Why is the doctrine of the pre-Trib rapture so maligned?

The controversy over rapture timing keeps pastors from even mentioning the rapture.

- Satan hates the idea that Christians will be rescued from the time when he will have his way on earth.
- Satan also loves to divide Christians over disputable matters because it harms the cause of Christ.

Who is this man who is revealed?

The *man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition* – Antichrist

- Lawless one in v8
- a man possessed by Satan
- Note that the Antichrist cannot come on scene until Church is removed

How does the revealing of the man of lawlessness prove the Thessalonians were not in the Tribulation?

Paul’s point is clear: “You are worried that we are in the Great Tribulation and that you missed the rapture. But you can know that we are *not* in the Great Tribulation, because we have not yet seen **the man of sin.**”

- The Antichrist initiates the Tribulation when *he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week* (Daniel 9:27)... he champions a peace treaty that allows Israel to build a temple in Jerusalem.

Why is the Antichrist called the *son of perdition* (NKJV)?

The phrase simply means “man doomed to destruction” and is not reserved for any one individual. In fact, there are two people to which the title “son of perdition” is applied. In context, John 17:12 is referring to Judas Iscariot, while 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is referring to the “man of lawlessness” —the Antichrist—who will appear in the end times before Christ’s return.

- The connotation is that of a person in an unredeemable state, someone who is already damned while he is still alive.

Besides the Antichrist, who else is doomed to destruction?

Revelation 14:9-10 – *Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God...*

Those who take the Mark of the Beast during the Tribulation... they will be literally of their father the devil.

- It is thus likely the Mark of the Beast alters DNA to the point where those who take it are no longer human so that they are no longer redeemable by the human blood of Christ.

Could this man of lawlessness refer to a system or an office instead of an individual?

There is *no* good reason to see this **man of lawlessness** to be other than what the plainest meaning is here — an individual who will come to great prominence in the very last days.

- Daniel described an individual person: *The prince who is to come* (Daniel 9:26), the *king of fierce countenance* (Daniel 8:23), the *willful king* (Daniel 11:36-45).
- Jesus described an individual person: The one who comes *in his own name* (John 5:43).
- This **man of sin** is a prominent figure in the Bible, and the ultimate personification of the *spirit of the Antichrist* spoken of in 1 John 4:2-3.

v4 – What does the man of sin do?

He represents himself as God in the temple demanding worship for himself that belongs only to God (Luke 4:8)...

Abomination of Desolation (Matt 24:15 & Daniel)

- there must be a temple in Israel
 - many want it for national identity
 - political situation must change to allow
- Jews realize that the world leader is not their savior but a deceiver

Why did Jesus refer to this event as the *abomination of desolation*?

Matthew 24:15-16 – *when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

An abomination is “something that causes disgust or hatred”; and desolation is “a state of complete emptiness or destruction.”

- Jesus warned that something (or someone) that people detested would stand in the temple someday. When that horror occurred, residents of Judea should seek to escape without delay.

What else did the prophet Daniel have to say about the *abomination of desolation*?

Daniel 9:27 – *Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate*

Daniel told us the Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews bringing their sacrifice to an end at the mid-point of the Tribulation.

Daniel 11:31 – *And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation*

He also said the Antichrist will defile the temple by setting something abominable there.

- So not only will the Antichrist declare that he is God in the temple, he will put something there to remind people that he is to be worshipped.

What will the Antichrist likely put in the temple to remind people that he is to be worshipped?

The Image of the Beast which the False Prophet has made by those who dwell on the earth...

Revelation 13:15 – *He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*

Since the Antichrist is omnipresent, the Image of the Beast will enable him to appear somewhat omnipresent. It will

likely be some sort of embodied artificial intelligence that looks like the Antichrist and speaks like him.

How else will the Antichrist show himself as God?

The man of sin is truly an *Anti-Christ*. Satan has planned the career of the man of sin to mirror the ministry of Jesus.

- Both Jesus and the man of sin have a coming (2 Thessalonians 2:1 and 2:9).
- Both Jesus and the man of sin are revealed (2 Thessalonians 1:7 and 2:3).
- Both Jesus and the man of sin have a gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11).
- Both Jesus and the man of sin say that they alone should be worshipped (2 Thessalonians 2:4).
- Both Jesus and the man of sin have support for their claims by miraculous works (2 Thess 2:9).

Clearly, the man of sin is Satan’s parody of the true Messiah. Yet in the end, the *man of sin* can only show **himself that he is God.**

- The coming of Jesus and the judgment of God will make it clear that the man of sin is not God at all.

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- This passage is powerful evidence that the rapture occurs before the Tribulation.
- The rapture will occur before the Antichrist is revealed... so it is futile to speculate who he is.