

The Meaning of *The Apostasy* in 2 Thess. 2:3  
A study of *apostasia*

**The Issue:**

There are two primary views of the meaning of the word *apostasia* in 2 Thess. 2:3. On the one hand, it is said that this refers to the catching away of believers to be with Christ. On the other hand, it is said that this refers to a spiritual apostasy in the end days.

Can we determine which of these views is correct? This study is intended to assist all of us by learning to do a simple word study in the NT.

**The Evidence:**

- 1) The uses of the noun *apostasia* [Strong's # 646]
  - a) Basic meaning: rejection
  - b) Only two uses in the NT
    - i) By Luke: Acts 21:21
      - (1) This is an inaccurate accusation against Paul, arguing he was teaching Hellenistic (non-Palestine) Jews to **spiritually** depart from the teachings of Moses, specifically regarding circumcision and other Jewish customs
    - ii) By Paul: 2 Thess. 2:3
      - (1) Does this teach a **spiritual** departure must occur before the Rapture?
      - (2) Does this teach the Rapture is a **physical** departure?
- 2) The uses of the noun *apostasion* [Strong's # 647]
  - a) Basic meaning: notice of divorce
    - i) This refers to a divorce (departure) certificate given to the innocent wife, so she is free to remarry.
  - b) Only three uses in the NT
    - i) Mt. 5:31; 19:7; Mk. 10:4
- 3) Both words above are derived from the same verb *aphistemi* [Strong's # 868]
  - a) There are ten uses in Luke's writings
    - i) Four uses in the Gospel
      - (1) Lk. 2:37
        - (a) Stated **negatively**: the widow Anna never departed from the physical presence of the Temple.
        - (b) Understood **positively**: she faithfully attended the physical presence of the temple for prayer and fasting.
      - (2) Lk. 4:13
        - (a) Satan departed from the physical presence of Jesus after the temptations.
    - ii) Six uses in Acts

- (3) Lk. 8:13
  - (a) Unbelievers who depart spiritually from Biblical teaching during times of testing.
- (4) Lk. 13:27
  - (a) A command for unbelievers to depart from the physical presence of Jesus.
- ii) Six uses in Acts
  - (1) 5:37-38
    - (a) Judas of Galilee caused a physical and political departure.
    - (b) Gamaliel commanded the rest of the Sanhedrin to depart (stay away) from Jesus' apostles physically and politically, lest the Sanhedrin be found to be fighting against God Himself.
  - (2) 12:10
    - (a) The delivering angel "physically" departed from Peter after guiding him out of the prison.
  - (3) 15:38
    - (a) Paul refused to take John Mark with them on the next church-planting trip because John Mark had physically departed from them in Pamphylia.
  - (4) 19:9
    - (a) Paul physically departed (separated) from the Jewish synagogue in Ephesus due to their hardened disobedience to the Truth.
  - (5) 22:29
    - (a) The Roman commander physically released Paul after learning that Paul was a Roman citizen.
- b) There are four uses in Paul's writings
  - i) 2 Cor. 12:8
    - (1) Paul prayed three times that the messenger of Satan might leave him.
  - ii) 1 Tim. 4:1
    - (1) The Holy Spirit clearly says that in the later times some will depart from the faith, having paid attention to deceitful spirits and demonic teachings.
  - iii) 1 Tim. 6:5 (some Greek texts do not have this phrase)
    - (1) Timothy is to withdraw himself from men characterized by the false teaching in 6:3-5.
  - iv) 2 Tim. 2:19
    - (1) Believers are to withdraw themselves from wickedness.
- c) There is one use in the anonymous book of Hebrews
  - i) Heb. 3:12
    - (1) Believers are to be careful that an evil heart of unbelief that departs from the living God does not develop in any of them.

What conclusions, if any, can be drawn?

1) The normal use of the word is:

a) By Luke:

b) By Paul:

2) The religious/spiritual/theological use of the word appears to be:

3) Based on what we have learned, the meaning of the word in 2 Thess. 2:3 is what?