

2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture

OVERVIEW

What is one of the most significant passages in the New Testament relating to the timing of the rapture? Second Thessalonians 2 is one of the most-debated New Testament passages that relates to the timing of the rapture. In this essay, Dr Paul Feinberg deals with three of the most important issues relating to the timing of the rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2. He demonstrates from the Scripture why the pretribulation position best explains the problems and issues in this important passage.

The Thessalonian epistles are Paul's eschatological epistles. We would expect therefore that Paul would have things to say about the rapture, and we are not disappointed. The Thessalonian church was not only an exemplary church (1 Thess. 1:8); it was an expectant church. Paul writes that the Thessalonians "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:9-10). In his first Thessalonian letter Paul writes to urge Christians not to neglect daily work even though they were to look for the Lord's return (4:11-12), and he writes to comfort those who had lost loved ones, assuring them that those who had died would meet the Lord in the air (4:13,15).

Paul's second Thessalonian letter is written about six months later. In chapter 2 he writes to correct some false teaching that was troubling believers in Thessalonica. Paul is trying to save the doctrine of the second coming of Christ from some misconceptions that were held by the Thessalonians. This chapter and its relationship to the rapture question is our subject here. I shall focus primarily on the first seven verses. There are three issues that I wish to address: 1) the relationship between 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and Matthew 24:29-31 and the time of the rapture; 2) the silence of Paul about a pretribulation rapture in correcting false teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4; 3) the identity of the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2:5-7.

The Relationship Between 2 Thessalonians 2:1 and Matthew 24:29-31

There is a twofold argument that relates 2 Thessalonians 2:1 with Matthew 24:29-31 and sets the time of the rapture as post-tribulation. One finds these arguments in Robert H. Gundry's *The Church and the Tribulation*.¹ The arguments are as follows. First, Gundry argues that "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him" is a reference to the return of Christ and the rapture at the end of the Tribulation period. He bases this argument on the idea that 1 Thessalonians 4:16-5:9 is a reference to a rapture that will take place just before the Day of the Lord which begins at the end of the Tribulation.² Moreover, Paul makes no distinction between his description of the second coming given in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 and the coming in 1 Thessalonians 4: 16ff. Further, he introduces the

phrase "our gathering together to him" in 2 Thessa-lonians 2:1 without any observable shift in reference from 1:7-10, which is a posttribulational coming in judgment to destroy the wicked. Finally, Paul writes about an event that will take place in the Tribulation, the Antichrist and his demise. Gundry concludes, "Hence, outstandingly posttribulational references surround the highly debated section 2:1-7. The very setting of the section should make us wary of unnecessarily interpolating the idea of a pretribulational rapture."³ And again, "if then the context of 2:1 leads us to regard the parousia there as posttribulational, it is singularly strange that 'our gathering together to Him' should be connected with it and mentioned second in order-unless the rapture, too, is posttribulational."⁴

To summarize what Gundry has done to this point, he has related Paul's discussions of the coming of Christ in the Thessalonian epistles to one another: 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 to 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 to 2 Thessalonians 2:1. He has also argued that, in their context in the Thessalonian epistles, these are references to a posttribulational return and rapture.

To this argument is added a second one which relates 2 Thessalonians 2:1 to Matthew 24:29-31. In Gundry's discussion of the Olivet discourse, he tries to establish the place of the rapture. He says that no reference to it would place it before the Tribulation. He rejects what he sees as common pretrib reasoning for this omission, namely that the Olivet discourse is about the Jewish age and is a Jewish discourse. Therefore we should not expect it to teach about a pretribulational rapture of the church. Gundry thinks this is simply false. He argues against an exclusively Jewish understanding of the Olivet discourse on the grounds that: 1) the disciples are a transitional group (one time representing the believing remnant in Israel, another time standing for the church); 2) that Jesus is teaching about the church just two days later in the Upper Room discourse (John 14); 3) that Matthew, the Gospel written to the Jews, teaches about the church (Matt. 16:13-18; 18:15-18).⁵

Posttribulationalists, therefore, identify the rapture with the gathering of the elect by the angels at the sound of the trumpet in Matthew 24:31. This clearly sets the rapture as posttribulational because Matthew 24:29 introduces the events that follow as occurring "immediately after the distress of those days." The correctness of this identification is further supported by a number of parallels with 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, where we read of a trumpet and clouds and 2 Thessalonians 2:1, where Paul discusses a gathering of believers just as in the Olivet discourse.⁶

In summary, Gundry has argued that the gathering together at the coming of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:1) is a reference to the rapture of the church, and that that gathering is the same as the gathering of the elect in Matthew 24:31, decisively establishing the time of the rapture as posttribulational. If this argument is correct, then a pretribulational rapture of the church cannot be correct.

However, if this argument is a good one, it is equally as decisive against a midtribulational rapture as it is against a pretribulational one. Second, this argument is good only if two conditions are met. The "gathering together" of 2 Thessalonians 2:1 must be a reference to the rapture of the church, and the gathering of the elect in Matthew 24:31 must be identical with it. I shall argue that first condition is met and is true but that second is false, because arguments aimed at identification fail. Therefore, this argument fails as an objection to a pretribulational rapture.

Here is a more thorough discussion of the aforementioned conditions. First, to what does the "gathering together to Him" of 2 Thessalonians 2:1 refer? There are only two answers: to a rapture, the time of which would be determined later, or to the coming and revelation of Christ on His return to this earth after the Tribulation. Clearly, the majority view

is that it refers to the coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. It is fair to say that many commentators on this verse do not relate it to the rapture issue at all. Their argument is that Paul discusses the return of Christ in these two epistles, and there is no reason to make any distinctions related to this eschatological event. For instance, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 teaches about a judgment that is to take place at the end of time, and there is no reason to think that 2:1 is a reference to anything else. This whole argument, in my judgment, is not an inconsequential one; but in the end I think that this is not a reference to the second coming of Christ to this earth.

The second option is the minority view. It identifies the gathering together with the rapture of the church. Interestingly enough, that is the view both of Gundry⁷ and Thomas,⁸ though the former thinks that the rapture is posttribulational and the latter pretribulational. I have already mentioned Gundry's reasons for taking it as the rapture. Thomas holds that "the being gathered" specifies what part of the "coming" is under discussion. It is the great event described more fully in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17. The gathering is of those who go to meet the Lord in the air, en route to meeting the Father in heaven. Both of these texts speak of a gathering, though 1 Thessalonians 4 says we "will be caught up together," while 2 Thessalonians describes it as "being gathered to Him." The ideas are clearly parallel. This too is a substantial argument, but the decisive matter in favor of identifying this phrase with the rapture is that Paul calls it our gathering to him. He is definitely speaking to Thessalonian Christians who were members of the church. He uses the first person pronoun in 1 Thessalonians 4. Therefore, I cannot escape identifying the gathering with the catching up.

What remains to be examined is when this rapture will take place. It must be a posttribulational rapture for Gundry's argument to be established. This could be done on one or all of the three grounds suggested by Gundry. The first is that Paul only discusses the coming of Christ as a single complex event coming at the end of a time of Tribulation, since 1 Thessalonians 4: 16ff, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, and 2 Thessalonians 2:1 are discussed without any appeal to a distinction between a pretribulational rapture and posttribulational second coming of Christ. The important link in this argument is the relationship of 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 to the rest of the references to the coming of the Lord, especially 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9. The point is that if you can tie 4:14-17 to posttribulational rapture, and identify 2 Thessalonians 2:1 with 4:14-17, and support the posttribulational timing of the rapture by its relationship to 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, which everyone takes to be after the Tribulation, then you have the rapture in the Thessalonian epistles consistently a posttribulational.

Again, the key to making this argument is to show that 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, is so related to 5:1-9 that a posttribulational rapture is required. It is just at this crucial point in the argument that a pretribulationist disagrees, and rightly so in my judgment. While Gundry thinks that 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, on its own, best fits a posttribulational rapture, another important reason is its relationship to 5:1-9. The connection between the two sections is through the Greek particle *de*. According to Gundry, this particle has "a mixture of a continuative sense and a slightly adversative sense. In other words, the particle implies a shift in thought, but not without close connection with the foregoing thought. Sometimes the adversative sense drops out altogether."⁹ Gundry's argument is based on a misreading of the text, as the connection between 4:14-17 and 5:1-9 is not through the particle *de*, but *pen de*. This is Paul's usual way of introducing a new subject (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:9,13). While it may be true that the two subjects discussed are not so different that they are completely unrelated to one another, or in contrast to one another, it is also true that they are not simply the

continuation of the same subject. "The proper interpretation recognizes a shift in thought, but not without some connection with the foregoing."¹⁰ suggest that the topic remains the coming of the Lord, but that there is a discussion of two distinct phases of it. This is further supported by the change from the use of "we" to "they" and "you" in 1 Thessalonians 5. Gundry does not think that this is significant, but to a pretribulationist's mind it certainly is. Once 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 is no longer connected in the simple way that Gundry suggests, his argument is going to fail.¹¹

A second reason for identifying the Thessalonian references as a posttribulational coming of Christ is the linguistic parallel between the "gathering to him" of 2 Thessalonian 2:1, and the "gathering of his elect," in Matthew 24:31. 2 Thessalonians 2:1 uses the noun *episunagoges*, while Jesus uses the verb *episunachei* in Matthew 24:31. On the basis of the use of related words, it might be argued that the two gatherings are the same and that they are clearly posttribulational, since Matthew says that this is "immediately after the distress of those days."

Such an argument fails. Methodologically, one cannot simply identify two events merely because they are described by the same word. Further, to do so in the context where the debate is whether the events are the same or different is to beg the question. There is one way out of this dilemma. One might argue that the word in question has become a technical term, such that wherever it occurs it has a constant meaning. In this case the argument would be that the verb *episunagein* and its cognate noun have the status of a technical term relating to a posttribulational gathering of God's children to Himself. However, an examination of the evidence shows this argument is simply false. There are nine occurrences of the noun and verb in the New Testament. Of those nine only three have an eschatological significance. They are the two under discussion here and a third instance in the synoptic parallel in Mark 13:27. Six occurrences are very general: the citizens of a city coming to see a dignitary. Therefore, to claim that a term has become a technical term based upon three occurrences, two of which are parallels in the synoptic Gospels, is to claim too much.¹²

In fairness to those who make this identification, they do not all do it simply on the linguistic parallel mentioned. They would offer a third reason, which, in combination with the second reason, they believe constitutes the case for identifying the gatherings. It is the similarity of detail along with the linguistic parallel that justifies the claim that the two gatherings are the same event and therefore posttribulational. There is the use of a trumpet, there are clouds, and there is a gathering of saints to the Lord. This argument, if true, is more substantial.

Close consideration, however, shows this argument is unconvincing to a pretribulationist.¹³ The parallel between trumpets, clouds, and saints being caught up to meet the Lord in Thessalonians and Matthew, depends on establishing 1 Thessalonians 4:14,17 as posttribulational. At the center of this argument is its relationship to 5:1-9, which we have previously rejected. Moreover, any argument of this sort must not only be based on similarities; it must also be sensitive to differences. Similarities between events may be because they are similar, not the same. Gundry himself recognizes that there are differences, but he tries to show that they are compatible with one another and/or insignificant. The gathering may be related to that of dispersed Jews at the coming of their Messiah as taught in Deuteronomy 30:4 and Isaiah 27:12,13., Those who are gathered in Matthew are called the elect, a term Gundry himself says may refer to Israel, the church, or both. The one who gathers the saints is different. It is angels in Matthew and the Lord Himself in 1

Thessalonians 4. Gundry calls the Olivet discourse the most complete description of what will take place at the rapture, but there is the curious omission of any statement about the resurrection of the dead.¹⁴

In summary, the similarities that are cited between the Thessalonian epistles and Matthew are all based on making 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 posttribulational and treating the differences as explainable. Both of these approaches will be unconvincing to a pretribulationist.

The Silence About a Rapture in Correcting False Teaching

A second issue is the Paul's silence about a rapture in his correction of the false teaching that was troubling the Thessalonian believers, in 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4. An important reason for Paul's writing this second epistle so shortly after the first is found in these verses. The false teaching that was troubling the Thessalonians came to them either by a variety of means (a prophecy, a report, a letter) or by one of these means. The content of this false teaching is clear "The Day of the Lord has come" (2:2). The teaching was that these believers were in the day of the Lord. This teaching was unsettling and alarming them. Paul writes to correct this false teaching, which was also incorrectly attributed to him.

Gundry thinks that there are two ways in which pretribulationists can interpret this passage. First, they can argue that the Thessalonians were unaware of a pretribulational rapture, and because of this ignorance they believed that they were in the Day of the Lord. This move, however, comes at a price. It requires that the entire case for a pretribulational rapture in the Thessalonian epistles be invalidated. If they did not know of such a rapture both from the first epistle and Paul's oral teaching, it is unlikely that we, who lack the latter, would be able to discern such a teaching. Furthermore, Paul merely reminds them of what he has taught them in order to correct their error. Thus, if they were unaware of such teaching, the case for a pretribulational rapture fails in 2 Thessalonians as well.¹⁵

Second, pretribulationists can hold that Paul taught a pretribulational rapture in 1 Thessalonians and orally, but that the believers forgot about it. Their forgetfulness caused them to believe the false teaching, and this was the source of their agitation. This is more likely the approach that a pretribulationist will take, but it too has a price. The problem here is that Paul had a very simple and decisive response to the Thessalonian error. He could have, and on Gundry's view ought to have, said that the Thessalonians should not worry because he had taught them that a pretribulational rapture had to occur before the Day of the Lord was going to begin. Paul is silent on this issue. He makes no mention of the rapture, and this counts severely against a pretrib rapture. Paul's answer is that the Thessalonians cannot be in the Day of the Lord because the apostasy had not occurred and the man of lawlessness had not been revealed.

There are a number of points that one can make in response to this claim. First, I can agree with Gundry that it would have been nice to have had an unequivocal statement about the time of the rapture here. However, the Spirit of God did not see fit to do that, and as I will argue that is not necessary here.

Second, there are some pretribulationists who do think that there is a reference to the rapture in Paul's response. For them, the reference comes in the statement that the apostasy must come before the Day of the Lord. They take the word "apostasy" not only to have the meaning of a religious defection but also to mean a physical departure. Were this the case,

and I do not think it is,¹⁶ then Paul corrected the Thessalonian believers by reminding them that the rapture had to occur before the Day of the Lord began.

Third, let us grant that there is no reference to the rapture in Paul's answer to the false teaching. Does that invalidate a pretribulational rapture? I think not! I can put my reason both negatively and positively. Negatively, what would invalidate a pretrib rapture would be teaching by Paul that was inconsistent with or contradictory to such a rapture. Positively, as long as Paul's teaching is compatible with a pretrib rapture there is no problem, as long as there is sufficient basis for such a belief elsewhere. In sum, all that is required is that Paul's teaching does not contradict a pretrib rapture and that such a rapture is based on biblical teaching elsewhere. I think that both of these conditions are met, although an unequivocal statement by Paul would have been nice.

Fourth, the problem of Paul's silence about a rapture in correcting the false teaching about the Day of the Lord is every bit as unresolved on a posttribulational understanding of the rapture. Put slightly differently, posttribulationists have either the same or a similar problem on the assumption of the correctness of their view. There are, I suggest, three interpretive options open to the posttribulationist. First, Paul taught no view of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians, or else the believers were unaware of it. If this is so, then the problem for the posttrib is the same as the problem for the pretrib in Gundry's first option. Second, it can be argued that Paul taught a posttrib, pre-Day of the Lord rapture. This is the view that I would attribute to Gundry. If this is so, Gundry has the same problem that the pretrib does on the second interpretative option set out above. The Thessalonians thought that the Day of the Lord had come. The decisive answer here, as well, would have been, "You are wrong in your belief; don't you remember I taught you a posttrib, pre-Day of the Lord rapture?" The text is silent about such a rapture too. Third, posttribulationists may hold that Paul taught a posttrib, Day of the Lord rapture. That is, the rapture will be both posttribulational and in the Day of the Lord. In this case, the problem is not the same but similar. It is not why Paul is silent about the rapture but why the Thessalonians are unsettled and alarmed, two strong words. On this interpretation, the Day of the Lord would have to come before the rapture could take place. If the Thessalonians thought they were in the Day of the Lord, even though erroneously, they should not have been unsettled and alarmed, for the coming of the Lord to rapture them was imminent; it was about to occur. Joy and expectancy should have been their attitudes. Those who were not working because they thought the Lord was about to return, were in fact vindicated. The rapture was about to occur.

In sum, it would have been nice to have had some unequivocal statement about the time of the rapture in answer to the false teaching. But that was not the Holy Spirit's intention, and it may be profitless to speculate why. However, if this is a problem, it constitutes the same problem for certain posttribulational views of the rapture, and a similar one for other interpretations.

The Identity of the Restrainer

A final theological and exegetical question in 2 Thessalonians 2 is the identity of the restrainer and its importance for the question of the time of the rapture. This issue is a bit different than the previous two. The first two matters dealt with arguments that posttribulationists offer against pretribulationism. This issue deals more with an argument that pretribulationists bring in support of their position and against mid- or posttribulationism. The argument is that the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2:6,7 is the Holy Spirit, and that the

removal of His restraint comes at the rapture. This removal supports a pretribulational rapture.

The first step in dealing with this argument is to identify the restrainer.¹⁷ As we might expect, we have a variety of interpretations. Let me just give an overview of the most common approaches. First, the predominant view in the early church was that the restrainer was the Roman Empire. The restraining power was embodied in the person of the emperor. As time passed, conflict arose between the civil and ecclesiastical power, and this text was interpreted as meaning that the civil power was restraining the papacy until the coming of the Lord, at which time the latter would be destroyed. This view was defended on the grounds of Paul's vagueness about the restrainer, since if this letter fell into the hands of the civil authority they might view Paul's claim about the restraint being removed as an act of sedition. The vagueness of the reference, however, seems to be related to the fact that the Thessalonians already know of this matter. Moreover, the Roman Empire no longer exists, and the man of lawlessness has not appeared.

Second, growing out of the first view is the interpretation that the restrainer is human government, particularly as it is expressed in the rule of law. Restraint through the rule of law is the opposite of the man of sin and the mystery of lawlessness. This view has gained popularity among interpreters of all views on the rapture. One can not rule out the possibility that this is the correct identification. Though human governments are often given to excesses, Paul teaches that their rightful duty is the restraint of evil (Rom. 13:1-7). At the same time we should not dismiss the possibility that the restraint of evil requires something stronger, more supernatural, than mere human government, which praises well-doers and punishes evildoers.

Third, many identify the restrainer with the Holy Spirit. This interpretation seems best to me. It too was widely held in the early church, being found in the writings of Theodoret, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Chrysostom. The view may reflect apostolic teaching. Moreover, it would seem that a person is required to restrain a person, and a supernatural one to restrain this man of lawlessness who is motivated by Satan himself. Finally, this view best accounts for the change in gender between verses 6 and 7. Verse 6 uses a neuter to identify the restrainer, most likely a reference to the Greek noun for spirit, *pneuma*. The change in verse 7 to the masculine is a reference to the personality of the Holy Spirit. Thus, I conclude that the most likely reference is to the Holy Spirit, for even if the restraining of evil is through human government, ultimately that is only possible through the power given it by the Holy Spirit.

Having identified the restrainer as the Holy Spirit does not settle the issue of the relationship of this to the rapture. For this to be used as an argument for pretribulationism, it must be shown that the Holy Spirit only restrains the revelation of the man of lawlessness through the church. It is only in this way that the removal of the church is identical with the removal of the restraint. As long as the Holy Spirit is active during the Tribulation period, it is possible that He will act to restrain the final manifestation of evil independently of the church and its restraining activity. There seems to be abundant evidence that the Holy Spirit will be active in the earth during the Tribulation period. He will empower His witnesses (Mark 13:11). Evangelism will be more effective than it has ever been (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 7:9-14). It is reasonable to assume that as Satanic activity increases, so will the activity of the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, this passage does not say, nor does any other, that the restraint of the appearance of the man of lawlessness is an activity that the church has been called to do. We are to be salt and light, but it is unlikely that Jesus meant that this was the restraining of

the final form of iniquity, if this is so, then any view of the rapture can meet the requirements of this passage. The Holy Spirit will be active during the Tribulation, and the church at best is one, not the only one, who restrains the revelation of the man of lawlessness. We may think that because of the special relationship between the Holy Spirit and the church, a pretribulation rapture best serves the meaning of the text, but, at least in my judgment, it is not the only possible interpretation. Thus, those of us who are pretribulationists need to be careful in the use of this argument, that we do not claim for it more than is justified.¹⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion I have tried to deal with one of the most difficult eschatological texts in the New Testament. I have tried to show that on the three issues raised in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7, there is no exegetical or theological matter that makes a pretribulation rapture impossible, or even improbable.

Appendix

While the majority of commentators on 2 Thessalonians 2:3 take *apostasla* to refer to apostasy or religious defection, some argue that it is reference to the rapture.¹⁹ If this claim is defensible, then Paul does use his teaching about a pretribulation rapture to instruct the Thessalonian believers about the Day of the Lord. The accuracy and defensibility of this claim rests on the etymology and usage of the Greek verb *aphistemi* and its cognate nouns.

Aphistemi and its cognates are found widely in Greek literature. The verb is first thought to have been found in the writings of Thucydides (Thuc., 1, 122). In the period from second century B.C. to first century A.D. there are at least 355 occurrences of this word group,²⁰ making these rather common words in the Greek language. *Aphistēmi* is a compound verb from *apo* (from) and *histēmi* (to stand). It is both a transitive verb, meaning "to cause to revolt, mislead," and an intransitive verb, meaning "to go away, withdraw, depart, fall away." From this verb are derived two nouns, *apostasion* and *apostasla*. *Apostasion* comes to have a fixed meaning, "a bill of divorce," while *apostas(a)* means "rebellion, abandonment, state of apostasy" or "defection." It is the latter noun that is found in our text.

The question that we are now ready to answer is whether the noun *apostasta* ever refers to a physical departure, allowing Paul to make a reference to the rapture of the church by using this word. Let us take how the words are used in the biblical Greek (the LXX and the New Testament) as the context for establishing how these words are used. These would be the primary contexts for setting the usage of any biblical term, although at least in this case what is true in biblical Greek is true more generally. The first thing that we can say is that the verb *aphistemi* is clearly used of physical departure in both testaments. In the Old Testament (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 persons as in 1 Samuel 18:13, where it is used of David's departure from Saul, and in Psalm 6:8, of the physical separation of the wicked from God's presence. In New Testament 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 (Luke 2:37; 4:13; 8:13; 13:27; Acts 5:37-38; 12:10; 15:38; 19:9; 22:29). It is found four times in Paul (2 Cor. 12:8; 1 Tim. 4:1; 6:5; 2 Tim. 2:19). It is used once by the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 3:12). All but Acts 5:37 are intransitive uses. 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. In Acts 19:9 Paul was teaching in the synagogue in Ephesus for three months, but he left or departed when some obstinate hearers refused to believe. Thus, there are clear examples where the verb means to physically depart or leave in both the Greek Old Testament and New Testament.

There are fewer uses of the two related nouns in biblical literature, but again both are found in the Greek Old Testament and New Testament. Apostasion is found with a fixed meaning in both testaments. It is related to the breaking of the marriage covenant (Mal. 2:14). And it means "a certificate of divorce" (Deut. 24:1,3; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8; Matt. 5:31; 19:7; Mark 10:4).

This leads us to the noun in 2Thessalonians 2:3, *apostas(a*. It is found in the Greek Old Testament and has the idea of rebellion (Joshua 22:22), wickedness (Jeremiah 2:19), and unfaithfulness (2 Chr. 28:19; 29:19; 33:19). *Apostasta* is found twice in the New Testament, in our text and in Acts 21:21. In Acts, the noun is used in Paul's teaching that the Jews who lived among the Gentiles that forsake the teaching of Moses about circumcision. None 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 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.

Let me summarize my findings: 1) *aphistemi* and its cognates are found widely in Greek literature; 2) the verb *aphistemi* has many and clear uses where a physical departure can only be meant; 3) the noun *apostasion* has a clear and fixed meaning that relates it to the marriage covenant, and it is the common way of expressing the giving of a certificate of divorce; 4) the other noun, *apostasta*, has a variety of meanings, but none of them relate to a physical departure. It seems that any fair assessment of the data leads to the conclusion that Paul does not refer to the rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

Before I conclude this appendix, let me state and respond to two possible objections to the conclusions that I have argued for above. It might be argued that though the derivative noun may never be used of a physical departure, the idea is nonetheless justified because of the underlying verb which has that etymology and usage. In other words, one rests the rapture interpretation of this text not on *apostas(a* but on the verb *aphistēmi*. This simply cannot be done. 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. *Anaginōsko* is a word in the New Testament. It is a compound from the preposition *ana* which means "up, upwards" and *ginosko* which means "to know." To base the meaning of the compound on the meaning of its parts leaves one with a meaning for *anaginōsko* of "to know up" or "to know upwards," when in fact the word means "to know certainly, recognize" or "to read."²¹ There is at least another clear example of the difference between a verb and its cognate noun. There is a verb *eperotao* which is found a number of times in the New Testament, 53 times in the Gospels, and five times in the epistles (e.g., Matt. 12:10; 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 *eperotema*. The idea here is of a pledge, quite different from its cognate verb meaning.²² 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.

A second objection to what has been argued is that, in the history of the interpretation of this text, there are some interpreters, important ones too, who have suggested that a

physical departure is at least a part of the meaning of this word. That may be, but that does not settle the matter. If they came to their conclusions on the basis of the etymology and usage of *aphistemi*, they were wrong, at least in my judgment. If, on the other hand, they reached their conclusions for some other reason, then we would have to know what those reasons were, so that they could be evaluated. However, it does seem that given what we presently know, there is no reason to understand Paul's use of *apostas(a)* as a reference to the rapture.

¹ Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973). See also Doug Moo, "The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position" in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Posttribulation?* Gleason Archer, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 186-90.

² *Ibid.*, 100-11, especially 105-06.

³ *ibid.*, 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 134-35. See also Moo, 190-96.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 113-14.

⁸ Robert L. Thomas, "Second Thessalonians" in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 319.

⁹ Gundry, 105.

¹⁰ Robert L. Thomas, "First Thessalonians" in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 280.

¹¹ For a fuller discussion see, Paul D. Feinberg, "Response to Doug Moo" in *Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Posttribulation?* Gleason Archer, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 226-27.

¹² For a fuller discussion see *Ibid.*, 229-31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 224-26.

¹⁴ Gundry, 135-36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 118. See also Moo, 187-190.

¹⁶ I have included an appendix on this issue. I set out my reasons for thinking that a physical departure and thus a rapture is not the correct interpretation of this verse.

¹⁷ See Gundry's fine discussion of the options, 122-26.

¹⁸ See both Gundry, 126-28; and Feinberg, 228-29.

¹⁹ See E. Schuyler English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture* (Travelers Rest, SC: Southern Bible Book House, 1954), 67-71; and Kenneth S. Wuest, "The Rapture-Precisely When?" *Bib Sac* 114 (1957): 63-67.

²⁰ *Ibychus, Thesaurus linguae Graecae*, The Regents of the University of California, Packard Humanity Institute, 1992, Listone.

²¹ This point was made to me by my colleague Douglas Moo.

²² This point was made to me by Ron Nickelson, presently a Ph.D. student in New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL.