

The Rapture – Concept, History, and Evidence

The subject of the Rapture can be a confusing topic in many of our churches today. Theology divides into two main branches, covenant and dispensational. On the covenant side the predominant view is that there is no Rapture prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and all Scripture relates to the Second Coming only. The dispensational camp believes that there will be the Rapture prior to the Second Coming. The covenant side tends to spiritualize (take passages to occur in a spiritual sense only), where dispensationalists take those passages literally. This study is based on the dispensational and mid-Acts view that yields the Pre-tributational Rapture of the Church the body of Christ prior to the outpouring of God's wrath, known as the Tribulation, and before His Second Coming to earth to set up that long-awaited Millennial Kingdom. We know, especially from the books of Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation, that there will be a future time where God will pour His wrath down on an unbelieving world. This is a time called "the time of the end" in numerous places in Daniel, "end of the world" in Matthew 24:3, "great tribulation" in Matthew 24:21, (the) "great tribulation" in Revelation 7:14.

Greek is the original language of our New Testament and you will find the Greek noun *apostasia* used twice. The first occurrence is in Acts 21:21 **ΑΠΟΣΤΑΣΙΑ** (accusative case) and the second in II Thessalonians 2:3 **ΑΠΟΣΤΑΣΙΑ** (nominative case). When Jerome produced the Latin Vulgate Bible in the year 390, at the direction of Roman Emperor Constantine I, he translated the Greek noun **apostasia** in Acts 21:21, into the Latin noun (in the accusative case) - **discessionem** (withdrawal) and in II Thessalonians 2:3, into the Latin noun (in the nominative case) - **discessio** (withdrawal). The Greek word *apostasia* is the noun form of the Greek verb *aphistemi* (depart). The two thoughts that can legitimately be derived from the word *apostasia* are: 1) non-physical such as a departure from a truth or the teaching of a person (Acts 21:21); and 2) physical departure from a location (II Thessalonians 2:3). I believe that both these thoughts are conveyed in the two occurrences of the Greek word *apostasia* in the Bible. The first occurrence is Acts 21:21, written by Luke, and the first two English Bible translations (Wycliffe & Purvey), taken from the Latin Vulgate, render the word "departing." This is using the infinitive or verbal noun form of the Latin noun **discessionem**. An alternate rendering for Wycliffe & Purvey could have been *withdrawal* to keep it as a noun. So, there we have the non-physical thought of a withdrawal or *departing* from the teachings of Moses (See Appendix I for Bible History).

Acts 21:21 - Jerome's Latin Vulgate Bible – 390

audierunt autem de te quia **discessionem** doceas a Mose eorum qui per gentes sunt Iudaeorum dicens non debere circumcidere eos filios suos neque secundum consuetudinem ingredi (**discessionem** – noun – withdrawal)

Acts 21:21 - John Wycliffe Bible – 1384

And they heard of thee, that thou teachest **departing** from Moses of those Jews that be by heathen men, saying, that they owe not to circumcise their sons, neither owe to enter after custom.

Acts 21:21 - John Purvey Bible – 1395

And. they heard of thee. that thou teachest **departing** from Moses, of those Jews that be by heathen men, that say, that they owe not to circumcise their sons, neither owe to enter by custom.

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Later, three English Bibles were translated from Greek Texts that would make up the basis for what we now know as the “Textus Receptus,” and in Acts 21:21 render the Greek word *apostasia* “forsake.” Here again the translators used the infinitive or verbal noun form of the Greek noun *apostasia*. Again, this word is derived from the Greek verb *aphistemi* (depart) but another word that is close is the Greek noun *stasis* (dissent). The English word dissent is similar looking to the Latin word *discensionem* and since the Tyndale, Geneva, and KJV translators looked at the Latin as well as the Greek, this could explain where the idea of “forsake” may have originated. You have to remember that the truth of the Rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ was first committed only to the Apostle Paul and was subsequently lost, as a truth, before the end of the first century (See Appendix II). This truth wasn’t recovered until late in the 1800’s so in the 1500’s and 1600’s it’s perfectly understandable that there wouldn’t have been any thought of a physical departure, when you come to the second occurrence of the word *apostasia*, as the Apostle Paul uses it in II Thessalonians 2:3. Even today many Christians aren’t aware of the recovered truth of the Rapture! So, with the light that has been given since Tyndale, Geneva, and KJV I believe they should have used the more accurate rendering of “departing” or “withdrawal” or “departure” instead of “forsake.”

Acts 21:21 - Greek Textus Receptus

κατηχηθησαν δε περι σου οτι **αποστασιαν** διδασκει απο μωσεω του κατα τα εψηνη παντα ιουδαιου λεγων μη περιτεμνειν αυτου τα τεκνα μηδε τοι εψησιν περιπατειν

αποστασιαν (apostasia) – noun – falling away, forsake, (departure)

Acts 21:21 - William Tyndale Bible – 1534

And they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the gentiles to **forsake** Moses, and sayest that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to live after the customs,

Acts 21:21 - Geneva Bible – 1560

Now they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews, which are among the Gentiles, to **forsake** Moses, and sayest that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to live *after* the customs.

Acts 21:21 - King James Version Bible – 1611

And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to **forsake** Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

I knew a woman (she passed away in 2007) who grew up in Greece and although the Modern Greek is much changed from the Greek in our New Testament, many of the words are still in usage today. I asked her about the Greek word *apostasia* and she told me how her father used it with her. He told her that if she found herself with others that were talking about things or doing things of which he didn’t approve, she was to *apostasia*. At that point she tore a piece from a page of paper in front of her and tossed it across the table. She was to *depart* from that group! Her father was expressing, by the infinitive or verbal noun use of both the non-physical and physical *departing* from their ideas, activities, and location. I don’t believe apostasy is the idea either. There are Greek words that would better depict apostasy, e.g. *hairesis* – heresy, disunion. Note - the word apostasy is not used in the KJV, but only in the later translations of the 1900’s.

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Now, when we come to II Thessalonians 2:3, this time Jerome translated the Greek noun **apostasia** into the Latin noun (in the nominative case) - **discessio** (withdrawal). His chosen word renders what I think is the correct thought of the physical departure or Rapture of the believers to whom Paul was referring. To put the verse into proper context, we need to refer to Paul's first letter in I Thessalonians 1:10 where we read that "Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." The word "delivered" is the Greek word *rhomai* and is in the Greek present tense so it has the idea of "delivers" In other words; when the wrath comes He "delivers" us. In I Thessalonians 4:16-18 we find the method that He will use when He "delivers" us:

16 For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (KJV)

(Ladies and gentlemen – this, **caught up**, is the Rapture!)

As we come to II Thessalonians Chapter 2, we find the Apostle Paul reminding his readers of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto Him," (in verse 1), as he proceeds (in verse 2) to dispel a false rumor that the wrath associated with the day of the Lord had already come. He assures them (in verse 3) that that day won't come before the *apostasia*. The only logical event he could have been referring to was the: "caught up" (from I Thessalonians 4:17), and the "gathering together unto Him" (from II Thessalonians 2:1). It doesn't make sense that he would tell them that the day of Christ (or the Lord) won't come until there is a falling away or apostasy from the truth. They were already witnessing apostasy via the false reports he was trying to dispel. In the first two English translations, out of the Latin, we find: **departing away** and **dissension**. You will notice that Wycliffe italicized the word *dissension* suggesting that he felt he was adding it to the original Latin. Purvey was a little more direct and only did what is known as a transliteration. This is where a word isn't translated but is given a spelling update to conform to the new language.

II Thessalonians 2:3 - Jerome's Latin Vulgate Bible – 390

ne quis vos seducat ullo modo quoniam nisi venerit **discessio** primum et revelatus fuerit homo peccati filius perditionis (**discessio** – noun – withdrawal)

II Thessalonians 2:3 - John Wycliffe Bible – 1384

That no man deceive you in any manner. For no but **departing away, or dissension**, shall come first, and the man of sin be showed, the son of perdition.

II Thessalonians 2:3 - John Purvey Bible – 1395

No man deceive you in any manner. For but **dissension** come first, and the man of sin be showed, the son of perdition.

When we read the next three English translations of the Greek *apostasia*, we find a **departing** twice, which represents the thought of a physical departure, and a **falling away** which represents a non-physical departure from truth. In all available Greek texts (Byzantine: Textus Receptus & Majority; Alexandrian: Wescott Hort, & Nestle-Aland 26) the definite article (the) **ἡ** is present so that a direct translation should be **the departure** (Rapture).

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II Thessalonians 2:3 - Greek Textus Receptus

μη τι υμᾱ εξαπατηση̄ κατα μηδενᾱ τροπον̄, οτῑ εαν̄ μη̄ ελψη̄ **η̄ αποστασιᾱ** πρωτον̄ καῑ αποκαλυψη̄ ο ανθρωπο̄ τη̄ αμαρτιᾱ ο υιο̄ τη̄ απωλεῑᾱ

II Thessalonians 2:3 - William Tyndale Bible – 1534

Let no man deceive you by any means, for the Lord cometh not, except there come a **departing** first, and that that sinful man be opened, the son of perdition

II Thessalonians 2:3 - Geneva Bible – 1560

Let no man deceive you by any means, for *that day shall not come*, except there come a **departing** first, and that the man of sin be disclosed, *even* the son of perdition,

II Thessalonians 2:3 - King James Version Bible – 1611

Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a **falling away** first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition:

The English Revised Version Bible of 1885, at least, correctly brought the definite article (the) **η̄** into the translation: “let no man beguile you in any wise: for *it will not be*, except **the falling away** come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition,”

Finally, I want to address where the word “Rapture” came from that so many believers use to identify the “caught up” of I Thessalonians 4:17 and the “departing” of II Thessalonians 2:3. When Jerome produced the Latin Vulgate he used the Latin verb **rapiemur** (to seize, snatch, carry away) and when you study all the various tenses (**raptus, rapio, rapui, ratum**), you can see where a word like “Rapture,” coined in Middle English in the 1590’s, could be used today for the Greek word *apostasía* (See Appendix III).

I Thessalonians 4:17 - Jerome’s Latin Vulgate Bible – 390

deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquimur simul **rapiemur** cum illis in nubibus obviam Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus

The original Greek manuscripts use the Greek verb **αρπαγησομεψα** (*harpazo* - catch up, take by force, catch away, pluck) and all available Greek texts are in agreement:

I Thessalonians 4:17 - Greek Textus Receptus

επειτᾱ ημε̄ῑ οῑ ζωντε̄ οῑ περιλειπομενοῑ αμᾱ συν̄ αυτο̄ῑ **αρπαγησομεψα** εν̄ νεφελαῑ εῑ απαντησιν̄ τοῡ κυριοῡ εῑ αερᾱ καῑ ουτω̄ παντοτε̄ συν̄ κυριω̄ εσομεψᾱ

I Thessalonians 4:17 - Greek Majority Text – 1982

επειτᾱ ημε̄ῑ οῑ ζωντε̄ οῑ περιλειπομενοῑ αμᾱ συν̄ αυτο̄ῑ **αρπαγησομεψα** εν̄ νεφελαῑ εῑ απαντησιν̄ τοῡ κυριοῡ εῑ αερᾱ καῑ ουτω̄ παντοτε̄ συν̄ κυριω̄ εσομεψᾱ

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I Thessalonians 4:17 - Greek Wescott Hort Text – 1881

επειτα ημεί οι ζωντέ οι περιλειπομενοι αμα συν αυτοί αρπαγησομεψα εν νεφελάι εί απαντησιν του κυριου εί αερα και ουτώ παντοτε συν κυριω εσομεψα

The earliest English Bible translations, i.e. Wycliffe and Purvey, use “snatch (up)” in their translations and Tyndale, Geneva, and King James Version use “caught up.”

I Thessalonians 4:17 - King James Version Bible – 1611

Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up [Raptured]** together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

I Thessalonians 4:17 - Geneva Bible – 1560

Then shall we which live and remain, be **caught up** with them also in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Next, we come to II Thessalonians 2:3 and we find the only time, in Paul's letters, that he uses the Greek word *apostasía*. I believe he had in mind the same physical departure he taught in I Thessalonians Chapter 4. It wouldn't make sense that he would talk about a non-physical departure from the truth or apostasy. There have been major breakouts of apostasy in virtually every generation of time since the first century. It wouldn't be very helpful to look for apostasy as a sign that the day of Christ (or the Lord) was about to start. Because Paul was inspired to write, in the first letter, that believers will be delivered from the wrath to come via the departure (Rapture), I believe he was reassuring them in the second letter that the *Rapture* will precede the day of the Lord's wrath and that the reports (I Thessalonians 2:2) that “the day of Christ (or Lord)” was then happening were false. In II Thessalonians 2:5 Paul further reminds them: “Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” KJV

II Thessalonians 2:3 - Jerome's Latin Vulgate Bible – 390

ne quis vos seducat ullo modo quoniam nisi venerit **discessio** primum et revelatus fuerit homo peccati filius perditionis (**discessio** – noun – withdrawal)

II Thessalonians 2:3 - King James Version Bible – 1611

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come **a falling away [the* Rapture]** first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

II Thessalonians 2:3 - Geneva Bible – 1560

Let no man deceive you by any means, for *that day shall not come*, except there come **a departing** first, and that the man of sin be disclosed, *even* the son of perdition,

II Thessalonians 2:3 - Greek Textus Receptus

μη τί υμά εξαπατηση κατα μηδενα τροπον οτι εαν μη ελψη **η;** **αποστασια** πρωτον και αποκαλυψη ο ανθρωπό τή αμαρτιά ο υιό τή απωλειά (**apostasía** Noun, falling away, forsake (departure))

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II Thessalonians 2:3 - Greek Majority Text – 1982

μη τί υμά εξαπατηση κατα μηδενα τροπον οτι εαν μη ελψη **η**;
αποστασια πρωτον και αποκαλυψη ο ανθρωπο τή αμαρτιά ο υιο τή
απωλειά

II Thessalonians 2:3 - Greek Wescott Hort Text – 1881

μη τί υμά εξαπατηση κατα μηδενα τροπον οτι εαν μη ελψη **η**;
αποστασια πρωτον και αποκαλυψη ο ανθρωπο τή ανομιά ο υιο τή
απωλειά

II Thessalonians 2:3 - Nestle-Aland Text – 26th Edition

μη τί υμά εξαπατηση κατα μηδενα τροπον οτι εαν μη ελψη **η**;
αποστασια πρωτον και αποκαλυψη ο ανθρωπο τή ανομιά ο υιο τή
απωλειά

*Note, all 4 Greek texts have the definite article (the) “**η**” preceding the word **apostasia**.

The reason it is important to include and consider the definite article (the) “**η**” is that its use suggests that the writer is referring to a previous thought, i.e., the “caught up” and the “gathering together unto Him.” It’s understandable that most of our English translations have missed the idea of the Rapture or physical departure from II Thessalonians 2:3, because the truth of the pre-tribunational Rapture was lost during the first century. Since that time we have been guided by “the tradition of men” and “the rudiments of the world.” I think it’s “high time” we return to the truth in all our churches and comfort each other with the biblically supportable truth of the Rapture. “And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed.” Romans 13:11 KJV

--Fred Lewis – December 2009-- www.biblicaladvancedbasics.com

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Appendix I

The following is a very brief chronology of the most significant milestones in the evolution of the Bible into English. It is not intended to be thorough or exhaustive, only to give the reader some introduction to the subject and hopefully spark interest in further study.¹

100 The first century saw the completion of all the gospels and epistles that now make up the New Testament in their original Greek.

390 Jerome's Latin Vulgate manuscripts are produced at the direction of Roman Emperor Constantine I, containing 80 Books (39 Old Testament, 14 Apocrypha, 27 New Testament).

1384 John Wycliffe produces the first hand written manuscript copy of the complete Bible in English (80 Books) from the Latin translations then in use.

1395 John Purvey revises the Wycliffe Bible.

1455 Gutenberg invents the printing press and prints the first book ever printed, the Gutenberg Bible in Latin.

1516 Erasmus prints the first consolidated New Testament in Greek from original manuscripts which later, after revision, became known as the Textus Receptus.

1522 Martin Luther prints the first New Testament in German translated directly from Erasmus' Greek.

1526 William Tyndale prints the first New Testament in English translated directly from Erasmus' Greek.

1530 Tyndale prints the first Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament the Jewish Torah or Law) in English.

1534 Tyndale prints his revised New Testament.

1535 Myles Coverdale prints the first complete Bible in English translated directly from Greek (80 Books).

1537 Matthews Bible, the second complete Bible to be printed in English, John "Thomas Matthew" Rogers (80 Books).

1539 The "Great Bible", the first English Bible to be authorized for public use is printed (80 Books).

1560 The Geneva Bible, the first English Bible to add numbered verses within each chapter is printed, containing extensive references and commentaries (80 Books).

1568 The Bishops Bible, the Bible which King James ordered to be the basis for the King James Version Bible was printed (80 Books).

1611 The original King James Version Bible is printed (80 Books).

1769 The Baskerville-Birmingham revision to the original King James Version Bible is printed, with spelling updates and minor word changes (80 books).

1885 The English Revision Committee revised the King James Version Bible, removing the Apocrypha and leaving the current 66 books. This is known as the English Revised Version today.

¹ Earliest New Testament Translations
An Interlinear Comparison in Modern English
Clayton G. Porter – December 2007

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Appendix II

Pauline Truths Lost (Order of Loss)²

- First:** The Distinctive Message and Ministry of Paul - II Timothy 1:15
- Second:** The Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ
- Third:** The Difference between Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ
- Fourth:** Justification by Faith Alone, in Christ Alone - Acts 13:39

Pauline Truths Recovered (Order of Recovery)

- First:** Justification by Faith Alone, in Christ Alone
Recovered via Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century via Luther, et al
- Second:** The Difference between Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ
Recovered in the 1800's via John Nelson Darby, Ethelbert William Bullinger, Sir Robert Anderson, et al
- Third:** The Pre-Tribulational Rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ
Recovered in the 19th Century via John Nelson Darby and included by C.I. Scofield in his Reference Bible, published 1909
- Fourth:** The Distinctive Message and Ministry of Paul
Recovered from the middle 1900's via John C. O'Hair, Charles F. Baker, Cornelius R. Stam, et al

² Grace Bible College, TH 414 – (adapted excerpt from) Studies in Dispensational Theology, T. F. Conklin, Course Prof., Spring 1994

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Appendix III³

rap·ture *noun, verb -tured, -tur·ing.*

–noun

1. ecstatic joy or delight; joyful ecstasy.
2. Often, **Raptures**. an utterance or expression of ecstatic delight.
3. the carrying of a person to another place or sphere of existence.
4. **the Rapture, Theology**. the experience, anticipated by some fundamentalist Christians, of meeting Christ midway in the air upon his return to earth.
5. *Archaic*. the act of carrying off.

–verb (used with object)

6. to enRapture.
-

Origin:

1590–1600; RAPT + -URE

rapt *adjective*

– adjective

1. deeply engrossed or absorbed: *a rapt listener*.
 2. transported with emotion; enRaptured: *rapt with joy*.
 3. showing or proceeding from Rapture: *a rapt smile*.
 4. carried off spiritually to another place, sphere of existence, etc.
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Origin:

1350–1400; Middle English (ptp. of *rapen* to carry off, abduct, rape) < Latin *raptus* seized, carried off (ptp. of *rapere*), equiv. to *rap-* (see RAPE¹) + *-tus* ptp. suffix

-ure *noun suffix*

an abstract-noun suffix of action, result, and instrument, occurring in loanwords from French and Latin: *pressure; legislature*.

Origin:

< French *-ure* < Latin *-ūra*

³ <http://dictionary.reference.com>