

APOCALYPTIC APOSTASY

Introduction

Thessalonica was the Macedonian capital and the location of Paul's second European church. The early primitive work of all the Apostles was without a complex administrative organization. That often made a cohesive Christian message difficult to promulgate. Complicating their evangelistic work were the Judaizers who dogged them often with fierce opposition (Acts 17:10-15). Additionally, false understanding regarding many truths brought challenges to that early church, especially in Thessalonica. These included:

1. Misunderstanding of the Resurrection
2. The timing and nature of Christ's Second Coming (*parousia*)
3. Events preceding His return¹

Because of persecution (Acts 17:5-10) Paul, with Silas, made a nighttime escape from Thessalonica to Berea. It was there that the weakness of the Thessalonians was exposed:

1. *"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11).
2. Paul had significant concern for those Thessalonian believers. They were being deceived through false teaching. When he wrote the second letter to them he urged that they not be taken in by speculations whether through *prophecy, report or letter* (II Thessalonians 2:2), or in any way.

Prevarication created confusion within those converts which necessitated a detailed response from Paul. He was able to introduce important eschatological truths that resolved much anguish for those believers. That information has become, in turn, pertinent to us since it summons a deeper investigation into that Pauline message.

Must-Occur Events Antedating the *Parousia*

The Apostle Paul first cautioned: *"Don't let anyone deceive you"* (II Thessalonians 3:2a – NIV). That is also what Christ warned against before He gave the Olivet discourse regarding the end of time (Matthew 24:3). He repeatedly exhorted believers to beware of *"false christs"* and *"false prophets"* (Matthew 24:5, 11, 23-26). There would come teachers who were not loyal to Biblical truths.

Two ***conspicuous*** phenomena must occur before Christ's return:

1. A *"falling away"* (II Thessalonians 2:3)
2. The *"lawless one"* (antichrist – a rival Messiah) becomes distinctly apparent (II Thessalonians 2:3)

¹ Beale, Gregory K.; *1–2 Thessalonians*, (Intervarsity Press, Academic, Downers Grove, IL – 2003), pp. 199-200.

The “*falling away*” or *apostasia* (G) is rebellion or apostasy, suggesting a *deliberate abandonment of a former professed position*, contextually within the Christian community.² The Thessalonians were led to believe that the Second Coming of the Messiah and the Resurrection had already occurred.

Paul, addressing those two events, made it clear that they are still to be anticipated. There are many pointed signs and events which truly announce the expected coming of Jesus. They are to be known and understood. That links with Christ’s words: “*When ye therefore shall see ...*” (Matthew 24:15a). The issue of ***apostasy*** or ***falling away*** joins that list. ***It is a sign!***

It is the purpose of this document to penetrate deeper into the ***apocalyptic issues of rebellion***. Riveting are the many prophecies predicting major apostasy.

Departure from Truth

It has been prophesied that broad ungodliness will infiltrate the very fabric of the church at the end of time: “*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.... Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away*” (II Timothy 3:1-6).

The second letter to the Thessalonians is a helpful springboard toward a deeper understanding of that ungodly, perilous time.

- As noted above, “*falling away*” comes from the Greek word *apostasia* – but it is preceded by an article – “the apostasy.” This *article* points out something that appears to be well known. It suggests an anaphoric tone: “Surely you recall what that truth was!” (II Thessalonians 2:5).³
- The issue contextually relates to a previously affirmed truth that the lawless person will undermine.

The antichrist appears to be a facilitator of this focused rebellion:

1. The lawless one will come with “*deceivableness of unrighteousness*” (II Thessalonians 2:10), echoing Daniel’s description of the little horn (Daniel 8:23-25).
2. Its followers do ***not*** love truth (II Thessalonians 2:10), recalling again Daniel’s description that antichrist, with his followers, “*cast truth to the ground*” (Daniel 8:12).
3. He takes God’s place in the Church (II Thessalonians 2:4), which reverberates with: He “*shall pollute the sanctuary of strength*” and “*the place of his sanctuary was cast down*” (Daniel 11:31, 8:11).

This terrible rebellion is within God’s covenant community.

² *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

³ Kurschner, Alan; *Antichrist before the Day of the Lord* (Eschatos Publishing; Pompton Lakes, NJ; 2013), p. 32, 209.

1. There is a “*falling away*” or apostasy, which conveys in both the New and Old Testaments a “departure from the faith.”⁴
2. It is consistent with the Danelic imagery of the last-day antichrist rebellion.
3. It is consistent with the immediate context of a controlling deception within the church.
4. Truth related to God’s righteousness and authority will be compromised.

This was additionally embellished by Daniel in his eleventh chapter, stating that it occurs at the *es qes* – time of the end – when:

- He will hate and forsake the holy covenant (vs 30).
- He sets up an abomination – something God detests (vs 31).
- He will corrupt by flatteries (vs 32).
- He exalts himself above every god (vs 36).

Deception leads to that “*departing*” or “*falling away*” with the focused leadership of the antichrist. His followers facilitate that antagonism with actual hatred for truth (Daniel 8:12).

- “*The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and **things taught by demons***” (I Timothy 4:1).
- There will be individuals led by “spirits” not from heaven.

Paul projects a terrible defiance of truth, perhaps bordering on insurrection within the church. To that young Thessalonian body he exhorts:

- “*... 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*” (II Thessalonians 2:2 – NIV) (some apparently fraudulently used Paul’s name).
- “*So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter*” (vs 15).

Don’t be caught up with such falsehood. Interestingly, disloyalty to God’s law is also implied because the antichrist will be law-less (vs 3 – NIV).

Daniel especially helps us to see how this applies to the last days – our day. End-time defection will include much of Christendom. Paul’s Thessalonian counsel concerns things that immediately antedate the Second Coming. They’ve become an eschatological prophecy.

Prophetic Apostate Issues

We now look elsewhere at two areas where God specifically identifies eschatological defiance and insubordination. Though given to Old Testament prophets, they are germane today! These advance more deeply the prophetic implications of the “*falling away*.”

⁴ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

1. Ezekiel 8 and its “abominations” (*toeba* – H) immediately preceding the sealing of God’s people (Ezekiel 9).
2. Daniel 11 and 12: “Abomination” (*shiqqus* – H) that will lead to desolation. It is presented in the middle of the Olivet discourse.

Ezekiel’s Vision of “Four Abominations”

Abomination One (Ezekiel 8:5-6):

Ezekiel is transported to the north gate of the inner court of Solomon’s Temple. “North” symbolizes the “direction” or “location” where God’s throne exists (Psalm 48:2).

- An idol is blocking that entrance.
- It is in competition with the “northern entry point to,” symbolically, where the holy mountain of God (Ezekiel 28:14-16; cf. Revelation 14:1, Hebrews 12:22), Zion is, where God resides. It was the direction toward which worshipers could envision God’s presence arriving from – His holy mount. This “direction” is where Lucifer used to serve and craves, once again, to appropriate.
- That satanic passion is unveiled: *“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the **sides of the north**: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High”* (Isaiah 14:12-14).
- In this imagery, the closest this fallen angel can come to realize that “dream” is to approach those precincts of the worship area designated for God’s chosen.

Ezekiel is told that this statue is called “Jealousy.” God had previously and emphatically said that He was a jealous God (Exodus 20:5) and visits wrath on those who hate Him. The imagery suggests that this “ignites Yahweh’s heart.”⁵

- “Jealousy” blocks the entrance to the inner court and to the temple where God wants to meet with His people. Intriguingly, “*Babylon*” is spoken of as also being “*north*” (Jeremiah 1:14-15; 6:1, 22). Interesting! Daniel depicts the apostate antichrist as the “king of the north” (Daniel 11:45).
- It is stunning to observe that God’s glory apparently remained in the outer court during this “event.” (Ezekiel 8:4). He couldn’t “get in!”

This “abomination” symbolizes anything that prevents God’s Spirit, His presence or His glory, to enter His church – the congregation’s hearts – their minds. In God’s eyes “jealously” can easily shut Him out!

⁵ Block, Daniel I.; *The Book of Ezekiel*, Chapters 1–24 (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1997), vol. 1, p. 282.

“... in the spirit of Jesus, demolish the idols in high places; they will unveil superstition, and plant truth, purity, and holiness where now are cherished only error, self-indulgence, intemperance, and iniquity ...”⁶ “... unite with Christ to transform the living **temple given to idols**, that you may become cleansed, refined, sanctified temples for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”⁷

A covenant relationship issue is being violated. “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3-5, Deuteronomy 4:1-20, 5:7-12). The most “simplistic” idol can bar the all-powerful Creator God of the universe.

Abomination Two (Ezekiel 8:7-12):

God is developing a case against Judah – the remnant of His chosen! Ezekiel is being taken for a tour of their worship center. The evils are being choreographed in ascending horror.

The prophet sees a “hole” in a wall he is to dig through. There he finds a door that enters into a dark room (apparently associated with the temple).

- Seventy men, representing the elders of Israel (the whole nation – Exodus 24:1, Numbers 11:16, 24:25) were worshipping a cross section of earthly creatures (from crawling critters to beasts).
- They were worshipping drawings of creations and not the living Creator Himself. These symbolized the diverse pagan gods that Israel had adopted.⁸

The Hebrew words describing these represent forbidden Canaanite images (Leviticus 26:1, Numbers 33:52)⁹

- Each man had an incense censer, revealing active worship and prayers to these earthly creatures or to the gods they represented!

This “worship” is being done in the dark with the assumption that God would not see (amazing, however – He is still recognized as existing!). This implies a rejection of Jehovah God and His omniscience (Isaiah 29:15). They also claim that He has forsaken the land – thus, a denial of His omnipresence. Intriguingly, Jaazaniah, apparently a civic secular leader, was in their center, suggesting he was their spiritual mentor.

Ezekiel reacted to what he saw:

- *Seqes* – “disgusting thing”
- *Qillulim* – “pellets of excrement”¹⁰

This “*abomination*” raises many current apostate issues:

⁶ White, Ellen G.; *Health, Philanthropic, and Medical Missionary Work* (1896), p. 50.

⁷ White, Ellen G.; *The Kress Collection* (1985), p. 68.

⁸ Keil, C. F. and F. Delitzsch; *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts 01961-3473; 2006 – 2nd printing), vol. 9, p. 71.

⁹ Block, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

1. Worshiping symbols of forbidden gods, and not the Creator, is portrayed through saint worship today. Even more alarming is the growing trend in “Christianity” to focus on the god of self, honoring what complements or even glorifies “myself.”

The underlying premise of contemplative spirituality, increasingly being adopted today, is the belief that God is in all things, in all people, virtually in the very center of “*me*.” A modern example:

“It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, ... If only they [people] could all see themselves as they really are ... I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other.... At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusions, a point of pure truth.... This little point ... is the pure glory of God in us. It is in everybody.”¹¹

“The Bible says that ‘faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God’ (Romans 10:17). Not so in the emerging church. Faith comes by seeing images, touching icons, smelling incense and hearing chants and liturgical recitations.”¹² It comes by personal exercises that focus on self.

2. Ezekiel’s “secular” leader, Jaazaniah, portrays the merging of state with church worship – an issue that started Israel’s decline when they first cried out for a secular king (I Samuel 8:10-22). Intriguingly, this portrays a contemporary issue:

The Church is bonding with the State. Examples:

- a. Catholic *Forum*: From Parish to Paris; *Why the World’s Faithful Are Asking for Climate Action*

- The Protestant and Catholic worlds see a “spiritual” experience in protecting God’s planet, which might bring collective peace. They have joined the secular world in this enterprise.
- A coalition of 1,780,000 Christians recently signed a petition imploring world leaders to act soon “before it is too late.”¹³

- b. In October, 2015, the *Parliament of the World’s Religions* met in Salt Lake City. They reported that there were 10,000 attendees from 80 nations and 50 faiths. The “institute’s” name was “Reclaiming the Heart of Our Humanity: Working Together for a World of Compassion, Peace, Justice and Sustainability.”

- As part of its mission, the Parliament voted that it would “cultivate harmony among the world’s religious and spiritual communities and **foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world.**”
- Its October “mission issues” included:¹⁴

¹¹ Oakland, Roger; *Faith Undone* (Lighthouse Trails Publishing, Silverton, Oregon), p. 85, quoting Thomas Merton in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1989).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹³ ZENIT.org, November 29, 2015, Staff Reporter

¹⁴ <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/parliament/salt-lake-2015/declarations>

3. Ezekiel's worshipping "coalition" adopted pagan practices that God abhors. To unify their "worship" experience, that Parliament of Religion's October "fest" permitted vast iconic forms of worship "to unify" the body – including Wiccans.

The major "sins" highlighted by this second abomination in Ezekiel include:

1. The church and its priestly functions have bonded with a civic leader. A church–state relationship is suggested.
2. The meaning and very nature of God was hijacked by idolatrous worship of creatures that God, as Creator, had made.
3. Sensory worship with visual representation of gods supplanted His theocratic guidelines. Substitutionary worship came into God's church.
4. The very ability of Yahweh's nature to "see" (Deuteronomy 4:28, Psalm 115:4-8, 135:15-18, Isaiah 44:12-29) or care was denied by their worship in darkness.¹⁶

As the church is secularized, its uniqueness mellows the respect of civic leaders, negatively emboldening their negative influence. Current examples:

1. *"Faith Crimes – How courageous Christians practicing their religion are being persecuted in Obama's America"*¹⁷
2. Greg Corombos, *"How Supremes could cripple Christian schools 'Just teaching kids that homosexuality is a sin would be sufficient' to trigger probe"*¹⁸
3. Charlie Spiering, 28 Sep 2015, *"Obama Warns Christians: Gay Rights More Important Than Religious Freedom"*¹⁹
4. *Todd's American Dispatch*, Christian "School's federal aid at risk if it fails to adopt transgender policy"²⁰

Abomination Three (Ezekiel 8:13-15):

Ezekiel is now taken from a "temple room" to the north gate of apparently what is the entrance to the temple itself (the geography is somewhat uncertain here). There he sees women sitting and weeping for Tammuz.

¹⁵ <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org//mission>

¹⁶ Block, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

¹⁷ *Whistleblower Magazine*, May 7, 2015.

¹⁸ *World Net Daily*, May 17, 2015.

¹⁹ <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/09/28/obama-warns-christians-gay-rights-important-religious-freedom/>

²⁰ Todd Starnes; May 07, 2015 Fox News.

- Tammuz was the Phoenician name for the mythological Greek god Adonis. It later became a god of the people of Judah. This was a life-and-death deity, dying each year and later being raised to life.
- Each year in June to July a festival called “The Tammuz” was held. It was of ***lamentation*** by women over his death. It was associated with licentious rites noted for the deepest obscenity, so much so that it is reported that Constantine the Great put an end to this celebration.²¹
- In the rainy season (winter to spring) Tammuz came back to life.²²

The major sins by God’s people highlighted in this abomination:

1. They are ritualizing the death of an “unknown god.”
2. It is a clear desecration of the “state of the dead” understanding with an annual life and death mystery which was eulogized. God’s people should have known better.
3. Vile sexual practices came into the church and became part of its ritualized worship life.

Today the majority of the Christian world believes that the soul enters the “pearly gates” at death. Funerals not only celebrate the life but one’s entrance into heaven. Though today not part of that “life and death” ritual, up to 50% of ***Christian*** men and 20% of Christian women are “addicted to pornography.”²³

Abomination Four (Ezekiel 8:16-18):

The previous picture occurred at the north entrance to the temple. Now the picture changes back to the inner court itself. The imagery is of the “space” between the actual porch of the temple and the altar of burnt offering.

- This is the most sacred spot, where priests alone could tread (Joel 2:17).
- Twenty-five men are prostrate, facing east, worshiping the sun. This represents the 24 leaders of the classes of the priests (I Chronicles 24:5, II Chronicles 36:14, Ezra 10:5) plus the high priest.²⁴
- It is noted that they have their back to the temple declaring their rejection of Yahweh in favor of the sun god Shemesh/Shamash.²⁵

The worship of solar or any astral gods was forbidden (Deuteronomy 4:19, 17:2-5). Nevertheless, this worship gained favor when Manasseh was king (II Kings 21:5). It appears that his son, Josiah, demolished the “horses and chariots” of the sun erected at the entrance to the temple (II Kings 23:5, 22-12). Upon his death, these abominations quickly returned.

The sins highlighted in this abomination include:

²¹ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Tammuz.”

²² <http://biblehub.com/topical/t/tammuz.htm>

²³ http://www.christiancinema.com/catalog/newsdesk_info.php?newsdesk_id=2657

²⁴ Keil, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

²⁵ Block, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

1. Worship of the sun [not unlike many pagan gods – Egyptian goddess of Re, the god Apis the bull with the sun between its horns, the Canaanite god Baal (sun and storm god) or Shamesh, the Babylonian sun god].
2. Rejection of God by turning their backs toward the temple – the place of His presence.
3. Apostasy of the spiritual leaders appointed over God’s people.

Today, this astral “worship” has been subtly adopted as part of the liturgical experience of the Roman Catholic Church. Examples of Ancient Sun Gods with their “Christian” orientation:



Egyptian Sun god Re
thecoincidentalandy.blogspot.ca



Pope Francis – eucharistic adoration
<http://salesianity.blogspot.com/2013/06/pope-francis-there-are-3-kinds-of.html>



Shamash:
 Babylonian Sun god –
 male/female rays
accordingtothescriptures.org



Eucharist – sun/male female rays
<http://saltandlighttv.org/blog/tag/eucharist>



Pope John Paul II



Babylonian Sun god – Shamish
[http://rocbo.lautre.net/gilgamesh/-
iconographie.html](http://rocbo.lautre.net/gilgamesh/-iconographie.html)

Babylonian Sun god symbols

Daniel's Abomination Mystery – Daniel 11–12

Christ urged the disciples and us to go to Daniel to gain greater insight into end-time prophecy. Specifically, He pointed to the area of the abomination that would result in desolation (Matthew 24:15).

These two verses specifically relate to that imperative:

- *“And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily [sacrifice], and **they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate**”* (Daniel 11:31).
- *“And from the time that the daily [sacrifice] shall be taken away, and **the abomination that maketh desolate set up**, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days”* (Daniel 12:11).

The study into these areas is exciting and extensive. Our objective, however, is limited to identify the **sin** related to that “*abomination*.” Gabriel provides the insight in Daniel 8:13:

- *“Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily [sacrifice], and the **transgression of desolation**, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?”* (Daniel 8:13).
- The word “*abomination*” is God’s emotional reaction to the “**transgression**” that leads to desolation.

Transgression (*be•pesha* – H) is one of the worst sins in the Hebrew vernacular. It is rebellion against **God’s law, authority and covenant**. This is summarized in the seventh-day Sabbath.

- *“For in six days **the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is**, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it”* (Exodus 20:11). (Symbolic of His authority as the Creator.)
- *“And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that **the LORD thy God brought thee out thence** through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day”* (Deuteronomy 5:15). (Symbol of His covenant promise.)

“And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he

The Sabbath embodies the covenant promise leading to ultimate deliverance and restoration.

*did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of **the covenant, the ten commandments***” (Exodus 34:28). (Symbol of our part in the covenant relationship.)

*“Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a **sign** between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day **he rested, and was refreshed**”* (Exodus 31:16-17).

Summary

Paul’s “*falling away*” eschatological view has deep associations elsewhere in Scripture.

The spiritual disintegration of Judah portrays to the Christian world the apostate issues that God said would enter in the last period of earth’s history. Their rebellion:

- Came from a desire to seek new religious sensory experiences
- Came from adopting practices that God specifically prohibited, that became integrated into the “worship experience”
- Deepened when the Sabbath was tarnished, bringing eternal desolation warnings
- Brought failure to honor the elevated truths of life and death

Judah received a second chance. In the end of time, the eternal fate of humanity will hang in the balance; God’s mercy will shortly end.

The sealing of God’s people in Ezekiel 9 follows and reflects that important end-time work described in Revelation 7. The wrath against wickedness, using “weapons of destruction” (Ezekiel 9:1), is seen in such apocalyptic verses as:

*“The same shall drink of **the wine of the wrath of God**, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb”* (Revelation 14:10).

*“And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of **the wine of the fierceness of his wrath**”* (Revelation 16:19).

“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

The apostasy at the “time of the end” noted in Daniel 8:17, 19 and chapter 12 relates to rebellion against the Sabbath. That must coalesce with the list portrayed in Ezekiel 8. It contextually will become a key legal issue promoted by the antichrist, the law-less one.

Christ urges us to penetrate the deepest meaning of last-day apostasy. The list is broad. Though apostasy can be seen through many “sins” within Scripture, the umbrella of earth’s final evil clusters within the wickedness portrayed in Ezekiel 8 and Daniel 8 through 12.

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