

New Testament gives clear evidence of the rise of apostate movements even in the days of the apostles. In the second century A. D. group after group departed from the ranks of orthodox Christianity, to form heretical sects of one type or another. Since that time, many additional centuries have passed, and many more apostasies have occurred, and the Lord has not yet come back. It would be strange indeed if Paul tried to keep Christians from having a false expectation of the imminence of the return of Christ by giving signs, one of which would not be a useful guide for more than a few years at most.

So the question inevitably arises: Is the phrase, "a falling away" a correct rendering of the Greek word here? It should be noted that the Greek word has the definite article. The American Revised Version translates it as "the falling away". The new Revised Standard Version says "the rebellion". Some interpreters have considered that it relates to the Jewish rebellion against the Romans which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. Such an interpretation must labor under the same disadvantage as that of our common version. If it kept the Thessalonians from a false expectancy, it would not have any similar value during nearly nineteen centuries that have passed since that time. What would be the purpose in causing the Thessalonians and the people who lived during the next few years to take an attitude contrary to that taught in the rest of the New Testament, if the sign given them would become of no account so very soon? After all, the Holy Spirit wishes the New Testament to teach us attitudes that should endure throughout the Christian era, not merely for a few years.

Before examining this Greek word to determine whether it has been correctly translated, it is well that we look at v. 2 again, and see whether, after all, the question to which verse 3 is an answer has been correctly understood. Verse 2 urges believers not to be troubled "as that the day of Christ is at hand." The American Revised Version says, "as that the day of the Lord is just at hand". Both A. V. and A. R. V. have wrongly translated the Greek verb. Dean Alford, the great English expositor of the last century, suggests the translation, "is present" and points out that this verb "occurs six times