

from Dr. E. Schuyler English, editor of Our Hope, suggesting a most original answer. Careful investigation has convinced me that the solution he suggests is the correct one.

Dr. English's suggestion is that the word translated "the falling away" is to be taken in the general sense of departure, and is really a reference to the rapture of the church. So Paul does not say: "Here are signs by which you can know that Christ's return is drawing near." What he really says is: "You must not be troubled or confused with the idea that the day of Christ is already present. Before that day actually begins, there must be, first, the departure (i. e., of the saints, as already fully described in I Thess. 4:14-18), and then the revelation of the man of sin who will have his brief period of seeming victory, but will be destroyed by Christ when He actually comes to the earth (as stated in v.8)". If this solution is true, II Thess. 2 presents no problem, but fits perfectly with the rest of the New Testament. But can it be correct? Let us examine the philological evidence.

In the first place we note that the word translated "falling away", (Greek 'apostasia'), is used only twice in the New Testament. Two occurrences are never enough to fix the meaning of a word.

The Greek noun 'apostasia' is derived from a verb 'aphistemi'. This verb is used in various forms in the New Testament. Of the fifteen occurrences of this verb in the N.T., eleven are translated "depart", and the other four are rendered "draw away", "fall away", "refrain from", and "withdraw oneself". It is to be noted that there is only one instance in which the verb is translated "fall away" (Luke 8:13). In fact only three of the entire fifteen occurrences have any reference to a departure from the faith, namely Luke 8:13, I Timothy 4:1 and Hebrews 3:12. The word is used in connection with departure from iniquity in II Timothy 2:19 and from ungodly men in I Timothy 6:5. Luke 2:37 uses it in the description of Anna the prophetess, who "departed not from the temple" but served with fastings and prayers night and day." In II Corinthians 12:8 Paul uses it with regard to his prayer that his thorn in the flesh