

## **God's News In The News**

### **Week One Hundred Fifty-Four**

### **The Great Falling Away**

#### **Reading Between The Lines**

*1-2 And now, what about the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to meet him? Please don't be upset and excited, dear brothers, by the rumor that this day of the Lord has already begun. If you hear of people having visions and special messages from God about this, or letters that are supposed to have come from me, don't believe them. 3 Don't be carried away and deceived regardless of what they say.*

*For that day will not come until two things happen: first, there will be a time of great rebellion against God, and then the man of rebellion will come—the son of hell. (2 Thess 2:1-3, TLB)*

*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition ... (2 Thess 2:3, NKJV)*

*Let no one deceive or beguile you in any way, for that day will not come except the apostasy comes first [unless the predicted great falling away of those who have professed to be Christians has come], and the man of lawlessness (sin) is revealed, who is the son of doom (of perdition) ... (2 Thess 2:3, AMPC)*

*3 Do not let anyone fool you. For the Lord will not come again until many people turn away from God. Then the leader of those who break the law will come. He is the man of sin. (2 Thess 2:3, NLV)*

Sometimes hearing something in different ways brings out the full meaning of the things described. In these verses written by the Apostle Paul and given to the Thessalonians, he is trying to assure them that the Rapture and the Second coming haven't occurred. But what is the apostasy Paul mentions? Is this something new for these believers?

#### **Jesus Warned About It First**

*Many people will give up and turn away at this time. People will hand over each other. They will hate each other. 11 Many false religious teachers will come. They will fool many people and will turn them to the wrong way. 12 Because of people breaking the laws and sin being everywhere, the love in the hearts of many people will become cold. (Matt 24:10-12, NLV)*

*... and many of you shall fall back into sin and betray and hate each other. 11 And many false prophets will appear and lead many astray. 12 Sin will be rampant everywhere and will cool the love of many. (Matt 24:24:10-12, TLB)*

Jesus warned His disciples of this apostasy when they asked when the end of the age would be. While Paul mentions it generically, Jesus gives us specifics of what will happen. Let's break this down a little and ascertain if we are seeing what was predicted.

#### **These Are Believers**

It helps to identify who these apostates are and the wording strongly implies that those falling away or turning away are people who once stood with Jesus. Here is how the web site [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org) explains it:

*The Greek word translated "rebellion" or "falling away" in verse 3 is apostasia, from which we get the English word apostasy. It refers to a general defection from the true God, the Bible, and the Christian faith. Every age has its defectors, but the falling away at the end times will be complete and worldwide. The whole planet will be in rebellion against God and His Christ. Every coup requires a leader, and into this global apostasy will step the Antichrist. We believe this takes place after the church has been raptured from the earth.*

Many of the Bible commentators agree with this assessment since you can't fall from something unless you once stood or were at a higher point. In this case, these are believers who once worked side by side with Paul or even Jesus. Judas comes to mind when Jesus uttered these words and we see that Paul had people who did the same:

*This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. (2 Tim 1:15, NKJV)*

*Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica... (2 Tim 4:9-10, NIV)*

We'll take a closer look at those three people in Paul's circle, but for now we'll see what the word for "apostasy" means in the Greek. It is the word *apostasia* (ap-os-tas-ee'-ah) and it means *defection, apostasy, revolt; "leave, depart," which is derived from 575 /apó, "away from" and 2476 /histémi, "stand") – properly, departure (implying desertion); apostasy – literally, "a leaving, from a previous standing."* As you can see this is not just leaving a position, it is rebelling against it and, to some actually changing teams as in defecting. This would explain what Jesus told us, as these former believers not only changed sides, but they will hate them and betray them and turn them in as those against the Antichrist.

### **And About Those Guys**

In researching who Demas was, we know that he is mentioned as being a fellow worker with Paul in several other places in the epistles (see **Philemon 1:24** and **Colossians 4:14**). But apparently in Paul's second time in Rome, the pressure got to him, mainly because he loved the world. His leaving wasn't merely a departure, but the timing suggests more as this quote from an article from [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org) describes:

*The Greek verb used in the original implies that Demas had not merely left Paul but had left him "in the lurch"; that is, Demas had abandoned Paul in a time of need. The apostle was in prison, facing a death sentence, and that's when Demas chose to set sail. Undoubtedly, Paul was deeply let down by Demas. It's never easy to see a friend and associate in whom you've placed your trust forsake you in the midst of hardship.*

Adding to this what we know about the Olivet Discourse portrayal of these apostates and you get the picture.

### **Little Is Known**

And what of our oddly named followers of Phygellus and Hermogenes? In searching for any other information about these previous supporters of Paul, sadly we don't have much to go on other than the details given to us in these verses. That alone is a poor testimony as attested to by *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*:

*Of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes - We know nothing of these individuals but what is here mentioned. It would seem that they were prominent persons, and those from whom the apostle had a right to expect other treatment... It is a sad thing when the only record made of a man - the only evidence which we have that he ever lived at all - is, that he turned away from a friend, or forsook the paths of true religion. And yet there are many men of whom the only thing to be remembered of them is, that they lived to do wrong.*

Now, put that in context with what we have mentioned earlier and you have yet one more characteristic of the age we are living in, the time just before Jesus returns.

### **Living With The Tares**

It would appear that God will allow believers to live right beside false believers until He deals with the tares once and for all as described in **Matthew 13:36-43**. Without going into a great deal of detail, the point of this lesson is that the closer we get to the Tribulation, there be more and

more of these turncoats who will make it their duty to not only sully the Church, but to eventually bring charges against the true Church even going so far as to turn them over to those who are in charge of governments wanting to expose them and, in some cases, arrest them. What are we to do with these traitors? As the parable Jesus gave the disciples, we are to let the farmer divide them with the farmer being Jesus and His angels as the reapers. Here is how one author of an article from [gotquestions.org](http://gotquestions.org) advises us:

*But we are not to pursue such people in an effort to destroy them. For one thing, we don't know if immature and innocent believers might be injured by our efforts. Further, one has only to look at the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, and the reign of "Bloody Mary" in England to see the results of men taking upon themselves the responsibility of separating true believers from false, a task reserved for God alone. Instead of requiring these false believers to be rooted out of the world, and possibly hurting immature believers in the process, Christ allows them to remain until His return. At that time, angels will separate the true from false believers.*

*In addition, we are not to take it upon ourselves to uproot unbelievers because the difference between true and false believers isn't always obvious. Tares, especially in the early stages of growth, resemble wheat. Likewise, a false believer may resemble a true believer. In Matthew 7:22, Jesus warned that many profess faith but do not know Him. Thus, each person should examine his own relationship with Christ (2 Corinthians 13:5) ...*

### **Take Care Of That Mote In Your Eye First**

How can we avoid being one of those Spanish Inquisitors? Again, Jesus wisely addresses this when He told His disciples to look in the mirror and pull out the board in our eye before we even consider removing a speck from another's eyes (see **Matt 7:3-5**). Holy Spirit can easily do eye surgery as He has the best and most objective view of things. He alone knows all Truth and can and will turn an "eye" problem into a solvable process. Oftentimes, when we try and be an ophthalmologist with poor vision we can do more harm than good. In the end times there will be great deal of these false eye doctors and we shouldn't be one of them unless Jesus tells us to speak up. We ought to be more concerned with our own vision issues first and then see how Holy Spirit leads us. I believe pointing out false doctrines generically and publicly is the best course of action, staying away from using specific examples even when we know them. Even veiled allusions should be verboten as people are smarter than we think and can connect the dots.

### **Let History Be Our Teacher**

Church history is replete with examples of public skirmishes that split whole movements over things that are not of primary importance to salvation and the Great Commission. Let us eschew such arguments especially using personal examples and naming names as it were. Go to that brother or sister privately and let the separating the wheat from the tares to Jesus and His angels. And literally for God's sakes, don't let such dispersions cause your hearts to get cold and hard. That is a chief sign of the last days falling away and the rise of sinful behavior from people who know better can be a tad disappointing and even cause us to start falling from Jesus. Don't be a part in form or fashion of the "False Doctrine" police who are like the Pharisees who brought the woman caught in adultery had the mote in their own eyes. As mentioned previously, let Holy Spirit lead and guide you through that minefield of disputes and speak for Him as you try and bring someone back in the fold if that is asked of you after much prayer and intercession. Pray more than you talk is my advice.