

2 Timothy 3:1-17    “In the Last Days”  
Exodus 8  
Psalm 90

January 1, 2012

In 2 Timothy 3 we will hear about Jannes and Jambres.  
Who were Jannes and Jambres?

Paul assumes that you know the stories about Jannes and Jambres.  
While this is the only place in the Bible where you find these names,  
you can learn a *lot* about them from other ancient Jewish sources.

According to *one* rabbinical tradition,  
they were the names of the chief magicians in Pharaoh’s court (Exodus 7-8).

It starts in Exodus 7-8,  
where after opposing Moses and plying their magic against his,  
the magicians tell Pharaoh in Ex. 8 that “this is the finger of God.”

But Jannes and Jambres appear all over the Exodus narrative!  
Some rabbis said that Jannes and Jambres had foretold Moses’ birth –  
thereby prompting Pharaoh’s slaughter of the Hebrew boys.  
Others said that Jannes and Jambres converted to Yahweh  
after witnessing the power of Moses,  
and joined the mixed multitude that left Egypt with Israel –  
but then helped lead the rebellion at Sinai,  
and assisted in the building of the Golden Calf.  
Others said that Jannes and Jambres were the two youths who accompanied Balaam  
when he was commissioned to curse Israel.  
Others said that Jannes and Jambres were in fact demonic spirits  
who took bodily form throughout the Exodus,  
and were finally caught by the power of the Divine Name,  
and slaughtered by Phineas (or, alternately, drowned at the Red Sea).

Jannes and Jambres were also known to Greek authors –  
Pliny (a contemporary of Paul) refers to Jannes and Jambres  
as great Egyptian sorcerers of antiquity.  
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8513-jannes-and-jambres>

But according to *another* rabbinical tradition,  
Jannes and Jambres were Israelites.  
(According to Ezekiel 20, Israel had been rebellious in Egypt  
and worshiped Egyptian gods.  
In this tradition,  
Jannes and Jambres were identified as *Hebrew* false prophets)

We don’t need to decide which stream of rabbinical tradition Paul is thinking of.

Because in *all* of these traditions,  
Jannes and Jambres were infamous in Jewish lore for their *opposition to the truth*.

Ancient Jewish sources referred to Jannes and his brother  
as being raised up by Belial (as the devil is often called) *from within Israel*  
to thwart the Exodus of God's people from Egypt.

If you only think of Jannes and Jambres as the Egyptian magicians in Exodus 7-8,  
then you will miss the point that Paul is making.

Because whether they were Egyptians who joined Israel in the Exodus –  
or whether they were rebellious Israelites at Mt. Sinai –

either way, they were rebels from *within Israel*.

Now, what is especially interesting about these ancient sources  
is that they are not simply “old stories about Israel.”

Rather, they retell the stories of the Exodus  
in the context of speaking about the coming dangers of the last days.

In other words,

The stories of Jannes and Jambres emerged  
as preachers sought to apply the lessons of the Exodus to the church of their day.

Remember Jannes and Jambres, and how they opposed Moses?

Well, that is what the devil will do (or is doing) in “the last days.”

Jannes and Jambres were used by Jewish preachers to warn people in their own day  
to beware of apostasy – beware of false teachers *within the church*.

And that is why we are singing the Prayer of Moses as our Psalm of response.

Psalm 90 considers how our lifespan fits into God's purposes in redemptive history.

“Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”

As we sing Psalm 90 together,

let us unite our hearts and voices together, saying,

“Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants!”

Sing Psalm 90

Read 2 Timothy 3

## **1. In the Last Days There Will Come Times of Difficulty (v1-9)**

### **a. What Are “the Last Days”? (v1)**

<sup>1</sup>*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.*

You are living in the last days.

The “last days” are the period  
in between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ.  
On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter quoted the prophet Joel:  
“in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.” (Acts 2:17)  
The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost  
was the demonstration that the last days have come.

Why is this important?

It’s important to understand where you are in history.  
You are not the center of the universe – Jesus is!

What does that mean?

Throughout the history of God’s dealings with his people,  
there have been major, epochal changes from time to time:  
Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the Exile;  
All of these eras come to their fulfillment and conclusion in Christ.

And with the coming of Christ – and with his being seated at the right hand of the Father in glory  
there is now no further “redemptive event” that we should expect in history  
until he returns.

Everything has been fulfilled in him –  
therefore we are now looking only for all things to be placed under his feet.

So we should expect to see the nations being subdued to the kingdom of Christ!  
But Christ’s method of subduing the nations is *not* like that of other kings.  
The way of our Lord is the way of the cross.

There are two basic eschatological positions out there:  
the optimistic – that sees the last days as a glorious advance of the kingdom  
until the whole earth submits to Jesus (and then he returns);  
and the pessimistic – that sees the last days as a period of suffering and persecution  
until Jesus returns to fix everything.

Both are correct –  
because the way of the kingdom is the way of the cross;  
and therefore the advance of the kingdom  
will only come through suffering and persecution!

Those who take the purely optimistic vision deny the cross.  
Those who take the purely pessimistic vision deny the kingdom.

This is important for you as you go back to work – as you go back to school – this week,  
because you need to see how your daily life fits into the cross and kingdom of Christ.

Indeed, this is Paul's message to Timothy – and to the church – as he writes in 2 Timothy 3.  
[read verses 2-4]

**b. In the Last Days, People Will Be “Lovers” (v2-5)**

*<sup>2</sup>For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup>heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, <sup>4</sup>treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup>having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*

Is love a good thing?

It depends what you love!

If you love God – that is always a good thing!  
Because when you love God,  
then you love all that God has made!

In the last days, Paul says, people will be “lovers.”

But what will they love?

They will love “self” – “money” – “pleasure.”

They do not love “good” – nor do they love God.

And yet, Paul says, (v5) “they have the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.”

How can this be?

When you read verses 2-4, you think “wow, those people sound like monsters!”

But look more carefully.

Is there anything outwardly obvious about verses 2-4?

There are no graven images here –

no murder, no sexual immorality, no stealing –  
you could be any number of these things,

and still be a member in good standing in any Christian church!

Oh, it's true, that these things are entirely unacceptable for a Christian –  
but they are hard to “prove” – they are hard to pin down.

But Paul says that such people

“have the appearance of godliness” but “deny its power.”

We haven't spent much time on this word “godliness” for a bit –

but if you think back to 1 Timothy, we ran into it quite often.

Godliness – eusebia – refers to “piety” – outward conformity to God's standard.

Paul told us in 1 Timothy that the secret to piety (the mystery of godliness)  
is Christ himself – his incarnation and resurrection –  
*as well as* the proclamation of Christ to the nations.

So in the last days we should expect to see people who outwardly conform to Christ's standard,  
but who, *in fact*, deny the *power* of godliness because of what they "love."

I want you to think about what Paul is saying here.

If you love yourself – if you love money – if you love power and pleasure –  
then you are denying the power of godliness (the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus).

One set of words that Paul uses has to do with arrogance and pride:

"one whose mouth is too big for his body"  
he talks big – but that is simply an expression of his arrogance;

Many of these words have to do with the use of language:

two of the words Paul uses are  
"blasphemoi" – a blasphemer is one who is verbally abusive;  
and "diaboloï" – a slanderer or gossip  
The diabolical use of words will destroy others.

But while some of these are sins of commission –

others are sins of *omission* –  
things that you fail to do:

like un-grateful – thankless –  
those who do not recognize or acknowledge what others have done for them)  
or un-loving – heartless –  
those who do not care for those around them;  
or unappeasable –  
those who *will not* be reconciled to others;  
those who hold grudges!

Paul also speaks of those who lack self-control –

those who are "un-tamed" – or brutal – who do not love what is good.

Paul's word translated "swollen with conceit"

literally means to be wrapped in smoke!  
the idea appears to be that they are demented – out of their minds!

They are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

And yet – Paul says – these people have "the appearance of godliness."

We've seen throughout the Pastoral Epistles that God permits the church to be a mixed bag –  
including both the wheat and the tares –

both the regenerate and the unregenerate –  
the elect and the non-elect.

And God does this because his purpose is purify his church.

As we saw in 2 Timothy 2,

there is a warning here to you – and especially to me –  
to flee youthful passions  
and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace  
along with all who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (v22)

But all throughout history,  
God has allowed people like this into the church,  
in order to test the church and find out,  
do we love him?  
Or do we love self, money, pleasure?

Notice how Paul puts it in verses 6-7:

**c. ...Like Jannes and Jambres (v6-9)**

<sup>6</sup>*For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, <sup>7</sup>always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.*

So – *among those* who have the appearance of godliness but deny its power,  
are those who creep into households and capture weak women.

These are the ringleaders – the false teachers – spiritual predators  
who prey on the weak.

While in English it might be a little ambiguous,  
in Greek it is very clear that it is the weak *women* that are burdened with sins  
and led astray by various passions.

The idea is that these women are trapped in a cycle of sin –  
burdened, perhaps, by the guilt of sin –  
always feeling like they should be doing better,  
but also always feeling like they are running in the wrong direction.

Paul says that these women are “always learning  
and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.”

In our day we have idealized the one who is “always learning” –  
and so perhaps we don’t realize how bad this is!

Once you have *arrived* at a knowledge of the truth –  
*then* you will always be learning in a good way!

But Paul is talking about people for whom *nothing* is settled.  
In the same way that their desires are all over the map –  
“led astray by various passions” –  
so also their ideas are all over the map –  
“never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.”

You *can* know the truth as it is in Jesus.

And when you know the truth – the truth will set you free –  
because the truth re-orientes your loves:

away from yourself, away from money, away from pleasure –  
and orients your love entirely upon God.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength –  
and therefore – because you love God with everything,  
you love your neighbor as yourself.

The truth reorients your desires – your affections.

One who is always learning, and never coming to a knowledge of the truth,  
will never have their loves reoriented.

It's worth pointing out that Paul is not bad-mouthing “women” here.

He is bad-mouthing *weak* women – women who are led astray by various passions!

The idea is that if you are led astray by false teaching,  
then you are like Israel in the wilderness –  
childish, foolish, you are like a weak woman!

But this is the same Paul who has spoken of what a strong Christian woman should look like –  
showing love for family, for strangers, for the church, and for the weak.

Her loves have been reoriented by the truth.

But at this point, in verse 8, Paul introduces Jannes and Jambres  
as an example of what he is talking about.

*<sup>8</sup>Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. <sup>9</sup>But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.*

The Damascus Document suggests that the three basic sins of Jannes and Jambres  
were fornication, love of money, and defiling the sanctuary.

And when you look back throughout history,  
these are the things that have characterized apostasy from the truth.

Whenever you find pastors who use their position and power to seduce women,  
you find Jannes and Jambres.

Whenever you find pastors who use their position to acquire wealth,  
you find Jannes and Jambres.

Whenever you find pastors who corrupt the worship of God for their own purposes,

you find Jannes and Jambres.

Paul says that they were “corrupted” (or depraved) in mind  
and disqualified (or worthless) concerning the faith.

2 Timothy 3:1-9 certainly make it sound like there had been a lot of defections  
from the Christian community in Ephesus.

Paul says that the problems that Timothy sees around him in the church in Ephesus  
demonstrates that they are in the last days,  
and all of this is part of the devil’s assault against the faithful.

“Jannes and Jambres are singled out because of their stupidity.” (Tromp, 224)

For Paul, stupidity has to do with people who once knew better.

Paul does not blame the ignorant for their ignorance.

They don’t know any better!

But those who once were enlightened –

like Jannes and Jambres, who acknowledged that Moses’ power was from God,

and then spent the rest of their lives trying to overthrow him! –

that’s stupid!

As one commentator puts it, “to succumb to sin and leave the road to salvation, is patent idiocy.

That it nonetheless occurs, as the members of the author’s community doubtless observe,

is an unmistakable indication that the end of this world is near,

so that the devil is intensifying his aggression,

in order to prevent as many people as possible from being delivered.”

(Johannes Tromp, “Jannes and Jambres,” *Moses in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Traditions* p225)

This may sound discouraging!

so I need to assure you – as Paul assured Timothy,

that “they will not get very far,

for their folly will be plain to all,

as was that of those two men.”

Yes, the church will be plagued by defections and corruption all throughout the last days –  
but Jesus promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.

Therefore, verses 10-17 give the solution:

## **2. So Know the Scriptures (v10-17)**

### **a. You Have Followed My Teaching, My Conduct, My Aim in Life... (v10-11)**

<sup>10</sup> *You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,* <sup>11</sup> *my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.*

[read v10-11]



This is the knowledge of the truth that you should arrive at!  
Paul's teaching – his conduct – his *aim in life*.  
What am I about?  
What am I here for?  
Christ – his cross – his kingdom – his gospel –  
that is what I am about!

You know that, Timothy – you have seen what I am about.  
Remember what happened at Antioch in Pisidia?  
Where I was driven out of the city by the mob incited by the Jews? (Acts 13:50)  
You know what happened next, at Iconium –  
where they plotted to stone me? (Acts 14:5)  
and Lystra, where they *did* stone me, and left me for dead? (Acts 14:19)

Well, that is what will happen to you if you desire to live a godly life:

**b. Expect the Same Thing to Happen to You (v12-13)**  
<sup>12</sup>*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,* <sup>13</sup>*while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

Oh, sure, the impostors who have the appearance of godliness, but deny its power,  
will have a good life.  
But if you are in Christ, then you are not seeking a *good life* – but a *godly life!*

If you desire to live a *godly life* – in other words,  
if you want to live a life of true godliness –  
characterized by the power of godliness – (the life of God in Jesus Christ)  
then you will be persecuted!

After all, with evil people and impostors scattered throughout the church,  
even a city that is 100% Christian  
will still see suffering and persecution for the sake of Christ.

Do not be deceived!  
Just because they are “Christian” doesn't mean that they are godly!

What is a Christian?  
The Bible clearly defines a Christian as a “disciple.”  
In Acts 11:26, we are told that in Antioch the disciples were first called “Christians.”

A Christian, then, is a disciple:  
namely, someone who has been baptized  
and who is being taught to observe all that Christ commanded.  
(That's how Jesus defines a disciple in Matthew 28,  
when he says to make disciples of all nations,  
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.)

Christian, then, is a similar term to Jew, Muslim, Mormon, Hindu, etc.  
It refers to someone who is a part of the Christian church –  
someone who embraces the Christian religion.

It does not say anything about his eternal status.  
Only God knows the heart.

That's why Paul here distinguishes between two different types of Christians:  
“all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus”  
and “impostors.”

But how do you know which one you are?

That is where Paul turns in verses 14-15:

**c. And Continue in What You Have Learned – Knowing from Whom You Learned It (v14-15)**

*<sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it*

Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.  
Unlike the weak women, you have come to a knowledge of the truth –  
the truth as it is in Jesus.

*<sup>15</sup>and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

The Shorter Catechism (89) summarizes Paul's point very well:  
“The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word,  
an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners,  
and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.”

You can see in verses 14-15  
the importance of the preacher (“from whom you learned” in v14),  
the importance of the scriptures (“the sacred writings” of v15),  
and the importance of faith (“through faith in Christ Jesus” in v15).

You heard me say last week that it is only by faith that we receive the benefits of baptism.  
Well, it is equally by faith that we receive the benefits of the Word!

You – together with your pastor – must continue what you have learned.  
It's not a matter of always learning more.  
It's a matter of continuing in what you have learned.

I know – that’s not the most exciting application.  
But it is what Paul says for you (and for me) to do.

Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed.  
Because what this means is,  
that you may not love yourself, you may not love money, you may not love pleasure.

And when you find yourself drifting away from the love of God,  
and when you find yourself being ungrateful, disobedient to your parents,  
arrogant, love-less –

repent – humble yourself before the Lord and ask for mercy –  
confess your sins before God the Father,  
for the sake of Jesus Christ the one who loved us and gave himself for us –  
and ask God to forgive you because of the blood of the Lamb who was slain,  
and who was raised from the dead and seated at the Father’s right hand!

And then –  
don't do it again!  
Bear fruit in keeping with repentance!  
The reason why you sinned was because you were believing a lie!  
Stop believing the lie!  
Believe the truth – believe in Jesus!  
And “flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace,  
along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” (2:22)

**d. Because Scripture Is Useful for Equipping You for Every Good Work (v16-17)**

<sup>16</sup> *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* <sup>17</sup> *that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*