

In The Last Days

The Eschatology of Heresy

2 Timothy 3:1 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,

³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good,

⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

⁶ For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions,

⁷ always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.

⁹ But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

(2 Tim 3:1-9)

Hymenaeus and Philetus

Hymenaeus was a first century member of the church at Ephesus under the leadership of Timothy. **He appears twice** in the letters, always with another individual. The first time

he is mentioned alongside of someone named **Alexander**, who could be Alexander the Coppersmith of **2Tim 4:14** whom Paul said, “**Did me great harm.**” It could be the Jewish Alexander in **Acts 19:33** who played some role in the rabble that gathered in Ephesus against Paul. The fact this riot was started by Demetrius *the Silversmith* who incited the other smiths in the city to turn on Paul who was ruining their business of selling trinkets of the goddess Artemis has led some to think they are the same man. Or, he could be a different Alexander all together.¹ Whatever the case, both Alexander and Hymenaeus were “**handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme**” (**1Tim 1:19**). What were they blaspheming? If the heart of 1 Timothy is any indication, then they had to have been blaspheming the heart of the Gospel itself, particularly the death and resurrection of Jesus (**3:16**). The second time Hymenaeus is mentioned is along-side **Philetus**. In this instance, we know the specific heresy. They had “**swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is already past**” (**2Tim 2:18**).

The resurrection being past is an over-realized eschatology. The resurrection is about the future. An **over-realized eschatology** thinks the future state of affairs that

¹ **Joel B. Green**, “Alexander (Person),” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 151.

have not yet actually come to pass are here and now.² It would be the opposite of an under-realized eschatology which denies that certain things ushered in by Christ have already happened when in fact they have. In this way, eschatology deals with the timing of events associated with the Two Comings of Jesus Christ.

The word “eschatology” comes from Gk: *eskhatos* (“last, furthest, uttermost, most remote” in time and “-ology” meaning “the study of.” So, it literally means the study of the last times. There are many overlapping phrases in the Scripture that give this idea. Vos gives us 10:

- a. “the last days”—*eschatai hemerai* (Acts 2:17; 2Tim 3:1; Jam 5:3; 2Pet 3:3)
- b. “the latter part of the days”—*eschaton ton hemeron touton* (Heb 1:2)
- c. “the last day(s)”—*eschate hemera* (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48)
- d. “the last of the times”—*eschaton ton chronon* (1 Peter 1:20)
- e. “the last time”—*eschatos chronos* (Jude 18)
- f. “the last season”—*eschatos kairos* (1Pet 1:5)
- g. “the last hour”—*eschate hora* (1Jn 2:18)
- h. Compare: “the last Adam”—*ho eschatos Adam* (1 Cor 15:45); “the last trumpet”—*he eschate salpiggi* (1Cor 15:52); “the consummation of the world”—*sunteleia aionos* (Matt 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; Heb 9:26)³

² I like how Athanasius put it, “Hymenaeus and Alexander and their fellows were confused about time—ahead of time—when they said that the resurrection had already occurred” (*Discourses Against the Arians* 1.54).

³ Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 2–3. “The consummation of the world” is better

Hymenaeus' resurrection obviously does **not refer to Jesus' resurrection**, because that in fact had already happened. Paul would agree with that. Therefore, he is talking about the resurrection of the saints (though this would have been at least an indirect attack on the resurrection of Jesus [8, 11]). In the Creeds we confess, “I believe in *the resurrection of the dead*, and the life of the world to come” (Nicene Creed) and “I believe in *the resurrection of the body*” (Apostle's Creed). Where do we get this from? One place is **Romans 6:4-5**. “In order that, *just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*” Another is **2Cor 4:14**. “... who will transform our lowly *body* to be *like his* glorious *body*, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

What kind of a resurrected body did Jesus have? While **it was different** from ours (it wasn't “flesh and blood” [*sarx kai aima*], for that cannot inherit the Kingdom of God because it is mortal [**1Cor 15:50**], it could appear and disappear and move through walls [**Luke 24:36; John 20:19**], etc., it was

translated as the “**end of the age**” (*aionos* rather than *kosmos*) and as such is also parallel with “the end of the ages” (**1Cor 10:11; Heb 9:26**), the “age to come” (**Heb 6:5**), and so on.

also similar. It was recognizable (Luke 24:31; John 20:16); it still contained the marks from the crucifixion (Luke 24:39; John 20:27); he ate fish with it (24:42-43); and it could be touched (John 20:27), Jesus even said it was “flesh and bones” (*sarka kai ostea*). Therefore, though glorified and I don’t pretend to understand all that this means, it was a real, physical body.

If our body is going to be “like his,” then it follows that our body will also be a real physical body. Paul takes this idea a step further in 1Cor 15. He begins by asking, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body (*soma*) do they come?” (1Cor 15:35). He then starts talking about how “not all flesh [*sarx*] is the same” (39). There are “heavenly bodies” and “earthly bodies” of different kinds of glory (40) and “so is it with the resurrection of the dead” (42).⁴ So the creeds are absolutely right to have us confess that our resurrection of the dead is a somehow, someway a physical resurrection.

⁴ Sproul notes on vs. 44 which hyper-preterists use to convince others that our future bodies are not physical, “Paul explains this for us in 1 Corinthians 15:42–57, where he tells us that the natural [*psychikon*] body sown in death will be raised as a spiritual [*pneumatikon*] body. He does not mean a nonphysical body, for spiritual is not set in opposition to the physical in this text. A spiritual body, instead, is one that has been permeated with the Holy Spirit and granted immortality. The new bodies that we will receive at the resurrection will be forever guarded from death by the power and love of God. We will be imperishable, and all of the weaknesses introduced by sin will be no more.” R. C. Sproul, “The Resurrection of Our Bodies,” *Ligonier* (Dec 26, 2017), <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/resurrection-of-our-bodies>.

This, of course, didn't stop **Hymenaeus**. Nor did it stop the **Valentinian Gnostics** in Tertullian's day. Nor did it stop the "filthy dogs" in Calvin's day.⁵ Nor does it stop the newest iteration of the old heresy among the so-called "full-Preterists" in our own day. It's a remarkable thing to read them. In one example, having dealt with none of these passages, the author concludes a series of arguments and discussions of selective texts saying, "It is clear therefore, that Jesus and Paul did not preach the kind of visible, discernible kingdom and resurrection desired by the Pharisees. They proclaimed, 'the kingdom (and thus resurrection, DKP) does not come with observation' (Luke 17:20f)." ⁶ It is already past. Because it is spiritual, not physical. That's obviously very clear, *if you don't look at the texts*.

Now, the resurrection of the saints is everywhere discussed in relation to the **end of the age**. Jesus himself says explicitly that, "The *harvest is the end of the age*, and the reapers are angels ... the angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous" where the righteous will be

⁵ **Tertullian**, *Prescriptions Against Heretics* 33; **Calvin**, *Comments* on 2Tim 2:18.

⁶ **Don K. Preston**, "Covenant Eschatology and the Hymanaeian Heresy," *Bible Prophecy: Preterist Research Institute* (June 1, 1999), <https://bibleprophecy.com/articles/1999/06/01/covenant-eschatology-and-the-hymanaeian-heresy/>. In his book, which I shouldn't have paid the \$5.00 for, he says "Resurrection and kingdom are synonymous concepts and doctrines." See *The Hymenaeian Heresy: Reverse the Charges!* Kindle ed.

gathered into the house of God (**Matt 13:39, 49, 30**). The **harvest** is the resurrection in that Christ is the **firstfruits** (a harvesting term) and we follow after (**1Cor 15:20, 23, 24**). Using the language of “last,” instead of the “end of the age,” in 1 Cor 15 Paul talks about Christ as the “last” [*eschatos* Adam” (**45**) and that at the “last [*eschatos*] trumpet” we shall all be changed (**51**). “The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed” (**53**). Our physical resurrection is our great hope in 1 Corinthians!

This “last trumpet” is described in Revelation as the **seventh trumpet**. “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever’” (**Rev 11:15**). Again, it deals with the end of the age, what is elsewhere called the “**last day**” (cf. **John 6:39**, etc.). It is the culmination of **six other trumpets** that have been blown prior to it, which warn the peoples of the world of their need to repent, while there is still time to do so. The first of those trumpets is blown *after* the Lamb is raised from the dead, and as such, the seven trumpets represent the warning that goes out **between the First and Second advents** of Christ.

There Will Come Times of Difficulty

This discussion that started with Hymenaeus takes us to our passage. It begins, “But understand this, that *in the last days* there will come times of difficulty” (2Tim 3:1). These “last days” is the direct connection back to him, via his denial of the resurrection. When are these “last days?” I’m going to return to this question at the end. Before doing that, I want to look closely at what marks these “last days.”

Paul says [have not discussed verb tenses yet] they are marked by times of “difficulty.” The Greek word here (*chalepos*) means difficult *in a variety of ways*. It can refer to feelings (hard to bear, painful, grievous), to circumstances (hard to deal with, irksome, dangers, demon possession, horrid diseases), to persons (hard to deal with, cruel, harsh), to their words, and their actions (tempers, cruelty), etc.⁷ It is informative to see the wide range of translations giving for it in English Bibles: difficulty (ESV), perilous (KJV), dangerous (DRA), trying (CJB), grievous (ASV), stressful (RSV), troublesome (BBE), and terrible (NIV), to name several. This is one of the *best* words you would use if you

⁷ “Χαλεπός,” *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Ed. Henry George Liddell et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1971-72.

wanted to paint these “last days” with the *worst* possible brush.

Next, the Apostle gets specific with a list of **sixteen adjectives**, two nouns (*alazones, prodotai*) and one participle (*tetyphōmenoi*), with two qualifiers (“to parents” and “rather than”) that **tell us what these darks days are full of (2-4)**. That list is then followed by **three more detailed explanations** of what they are like (**5-8**), which is then concluded with a statement about this will all end and the reason for it (**9**). That takes us, in the chapter, to **a break in thought** which causes Paul to talk directly to Timothy, and thus **2Tim 3:1-9** makes for a good section to look at today.

Let’s look at **the list first**. In studying the words, it becomes clear that they all describe **traits** that belong *to people*. These people undoubtedly also create turbulent circumstances and feelings through their actions, words, and temperaments, so the entire range of meaning of “difficult” fits. Without explaining it yet, Paul simply calls these people, “**men**” (*anthropos*). What are they like?

A **discernable structure** (below) helps us make sense of the list. We can look at this both through the Greek and through the ideas the words convey. **In Greek** (Knight’s Middle Column above), the first two and last two words

A) 3:2a, For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money;	φίλαυτοι φιλάργυροι	philautoi philargyroi
B) 3:2b, Boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents;	ἀλαζόνες ὑπερήφανοι βλάσφημοι	alazones hyperēphanoi blasphēmoi
C) 3:2c-3a, Unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving;	ἀπειθεῖς ἀχάριστοι άνόσιοι ἄστοργοι ἄσπονδοι	apeitheis acharistoi anosioi astorgoi aspondoi
D) 3:3b, Slanderers;	διάβολοι	diaboloī
C') 3:3c, Without self-control, brutal, despisers of good;	ἀκρατεῖς ἀνήμεροι ἀφιλάγαθοι	akrateis anēmeroi aphilagathoi
B') 3:4a, Traitors, headstrong, haughty;	προδόται προπετεῖς	prodotai propeteis
A') 3:4b, Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; ⁸	τετυφωμένοι φιλήδονοι φιλόθεοι ⁹	tetyphōmenoi philēdonoi philotheoi

both begin with “*phil-*.” The next three words each begin with a different letter. However, just before the final two words, there are three words that all begin with a “p” sound and rhyme (*pro-*, *pro-*, *phō*). Two of the three words that start with different letters also have a “p” sound in them. The next five words all begin with “a.” As do the three after one that doesn’t. That one marks **the center** with a “d.” And it is a diabolical word, literally. The word is *diaboloī*.

⁸ Christine Smith, 2 Timothy 3, Out of Them All The Lord Delivered Me,” *A Little Perspective* (Oct 30, 2013), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/2-timothy-3-out-of-them-all-the-lord-delivered-me/>.

⁹ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 430.

We can also look at the words **according to themes** (Smith's column left).¹⁰ The first two and last two words are all “**lovers**” of something. The next three words begin with the *proud* while the corresponding last three end with the conceited or *haughty*. The “a” words are all **negations**. In Greek, as in English, “a” at the front of the word negates it. So they are *ungrateful*, *unholy*, *unappeasable*, *without* self-control, *not* loving good, and so on. Again, that takes us to the center and a word that is related to the **devil**.

That's quite fascinating to me given the parallel of **2Tim 3:1-9** in **1Tim 4:1-3**. It begins, “**Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...**” and then discusses how they are insincere, liars, people with severed consciences, who teach a form of religion that has no power to do good and despises the God who made his creation good. Thus, in both lists we have some kind of **demonic center** that is causing the people to go the way they do. Let's look more specifically at the words in our list.

¹⁰ The fact that these two structures are so similar is further proof of a structure. There is no way one used the other; they were developed independently. It seems clear to me that Smith did not look at the Greek, but was instead looking at themes. This explains why she mistakenly put disobedience to parents in the “b” structure. She didn't notice that “disobedience” begins with “a.” Her idea was probably that disobedience to parents paralleled the treacherous.

Philautoi. The first word is *lovers of self*. They are selfish. They *love* themselves. They are *narcissists*. They are vain. A necessary caveat needs to be given here. Aristotle believed that love of self was a *positive attribute in the sense of self-esteem*. As a virtue he said, “*It is necessary to love oneself*” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1169A).¹¹ Christians have often been taught that all selfishness or self-love is evil. But this flies in the face of the Golden Rule taught by the Lord himself. We are to *love our neighbor as ourselves*. If we are supposed to hate ourselves in every sense, then Jesus is commanding us to hate our neighbor! But, the self-love here is an anti-God stance that creates egotism, arrogance, conceit, and vanity. *Philo* connected it with atheism (*Allegorical Laws* 1.49). This is not a virtue, but a vice, a sin.

Philargyroi. The next word is *lovers of money*. Both of these words have *phil-* as the root. We get Philadelphia (brotherly love) from it. To love money is to be greedy. It is avarice. It is to have an insatiable lust for that which can buy you anything you want. It is to spend your waking thought, your life’s work running after it with all your might. It infects the way you think about the world. It consumes your thoughts

¹¹ *Luke Timothy Johnson*, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 35A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 404. NOTE: I will cite the original when I can, but this entire discussion will follow *Towner*, NICNT. If I have a quote that isn’t cited, it is from Towner.

and time and interests. It is interesting that in the lists of seven deadly sins, vanity and greed are often the first two.

Alazones. Third, we have *proud* or *boastful*. The word is associated with people who are boisterous and self-aggrandizing, rich and often public figures. In this way, it is like the evil child that comes as the product of the first two words coming together in one person. These are rich people who love to be the center of attention and want everyone in the world to know it. In the ancient world, they sometimes took themselves to be gods. We call them *stars*. So again, it is directly opposed to God.

Hyperēphanoi. Next, we have *arrogant*. This is so closely related to the previous word in that sometimes an English translation will render one word as proud or the other as proud. Scripture says, “God resists the proud/arrogant and gives grace to the humble” (**Prov 3:34**). It is perhaps the chief sin that causes a person to refuse to acknowledge God, either acknowledge him at all or not acknowledge him in some sin that we refuse to admit we are doing. Each of the last two words are found in **Romans 1:30**, which I’ll come back to later.

Blasphēmoi. The fifth word is *abusive*. It is the same root word from which we derive blasphemer or more generally,

a **slanderer**. This is a turning word in the list that moves us away from egotism to behavior that is caused by it. Rude and selfish behavior that becomes slander is opposition to the image-bearers and therefore at its heart is opposition to God who created them.

Apeitheis. The next word is the first of two that is qualified. It literally is **disobedience**. In **Titus 3:3** it is disobedience to God. But the qualifier here is disobedience **to parents**. This is also found in the long list of sins in Romans 1. In the Ten Commandments, this sin has much more in mind than a little child disobeying. Rather, it is about the willful neglect and despising of one's parents when they are old and you are able to take care of them. This sin was “**abhorred within the church and Judaism and in the secular world**.” As you can hear again, disobedience to parents is closely connected to disobedience to God, who gives the commandment.

Acharistoi. Seventh is **ungrateful**. The Greek word is the **negation of grace**. This person is without grace in their life and thus that are incapable of being grateful for anything. This was an “**evil and barbaric**” sin that is related to the very first sin in the list of Romans 1: Thanklessness (*eucharisteō*; **Rom 1:21**). If this is the first sin that leads to many others, it

is extremely important, which lends itself to being the seventh in the list.

Anosioi. The eighth word is the first that is explicitly related to God. It is being *unholy*. This views the men in terms of their disregard for sacred duties and laws as they live their life in rejection to sacred norms in a religious community.

Astorgoi. We finally come to **vs. 3**. The word is *heartless* or “without love.” Again, we find a parallel in **Romans 1:31**. To be without love or without feeling is to be cold towards your fellow man, or worse, towards one you are in a relationship with. These men lack even a basic love for people.

Aspondoi. *Unappeasable* is the tenth word. Synonyms are implacable or unforgiving. This is the only time it appears in the Bible. This is a harsh attitude that refuses reconciliation when a relationship is broken. “**I will not forgive you!**” It is a terrible sin of pride that destroys relationships and lives.

Diabolo. While eleventh in terms of the list, *diabolo* gets center stage in terms of the structure. The word means *slandorous*. In its singular form it may refer to the devil (**2:26; 1Tim 3:6**). The Devil is literally The Slanderer. He is an accuser and maligner who seeks to damage the reputation of the innocent. This is why he is called the Accuser of the

Brothers (**Rev 12:10**). Many men follow the devil headfirst into this wicked sin that generates such bitter and terrible consequences in a person's life.

Akrateis. The only “d” word is followed by three more “a” words. They are *without self-control*. This is the flaw of not being able to deal with temptation. In a worse form, it is the total lack of restraint. One of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control (**Gal 5:23**). Without self-control is therefore its opposite vice.

Anēmeroi. *Brutal* describes the thirteenth word. This is a word used for wild animals and people who act like them. We might call them barbarians. It is the opposite of brotherly love. Jude says, “*These people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively*” (**Jude 10**).

Aphilagathoi. The last “a” is that they do *not love good*. This one is in its most basic sense the lack of appreciation for the pursuit of virtue. To put it another way, it is the sin that leads a person down the road of all these vices. Disinterest in good is the corollary to excessive interest in self. It is a willful inward turn of your heart and emotions that robs you of the capacity to love good.

Prodotai. We move to **vs. 4**. *Treacherous* or traitors are words that translate the fifteenth word. These are people who betray a cause to which they were once committed. We can think of the Jews who killed the prophets (**Acts 7:52**); Judas who betrayed Christ (**Luke 6:16**), and so on. These are men who break faith, have no loyalty, and turn to serve their one-time opponent. The term came to define blasphemers and apostates.

Propeteis. *Reckless* is the next term. This is often associated with the mouth. You speak before you think. It is also associated with actions. You are a hothead. You blow up easily. You are impetuous. It causes you to jump into the fray and things end up badly. To use the language of Proverbs, this is a foolish person. I suppose they all are!

Tetyphōmenoi. *Swollen with conceit* translates the next word. These people highly overestimate themselves and become conceited. This is one reason why youth in the faith is warned against in the list of officers in 1 Timothy. This conceit is filled up with self-delusion. The conceited person has no idea he is this way, because he is delusional and totally oblivious to his own arrogance and self-importance.

Philēdonoi. The penultimate sin in the list is *lovers of pleasure*. We are back to lovers. This is the hedonist. It

complements nicely the second in the list, the lover of money. Seeking your own pleasure (*hēdonē*) refers especially to the baser side of life. Rather than care about wisdom or virtue, you simply love the things that make you feel good. It is utterly selfish.

Philotheoi. As we saw with the first two “lover” vices, the last in the list is contrasted with it. This is the second of the two where the word is qualified. They are lovers of pleasure *rather than lovers of God*. And that’s the whole point of the list. Towner puts it pointedly. “The corollary of their lack of love of God (devoutness) is a superficial ‘piety.’” If Christian virtues are characteristic of the godliness, then this entire list of vices is kind of the *anti-religion religion list of godlessness*. That’s why it finishes this way. Nineteen sins create one extremely wicked person whose whole bent in life is to hate and reject his Creator, but to do so under the pretense of a kind of anti-religion religion of self. No one escapes being religious. No one.

That’s quite a list and now is the time to *pause and ask a couple of questions*. When you hear these nineteen things, is there *a timeframe* that you have in mind for the fulfillment of them? Have you long had a timeframe that you’ve been taught about it? Have you perhaps used his passage to teach that to

others? If so, what might be the consequences or implications of your timeframe upon those you know today, upon those Timothy knew (it was written to him after all), perhaps even to your own church and even yourself?

Before diving further into those questions, let's move to the **three more detailed examples** of what these “last days” people look like. It begins in **vs. 5**. “**Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.**” This is the important ending to the sentence that began way back in **vs. 2**. In other words, all of those nineteen words are connected to it. This **contextualizes** the nineteen, forcing you to think more specifically about them. What kind of people have an appearance of godliness, but deny its power? At the very least, we would have to say “**religious**” people. Just as there were people in 1 Timothy who misunderstood and exploited godliness (**1Tim 6:5–6**), used it for financial gain (**4:7–8**), and otherwise were generally its opposite (**2:2**), it seems that Paul was also concerned about enough about this to tell Titus nearly the same thing, “**They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work**” (**Titus 1:16**). We've seen hints of this in at least the words *unholy*, *slanderers*, and *treacherous*, each of which have overtly religious connotations.

This is a truly **blinding sin**. They profess to be *godly*. Ask yourself after hearing such a list how anyone could possibly profess to be godly when they are like that? But this is precisely what Paul is saying they do. They tell others how godly they are in their counterfeit spirituality as they hide their lies, as they cheat, steal, murder, rape, pillage, plunder all while passing the blame for these very things on others, usually their enemies. But there is a **power** to godliness that comes only from the opposite virtues to these vices, and that power is foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews. It is the singular power what anyone who has been transformed by it knows works the opposite way of anything in this world. It is the **power of Christ** and his Spirit working through the Gospel of peace through no works of their own, but only the Power of God. It is God's Power. It belongs to him, but because they hate it or think it rubbish or can't see it or have not understood it, they deny this power even while faking godliness. **Vs. 9** will tell us how foolish this truly is, but we aren't ready for that yet.

The **second** thing we learn is that these men “**creep into households and capture weak women.**” These women are “**burdened with sins and [are] led astray by various passions, always learning but never able to arrive at a knowledge of**

the truth” (6-7). Let’s look at creeping into households. Beale makes the fascinating analogy that what is going on here is deliberate infiltration of fifth-columnist movements.¹²

A **column** is a formation of soldiers marching together in one or more files which are significantly longer than the width of the ranks. A **fifth column** was a term that appears to have been coined in Spain just prior to WWII, which Hemmingway used to turn into a play of the same name, his first and only play. Supposedly, a secret telegram was sent to Berlin from the General later turned Dictator Francisco Franco who warned of four Nationalist columns were approaching Madrid and a fifth column waiting to attack *from the inside*.¹³ Therefore, a fifth column is **any group of people who undermine a larger group from within**, usually in favor of an enemy group or nation. They can be overt or clandestine. They gather in secret and mobilize openly. Their tactics are disinformation, sabotage, and espionage. Sounds like a conspiracy theory! That’s essentially what Paul is saying **these men do**.

¹² G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 820.

¹³ See Julius Ruiz, *The ‘Red Terror’ and the Spanish Civil War: Revolutionary Violence in Madrid* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 185-86.

Second, their target is women. We've seen this in 1 Timothy with gullible women, young widows who were idle, busybodies, and gossips (1Tim 5:13). It was common in the ancient world to prey upon them. Irenaeus (130-202) tells us that the Gnostic Marcus “especially occupied himself with women, and among women, those who wore fine and purple garments and were the most wealthy” (*Against Heresies* 1.13.3). Lucian of Samasota (125-180), who wasn't even a Christian, tells the story of (curiously) another Alexander, a false-prophet and sorcerer who was just old enough to be growing a beard when his mentor Tyana (himself a follower of the infamous Apollonius whom we met in 1 Timothy!) died, leaving him without a way to make a living. So he concocted a plan with a friend and together they “went about practicing quackery and sorcery” when they “hit upon a rich Macedonian, past her prime but still eager to be charming,” and lined their purses fairly well at her expense, using her to travel throughout Turkey (Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* 6).¹⁴

Finally, these women are led astray. Paul gives the reasons. These women are primed for it already, as they are

¹⁴ These are cited in Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 116, n. 10. See also See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.65–86; *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 7–14.

burning with passions and filled with sins of gossip and living only to please men. It's incredible, given our list, that anyone would actually believe such men. What does that say for the **discernment** some folks have or, rather, the complete lack of it? All must pray to God for such discernment.

The **third and final example** Paul gives is a most fascinating one. It comes from the ancient past and is used as a direct analogy. “**Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith**” (2Tim 3:8). Notice that it isn't just women who are easily corrupted. The men doing this to them are too, hence the list of nineteen sins, of course.

Just **who are Jannes and Jambres**? We are told that they opposed Moses. But when you go looking for these names in the OT, you will not find them. So who are they? Jewish tradition is that these are the names of the **two sorcerers of the Pharaoh**, who put their rods on the ground, and they became serpents. Isn't it interesting that Lucian's Alexander was a **sorcerer** preying upon women, that he learned it from another sorcerer who learned it from Apollonius himself, whom I have argued very well could have been a main nemesis facing this very church in Ephesus? Now Paul gives two more sorcerers as examples from Israel's history?

There are many traditions that sprang up around these two men. [Targum Jonathan](#) tells us that Pharaoh found out about the [baby Moses](#) through them, who told the Pharaoh that this baby would be the destruction of Egypt ([Ex 1:15 TgJon](#)). It tells us that later on they [sided with Balaam](#) and were present when the Angel of the LORD confronted him on his talking donkey ([Num 22:22 TgJon](#)). They were even known by name to Greeks like [Pliny the Elder](#), who mistakenly called them “[Jews by birth](#).”¹⁵ In all cases, they are magicians, sorcerers, and those who deal with the dark spiritual forces. That’s who Paul is now likening these men to.¹⁶

When are These “Last Days?”

It is at this point that I want to [return to the timing of all this](#). I asked you earlier if you had in your mind the timeframe you think Paul is talking about. I’ve found that

¹⁵ [Pliny the Elder](#), *The Natural History*, ed. John Bostock (Medford, MA: Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, 1855), 5425.

¹⁶ [Going Deeper](#). This doesn’t really fit the sermon, but it is worth noting, especially when so many Christians have an aversion to any kind of extra-testamental literature other than the Bible, that Paul *is necessarily* using extra-testamental literature to derive these names! In other words, he read and was familiar with the traditions and the material. Both the NT and the OT have many references to “other books” that the authors feel are helpful for proving a point or even truthful in the way they tell history. An excellent overview of Jannes and Jambres is in the introduction by [A. Pietersma](#) and R. T. Lutz, “Jannes and Jambres: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Expansions of the “Old Testament” and Legends, Wisdom, and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, vol. 2, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), 427-31.

most people do. So exactly **when are these “last days?”** This is an extremely important question.

The first thing we need to do is point out something that should be **obvious**, but for whatever reason seems to escape the minds of many. Preconceptions are difficult things to overcome. That is, Paul isn't talking to you. He is talking to Timothy. The letter is written to him. Here are a few things to point out specifically.

First, the men who come to the women, are coming *to their homes* (6). The early church was full of house-churches. The verb is not a future, but a *present* active participle. **Second**, the infiltration is *in the church*. When Beale talked about the fifth column, he did so in the context of God setting up officers of the churches specifically so that they could fight and combat this problem. They do this primarily through doctrinal purity that is covered lavishly in godly behavior. **Third**, nearly every sin in the long list, and also the pretended spirituality, going after weak women, and sorcerer like behavior are *found specifically in Ephesus*, in Timothy's church, as we especially learn from 1 Timothy.¹⁷ **Fourth**, we've seen how the entire list has as its culmination godliness that denies the power and love of God. That's

¹⁷ See Kenneth Gentry, “2Tim 3 (#7): The ‘Last Days,’” *Postmillennial Worldview* (Jan 26, 2015), <https://postmillennialworldview.com/2015/01/26/2-tim-3-and-the-last-days-7/>.

what we expect of people *in the church*. Finally, Paul even tells Timothy to “avoid such people” (5). What would be the point if they wouldn’t be born for 2000 years?

What this means is that in a very real sense, Paul is telling Timothy, whose church has people in it that look just like this, that *the last days have come upon him*. This idea troubles a lot of people, because they were raised thinking that the last days is still *in our own future*, let alone Timothy’s. But this is simply not the case. Hebrews 1:2 tells us, “In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son.” In the first Christian sermon ever, Peter quotes for the crowds Joel 2:28-29 which says in part, “In the last days it shall be ... I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (cf. Acts 2:17). He then tells them that this very moment is the time of Joel’s fulfillment. James warns his hearers not to lay up treasure in the last days (Jam 5:3), meaning they can do that now. The point is, biblically speaking, *we have been in the “last days” since Pentecost*. And this is precisely why the warning is so important to Timothy to heed.

This is a view that *most of the good commentaries* take, whether they are *pre-*, *a-*, or *postmillennial*. They understand the *present nature* of the last days. They do not want to have an underrealized eschatology. They know that Jesus did

things that are otherworldly and that he brought the benefits of those to us here now.

However, whereas I grew up hearing none of this and only that this passage is fulfilled in the Great Tribulation in my soon-to-see future, some commentators do not want to say a whole lot more about our own circumstances. Some **Preterists** want to say that the last days actually ended in 70AD. This is especially true of hyper-preterists who follow Hymenaeus. There's a lot about *partial*-preterism that I find truthful, including how the Jews sometimes saw the last days as applying to Israel and dealing with that people's violation of the covenant (for example, see **1QpHab Col. ii:1** and **Jub 23:14-17**). In 70AD, there is no question but that **the old covenant**, by which I mean the one that held the nation together though Abraham, Moses, Levi, and David was cut-off with the destruction of the temple.

But it **does not do justice** in my opinion to see the last days end there or to minimize the ongoing nature of this kind of evil that penetrates through the dark veil in the last days. It's very clear that some Jews saw the last days as applying to the entire world, not just to Israel. This includes 1 Enoch 1, which Jude directly quotes. Here's Enoch.

And *everyone* shall be afraid, and *Watchers* shall quiver. And great fear and trembling shall seize them unto *the ends of the earth* ... And *earth* shall be rent asunder; and all that is upon *the earth* shall perish. And there shall be a judgment upon *all*, (including) the righteous ... Behold, he will arrive with ten million of the holy ones in order to execute judgment upon all. He will destroy the wicked ones and censure *all flesh* on account of everything that they have done, that which the sinners and the wicked ones committed against him.

(1En 1:5-9)

Immediately after quoting from this very passage, Jude says, “You must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, ‘In the *last time* there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.’ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit” (Jude 17-19). As such, it is very clear that Jude has in mind something far beyond his own day or 70AD, something that extends all the way to our own, even as it *included his own hearers*. It is important, I think, to recognize here that the verb in 2Tim 3:1 is a *future tense*—“*there will come*.” Not just now (with Timothy), but in the future. This is a *prophecy*!

Some commentators go out of their way to point out that quite a few of the sins in our list are also found in **Romans 1**. But Romans 1 isn't written to Christians or the church. Rather, it is written as an indictment against **all mankind**, including us. Everyone one of us commits these sins, which is why it concludes, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things" (**Rom 2:1**). These commentators will then note that even though those overlaps exist between the two passages, Paul is *not writing to the world*, but to the church at Ephesus, which in one way is certainly true. However, I do not think we should just dismiss such obvious parallels, just because the situation is different. It is abundantly clear that the world has always looked like this. Indeed, Paul keeps it general: *People* (**vs. 2**) will look like this.

Many Christians who read 2 Timothy 3 **immediately look at our own current situation** and says, "We **MUST be living in the fulfillment of this passage.**" I would agree with them, but *not for the same reasons*, especially those who jump to their eschatology of a Seven Year Great Tribulation and conclude, "It must be near, because **this only happens then!**" What they are not understanding is that **this has been the way**

of it for 2,000 years (indeed, all the way back to the beginning of time). It doesn't mean that all the time in all places the world looks like this. It does mean that there are sporadic times throughout the last days where it will (and, simultaneously in some places, where it will not).

I believe that this kind of **apocalyptic blaming of the current world**, as bad as I think it is right now (and you all have no idea how bad I actually think that is, because I rarely talk about it publicly), can lead, ironically, to the same kind of self-delusion, arrogance, superiority complexes, and blindness to our own sin that is strangely causing many to turn from the faith in our own day, indeed, even turning against the church that they once held allegiance to.

The **main point** of the passage, and the one that is so **very rarely talked about**, is that Paul really isn't talking about the world here, but rather he is talking about people who are in churches *who look no different from it*. Beloved, this must not be so! I do **not think he is painting some kind of absolute dystopian nightmare** picture where everyone in the world is like this (Hence, Great Tribulation), for we have already seen how Peter says that in these very same last days, **God will pour out his Holy Spirit** upon all flesh. You can't have *total* dystopian tribulation *and* God's Holy Spirit working in

people simultaneously. You *can* have a *partial* dystopia (which is frankly what we call the world), you can have it during times of external and even formal obedience to God's commands within a culture, where even unbelievers show certain common grace restraints in their lives. Or, like our own, it can wane where culture looks much more like 2Tim 3 than it did in an earlier generation, making it extremely easy to see what Paul is saying—at least to those with eyes.

At the same time, **God's Spirit is still moving**. Otherwise, why would I be preaching to you now? I believe that **those who hear** these words and internalize them rather than looking at their neighbor or their country or their evil leaders can be humbled by the Power of God to save, the same power that looks so foolish to these corrupt men. I also believe that **if you will take this seriously** and understand that Satan has a very real strategy to infiltrate *the church* from within, that we carefully guard our hearts and minds, our doctrine and our ethics, our behavior and our love for the Lord, such that individual churches even in the very worst kind of apostacy as depicted here, need not look like that. Indeed, is this not the very reason Paul is talking to Timothy about these very things as the pastor of Ephesus?

Apparently, in one respect, it worked. (Presumably) A couple decades later, **Ephesus was known by John** to be the church that has patiently endured and that could not bear with those who are evil. They began testing these kinds of false teachers and found them to be false (**Rev 2:2-3**). This is precisely what Paul told them they would find in our last verse. **“But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men [Jannes and Jambres]”** (**2Tim 2:9**).

But that didn't mean they were immune to attack. As they watched their doctrine so closely, a terrible thing began to happen to them. **“They lost their first love”** (**Rev 2:4**). And what that means is that some of these very same vices began to take them over, *without their even sensing it*. Have we not see it here? Paul warned them, **“... rather than lovers of God,”** **the very last sin in the list**. Watch yourselves closely in evil days that you do not look outside at others before you look at yourself. If you heed these words, and remember your first love, the Lord Jesus, who was raised to life by the power of God, you will save yourselves in these last days and find yourselves raised with him on the very last day.

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