

WHAT DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACH ABOUT END-TIME APOSTASY?

by Thomas Ice

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.
—Jude 3–4

I will never forget what one of my church history professors told us one day in class in the late 1970s at Dallas Seminary. He said something like the following: “Those of us who will follow Christ and His Word, as opposed to the rising emphasis upon religious experience, will increasingly become a smaller group until one day we will be on the outside of the American Evangelical Church looking in.” My reaction to my prof was, “No, things will never get that bad within Evangelicalism.” Well, my prof was certainly right. I believe that just such a day has arrived! Like Jude, I would have loved to write about our common salvation, but the times are pressing in on biblical believers. We must contend earnestly for the faith! The Evangelical Church in America is drowning in a sea of increasing apostasy!

Throughout American Evangelicalism we are seeing in our day departures from the faith at an alarming rate and it seems to get worse every day. As a friend of mine once said, “Don’t worry it will get worse before it gets worse.” Historically American Evangelicalism is within the stream of the Protestant tradition, which was a movement that arose 500 years ago as a corrective to Roman Catholicism in the Western Church. The Protestant revolt was based upon the Bible—Scripture Alone—in contrast to the mysticism and false traditions of the Medieval Roman Catholic Church. Protestantism taught the need to return to the Bible and the Bible alone as our only authority base. Evangelicalism continued that viewpoint against the rise of liberalism within Protestantism in the 1800s. Now we see Protestant Evangelicalism returning to the stream it had once broken away from as every conceivable form of departure from the faith appears on the rise.

NEW TESTAMENT APOSTASY

The English word “apostasy” is a transliteration of the Greek noun *apostasia* and is made up of two smaller Greek words, which are *apo* and *istemi*. *Apo* means “from or away from,” while *istemi* means, “to stand.” Thus, taken together, the compound word has the idea of “to stand away from,” “depart from,” or “departure.” The verbal form *aphistemi* is used in 1 Timothy 4:1 and means, “to cause someone to move from a reference point, go away, withdraw.”¹ “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith . . .” (1 Tim. 4:1a). Apostasy, as used in this article means to depart from the faith of biblical Christianity. In other words, to no longer believe what the Bible teaches about anything.

The following is a list of the seven major passages that deal with the last days for the church: 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 4:3-4; James 5:1-8; 2 Peter 2:1-22; 3:3-6; Jude 1-25. Every one of these passages emphasizes over and over again that the great characteristic of the final time of the church will be that of *apostasy*. Dr. Pentecost

concludes: “This condition at the close of the age is seen to coincide with the state within the Laodicean Church, before which Christ must stand to seek admission. In view of its close it is not surprising that the age is called an “evil age” in Scripture.”² The New Testament pictures the condition within the professing church at the end of the age by a system of denials.

- Denial of **GOD**—Luke 17:26; 2 Timothy 3:4-5
- Denial of **CHRIST**—1 John 2:18; 4:3; 2 Peter 2:6
- Denial of **CHRIST’S RETURN**—2 Peter 3:3-4
- Denial of **THE FAITH**—1 Timothy 4:1-2; Jude 3
- Denial of **SOUND DOCTRINE**—2 Timothy 4:3-4
- Denial of **THE SEPARATED LIFE**—2 Timothy 3:1-7
- Denial of **CHRISTIAN LIBERTY**—1 Timothy 4:3-4
- Denial of **MORALS**—2 Timothy 3:1-8,13; Jude 18
- Denial of **AUTHORITY**—2 Timothy 3:4³

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary, in an extremely insightful statement characterized the last days for the church in the following way:

A very extensive body of Scripture bears on the last days for the Church. Reference is to a restricted time at the very end of, and yet wholly within, the present age. Though this brief period immediately precedes the great tribulation and in some measure is a preparation for it, these two times of apostasy and confusion—though incomparable in history—are wholly separate the one from the other. Those Scriptures which set forth the last days for the Church give no consideration to political or world conditions but are confined to the Church itself. These Scriptures picture men as departing from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-2). There will be a manifestation of characteristics which belong to unregenerate men, though it is under the profession of “a form of godliness” (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-5). The indication is that, having denied the power of the blood of Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 3:5 with Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:23-24; 2 Tim. 4:2-4), the leaders in these forms of righteousness will be unregenerate men from whom nothing more spiritual than this could proceed (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14).⁴

As can be observed from the above characterizations, apostasy occurs in two basic areas: 1) doctrinal defection from the Bible, and 2) immoral or ungodly behavior. The clear course of the last days for the church consists of constant warnings to the believer, especially to pastors and leaders, to be on guard within the flock against doctrinal defection, commonly known as apostasy. Such a characteristic provides for the believer today a clear sign that we are in the last days of the church age.

When one looks at the seven major passages in the Epistle that warn about apostasy, it is important to note that most of these sections are found in later Epistles, especially in Paul and Peter, providing a farewell warning to the church.

LAST DAYS VOCABULARY

Sometimes Christians read in the Bible about the “last days,” “end times,” etc., and tend to think that all of these phrases all of the time refer to the same thing. This is not the case, just as in our own lives there are many endings: there is the end of the work

day, the end of the day according to the clock, the end of the week, the end of the month, and the end of the year. Just because the word “end” is used does not mean that it always refers to the same time. The word “end” is restricted and precisely defined when it is modified by “day,” “week,” “year,” etc. So it is in the Bible that “end times” may refer to the end of the current church age or it may refer to other times.

There are a number of different biblical expressions which appear to speak of the end times. The Bible teaches that this present age will end with the rapture, followed by the tribulation, which will end with the second coming of Messiah to the earth. Thus, we must distinguish between the “last days” of the church age and the “last days” of Israel’s tribulation.

Note the following chart, which classifies and distinguishes between passages referring to the end of the church age and the “last days” for Israel:

BIBLICAL USE OF LAST DAYS

| ISRAEL | CHURCH |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“latter days”</i>— Deuteronomy 4:30; 31:29; Jeremiah 30:24; 48:47; Daniel 2:28; 10:14</p> | <p><i>“latter days”</i>— 1 Timothy 4:1</p> |
| <p><i>“last days”</i>— Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Hosea 3:4–5; Micah 4:1; Acts 2:17</p> | <p><i>“last days”</i>— 2 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3</p> |
| <p><i>“last day”</i>— John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48</p> | <p><i>“last times”</i>— 1 Peter 1:20; Jude 18</p> |
| <p><i>“latter years”</i>— Ezekiel 38:8</p> | <p><i>“last time”</i>— 1 Peter 1:5; 1 John 2:18</p> |
| <p><i>“end of time”</i>— Daniel 8:17; 12:4, 9</p> | |
| <p><i>“end of the age”</i>— Daniel 12:13</p> | |

The Bible clearly speaks of a last days or end time, but it does not always refer to the same period of time. The contextual referent enables the reader to know whether the Bible is speaking of the last days relating to Israel or the end times in reference to the church.

Many believe that there are specific signs that relate to the end of the church age. However, I believe that it would be too strong to say that there are signs of the end of the church age. Instead, the Bible indicates what the condition of the church will be like—the general course of the age—and then warns about some general trends toward the later part of the church age. Passages like 1 Timothy 4:1–5, 2 Timothy 3:1–5, and 2

Peter 3:3 most likely refer to the second half or latter part of the church age. These passages warn believers about beliefs and lifestyles that are common in the world will enter the church and become common there as well. These passages do not speak about the general moral decline of society, which I do not doubt, instead, it is a decline that was predicted to occur within the church as part of the apostasy.

It can also be noted, that it is hard to quantify such decline. No matter how bad things get, they can always get a little worse. So it is impossible to know specifically how bad things must be in order for something to be a prophetic sign. It is the general condition within the realm of the church in which "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13).

THE CHURCH AGE

There are a number of New Testament passages where "last days," "last times," and "last time" clearly refer to the present church age in which we now live. The writer of Hebrews says, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these *last days* has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). The contextual nuance of this passage demands that "last days" is a reference to the current church age in which we presently live. In the same way Peter says, "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these *last times* for the sake of you" (1 Pet. 1:20). These "last times," to which he speaks, in that context, must refer to the last two thousand years in which we still live. John adds support to the two previous writers when he says, "Children, it is the *last hour*; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the *last hour*" (1 John 2:18). Jude, speaking of things going on in his day says, "that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts" (Jude 18).

The Jewish view of Bible prophecy viewed history as consisting of two ages. The first was *this present age*, the age in which Israel was waiting for the coming of the Messiah. The second was *the age to come*, the age in which all promises and covenants would be fulfilled and Israel would enter into her promised blessings as a result of Messiah's coming. The present age would be terminated by the appearance of Messiah, and the coming age would be introduced by His advent. The present age, then, was to end in judgment, and the coming age must be preceded by this devastation. The New Testament references the present age as the last days (Heb. 1:2). The last days of what? The last days before the coming of the Messianic age.

We see that there are at least four clear references in the New Testament that use end times vocabulary to refer to their own day and the entire church age as the last days. Thus, in that sense, we are clearly living in the last days, since the entire church age is considered the last days. However, that is not what the average person means when they ask, "Are we living in the last days?" They want to know if we are living in a time when the final prophecies of Scripture are being fulfilled. Before I can answer that, we need to look into the use of Old Testament terminology and the last days.

OLD TESTAMENT USE OF LAST DAYS

When we look at Old Testament usage of these terms, we see that they are used differently than those which speak of the church age. I believe that the Old Testament use of this language refers to the time leading up to the coming of Messiah to set up His kingdom on earth, which I would call the tribulation period.

A clear example of this is found in Deuteronomy 4:30, which says, "When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the *latter days*, you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice." The English word "distress" is the Hebrew word for tribulation—in this context, the tribulation—which means that this text equates the tribulation with the "latter days." Thus, the "latter days" are the tribulation period, which we are not currently living in, but may be on the brink of entering. Of course, the church will be raptured before the world enters the tribulation.

Deuteronomy 31:29 uses "latter days" as a reference to the tribulation when it says, "evil will befall you in the *latter days*."

The term "latter days" is used of the tribulation period twice in Jeremiah (30:24; 48:47). Daniel also uses it this way: "However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the *latter days*" (Dan. 2:28). Daniel commences to reveal God's plan for the future, which revolves around events that will unfold in the tribulation period. This is also the case concerning another passage in Daniel: "Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the *latter days*, for the vision pertains to the days yet future" (Dan. 10:14).

The prophet Daniel uses a whole cluster of other "latter day" terms that all refer to the tribulation period or prepare the way for the kingdom reign of Messiah. Terms like "end of time" (Dan. 8:17; 12:4, 9) and "end of the age" (Dan. 12:13) speak of the end-time, tribulation period, which is yet to come. These terms are used three times in Daniel 12, which is said in verse one of that chapter to "be a time of *distress* such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time." "Distress" is the Hebrew word for tribulation. Thus, the entire context is once again a reference to the coming tribulation.

Daniel 12:4, says the teachings about the end-times in Daniel will be sealed up for the Jewish people until "the end of time." Many prophecy teachers believe that shortly before Christ's return the world would experience an increase in the speed of travel coupled with an explosion of information based upon Daniel 12:4, which says "many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase." No one would quarrel with the fact that the last one hundred years has indeed witnessed an exponential increase in both the speed of travel and the accumulation of knowledge and thus would be a sign in our time that the end is near. But is this really what Daniel is saying in the passage? I don't think so.

The correct interpretation of the passage is given by Dr. Charles Ryrie in his famous *Ryrie Study Bible* when he says, "As the end approaches, people will travel about seeking to discover what the future holds."⁵ Not just people in general, but the Jewish people in particular. This means that many Jews during the tribulation will study the Book of Daniel in an attempt to find out what is going on during this unique period of time. Harry Bultema says, "The movement of to and fro may refer to that of the eyes through leaves. . . . Thus considered it seems to us that the text here speaks of the diligent search of the Scripture at the end of time."⁶ Thus, the scope would be limited to the future time of the tribulation and could not justly be applied to our own day.

So are we living in the last days? As you can tell from the above discussion, we are currently living in the last days because we are in the church age, which is called the "last days," "last times," and "last time." However, in no way shape or form are we in the last days, as the Old Testament says of Israel. Those terms, "latter days," "last days," "latter years," "end of time," and "end of the age" all refer a time when Israel is in her time of tribulation. This is a future time, which we could very well be on the

verge of entering. I believe that we are seeing the stage being set for last days or end time events of the tribulation. But we are not currently in those times at the present time. However, when we look at passages that speak of the “last days” of the current church age, we clearly appear to be in those days. The last days of the church age is said to be a time of such apostasy that New Testament writers give clear warnings to believers, concerning the time in which we currently live.

1 TIMOTHY 4:1–3

After stating the true faith at the end of chapter 3, Paul now warns against departure from that faith in chapter 4. Paul points out that the Holy Spirit *clearly* is telling him that apostasy will come in the latter days of the church age (verse 1). The term “latter” means “pertaining to a point of time that is subsequent to another point of time,”⁷ thus in this contexts it means the latter portion of the church age. Other similar phrases found in the New Testament Epistles have the same general meaning (2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18). Paul warns to watch out for those within the church that will “fall away from” or depart from the truth. Such defection is the norm today within the church. Paul says, “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 4:6).

2 TIMOTHY 3:1–5

In Paul’s farewell epistle, he warns “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come” (2 Tim. 3:1). Since Paul is speaking to the pastors and leaders within the church, I take it that he is telling us why it will be even more difficult to shepherd the sheep. Basically, he is saying that the sheep will be “lovers of self . . . rather than lovers of God” like they are supposed to be. “For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these” (2 Tim. 3:2–5). Paul uses an inclusio as a literary device to frame his basic idea that “men will be lovers of self . . . rather than lovers of God.” The descriptive terms sandwiched between the beginning and ending phrases describe specifically what it means to be a lover of self rather than a lover of God. We can see that this profile fits the behavior of too many within the church of our own day.

End Time Apostasy in The Church

lovers of self,

lovers of money,
boastful,
arrogant,
revilers,
disobedient to parents,
ungrateful, unholy,
unloving,
irreconcilable,

malicious gossips,
without self-control,
brutal,
haters of good,
treacherous,
reckless,
conceited,
lovers of pleasure

rather than lovers of God

Verse 7 says that they are “ignorant intellectuals” who are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Talk about an apt description of our own day, this is it! These men within the last days church are said to “oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the faith” (2 Tim. 3:8). They will have a limit to their success. They will not infect all with their falsehoods.

Paul provides the antidote to such “ignorant intellectuals” in verse 10 when he says, “But you followed my teaching . . .” He reminds Timothy and I would add believers in our own day the following: “But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*” (2 Tim. 3:13–14). In other words, “It will get worse . . . before it gets worse.” This is why Paul says that in the midst of such opposition one must be confident that God’s Word is absolutely the inspired and inerrant Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16).

2 TIMOTHY 4:3–4

Paul speaks in this passage about the need for the faithful man of God to constantly be proclaiming the Faithful Word to believers under their care. Why? Because “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:3–4). This is probably the most apt description one could give of man-made counterfeits

within Christendom like the church growth movement, the emerging church, and the emphasis upon human experience instead of the Word of God.

JAMES 5:1–8

In the earliest book in the New Testament canon, James deals with an issue of self-centeredness in his own day and tells them to “Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:7–8). Here we see that we will not be able to root out much of the apostate behavior and thought that invades the church, but we can look forward to the Lord’s coming at the rapture so that He will take care of these problems. Our focus in the present is to be upon future, so that we will be motivated to behave correctly in the present. Throughout the New Testament Epistles, the coming of the Lord is said to have such a present impact on the lives of Bible-believing Christians.

2 PETER 2:1–22

The entire second chapter of 2 Peter is a warning in Peter’s final epistle for faithful believers to be on the watch for “false prophets” and “false teachers” (2 Pet. 2:1). These false Christians “will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (2 Pet. 2:1). Peter further warns that, “many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” (2 Pet. 2:2–3). This chapter is an in-depth description of the motives and character of false prophets and false teachers and their “false words.” Peter warns believers, especially Christian leaders, to be on the lookout for these kinds of individuals within the church.

2 PETER 3:3–6

Peter’s warning for our day is that “mockers will come with their mocking.” This phrase is also repeated in Jude 18 without reporting to his readers an account of their mocking as we have here in 2 Peter. Jude just says there will be mockers in the last day. Lenski tells us, “Yes, the first thing they should know or realize is that ‘mockers shall come at the days’ end,’ meaning that the second thing to realize is the Parousia itself which shall come after these mockers have appeared.”⁸ In the same vein Mayor notes, “The existence of these scoffers is a proof of that which they deny. It is one of the appointed signs of the approach of the last day.”⁹

So here we are in the twenty-first century, it has been about 2,000 years since Christ left earth for heaven and we see last days mockers all around us. Certainly unbelievers and liberals deny a future second coming and apply a uniformitarian rationale to this issue as described in verse 4. However, there are others, even within Christendom, who deny that there will be a future second coming of Christ. Chief among them are full preterists.¹⁰ Also, partial preterists,¹¹ while still clinging to a future second coming, by and large scoff at those who believe the traditional understanding that Matthew 24 (see also Mark 13; Luke 21), Revelation 1:7 and 19 teach a second return of Christ that is still future to our time.

Gary DeMar has become a partial preterist who seems to go out of his way to mock Christians who believe that Christ could come at any moment. Even though he admits that Christ will return in the distant future¹² the clear emphasis in his ministry is upon

why Jesus cannot return in our day and mocking those who believe He can. “We are not end-time scoffers,”¹³ insists DeMar. Oh really?

In his book *Last Days Madness*, DeMar tells the story from Aesop’s fable of the shepherd boy who cried wolf and declares, “In the same way the people of God—the sheep—are harmed by continual shouts of ‘the end is near!’”¹⁴ He continues, “By crying wolf and being wrong each time, the church is perceived as unreliable.”¹⁵ The fact of the matter is that Christ’s return is a one-time event. Just because some have been wrong in the past does not prove that He will not return in the future. That is the point Peter makes in 2 Peter 3 when he notes that such an assumption is undermined by what the mockers willingly ignore (3:5). They ignore God’s past intervention in history when He created the world and judged it globally at the Flood (3:5–6). Just as in Aesop’s fable, the wolf did come, so also, Jesus will return one day in the future. Just because Jesus has not returned in the past does not mean he will not in the future.

DeMar does not think that last days mockers will ever come in the future since he believes that the 2 Peter 3 passage was fulfilled by A.D. 70. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). He says, “the coming judgments were near for those who first read Peter’s letter. The scoffers were alive and well in the first century. People have a right to mock and scoff when they read that Jesus was to come within a generation and nearly 2000 year have passed.”¹⁶ Are there no last days scoffers in our day? How could there be last days scoffers in our day if 2 Peter 3 was fulfilled 2,000 years ago? However, has 2 Peter 3 already been fulfilled?

A first century fulfillment is so bizarre that even fellow partial preterists do not agree with DeMar on this point. Ken Gentry has given five reasons why 2 Peter 3 will be future and was not fulfilled in the first century. “First, the thrust of the book seems to promote a spiritual *perseverance* in anticipation of the historical long run—a long run that ends up in the eternal new creation,”¹⁷ notes Gentry. “Second, the mockers scoff at the promised second advent of Christ due to the long wait associated with it (2 Pet. 3:2–4, 9). Despite the trials to come soon (2:9), Peter even suggests it may be thousands of years before Christ’s return, in that the delay is based on God’s time rather than man’s . . . (3:8).”¹⁸ When one realizes that 2 Peter was written within four to five years from the time that DeMar says it was fulfilled, there would hardly be reasonable time for any fulfillment.

“Third, the longsuffering of the Lord is due to a process that is necessarily age-long . . . (2 Pet. 3:9) . . . (2 Pet. 3:15a). The process of calling the ‘all’ to ‘repentance’ unto salvation is one that spans the entire inter-advental era and is still continuing today.”¹⁹ So if DeMar’s view were true, then there was only a four to five year window of opportunity for salvation. Gentry further notes, “The way that we ‘hasten the coming of the day of God’ (3:12) is by evangelistic endeavor.”²⁰ DeMar’s first century fulfillment view makes no sense and is not workable at all in light of this passage. “Fourth, the reference to the unraveling and conflagration of the heavens and the earth is expressly tied to the material creation. Hence, it seems clearly to refer to the consummation and not to A.D. 70.”²¹ “Fifth, the strong detailed language of the destruction of the heavens and the earth seems to go beyond apocalyptic imagery, referring to the actual consummation . . . (2 Pet. 3:10) . . . (3:12).”²² This final point is such an understatement.

Clearly there are last days mockers within the unbelieving world who deny the future possibility of Christ’s return due to an anti-supernatural bias. Those are obvious.

It is also obvious that full preterists within Christendom do not ever believe that Jesus will return in the future because they say He returned in A.D. 70. The more subtle approach concerning this matter is practiced by some like Gary DeMar who not only ridicules those of us who believe that Christ could come at any moment but also think that the last day mockers have already come and gone. Such a view blinds one to the warning that Peter issues in this passage since they do not believe it to be a possible threat to the church today. I guess we will have to wait a little longer for Christ's return to actually take place so that the mockers will become aware to the truth of Peter's words.

JUDE 1–25

Peter warned keeping on the lookout for false teachers within the church and one of the last Epistles in the New Testament was written to say that those false teachers have arrived. Jude says, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 3–4). It appears that contending for the faith is to be of the highest priority within Christian ministry, however, it is rarely mentioned today from most pulpits. There are some that are faithful, but they are in great decline in our day.

THE COURSE OF THIS AGE

I have noticed over the years, about the only group of Christians within America's current Evangelical Church that takes the issue of apostasy seriously are generally the same one's that give attention to the teaching of Bible prophecy. This is likely the case because those who study Bible Prophecy appear to be more aware of the Bible's teaching about the course of the current church age and its impending end via the rapture. The church age is not characterized by historically verifiable prophetic events, (except her beginning on the Day of Pentecost and her ending with the rapture). But the general course of this age has been prophesied and can provide a general overview of what can be expected during this age. Keep in mind, however, that there are specific prophecy that is fulfilled during the church age that relates to God's prophetic plan for Israel and not directly to the church. For example, the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem and her Temple in A.D. 70 relates to Israel (Matthew 23:38; Luke 19:43-44; 21:20-24). Thus it is not inconsistent that prophetic preparations relating to Israel are already underway with the reestablishment of Israel as a nation in 1948 even though we still are living in the church age.

The clear course of the last days for the church consists of constant warnings to the believer to be on guard against doctrinal and moral defection, otherwise known as apostasy. Such a characteristic provides for the Christian today a clear sign of the end times. Even though specific prophecy is not given concerning the present church age, we see that the New Testament paints a general picture of the course of this age. We see that while the gospel will always be preached throughout the world during the church age, we also see that an increasing apostasy will characterize Christendom during the time when the rapture will take place.

CHRISTIANITY OR HINDUISM?

Caryl Matrisciana in her new video series exposing the new emerging Christianity entitled: *Wide is the Gate* says at the beginning of her presentation, "There are really only two basic worldviews. The Eastern mysticism of Hinduism . . . and the biblical worldview."²³ I have long realized this myself when I learned in the 1970s that Hinduism was the polar-opposite of true biblical Christianity. Thus, any time one moves away from the Bible and its teachings by necessity one has to move in the direction of Hinduism and mysticism. My belief has been verified and strengthened over the years as we have seen metaphysical mysticism increasingly come into the Evangelical church during the last 40 years.

I was amazed to read a similar view back in the early 1890s by a pastor who had developed the same belief, but wrote of it in the late 1800s. Samuel J. Andrews wrote a book entitled *Christianity and Anti-Christianity in Their Final Conflict*.²⁴ Andrews believes that the polar-opposite of biblical Christianity is what he calls pantheism and the church of his day was moving in that direction. Pantheism, which means that everything is god, is an excellent single term description of Hinduism.

Andrews noted that there are three stages in the history of ideas. "First, their origin the minds of individual thinkers, . . . Secondly, their popularization and general diffusion. . . . Thirdly, when generally diffused, these ideas find their embodiment in laws and institutions."²⁵ Andrews believed that the nineteenth century in which he lived was the second stage of transition to Pantheism, which means that we are clearly in the third and final stage of transition.

When I look at the final form of the apostasy, which will occur during the seven-year tribulation in which the antichrist will be dominate, it appears to be a false system along the line of pantheism. There will be false signs and wonders that will be the basis upon which the False Prophet supports the Beast or the antichrist as noted in Revelation 13:13-15. This is reiterated in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 when speaking of the man of lawlessness, "the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders." This will be the mysticism and magic of Satan himself. This deceptive apex is said to occur because unbelievers in the tribulation "did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" (2 Thess. 2:10). One other passage of note in 2 Thessalonians 2 is verse 7 that tells us that "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" during the current church age preparing the world for the entrance of the antichrist who is currently being restrained from making a full appearance until after the rapture.

CONCLUSION

Such preparation explains why we are seeing all the world's false religions and belief systems increasingly unite against Bible believing Christians. This is where the world is headed. Either one is for Christ or he will be against him. No middle ground.

The common denominator for all anti-Christians is human experience set against God's revelation. Since biblical Christianity is rooted and grounded in the fact that Second Person of the Trinity became a man and entered history in order that He might die for man's sin as a substitutionary sacrifice in order to provide salvation to those who believe, it is important for unbelievers to shift focus away from the God-Man to human experience. Biblical Christianity has to be stripped of the historical facts of Scripture like creation, the fall, the flood, the call of Abram, the exodus, the conquest, the Temple, the incarnation, the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, as well as His second coming. In its place is the self-discovery through some religious discipline of the inner self. Nothing more than human experience.

Human experience rather than God's revelation is the common denominator that links all false religions and philosophies into a common bond. This is why the products of humanistic thinking is being brought into our Evangelical church through items such as psychology and psychotherapy, self-development, quietness and meditation exercises, Yoga, social justice, health foods, and all kinds of metaphysical approaches that replace a biblical doctrine of holiness and sanctification. The gospel is taking a backseat to social programs and "do-goodism" since these metaphysical approaches seek to reform mankind instead of recognizing our sin and need for the Saviour. These kinds of trends being spearheaded by the emerging church within Evangelicalism are not making the gospel more relevant to the culture instead it is leading the way to hell by making the church no different than the world. It is also setting the stage for accepting the antichrist. Maranatha!

¹ W. F. Arndt, F. W. Danker, F. W. Gingrich, & Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 158. Hereafter BDAG.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), p. 155.

³ Taken from Pentecost, *Things To Come*, p. 155.

⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 Vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), vol. IV, p. 375.

⁵ *The Ryrie Study Bible*, NASB (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 1332.

⁶ Harry Bultema, *Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1988), p. 349.

⁷ BDAG, p. 1045.

⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 338.

⁹ Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and The Second Epistle of St. Peter* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers [1907] 1978), p. 147.

¹⁰ Preterism is from a Latin word meaning "past," or "gone by." A full preterist is one who believes that Christ has already returned in A.D. 70 and He will not return in the future.

¹¹ Partial preterists believe that most of the passages that the church has historically thought to refer to a future second advent were fulfilled in A.D. 70, but that a few passages still teach a future second advent.

¹² The only three passages I have ever seen DeMar give in reference to a return of Christ are Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

¹³ Gary DeMar, *Meet the Real Last Days Scoffers: A Response to Ed Hindson's "The New Last Days Scoffers" — Part 2*, www.americanvision.org/articlearchive/05-27-05.asp.

¹⁴ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, (Power Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 29.

¹⁵ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁶ DeMar, *Meet the Real Last Days Scoffers*.

¹⁷ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), p. 302.

¹⁸ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, p. 303.

¹⁹ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, p. 303.

²⁰ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, p. 304.

²¹ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, p. 304.

²² Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, pp. 304-05.

²³ Caryl Matrisciana, *Wide is the Gate: The Emerging New Christianity*, Vol. 1 (Menifee, CA: Caryl Productions, 2011), @ the 4 minute mark of the DVD.

²⁴ Samuel J. Andrews, *Christianity and Anti-Christianity in Their Final Conflict* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1898).

²⁵ Andrews, *Christianity and Anti-Christianity*, p. 201.