

When Exactly Will the Apostasy Take Place?

The Last-Times Persecution

There's more than a dozen passages for us to analyze in order to determine when the Apostasy will take place, so let's get at it! We'll start with the words of the Lord Jesus. He gave multiple references for us to pinpoint the Apostasy. Many of them he shared during a private lesson he gave to four apostles (John, James, Peter, and Andrew) on the Mount of Olives, a lesson called the Olivet Discourse. The Lord gave other teachings on the Apostasy in the Upper Room earlier that same night.

The first passage we'll look at is when Jesus warned of a time when the people of God—both Jewish and Gentile Christians—would be persecuted. These warnings are found in each of the four Gospels. Note that it's a rarity for one particular teaching of Christ to be found in all four Gospels. Normally only Matthew, Mark, and Luke follow the same pattern. In the case of the Last Times Persecution against believers, all four Gospels teach the same thing—and that indicates that this is an event God wants his Church to be keenly aware of.

[the Persecution] Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

[the Apostasy] At that time many will turn away from the Faith¹ and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,

[the End] but the one who stands firm to the End will be saved (Matthew 24:9-13).

You'll notice that after Jesus described the Last Times Persecution, he mentioned a time called *the End*. So, the Apostasy is sandwiched between the Persecution and the End. Observe how Jesus clearly laid out the three periods. We marked these periods with brackets [like this].

¹ This is the Greek word *skandalizo* which means *to cause to stumble*. The NASB simply translates it *many will fall away* which is more literal. The NIV supplements *will fall away* with the words *from the Faith*. The words *from the Faith* are not in the original Greek, although they are implied, so the NIV translation is accurate.

Here's a graphic to help you visualize the order of events:



We gather from Jesus' words that the Last Times Persecution produces the Apostasy. Literally, the Persecution *bleeds* into the Apostasy. The Persecution generates so much violence that many professing Christians will deny the Faith. This can be understood firstly by basic human psychology. The human survival instinct causes people to avoid death at all costs. But secondly, we can understand that the Last Times Persecution produces Apostasy through Jesus' words. After the Lord described the Persecution, he then stated that the Apostasy would occur *at that time*. Can you see that in the text above, in part 2?

Logic and History

The principle that persecution generates apostasy is logical—it follows a universal rule of human nature: threats generate fear. It makes perfect sense that religious persecution will always produce apostasy (*falling away*) in those subjected to persecution. Believers get frightened when their lives are under threat, and the Church will always have a large proportion of new believers who don't have the maturity to overcome that fear. There will always be a portion of believers who will fall away from the Faith when faced with death, many of them simply because they are new to the Faith.

Apostasy during times of persecution is a fact of history. For example, there were so many recanters under the third and fourth century Roman persecutions that synods were held in Carthage in 251, 256, and 345 AD to decide whether or not, and if so, *how* the Church should receive the recanters back into the fold again. An entire vocabulary developed out of this: The ones who recanted were called *lapsed* believers, and those who were allowed back into fellowship were called *penitents*²—among whom were ones they called the *rebaptized*.

² The men involved with these debates were Novatian (c. 200-258) of Rome who would not readmit the lapsed, Cyprian bishop of Carthage (c. 248-258) who welcomed them back after a probationary period of penance and rebaptism, and Stephen bishop of Rome (c. 254-257) who welcomed the lapsed back into fellowship without requiring a second baptism.

Where Love Fits In

Now, the coming Persecution will not only produce a massive departure from the Faith, it will also drive those who depart from the Church to hate their old Christian friends. It will cause those *apostates* to betray those who once were their brothers and sisters in Christ, and that's why Jesus warned that the hearts of *most* people in the Church will grow cold. That is, Christian love will wane. This unfortunate phenomenon is exactly why Jesus, right in the middle of his Upper Room discourse on End Times Persecution, delivered a New Commandment to the Apostles—that we love one another!

Truly, truly I say to you, the one who receives anyone I send receives me... A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another—just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another... This is my commandment: that you love one another just as I have loved you... If the World hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the World, the World would love its own. But because you are not of the World, but I chose you out of the World, for this reason the World hates you (John 13:20, 34-35; 15:12; LEB).³

Forewarned of “Their Hour”

Jesus not only warned his apostles about the Last Times persecution, he explained *why* he was warning them about persecution. Look at his reason in the following passage—it was so that they would not *fall away*—and the word he used for *fall away* is a synonym for *apostatize*! In other words, to prevent apostasy, the Jesus thing to do is to warn people that persecution is on the way. As the saying goes, “forewarned is forearmed.”

I have said these things to you so that you will not fall away [*skandalizo*]. They will expel

³ It cannot be denied that Jesus is speaking about religious persecution coming from the Jews, and that's exactly what Mystery Babylon will be, a Jewish religious system which persecutes Israeli Jewish converts and people like us. Notice how the text continues:

Remember the word that I said to you: 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my Word, they will keep yours also... If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin... If I had not done among them [the leaders of the Jews] the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this happened so that the word that is written in their [the Jewish] Law would be fulfilled, 'They hated me without a reason' (John 15:20-25; LEB).

you from the synagogue,⁴ but an hour is coming that everyone who kills you will think they are offering service to God. And they will do these things because they do not know the Father or me.

But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you about them... I have said these things to you so that in me you may have peace. In the World you have affliction, but have courage! I have conquered the World (John 16:1-4, 33; LEB).

Did he say *when their hour comes*? Yes, Jesus said *an hour is coming*, so he was talking about a period in human history. Whose *hour* will it be but the supporters of the Antichrist, which will initially be the Jews, but then will become a very large group of Gentiles. When will that *hour* come? In the Last Times—mostly during the last seven years of this age, at the conclusion of the Age of the Gentiles, which is the Seventieth Week of Daniel.

Seventy ‘weeks’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place (Daniel 9:24).

Note that the same word Jesus used to discuss the Last Times Persecution in John 16, above [*skandalizo*] is the same word he used while describing persecution in Matthew 24, below. That’s not an accident. They are the same events. The word *skandalizo* is often translated *fall away* or *turn away* and it’s frequently used to describe apostasy.

⁴ Three things to note about this passage:

1. Jesus is talking about Jewish religious leaders here. Only they lead in synagogues. Won’t the religious fervor the Antichrist promotes inspire the Last Times Persecution against us? Yes, and the Antichrist *makes the covenant firm*, allowing the Jews to perform the Temple sacrifices.
2. The Last Times Persecution proceeds from a certain religious fervor that opposes the Faith. In other words, it is a passion for religion that opposes the truth of Christ. That’s why Revelation 14:8 says that Mystery Babylon “...made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” Jews get wrapped up in this for a time, until the Antichrist hands Jerusalem over to the Gentiles.
3. Jesus clearly warned that *their hour* would come. To what hour was he referring? The time of Persecution when the World joins together in opposition to God, Christ, and believers like you and me.

At that time [during the Seals, a.k.a., the *Beginnings of the Birth Pangs*] many will turn away [Greek word *skandalizo*] from the Faith and will betray and hate each other (Matthew 24:10).

What You Did for One of These

Right after the Antichrist has been defeated at Armageddon, at the Judgment of the mortals (*sheep* and *goats*) who have survived the Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl judgments—Jesus will judge people based on how they treated Christians. Since everyone will have just finished the period of history when Christians were the most hated people on Earth—the Last Times Persecution—treatment of Christians will be the perfect parameter by which to judge people. Christians had just finished roaming the Earth hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick, and in prison during that time, so it will be interesting to see who helped and who would not help.

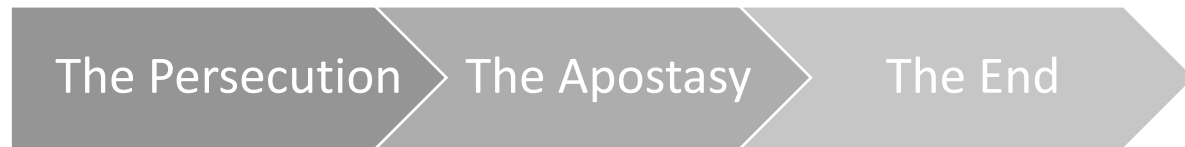
When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the World. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’ (Matthew 25:31-40).

Considering this future judgment, ask yourself today: How do you treat the outspoken Christians nobody else loves? How do you treat the most despised Christians in your society? If your church community became that group in your city, the most hated people around, would you still congregate? Would you stand publicly with those who hold to the Truth when the Truth is hated by everybody else?

More Proof of a Last Times Persecution

As a reminder, we've established that there will be at least three End Times events and that they will occur in a particular order:



The End Times Persecution will come into full swing at a very precise time in history, and the Seven Seals help us to pinpoint it: The Antichrist's initial push towards conquest is Seal #1. Wars is #2. Economic injustice joined with famine is #3. Death to ¼ of the global population [through violence, famines, plagues, and *beasts*⁵] is Seal #4. We know that earthquakes will also occur during that time because the Bible says so:

Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains (Matthew 24:7-8).

Then comes Seal #5—the cry of believers who were put to death for their faith. The fact that these people have been martyred means that by the time Seal #5 comes along, the Last Times Persecution has already been in full swing. In fact, according to the following passage, the Persecution will have started prior to the Seals (here referred to as the *birth pangs*).

Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from Heaven. But before all this [prior to the wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and celestial disturbances—which are the Seals, or *birth pangs*], they will seize you and persecute you.

They will hand you over to synagogues [Jewish-led religious persecution] and put you in

⁵ Although the plain interpretation should certainly be that the Greek term *beasts* means wild animals prowling around, animals which are acting aggressively due to the celestial disturbances and earthquakes—running rampant also because human activity will have decreased in many places due to the war and viruses/plagues—there is another interpretation that's worth mentioning: The *beasts* could refer to the two *Beasts* who are the principal cause of the disasters wrought upon the World. We're talking about the Antichrist (the *Beast* from the Sea) and the False Prophet (the *Beast* from the Land).

prison... You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, and friends. And they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me (Luke 21:10-12, 16-17).

So, with that, we have a more precise idea of the Last Times timeline. It'll look like this:



A Socio-Political Movement

Notice that Jesus warned that *some of us* will be put to death. That *some of us* are the people we see crying out to God from Hades in the 5th Seal. The statement *everyone will hate us* is Jesus' way of telling us that there will be a very strong anti-Christian socio-political movement in Israel as the Antichrist rises to power. This movement is the same one that Zechariah wrote about when God told him:

I will no longer have pity on the people of the land [Israel]... I will give everyone into the hands of their neighbors and their king. They [the neighbors and the kings] will devastate the land, and I will not rescue anyone from their hands (Zechariah 11:6).

Why will people hate Christians so much during those times? Jesus told us that we'll be hated because of him—saying *everyone will hate you*. So why are we such an object of hatred during the Last Times? Mainly because people hate Jesus. But why do they hate Jesus so much? In the Last Times, there will be no one else who competes with the Antichrist for the hearts of mankind like Jesus, and the people who hate us support the Antichrist. Those who support the false christ have no option but to hate the True Christ, and his followers!

There will be a general global consensus that if everyone just stands behind the Antichrist, he will overcome the war, death, injustice, famine, violence, plagues, and chaos the world will be experiencing. Communist governments of the past have inculcated this message during the regimes of God-hating leaders like Stalin, Lenin, Mao, and Castro. Likewise, anybody who gets in the way of the reform the Antichrist brings will be seen as an impediment to progress.

In addition, anyone who clings to their faith in Christ Jesus will be seen as a fool, a divisive dreamer, and an enemy of the new system. Because of that, they'll slander us and mock us.

Particularly silly to them is the fact that we hope in a future coming. Why? Because, for them, the Messiah will have already come.

Above all, you must understand that in the Last Days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he [Jesus] promised? (2 Peter 3:3-4)

Their Time

You’re getting a clear picture of what the Last Times will look like, but we’ve still got more information about this specific time, the period of history we’re calling the *Last Times Persecution*. Notice how, in the passage below, Jesus tells us it’s *their time*. Who is Jesus talking about? Read the passage and you’ll notice that he’s talking about the people who run synagogues. He’s talking about the Jews who will lead the religious extirpation of anyone who will not fall in line with the man they believe is the messiah.

What these Jewish leaders will do will be similar to the Spanish Inquisition. They will be so fervent for their newfound messiah that they will kill anyone who names the name of Jesus, fully convinced that what they’re doing pleases God.

They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them (John 16:2-4).

Jesus has warned us beforehand about these Christian-haters, telling us that *when their time comes* it will be shocking—so shocking that we’ll need to recall these warnings. When these things happen, it’ll be hard to believe things could get that bad. It will be so distressing to us that we’ll need to get our bearings and remember that it is part of God’s sovereign plan. We’ll cling to the fact that Jesus told us in advance.

A Snapshot of the Persecution

So, what will this Last Days Persecution look like? It will consist of intense rejection of Christians on both the local and national level. It will be so much a part of society that friends and family will betray us. It will also cause the love of many who once professed a Christian

faith to grow cold—so cold that they will betray those they once shared fellowship with.

Remember: Our persecutors will consider the revival of Old Covenant Judaism to be *the New Covenant*⁶—the only way to bring the World into a unity that will save the planet and humanity. Anyone who has a different focus (like hoping in Jesus' return) will be seen as an enemy of their religion! Anyone with a different hope than theirs will be considered an obstacle to the restoration of the World.

That's precisely when many will apostatize from the Faith. That's why there will be an *Apostasy*. Note that Paul tells us that the Apostasy will occur *first* (2 Thessalonians 2:2). That is, we'll witness the Apostasy prior to the revealing of the Antichrist, prior to the Midpoint (the 3.5-year mark). Paul also affirms that the Apostasy and the Antichrist's manifestation must occur before the Rapture.

Jesus', Paul's, and Peter's Terminology

Like Jesus, Paul laid out a definitive timeframe, declaring that the Apostasy will occur prior to the Rapture. To see this, you need to understand that Paul's terminology for the Rapture is *the*

⁶ These teachers will be legalists—quite the contrary of the libertinism we see today in Evangelical churches. So, the permissive Evangelical teachers of today don't have much in common with the Last Times teachers. The Last Times teachers will prohibit foods and restrict marriage.

... the Spirit explicitly says that in the Last Times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, by the hypocrisy of liars, who are seared in their own conscience, who forbid marrying and insist on abstaining from foods that God created for sharing... (1 Timothy 4:1-4; LEB)

*Day of the Lord.*⁷ If you can't distinguish the usage of the term among different Bible authors,⁸ you might get confused. For example, Peter used the term *the Day of the Lord* for the Judgment Day, and Jesus didn't use it at all. Instead, Jesus called the Rapture *the End*.

If you can overcome the confusion about terminology, then you should be able to see how Paul's affirmation that the Apostasy will occur prior to the manifestation of the Antichrist agrees with Jesus' words in Matthew 24, in which Jesus laid out the Apostasy-Antichrist-Rapture chronology in an unmistakable way:

- ... many will turn away from the Faith [that's the Apostasy] and will betray and hate each other [such betrayal is an effect of the Last Times Persecution], and many false prophets [among them will be *the False Prophet*] will appear and deceive many people... but the one who stands firm to the End [the Rapture] will be saved (Matthew 24:10-13).

In the Scripture passage below, Paul says that the Apostasy will occur prior to the time the Antichrist reveals himself as the *Man of Sin*—not talking about the *First Seal* when the

⁷ Below are a handful of examples of Paul's use of the term *Day of the Lord*. You should be able to see that he uses it to refer to the Rapture.

He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:8).

... hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:5).

... as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the Day of the Lord Jesus... (2 Corinthians 1:14)

... for you know very well that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

... not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the Day of the Lord has already come... (2 Thessalonians 2:2)

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8).

⁸ Another speaker would include Peter, who uses the expression *the Day of the Lord* to refer to the Final Day of Judgement. For him, it's synonymous with the *Day of God*, the Great White Throne Judgement.

By the same word the present heavens and Earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of the ungodly... But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief [the thief metaphor is normally used with reference to the Rapture, but here it's for the Judgment Day]. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the Earth and everything done in it will be laid bare... everything will be destroyed in this way [by fire]... You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the Day of God and speed its coming. That Day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat (2 Peter 3:7, 10-12).

Antichrist as the Rider of the White Horse—but talking about when the Antichrist manifests himself as the *Man of Lawlessness* sitting in the Temple as God. In this statement, Paul aligns his Last Times chronology perfectly with Jesus. You'll recall that Jesus said that the Apostasy would occur before the rise of the false prophets and the Rapture. Likewise, Paul said:

No one is to deceive you in any way! For it [the Day of the Lord—Paul's term for the Rapture] will not come unless the Apostasy comes first, and the Man of Lawlessness is revealed, the Son of Destruction (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 15; NASB).

Notice Paul's use of the word *first*. In Greek, the word is *proton* and it simply means *first*. This passage confirms what we already knew, not only that the Apostasy occurs some time subsequent to the Last Times Persecution, but that it occurs prior to the day the Antichrist takes his seat in the Temple. That is, the Apostasy has to take place before the Abomination of Desolation—and we know that the Abomination of Desolation is at the Midpoint. Furthermore, the Apostasy will occur much before the Rapture, which comes last in order.



Zechariah's Revelation

One more Bible passage, Zechariah 11:4-17, confirms our Last Times timeframe, specifically the three events Persecution-Apostasy-Antichrist. That's not surprising as we see that the Rapture (the End) only appeared as a teaching from the Olivet Discourse onward. Remember how Jesus corrected the apostle's mistaken idea that he would come back to reign immediately? He established that the goal was the Rapture, especially in light of the fact that the Antichrist was going to try to appear as the Christ whose return to rule was immediate.

Let's examine Zechariah 11. Firstly, the prophecy speaks of congregations destined for destruction. The passage warns us of a terrible period in time when believers will be massacred! Such congregations obviously will need pastors, so God says to Zechariah: *Shepherd one of them*.

This is what the Lord my God says: ‘Shepherd the flock marked for slaughter’ (Zechariah 11:4).

Zechariah didn’t just live in times when congregations were unwell. He lived in times when false pastors exploited congregations with impunity, boasting of their financial success. The next verse sounds very much like today’s Prosperity Gospel preachers—pastors who brag of getting rich from their ministry!

Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, ‘Praise the Lord, I am rich!’ Their own shepherds do not spare them (Zechariah 11:5).

Negligence Among Pastors

God announced the times that were on the horizon for believers, foreseeing that times of great socio-political upheaval were just around the corner. With this announcement, God indicated to Zechariah that the sign of the times was pastoral negligence—pastors had forsaken their work. Because of this negligence, the time had come for God to no longer restrain society’s evil influence. The application of this principle to us today is that once the Church fails, there is no more hope for the World. Once there are no more pastors to care for the Church, God will show no more pity on the Earth. When no one is around to care for the lost, God stops saving people!

‘And look!’⁹ I will no longer have pity on the people of the land,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will give everyone into the hands of their neighbors and their king. They will devastate the land, and I will not rescue anyone from their hand’ (Zechariah 11:6).

⁹ The Hebrew here is best translated: *And lo!*, *And behold!*, or *And look!* You could even translate it into the modern expression *And check it out!* It’s the exact same word we see in Genesis 1 where God creates the Universe, saying *It was good!* Right before that it says *And behold!* Because this is what it really says, it’s unfortunate that the NIV put one vague word in their translation (*for*) and nothing else.

We do not believe that the Hebrew word *heene* should be translated *for* here. *For* gives you the idea that what follows is the reason why the shepherds are not sparing the people. In other words, the Hebrew word *heene* does not have the meaning of *because* (which is what *for* makes it sound like). On the contrary, what follows *heene* is caused by the pastors! That is, this passage is saying that *due to* the negligence of the pastors, God will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land.

When the Church stops being the Church, God has no reason to send people to the Church for salvation. This principle agrees with Abraham’s barter with God for the sparing of Sodom. Abraham went from 50 down to 10 righteous people inhabiting a city God would spare from judgment. God made it clear to Abraham that he will have mercy on a city where there is a group of believers—10 people being the minimum number of people to form a congregation.

During the coming Apostasy, just like in Zachariah's day, God will remove his mercy, allowing for a new World order to overrun societies on the local and national level. God has decided not to save anyone, not even his own flock, from the overwhelming destructive force of the new World Order.

Outward and Inward Focus

Zechariah dutifully did his job as a pastor, focusing on believers who were oppressed. He made his commitment by taking two staffs. These represented his intention to minister to all the nations (outreach) and to conserve the family bond between Judah and Israel (internal efforts for unity). However, Zechariah quickly experienced conflict with three shepherds, and he had to remove them from pastoral duty. In like manner, sincere pastors will have conflict with insincere pastors during the Last Times.

So I shepherded the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one *Favor* and the other *Union*, and I shepherded the flock. In one month I got rid of the three shepherds (Zechariah 11:7-8a).

Problems Without and Problems Within

But conflict with pastors wasn't the only difficulty Zechariah faced. He also had problems with the sheep. Although he tried his best to save those who were dying, they hated him for his labors. That became wearisome to Zachariah. Furthermore, the members of his congregation were not kind to one another—so Zechariah decided to leave them to their infighting.

The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them and said, 'I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh' (Zechariah 11:8b-9).

Zechariah then gave up on missionary work. He said 'forget about missions' and he said it in such a way that the sheep (especially the humble ones) would know that he was obeying God in doing so. This will surprise many, but sometimes a missionary can quit his work in obedience to God!

Then I took my staff called *Favor* and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. It was revoked on that day, and so the oppressed of the flock who were watching me knew it was the Word of the Lord (Zechariah 11:10-11).

“I Quit!”

In a non-greedy way (this was unique for his times since greedy shepherds abounded), Zechariah then quit his job, asking disinterestedly for his liquidation salary. He received it, but then gave it away—but why? To demonstrate that he never worked for a salary in the first place. Zechariah was not a *hireling* (John 10:12), but a servant of God.

I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the House of the Lord (Zechariah 11:12-13).

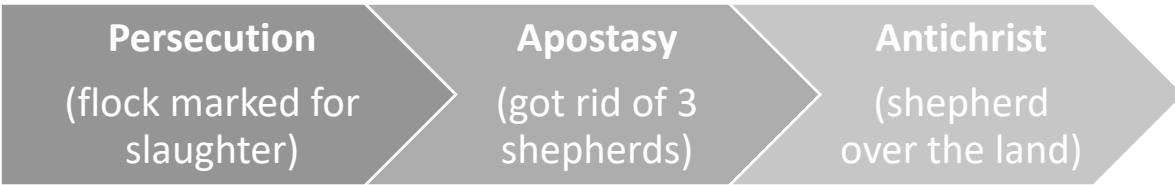
Zechariah then ceased to work for the unity of God’s people. He lived in times of apostasy, so efforts towards building unity were fruitless anyways. It was best to cease this particular labor, just as it was best to quit doing missionary outreach. Why struggle for the unity of a people that refuses to love?

Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the family bond between Judah and Israel (Zechariah 11:14).

Back to Work

Then, in the midst of times of apostasy (greedy pastors, ungrateful sheep, hatred, and an anti-Christian oppressive political system), God called Zechariah to do pastoral work again! Remarkable.

This must have been disheartening for Zechariah, but God had a specific reason for Zechariah’s renewed calling: God was about to lift up a *shepherd over the land* who would be completely negligent in the care of the sheep. In fact, this shepherd-ruler would destroy the “choice sheep” with cruelty. You may have guessed it by now, but if not, know that the Zechariah prophecy is about the Antichrist. Just like in the NT parallel passages, the key events of the Last Times maintain the same order.



Then the Lord said to me, “Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hooves (Zechariah 11:15-16).

Zoom in on the word *for* in the passage above, because we’ll come back to it. It’s the key to understanding why faithful men must pastor during the Apostasy.

A Grave Warning to Pastors

God wraps this section up by issuing a firm warning to pastors who serve him during any time of apostasy. As bad as things might get (ungrateful sheep, puny salaries, antagonistic fellow-pastors, and the Antichrist attacking Christians), a God-ordained pastor is not allowed to abandon God’s people. We pastors must be faithful even through the hardest times.

Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!” (Zechariah 11:17)

This last verse is reminiscent of the warning Jesus gave to pastors in his Olivet Discourse conclusion. Although he taught two additional parables and described the Sheep and Goats Judgement in Matthew 25, the Lord also made a warning to pastors part of his conclusion to the Olivet Discourse! Look at what he said:

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.

The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:45-51).

Being cut into pieces is quite a severe punishment for pastors who do not act like Jesus is coming soon, do you agree? Well, the severity of this punishment is based on the principle of “to whom much given, much is expected.” In fact, right after Jesus taught about the punishment of pastors, he established this principle!

... suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant [Jesus] will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:45-48).

James repeated the same principle that Jesus and Zechariah gave us.

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1).

Four Insights into the Apostasy

Now that we have established a definite timeline of events surrounding the End Times Apostasy, we can better interpret other Apostasy passages. Below are four major insights into what the Apostasy will look like.

1. The Faith will Disappear

Jesus said that people in the Church will be turning from the Faith—that is, the sound doctrine of the apostles—all the way up to the Rapture. Observe Jesus' expression of doubt as he asks whether he will find this Faith on Earth when he returns.

... now, will God not bring about justice for his elect who cry out to him day and night, and will he delay long for them? I tell you that he will bring about justice for them quickly.

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find the Faith on the Earth? (Luke 18:7-8; NASB).

Jesus has doubts regarding whether he'll find *the Faith* on Earth when he comes—but why are these doubts credible? It's because Jesus knows that sound doctrine is a rarity in the Last Times. He knows that the Gospel and the preaching of the Word will have become watered down. He knows that love will have diminished. He knows the common-sense principle that apostasy gets worse as time goes on. Apostasy is not just a Last Times event; it has been a trend ever since the times of Paul. He observed it by stating:

... evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse... (2 Timothy 3:13)

So, our Lord Jesus was aware of the trend towards Apostasy. He mentioned that a *time of the dry tree* would come.

Things were bad enough during Christ's day. Religious people killed him for speaking the truth—but according to the Lord he lived in the times of *the green tree*. That is, he ministered in times when there was more receptivity to the Gospel, more spiritual life, and more fruit. People were much more willing to repent, believe, and enter into a covenant with God during his time.

What will people do to us when receptivity to the Word of God has dried up and there's no willingness to repent? Worse things than what they did to Jesus? Yes—worse than crucifixion.

Our Lord recognized this when he asked the crowd a rhetorical question carrying his Cross to Calvary:

If they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry? (Luke 23:31)

So, what could be worse than crucifixion? Maybe decapitation?

I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the Word of God (Revelation 20:4).

2. Mockers Will Prevail

Within the Church, in the Last Times, there are going to be people who mock those of us who believe in a literal Flood (the story of Noah), and a literal 6-day Creation. They will mock us in an attempt to divide us. They will attack the story of the Flood in particular because they reject the reality of God's wrath and judgment. In addition, they mock the hope we have that Jesus will return from Heaven.

These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage. But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, 'In the Last Times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.' These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit (Jude 1:16-19).

Above all, you must understand that in the Last Days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of Creation."

But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's Word the Heavens came into being and the Earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed (2 Peter 3:3-6).

As you reflect upon these two passages, it's important to recognize that both Jude and Peter are talking about the same *scoffers*—a word which is translated *mockers* in other versions.

Secondly, both are writing about what will occur during the Last Times. Peter says that this will happen in the Last Days. Admittedly, Peter uses the terms Last Days in a broader sense than Daniel's Seventieth Week. On the Day of Pentecost, he declared that the Last Days had started:

These people [the apostles, who were speaking in tongues] are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the Last Days, God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people' (Acts 2:15-17).

Regardless of how Peter used the term *Last Days*, the issues Peter addresses in 2 Peter 3 are all matters pertaining to the Last Times. For example, it's the policy of the Antichrist to lead people towards a "here and now" salvation. The Antichrist will offer people the freedom to buy and sell with a number the False Prophet will give them (666), liberating the people of this World from the chaos and economic instability surrounding them. The socio-political-religious system they weave together will appear so effective, that people will be convinced that it's the Kingdom of God on Earth. Hence, those of us waiting for Jesus to return in the clouds will look like fools.

These scoffers will mock our belief in the return of Christ—mainly because they refuse to wait. They'll want us to believe, as they do, that the Messiah has already come. They'll want us to believe that the Messiah is the one who has become so successful in bringing order to a world that's been turned upside down—a man who will have provided a religious-political-economic system to save everyone on the planet from war, disease, poverty, misery, hunger, and privation. In addition, they'll see him (fully convinced by the False Prophet) as the man who truly fulfilled the prophecies of the Christ, including being resurrected from the Dead!

Thirdly, these scoffers are not unbelievers. They're people (even pastors!) in the Church trying hard to divide it, just as it says in Jude 1:19 'these are the people who divide you.' Let's also heed Jude's warnings as he speaks of what these mockers do.

... certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you (v. 4).

These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves (v. 12).

The mockers talk about the Creation (because they believe in it—they will be religious people). However, they mix their religious beliefs with the false science of naturalism¹⁰ saying ‘everything goes on as it has since the beginning of Creation’ (2 Peter 3:4). The apostles have long had to combat with “the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Timothy 6:20), debating particularly hard with the Gnostics. But today, we have to deal with naturalism, the Big Bang theory, humanism, and Darwin’s theory of evolution. Those are some newer categories of “knowledge” enemies of the Faith promote through governments, schools, colleges, media, and businesses—but they also promote those in in the Church—and therein lies the greatest danger!

3. True Pastors Will Struggle

Men called by God are going to struggle arduously in their pastoral labors. They’ll try to teach and to exhort God’s flock both in public and in homes, but to no avail. Although many will be successful in the eyes of Christ, their ministries will fall. This will not be their fault, however. The failure of God-ordained pastoral ministries stems from other sources: false doctrines, a weak or non-existent network of pastoral support, and ungrateful people in the Church.

Observe here how the primary sin of Last Days “shepherds” is their greed. They become buyers and sellers of God’s sheep, disregarding Jesus’ passionate chastisement ‘My house will be a house of prayer but you have made it a den of robbers’ (Luke 19:46).

¹⁰ Naturalism is the belief that we live in a system closed to the supernatural. That is, our universe has no Divine intervention, it’s just a system in which the laws of science with their processes have always been the same. They think that we can evaluate the past according to the stability and consistency of the present geography and earth sciences—but the Bible teaches that the world of the past was very unstable and that it was subject to catastrophic changes. If such changes occurred, such as the Flood, the shifting of tectonic plates, mega volcanoes, and an Ice Age, that would ruin the Naturalists’ calculations of time periods. The Bible, of course, also teaches that there is an Intelligent Designer who made all things in 6 days.

The truth is that Earth’s environment was very unstable and very different in millennia past. For example, the amount of carbon-14 in the environment has never had a constant decrease—as is believed by many scientists. The World of Old saw the effects of the Curse on plants, animals, and humans; the collapse of the Firmament, the erupting forth of waters from great springs, a Global Flood, millions of other local floods, millions of earthquakes large and small, tsunamis, great shifts in the tectonic plates, the formation of gigantic mountains, the advance and retreat of huge glaciers, thousands of volcanic eruptions, the formation of deserts, and many other occurrences such as the formation and disappearance of rivers and lakes.

This is what the Lord my God says: “Shepherd the flock marked for slaughter. Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, ‘Praise the Lord, I am rich!’ Their own shepherds do not spare them” (Zechariah 11:4-5).

It’s not only Zechariah who speaks out against the greedy pastors. Peter also warned us of unfaithful pastors—men who make it their aim to exploit the Church.

... there will be [future tense] false teachers among you. They will [future tense indicating that this was not happening in Peter’s day] secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many [this is something major, involving a lot of people—it’s the Apostasy] will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of Truth [Christianity] into disrepute [scandalous behavior will give a bad reputation to the Church]. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories (2 Peter 2:1-3a).

And Jesus warned us too! He called the fake pastors *ferocious wolves*.

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves (Matthew 7:15).

Indeed, Jesus concluded his teaching on the Last Times with a stern warning against (of all people) pastors! He warned us about the pastors who do not feed his sheep. He points out the root of their sin—their belief that the Lord Jesus will tarry. That is, they secretly think that Jesus will not be coming soon, and hope in this World rather than in the Kingdom. With that thought, they choose the company of sinners over the company of the saints, and live in sin!

Who then is the faithful and wise slave [a pastor] whom the master [Jesus] has put in charge of his household slaves to give them their food at the right time [that’s teaching the Scriptures carefully]? ... But if that evil slave should say to himself, ‘My master is staying away for a long time,’ and he begins to beat his fellow slaves and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day that he does not expect and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in two and assign his place with the hypocrites (Matthew 24:45-51; LEB).

The unfaithful pastors preach out of greed. They turn God's Church into a marketplace. They focus their teaching ministries on tithing, offering, and prosperity. And if that weren't enough—they don't allow true pastors to participate in the life of the Church!

... you will do well to send them [good missionaries] on their way in a manner worthy of God for they have gone out on behalf of the Name [of Jesus], accepting nothing from the pagans. Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we become fellow workers with the Truth. I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes ... does not receive the brothers himself, and he hinders those wanting to do so and throws them out of the church (3 John 1:6-10; LEB).

4. The Church will be Defeated

As a consequence of the absence of ministries of truth and righteousness, the Church dies. The ineffectiveness of the Church signals a new era, one in which evil will rule, since God has no further reason to restrain evil. God then will let the evil system of the Antichrist overwhelm societies everywhere. With no more salt or light in the World, God has no more reason to restrain evil.

You are the salt of the Earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot (Matthew 5:13).

Therefore, when the Church abandons the biblical model (Acts 2:42) and conforms instead to the model of this World (exalting money, worldly success, entertainment, psychology, and technology)—it sacrifices those things that are truly valuable: the Cross, truth, holiness, righteousness, anointing, and love. Its commitment to impress the people of this World make it completely ineffective in pleasing God. It becomes useless.

You cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24).

... they loved human praise more than praise from God (John 12:43).

The seven churches of Revelation were warned to repent, and so is the Church today! If we will not take God's warnings, once we become completely ineffective, God will cease to restrain the Antichrist. The people of this World will willingly submit to the authority of the Antichrist, and

will do as he wishes, but we (as the remnant of believers who resist the Antichrist) will be crushed by his military and political power.

And it was given to him [the Beast] to make war with the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given to him over every tribe and people and language and nation (Revelation 13:7; LEB).

As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them (Daniel 7:21).

What will the influence of the Antichrist look like? It will be a socio-political movement through which anti-Christian sentiment waxes strong. People will want to kill us on both a local and national level.

‘For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will give everyone into the hands of their neighbors and their king. They will devastate the land, and I will not rescue anyone from their hands’ (Zechariah 11:6).

Zechariah did what God told him to do. He pastored in tough times, even with minimal monetary remuneration. Are you willing to serve God in tough times? How tough are times going to get? Sadly, they’ll be so tough that the handful of faithful pastors left with us will be put to death.

Weep and wail, you shepherds; roll in the dust, you leaders of the flock. For your time to be slaughtered has come; you will fall like the best of the rams. The shepherds will have nowhere to flee, the leaders of the flock no place to escape. Hear the cry of the shepherds, the wailing of the leaders of the flock, for the Lord is destroying their pasture. The peaceful meadows will be laid waste because of the fierce anger of the Lord (Jeremiah 25:34-37).

The Doorway to Apostasy: False Doctrine

Those who are in the Church today but who are destined to apostatize in the Last Times begin their descent once they trust in false doctrine. At least three times Paul addresses the subject of the deterioration of sound doctrine during the Last Times. He points out that Jewish legalistic doctrines will have a particularly strong sway in the Last Times—but why? The reason is because the Antichrist promotes Old Covenant Jewish religion.

... the Spirit explicitly says that in Later Times some will fall away¹¹ from the Faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons... (1 Timothy 4:1; NASB).

Note that Paul tells us that the coming Apostasy is an express teaching of the Holy Spirit. It's not a hidden teaching, but something the Spirit has stated *explicitly*. In Later Times believers will depart from the Faith. They are going to apostatize. Don't have any doubts that this will occur. Rather, brace yourself for it. You've been warned.

It's also noteworthy that—regarding a quantifiable number of Christians who will apostatize—Paul chose to use the term *some* instead of the term *many* utilized by our Lord Jesus (in Matthew) and Peter (in 2 Peter).

... many will turn away from the Faith and will betray and hate each other (Matthew 24:10).

Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the Way of Truth into disrepute (2 Peter 2:2).

This is not a contradiction of the Scriptures, however. The terms *some* and *many* are not mutually exclusive. For example, we could say that we have *some* oranges in our hands, or that we have *many*—and both could be true.

Another example is we could say that *some* diamonds were stolen from a jewelry store, and another person could report that *many* diamonds were stolen. Both statements could be true, depending on the perspective of the speaker. Certainly, for the owner of the store, *many*

¹¹ This is the Greek word *apostēsontai* meaning *depart from*. The NASB footnote provides *apostatize* as a synonym. We agree that it's a suitable synonym because Paul is speaking of the Apostasy in this passage, and the Apostasy is the great departure from the Faith.

diamonds were stolen, but for someone who works in the diamond mining industry and who knows how many diamonds exist in the world, only *some* diamonds were stolen. For reasons unbeknownst to us, Jesus and Peter had a bleaker perspective on the Apostasy than Paul, emphasizing that *many* believers will fall away, not just *some*.

This same passage (1 Timothy 4) goes on to describe the kinds of deceit and demonic doctrines we'll hear about during the Last Times Apostasy: False pastors will forbid marriage and will put dietary restrictions on their congregations. Paul points out that such teachings originate in hypocrisy. The roots of such teachings are the lies of people who do not have a good conscience—contradicting the sound doctrine that should characterize every true Christian ministry.

... by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the Truth... [if you teach about our freedom in the New Covenant] you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the Faith and of the good doctrine which you have been following (1 Timothy 4:2-3, 6; NASB).

Paul warned Timothy about Apostasy again in his second epistle to Timothy. That second time, he painted a picture of what churches will look like during the Apostasy—and it's not pretty! Remember as you read this that the people Paul is describing *hold to a form of godliness*. What does that mean? It means that they have outward Christian religion (holidays, certain dress, a particular vocabulary, restrictions on foods, etc.), but they reject inward Christian religion. That is, they reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit!

But realize this, that in the Last Days difficult times will come. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, 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; avoid such people as these...

Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, [the] Faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings... But evil people 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 Timothy 3:1-5, 10-11a, 13-14; NASB).

Shocking. Could the Church be reduced to such levels of sinfulness? Could it become a place overrun by *lovers of self* and lovers of money? Could it be a place where the *boastful, arrogant,* and *slanderers* have their way? Could the Church become home to those who are *disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable,* and *malicious gossips*? Will the Last Times Church be a place where people are *without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited,* and even *lovers of pleasure*? Sadly, yes. Just as Israel stooped to the lowest levels of depravation, if we don't take their punishments as a warning, we will also be reduced to this.

... they [the Jews] were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off (Romans 9:20-22).

But let's zoom in on the words *from whom you have learned.* Paul wanted Timothy to remember his teacher, and he didn't mean himself. Paul was referring to the Holy Spirit. Now, ask yourself the question Paul poses: Do you possess the Faith taught by the Holy Spirit, or did you learn about Christianity from a merely human source—a religious leader?

Finally, did you notice how the passage speaks of the general trend of evildoers getting worse? Paul says 'evil people and impostors will proceed from bad to worse.' This has always been the trend. Those who have been able to resist the trend are men like Timothy who follow sound doctrine, imitate holy conduct, and accept suffering. Those who find a way to persevere in the things they have learned from the Holy Spirit resist this trend. Are you one of them? Will you be able to resist the final manifestation of this trend, the Great Departure from the Faith—the Apostasy?

Preach the Word

Another way to prevent a congregation from falling into apostasy is faithful preaching of the Word. If you're a pastor, you should preach the Scriptures at Sunday meetings, during the week, in prayer groups, in homes, at funerals, in holidays, at weddings, during celebrations, and even in public places like in the workplace or in a courthouse. That's what the Bible calls 'in season and out of season.'

If you're not a pastor, make sure you're part of a congregation where the Bible is held in high esteem. Regularly attend a church where preaching the Scriptures is the norm. Be part of a fellowship where they know what sound doctrine is. Read their statement of faith, and make sure that they use the Bible for correction, rebukes, and encouragement. They should do this with patience and careful instruction—not sloppy self-centered storytelling. It should be obvious that your pastors take the work of teaching the Bible seriously.

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage— with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the Truth and turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

This passage is striking, and named often among Evangelicals [although not among those who are in the Faith Healer / Prosperity Gospel movement]. Reading it, we have to ask ourselves whether the Church is finally at the point when people simply don't tolerate sound doctrine anymore? This passage says 'the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.' Are we there yet? Have they finally filled the Church with so many teachers who tell them what they want to hear, that there's no room for a sincere pastor faithful to God?

Well, there's no need to treat this question subjectively. We can perform an objective test to find out whether or not we are in the time when sound doctrine is no longer tolerated. The test is simply for you to share sound doctrine with the people in the Church. Sound doctrine is indisputable. It consists of the Doctrine of Christ (1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 1:7-11; Romans 8:3-4), the Fundamentals (Hebrews 6:1-2), and the unity of the spirit (Ephesians 6:3-6). Explain these passages to a church group. Let them reflect on them, repeat the teaching, and observe their reaction. If they reject these, then they do *not put up with sound doctrine*. Just because they're not chronologically in the time of Apostasy, that doesn't mean that they're not in apostasy.

They are! They have turned *their ears away from the Truth*.

Micah's Encouragement

Let's say you have realized that your congregation is doing very poorly. You think that they're in apostasy. It's a bad feeling, undeniably, but you're not alone. Micah lived in times like yours. He felt miserable—like someone trying to gather fruit at the very end of the harvest. When the gatherers have passed, everything is gone, and the people who follow up, the gleaners (who were poor people looking for scraps), feel miserable.

You will plant but not harvest; you will press olives but not use the oil, you will crush grapes but not drink the wine... What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave (Micah 6:15-7:1).

Micah looked around him and couldn't find one person who was righteous.

The faithful have been swept from the land; not one upright person remains. Everyone lies in wait to shed blood; they hunt each other with nets. Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire—they all conspire together. The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge (Micah 7:2-4a).

The LEB, instead of *they all conspire together*, supply the translation *they weave it together*. The NKJV says *they scheme together*. These get the message across, that from a global level down to a local level, the Antichrist is going to organize the economical-political systems of the World to root out the Christian Faith, effectively overwhelming all who trust in God. Are you prepared to resist that system or will you be caught off guard?

Even the very best pastors today are a big disappointment. Which one among them, even if they use verse-by-verse exposition, aren't preaching heretical doctrines? If all of them contradict the Fundamentals, then none of them can be trusted. Beyond the Church, the best politicians are highly dangerous, like thorn bushes. Only a handful of them profess faith in Christ, and among those, which one has sound doctrine or a spotless testimony?

The day God visits you has come, the day your watchmen sound the alarm. Now is the time of your confusion. Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with the woman who lies in your embrace guard the words of your lips. For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies are the members of his own household. But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me (Micah 7:4b-7).

These are the final words of Micah’s prophecy of how bad things will get, and we know that his prophecy deals with the Last Times. The prophetic expression *the day God visits you* is a reference to the Last Times. But there’s an even better way to confirm that Micah was speaking about the Last Times—through Jesus who quoted it as he warned the disciples about the Last Times:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves... Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues... But when they arrest you, do not worry... Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the End will be saved.

When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes... I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household’ (Matthew 10:16-23, 34-36).

Nobody wants this. Nobody prays for division in the family, but Jesus says that it’s the effect of his ministry. Those who are born of the Spirit are markedly different from those who are born of the flesh—that is to say, believers are not united by genetics. Our unity is spiritual. Being born into the Family of God is what makes for true brotherhood. Jesus made this point using the same prophecy from Micah:

Do you think I came to bring peace on Earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother

against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (Luke 12:51-53).

Now, if Jesus hadn't framed his interpretation of Micah's prophecy as a Last Days event, then we wouldn't mention Micah—but he did. Jesus used Micah's prophecy to describe the Last Times Persecution that's going to lead into the Apostasy. That's why, in the middle of the warnings, Jesus said 'the one who stands firm to the End will be saved.' And with those words, Jesus revealed his purpose in warning us—the same purpose Micah had—to encourage believers who have to suffer through the Last Times!

Habakkuk's Encouragement

The prophet Habakkuk also tried to encourage believers. His illustration of there being no grapes, no olives, no food, no sheep, and no cattle is a picture of spiritual dryness, the same kind we'll see in the Last Times. A lack of fruit indicates that no souls are being saved. No olive harvest means little anointing, and no sheep in the pen means that there are no people in the Church. Did times of spiritual dryness discourage Habakkuk? No. He kept his faith in God and refused to stop rejoicing in Yahweh.

Though the fig tree does not blossom, nor there be fruit on the vines; the yield of the olive tree fails, and the cultivated fields do not yield food; the flock is cut off from the animal pen, and there is no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in Yahweh; I will exult in the God of my salvation. Yahweh, my Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer; he causes me to walk on my high places (Habakkuk 3:17-19; LEB).

2. The Faithful Few

There may still be pastors who stick with shepherding, even in the hardest of times—even when the great majority give up on pastoring to follow money. Pastors are exhorted in the Scriptures to serve God's flock, and to do it with zero greediness.

[Jesus said] I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the

sheep (John 10:11-13).

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:1-4).

... appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless... Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless... not pursuing dishonest gain (Titus 1:5b-7).

There will be pastors who will stick with the work even when the sheep themselves are hateful, wearisome, ungrateful, and skimpy with the pastors who serve them. So what motivates these perseverant pastors? It's that they know that they've got to face it off with the Antichrist—and they know that facing him means that they're in the Last Times. Being in the Last Times means that Christ is near—and he has his reward with him.

Timing of the Faceoff

This brings us back to the issue of the timing of the Apostasy. It will occur right before the Antichrist becomes the Global Shepherd of all nations. The fact that true pastors will choose to serve God in the pastorate particularly in light of the fact that God will lift up the Antichrist—a man who will not show any care for God's people, but will exploit them to the fullest extent, can be seen in a passage we looked at earlier:

Then the Lord said to me, 'Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For* I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hooves' (Zechariah 11:15-16).

Notice that word *for** which is so key to the interpretation of the passage. The *for* explains why God expects his faithful pastors to continue in the labor of pastoring—it's equivalent to

because, that is, it leads the reader to the reason to pastor in tough times. The reason is because God is going to raise up a “shepherd” over the land—but one who will not show any care for lost sheep, or offer any assistance to the young ones, or heal the wounded, or feed the healthy.

Rather, this “shepherd” will eat the meat of the best sheep, violently ripping their hooves off! The “shepherd” God will lift up is the Antichrist, a man who appears to be interested in everyone’s wellbeing, but whose façade will be revealed! Someone has to face off with him, and the brave men who accept that challenge will pastor God’s sheep during the Apostasy, understanding full well that they serve God at the risk of life and limb.

Many Antichrists

This sounds unimaginable, but Antichrists have been sowing false doctrine among the churches for thousands of years. They were already active at the time of John the apostle, who wrote the following text:

... many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the World. Any such person is the Deceiver and the Antichrist... (2 John 1:7, 9).

Most people read this passage and interpret it to mean ‘many antichrists have come.’ They take it as a reference to the world rulers who have oppressed and defeated the Jews militarily. But is John talking about Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Assyrian king Sennacherib? Is he talking about the evil leader Haman (Prime Minister under the Persian king Ahasuerus / Xerxes I)?

Bible commentators talk about Antiochus Epiphanes [who ruled the Seleucid kingdom after the division of the Greek conquest under Alexander the Great and to whom the Bible makes an unmistakable comparison to the Antichrist (see Daniel 10-11)]. Maybe they’ll mention the Roman General Titus, and maybe the modern world rulers Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and the infamous Adolf Hitler. But were these men antichrists according to John’s definition? Are these among the *antichrists* John is referring to? Dramatic and terrible as political-military history has been, John was not speaking about political-military rulers who have come into the World.

John was speaking of those who have ‘gone out into the World.’ When John said that ‘any such person is the Deceiver and the Antichrist’ he was addressing a phenomenon which is much more subtle and diabolical than anything Pharaoh or Hitler ever did. John was speaking of

antichrists within Christian fellowship—men sent out as missionaries from churches. His message is a warning against trusting in pastors who ‘have gone out into the World’—in particular, the missionaries who do not profess the central doctrine of Christianity, the *doctrine of Christ* (Hebrews 6:1; 2 John 1:9)!

These false messengers ‘do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.’ In other words, they disregard the central doctrine of the Christian Faith: the incarnation. They allow people to think vaguely about what Jesus’ nature was like during his first coming. For example, these are the preachers who call Jesus the “God-man,” who say that he was teaching the Bible at age 12 (instead of doing questions and answers), and who say that he stopped the storm and walked on water “because he was God.” They call him “God the Son.”

They also say that Jesus knew what men were thinking “because he was God.” In other words, they believe that Jesus came to us in the divine nature. They do not teach that Jesus came with the nature of sin (Romans 8:2) or that he needed to get the baptism of the Holy Spirit to do his miracles. They never explain to people what Jesus meant when he said:

... the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing... By myself I can do nothing... If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true” (John 5:19, 30, 31).

Indeed, these antichrists misconstrue and avoid innumerable NT verses, to their shame. They call Jesus “God,” but not like Thomas did when he said “my Lord and my God.” Thomas did it because he had come to realize how much the One God and Father loved Jesus, having come to understand the resurrection of Christ to be the hand of God exalting and glorifying his Son. On the contrary, these antichrists call Jesus “God” to parade their theology, Trinitarianism. Using an ancient heresy to hide behind a cloak of orthodoxy, all the time confusing Jesus with the Father in their worship and prayer time. These men put a massive stumbling block before naïve believers. These are antichrists!

Who is the Christ?

The previous passage says that there are *many deceivers*, and that these are the Antichrist. The next passage clarifies that concept, helping us to see that although there is one primary

Antichrist who is to come, the deceivers who precede him—being party to the same lies—are considered *antichrists*.

Dear children, this is the last time period;¹² and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last time period... Who is the Liar? It is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the Antichrist—denying the Father and the Son (1 John 2:18, 22).

According to this passage, *the Liar* and *the Antichrist* are the same person. They are situated in this text according to an ancient Hebrew linguistic device called parallelism. Similarly, John uses parallelism with the ideas of *to deny that Jesus is the Christ* and *denying the Father and the Son*. Why are these two denials the same thing? Why is it that if you deny that Jesus is the Christ, you're also denying the Father and the Son?

To identify Jesus as the Christ is to recognize the proper and true relationship that exists between Jesus and God. Jesus is the man sent, anointed, resurrected, and glorified by God. He is the Christ, the man who does God's will in salvation. The Christ only speaks God's Word and only does God's will. If that's the Jesus you know, then you affirm he is the Christ.

Who exactly are these *antichrists*? These are men and women who preach Jesus, but who do not preach him rightly. Don't forget that the false christs Jesus warned us about will come in the name of Jesus (Matthew 24:5; Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8)—so they talk about Jesus. They talk about Jesus a lot! They preach Jesus, and call him *Jesus Christ* (just like the Muslims do, and their book, the Koran, does), but when you speak to any of these people about what the Bible says the Christ is, they deny that Jesus is that man. Tell a Muslim that Jesus is the Son of God, and he'll vehemently disagree—but that's exactly what the Messiah must be according to the Bible. The Koran repeatedly calls Jesus *the Messiah*, but it doesn't explain what that word means.

¹² Most translations have translated *time period* as *hour*. The meaning here is that we are in the period of human history in which people must decide who the Messiah is. The HELPS word studies gives this definition for the Greek word utilized here, telling us that although it's normally translated *hour*, it can be used figuratively to mean: a finite "season"; limited time or opportunity to reach a goal (fulfill a purpose); a divinely pre-set time-period; a limited period to accomplish the Lord's specific purpose (retrieved on February 17, 2023 from <https://biblehub.com/greek/5610.htm>).

To preach Jesus rightly, we must explain what it means for him to be the Christ. The Christ is, in the simplest terms, the man whom God has anointed. Christ is from *christos* meaning *the Anointed One* in the original language of the NT, Greek. The English word *messiah* comes from *meshiach* which also means *the Anointed One*, and that word is from the original language of the OT, Hebrew.

Believers have always waited to see who God would anoint with his Spirit. They've always known that such a person would be the Messiah. We believe the NT which states that at Jesus' baptism, God gave Jesus his Spirit, confirming before all present that Jesus was *the Anointed One*. After that, Jesus affirmed that the Anointing had come upon him. In fact, at the very start of his public ministry, when he first preached in a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus declared 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the Good News...' (Luke 4:18).

The Christ is the man God sent to the Jews in particular, but to all humanity in general, to reconcile all people to God. *The Christ of God* is the one whom God has chosen to be his Son—the heir of God's Kingdom. And the Heir will be King and will rule over the Earth forever! Observe how Peter, Simeon, Andrew, Mary (Lazarus' sister), and Paul came to understand that Jesus was the Messiah.

'... what about you?' he [Jesus] asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'God's Messiah' (Luke 9:20).

... there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon... [God told him that he] would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah (Luke 2:25-26).

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus (John 1:41-42).

'... whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she [Mary, Martha's sister] replied, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God' (John 11:26-27).

Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 9:22).

... many more came to him [Paul] at his lodging place, to whom he was explaining from early in the morning until evening, testifying about the Kingdom of God and attempting to convince them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the prophets... (Acts 28:23; LEB)

Knowing God and Knowing Jesus

The Apostles eventually came to understand who God was and who Jesus was after spending more than three years with Jesus. At the end of Jesus' +3-year ministry, he said 'Now they know...' Have you come to understand who God is and who Jesus is? The conclusion of the apostles was that Jesus had been sent from God, and that God had given Jesus everything—the power, authority, and Kingdom. What's your conclusion? The Lord Jesus was very proud of this accomplishment of the apostles:

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent... I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the World... Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me (John 17:3, 6-8).

Have you come to realize that 100% of what Jesus has comes from God, that Jesus came from God, that God sent Jesus? For most Christians today, these three statements sound very strange. These three statements don't at all reflect what they have been taught. They were taught something different: that Jesus *is* God. They were taught that Jesus is one of the three members of "the Trinity," and that he actually is the One God. But that's a contradiction of fundamental Bible truths and it's even heretical. Heresy—contradicting one of the seven basic truths of the Christian Faith—is serious business. It's a grievous sin, akin to adding to God's Word.

You must not add to the Word that I am commanding you, and you shall not take away from it... (Deuteronomy 4:2; LEB)

All of the things that I am commanding you, you must diligently observe; you shall not add to it, and you shall not take away from it (Deuteronomy 12:32; LEB).

Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar (Proverbs 30:6).

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll (Revelation 22:18).

Contend with Those who Go Too Far

Denying that Jesus came in the human nature of sin, and not recognizing that he came to us 100% man, means you've lost touch with God Himself. You do not have God.

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son (2 John 9).

What does John mean by *running ahead*? Running ahead of who? Of the Church, *the foundation and pillar of the Truth* (1 Timothy 3:15), and of God who has given us his Word. Regarding the Doctrine of Christ, it's going too far with your estimation of who Jesus was when he came to us. If you say he came in the divine nature, you've added your word to God's Word, and have altered a fundamental doctrine to serve your own puny thoughts. The doctrine which comes from Scriptures is that Jesus came to us *in the flesh*—that is, in the human nature of weakness, not in the divine nature of power.

How should an honest teacher of the Word respond to those who say that Jesus came in the divine nature? By fighting. We have to contend for the Faith. We have to confront false teachers in the Church. We must straighten that which they have twisted regarding the knowledge of Jesus Christ!

I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the Faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord (Jude 1:3-4).

Testing a Teacher

The Devil disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Likewise, charlatans will come to us in the name of Jesus. They call themselves *Christian pastors* and preach Jesus, but they don't know the Jesus of the Bible. They preach another Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:4).

Because of that, we have to ask them precise questions about Jesus, and the key question is: Do you affirm that Jesus came in the flesh—that is, the human nature, the exact nature that we have?

Can the teacher you follow publicly state that Jesus came in *the flesh of sin* (Roman 8:3)—meaning with a *natural body* (1 Corinthians 15:44-46) with inclinations towards sin? If they do, then we have discerned which spirit is within them: it is the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit will always honor this truth—the most basic truth of the Christian Faith—called *the Doctrine of Christ* (Hebrews 6:1; 2 John 1:7-11).

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the World. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus [every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; NKJV] is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the World (1 John 4:1-3).

As you can see, if these teachers do not acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh, you must reject them. Why must we be so severe? Because they have the spirit of the Antichrist. It's your duty to discern the spirit that guides your pastor or your Bible teacher. You'll know by what they say about Jesus. That's the litmus test.

Who is Jesus?

Let's consider the most common answers to the question "Who is Jesus?" Most Evangelicals, Protestants, and Catholics have been trained to say that Jesus is the "Second Person of the Holy Trinity." They've been trained to affirm that he and the Father are one—meaning "one person," or "one being"—but this is false.

If you press them further, seeking an explanation for their belief, they will likely say that the Trinity is a "mystery," but that's their way of avoiding further discussion. It may also be their way of writing you off. Many of them will decide on the spot that you are a heretic for challenging a subject not up for debate. For them, the Trinity is orthodoxy—non-negotiable Christian doctrine—and they won't allow for questions.

If you haven't hit a brick wall and you're speaking with someone on friendly terms and they are willing to talk more, head straight to John 10:30, 'I and the Father are one.' They're going to quote it sooner or later anyways, since it's one of the only verses Trinitarians manipulate to defend the Trinity, so you might as well deal with it head-on. Grab the bull by the horns, and read the entire passage (John 10:27-38) with them so that together you may deal with the context.

My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will never perish forever, and no one will seize them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can seize them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Then the Jews picked up stones again so that they could stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good deeds from the Father. For which one of them are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "We are not going to stone you concerning a good deed, but concerning blasphemy, and because you, although you are a man, make yourself to be God!"

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, "You are gods"'? If he called them 'gods' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—do you say about he whom the Father set apart and sent into the World, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

If I do not do the deeds of my Father, do not believe me. But if I am doing them, even if you do not believe me, believe the deeds, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (LEB).

Please consider some key takeaways from this passage:

- a) That Jesus works with the Father for the salvation of human beings—people God chooses, not the people Jesus chooses—and Jesus reaches them through the supernatural *deeds* of the Father, by which people believe in Jesus as a man sent by God.
- b) That Jesus meant by "I and the Father are one" that he is the Son of God. That's equal to Jesus calling himself the Messiah, the Heir of God's Kingdom, something very offensive to the Pharisees who did not believe in him that way.
- c) Jesus did not disagree with the Pharisees that he was 'making himself out to be *God*'—he

was indeed making himself out to be God, but in the way the Scriptures say ‘you are gods,’ not in the way Trinitarians would read it. That is, Jesus as the Son of God gets the privilege of getting a divine nature and reigning with God in the Kingdom (just like we do). In other words, Jesus is God in the same way we get to be gods—that God will share everything with us (including his nature, his rule, and his glory). Jesus did not mean ‘I and the Father are one’ to say that Jesus has some mysterious metaphysical unity with a being they call “the Godhead.” That’s just weird. In fact, never in all history have the Jews had any confusion on the truth that there is One God, the Father, and neither did Christians have that problem until philosophers in their arrogance tried to mix Greek metaphysics with fundamental Truths of the Christian Faith.

d) That Jesus by no means wanted his unity with the Father to sound like something exclusive! On the contrary, being gods is for anyone who receives the Word of God. He didn’t just show this in his argument with the Pharisees, Jesus proved that he yearns to see the fulfillment of the Scriptural promise “you are gods” when he prayed for the apostles and the future Church in the Upper Room:

I pray... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us... I have given them the glory that you gave me [the promise of a divine nature and Kingdom rule] that they may be one as we are one [*as* = in the *same way* Jesus is one with the Father]—I in them and you in me [Jesus is in us through the Spirit, and God is in Jesus through the Holy Spirit]—so that they may be brought to complete unity (John 17:20-23).

e) That even if people didn’t believe in Jesus’ words, they could at least believe in him through the miracles, healings, and signs which indisputably had their origin in God (as they were supernatural and no human being could perform them). What did Jesus want them to believe about him? That God was with him—that God was *in* Jesus (through his Spirit, the Spirit of God). In other words, Jesus urged those who heard him to put their trust in God—the God who gave Jesus the Holy Spirit, the God who anointed Jesus, making him the Messiah.

Other Key Verses

You do well guiding any Trinitarian willing to speak to you to the passages in the Bible where Jesus teaches that we are part of the unity he shares with the Father. If we’re part of the unity of

the Father and the Son, then it's simply not a mystery. Rather, it's something to be lived out. Our unity with Jesus and God is not a theology, it's a life experience! So, if a diehard Trinitarian insists on imposing his theology on you, you could facetiously ask them whether these passages mean to say that we're part of "the Trinity" too:

Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me (Matthew 10:40).

Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects Him who sent me (Luke 10:16).

Point out that Jesus wants us to be one in *the same way* that he and the Father are one. For us to accomplish this, the unity Jesus speaks of cannot be any mystery. On the contrary, it has to be a completely practical kind of unity. In fact, Jesus' prayer in the Upper Room made that crystal clear:

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one... As you sent me into the World, I have sent them into the World (John 17:11, 18).

How are we one as Jesus and the Father are one? In that God sent Jesus into the World, and Jesus has sent us into the World. As Jesus spoke the words of God, so we speak the words of Jesus. As God has given Jesus glory, so has Jesus given us glory—that we may be one as they are one!

The Good Fight of the Faith

Will you contend for the Faith? Will you resist the tendency towards apostasy? Will you have any compassion on the Christians who have been swept away by apostate teachings? If you do, try to free your friends from their proof texting. Sit down with them and read whole Bible passages with them, asking them questions so that they might think. They stopped thinking when they started believing in a non-biblical God composed of the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit. They've given him a name—the "Godhead" or "the Trinity"—but they only think this way because they've been persuaded and even brain washed by human theology. Human theologies can be smashed to pieces by the Scriptures, as they always have been!

Your friends maintain their faith in the Trinity because of peer pressure, fear, and ignorance of the Scriptures. You can relieve the peer pressure by being their friend. You can demonstrate the boldness of the Holy Spirit as an example of what it means not to fear. And you can dissipate their ignorance by reading the Bible with them. You are not fighting against flesh and blood. You are releasing a blind person from spiritual darkness. You are battling against the spirit of the Antichrist.

For the mystery of lawlessness is at work already; only the one who now restrains will do so until he is out of the way, and then the Lawless One will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of his mouth, and wipe out by the appearance of his coming, whose coming is in accordance with the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders... (2 Thessalonians 2:7-9; LEB)

What is this *mystery of lawlessness*? It's the ministry of the Antichrist, the *Lawless One*. Once Michael the Archangel is out of the way, the Antichrist will sit in the Temple and call himself God. People who don't know Jesus will believe in the Antichrist. They'll believe that that Antichrist is the Messiah for one basic reason: They don't understand what makes Jesus the Messiah.

The Sense in which the Antichrist is God

The Antichrist sits in the Jerusalem Temple calling himself *God*—but not in the sense that Jesus said 'I and the Father are one.' No. The Antichrist will call himself God as if there were no other but him.

Read John 10 where the Pharisees were perturbed with Jesus because he, a man, claimed to be God. The Lord Jesus clarified [for our sakes] that he was making himself out to be the *Son of God*. Now, the Jews never have and never will believe that a man can be the One God. It's evident in John 10 that the Pharisees were upset that Jesus was implying that he was *the Son of God*, that is, the *Messiah*—the Savior of the World.

Look at the Antichrist's claim:

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's Temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2

Thessalonians 2:4).

We've got to understand that what the Antichrist will claim for himself is that he is God in the same sense that Trinitarians think that Jesus is God—not only the Messiah, but the One God.

We know that the Antichrist will 'will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God.' So, how will he 'oppose and exalt himself over' Jesus—who 'is called God'? Well, he won't rant against Jesus. He's too crafty for that. He'd lose a big following by ranting against Jesus. Rather, he'll smother us with smooth words, say lots of positive things, but at the same time will allow for the worst and most subtle heresy to spread its roots deeper into the Church. People have already forgotten and denied the Doctrine of Christ, so the Antichrist will simply not speak of that aspect of Jesus' coming, and will allow Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals everywhere to lose all awareness that Jesus came in the flesh.

Appearing to be very Christian, the Antichrist will even do what (to their shame) many Evangelical pastors are skilled at doing right now: never admitting that Jesus came in the flesh. The effect ignoring the Doctrine of Christ will have on the Church is already manifest since it's already teaching most pastors deny. As churches continue to ignore it, the Lord Jesus will become more distanced from us. As Jesus becomes less human, the Antichrist will grow to appear more and more human—more and more like us—to the whole World, and the Antichrist will strengthen his bond with all mankind.

So, the Antichrist will seek to ruin any bond Jesus would have with us. The true bond Jesus has with us now is through his that he came in the flesh. In other words, since Jesus came as we are, he was like us in every way. The Antichrist will maintain most Christians blind to that truth, the Doctrine of Christ, until they have forgotten it completely.

The Imposter

So, you can see that the Antichrist won't focus so much on doctrine. That's very shrewd of him, since most people aren't interested in Bible study. His strategy is not teaching certain things rather than teaching certain things. In other words, we have to pay close attention to what he leaves out than on what he puts in. Even now, we have to pay attention to the teachings pastors are cutting out of their teachings, and not focus so much on what they're saying.

Certainly, they're saying lots of Biblical things, things that come from the Bible—like prosperity and healing. But the Devil quotes the Bible too. They'll do lots of healings and deliverances, but if pastors leave out the Fundamentals, and they will not teach through the truths known as 'the unity of the spirit' (Ephesians 4:3-6), they're not strengthening anybody in the spirit. They're only tickling ears. They're not feeding souls.

The Antichrist is patient. He knows that if he just focuses on doing the things that the Christ is supposed to do, that eventually everyone will be amazed enough, and their desperation will become extreme enough for them to put their trust in him. He'll perform many signs and wonders. He'll draw people into faith in him through miracles, and then will take advantage of their desperation when the World is in chaos due to wars, famines, economic injustices, pestilences, and natural disasters.

Counterfeit vs. True

In order to not fall into the counterfeit claim of the Antichrist "I am God," you need to know very well what to expect from the authentic coming of Messiah Jesus. Everyone will see the genuine Messiah in the clouds when he comes. It will be extremely notable, like lightning that streaks from one side of the sky to the other.

... if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:26-27).

... he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other (Luke 17:22-24).

There are seven NT verses which warn us against false christs. Reading these, they might stir you to ask "Won't there only be one false christ, the Antichrist?" Why does the Bible speak of so many rising up? The answer is because with a new Temple, wars, earthquakes, social injustice, plagues, and the 7-Headed 10-Horned Beast (the very government Bible prophecies said was going to come) actually ruling the Mediterranean region, lots of people will be wondering whether it's the End or not. False prophets will have a lot of Bible fodder to work

with, and a lot to preach on. Many will follow them.

Messianic Expectations

It's natural for many people to present themselves as Messiah when messianic expectations are high. Soon after the Resurrection of Jesus, Dositheos the Samaritan arose in the mid-1st century, making an effort to persuade the Samaritans that he was the Messiah. There was a Theodas (Acts 5:36) and Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37) who made messianic claims right before the time of Jesus, and those men drew many followers. We know that many people thought that John the Baptist was the Messiah too (John 1:19-20), even though he told them he was not. But the most famous supposed messiah was Simon bar Kokhba, a military leader who led a revolt against the Romans. He died in battle in Israel in AD 135, which dashed the hopes of many Jews.

Messianic expectations will be high in the Last Times once again. Many will claim to be the Christ but only one in particular will stand out in the end. That one will conquer Israel's enemies—neighboring Arab countries. He will become manifest to the Jews through the declarations of a prophet who (apparently) has all the anointing of Elijah. The prophet will be the False Prophet. The man he proclaims to be the messiah is not. He will be the Antichrist, and he will capitalize on people's expectations of a savior.

For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many (Matthew 24:5; NASB).

Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and will mislead many (Mark 13:6; NASB).

And he said, "See to it that you are not misled; for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not go after them (Luke 21:8; NASB).

Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There he is,' do not believe him (Matthew 24:23; NASB).

And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, he is there'; do not believe him (Mark 13:21; NASB).

For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so

as to mislead, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24; NASB).

... for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect (Mark 13:22; NASB).

From the warnings Jesus' gave, we gather that we must be wary of men who *arise*, that is, who become popular. These men will draw a great numbers of followers—which is what the Bible means when it says *people go after them*. These false christs will appear in a certain places like deserts, towns, or cities. They will not appear in the clouds. The real Christ will! Their followers will cry out "Here he is!" as their purported Christ performs great signs and wonders.

The Lead-in to Apostasy

The doctrines of today's Church lead us straight into the Apostasy. The behavior of most pastors also leads us into the Apostasy. Most pastors do not teach the Doctrine of Christ, and (indirectly) they deny that Jesus is the Christ. How so? By not stating that God anointed Jesus as the Christ. Their silence is a denial of the Father.

Such silence is a demonstration that someone does not know the Father or the Son. What stops the Antichrist from misleading people who have never had foundations in the Faith. In the beginning of their Christian life, nobody taught them what it means for Jesus to be the Christ, so there's no way for that teaching to remain in them.

Who is the Liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the Antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father (1 John 2:22-24).

Today's Christians don't understand basic truths like how Jesus testified of himself, and the Father testified of Jesus. If they can't grasp this concept, then they don't know Jesus or his Father.

'In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.' Then they asked him, 'Where is your Father?' 'You do not know me or my Father,' Jesus replied. 'If you

knew me, you would know my Father also' (John 8:17-19).

Today's Christians deny God any time they refuse to recognize that Jesus came from God. If they won't affirm that God sent Jesus, then they don't know God.

Then Jesus, still teaching in the Temple courts, cried out, 'Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but He who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me (John 7:28-29).

Today's Christians are clueless when you explain to them that Jesus got his glory from God. If they can't comprehend this reality, then they simply don't know the Father.

If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word (John 8:54-55).

The people who hate us do not know the One who sent Jesus.

But they will treat you like this because of my name, since they do not know the One who sent me (John 15:21).

People who hurt us have not known the Father or Jesus.

They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me (John 16:3).

Things to Know Ahead of Time

Do you know Jesus? Do you know the Father? If you don't know them, the Antichrist will be able to deceive you easily. Jesus is the Christ—but what does that mean? It means that he's the One whom God anointed. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," Jesus preached. He stressed that he was sent from God, that he spoke the words of God, and that he was resurrected by God.

Jesus will return in God's timing to rule because 'God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus' (Acts 2:36). He will return with authority because 'all authority in Heaven and Earth has been given to him' from the Father (Matthew 28:18).

The Antichrist will be an imposter. He will have 95% of the qualities of the true Christ—wisdom, authority, bravery, power, and grace. He'll fulfill 95% of the prophecies of the

Christ—defeating the enemies of Israel, being a Jewish king, resurrecting from the Dead, being declared Messiah by a prophet, doing miracles, being a priest, speaking wisely, and saving people. That’s exactly why Jesus’ return in the clouds of Heaven and his being visible to all humankind are the two things he most emphasized when he taught on the Last Times. He wanted us to be able to discern who the true Christ would be, and not to believe the subtle lies of the Antichrist.

... false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time (Matthew 24:24-25).

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