

# SCOFFERS AND SINNERS

## Introduction

As the end approaches, the evil that drives the human heart reaches antediluvian proportions (Luke 17:26).

- *“And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.... And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”* (Matthew 24:10, 12).
- Global anarchy against God will develop. *“These shall make war with the Lamb,” but the promise quickly comes, “the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful”* (Revelation 17:14).

In the apostolic writings, this estrangement will finally penetrate the church. Paul notes that in the last days (a period just preceding the Second Coming<sup>1</sup>) that would bring perilous times (II Timothy 3:1-5):

- He then lists the horrendous sins that would exist.
- That “church-associated” rebellion is a disquieting array of transgressions!

Jude disclosed that even back then ***certain fearless people*** (v. 4) had already slipped unnoticed into the center of the Christian community (vs 12) through deceptive friendship and flattery (vs 16). They were heretics, shadowy characters, ungodly and immoral. That was just a little over three decades from the Cross!

“The doctrine of grace seems to have been understood by them as giving them license (cf. Rom. 6:1) to engage in sexual excess (... see Mark 7:22; Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:2, 7, 18).... Their version of grace was employed in the service of lust.”<sup>2</sup>

Recognizing this fearful shift from the purity of the gospel, Paul questioned:

*“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid”* (Romans 6:1-2).

- Though Jude sees this as a contemporary curse, he associated this apostasy as if it were the very end of time (vs 18).
- This had been highlighted by echoing Enoch’s eschatological concerns:

*“Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: ‘See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of*

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<sup>1</sup> Earle, Ralph; “2 Timothy”; In Gaebelin, Frank E., general editor, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 (Zondervan; Grand Rapids, MI 49530; 1981), p. 406.

<sup>2</sup> Green, Gene L.; *Jude & 2 Peter* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), p. 60.

*them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him [the Lord]” (Jude 14-15 – NIV).*

Of major interest, Jude announced that those defectors would not receive the “eschatological gift” of the Holy Spirit (vs 19).<sup>3</sup> Their crusades and lives were ordered by another power.

It is a mistake to think or assume that that “time” is still in the future. It is additionally fatal to conclude that these prophecies apply to “other churches.” This **sign** of the end is the **infiltration of sin into the church**. This subsequently alters the ability to understand truth. *“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (II Timothy 3:7).*

### **Urgency because there is an End**

Jude penned that brief book around 66 A.D. It was a “flash” meant to ignite concern over sin, divisiveness and moral decline in that young Christian church.

- Earnestly seek for the holy faith you once had” (vs 3, 20).
- “Remember the purity of truth given by the apostles.”
- It was doubly urgent because the period of a catastrophic Jewish “end” had commenced. Three and a half years later, in 70 A.D., the “holy city” of Jerusalem was desolated and the Jewish center of worship was destroyed! The second and last temple was leveled. Over a million perished.

Because of their “end” understanding, Jude, as well as the other New Testament writers, assumed that those many signs related to desolation meant that the eschaton was imminent (Acts 2:17; I Corinthians 10:11; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 1:2, 9:26; I Peter 1:20).

- “The ‘last time’ (Jude 18) was perceived as the era of final prophetic fulfillment.”<sup>4</sup>
- A “time” when evil forces will be especially active within the church (I Timothy 4:1-3, II Timothy 3:1-9).

Because of this, many current expositors assume that the *end of time* began immediately post-Cross. That notion deflects the vital concern that even Jude raises. There are conclusive studies that reveal that it is to be reapplied specifically to the present. The “grand finale” of what they described and predicted is an indictment of the church today.

- Prophecy invites us to identify those “intruders” as a spiritual threat to God’s community of believers.
- Evil desires, turning grace into an excuse to sin, disrespect for reverence of what God established and divisive spirits (Romans 16:17, I Corinthians 1:10, Galatians 5:20, Titus 3:9-11) are engrossing Biblical markers of these individuals and times.

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<sup>3</sup> Bauckham, Richard J.; *Word Biblical Commentary, Jude and II Peter* (Word Books, Publisher; Waco, TX), vol. 50, p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> Green, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

## Other Subversive Issues

Misinterpreting or even jeering at prophecy, especially as it applies to the period immediately preceding the Second Coming (*parousia*), is intimated as spiritually offensive and another sign:

Paul noted in his second letter to the Thessalonians this intriguing statement:

*“That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. **Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition**”* (II Thessalonians 2:2-3). Christ won't return until we recognize the rebellion in the church and who the antichrist really is!

These threats relate, once again, to “believers” who promote a prophetic understanding that is tainted and not accurate! Scholar Richard Bauckham even concluded that these individuals set themselves up as teachers within the church, creating serious misunderstanding of what lies just ahead.<sup>5</sup>

- Stunning! They actually fulfill prophecy. Peter pressed this further: *“You should remember the predictions of the apostles related to this”* (II Peter 3:1-2, paraphrased).
- There is not only sin within the church, there are deceptive teachers regarding prophecy. What are they implying? That Jesus is about to come – without focusing on distinct signs.

In the “final age” there would be those with the opposite claim – scoffers (vs 3; cf. Jude 17-18). Beware!

## Peter Delves Deeper into this Issue

This apostle came face to face with these skeptics. This issue actually brought cataclysmic threats to the young Christian church. He can be heard with pathos in his voice – first describing who these people were:

- *“With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed – an accursed brood! ... For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, **they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error**”* (II Peter 2:14, 18).
- Then he passionately states: *“**Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts**”* (II Peter 3:3).
- Peter alludes to the Old Testament prophecies where scoffers mocked God's delayed judgments (Amos 9:10, Malachi 2:17), even though punishment was predicted (Isaiah 5:18-20, Jeremiah 5:12-24).
- Paul had additional deep anxiety for similar doubters (Acts 13:41)!

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<sup>5</sup> Bauckham, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

Though these apostolic concerns related to contemporary issues, the prism of light in those messages shines forward to the period immediately preceding the Second Coming. For Peter, the end had arrived. But – he addresses these concerns with **prophetic certainty** of the pending *parousia* and eschatological judgment.<sup>6</sup>

What is to be grasped are the issues they were burdened with, as critical descriptions of last-day *signs* of Christ's coming.

Peter began his final discourse with the pointed phrase: "*Above all know this!*" (paraphrased) (II Peter 3:3). Before anything else this matter must be grasped!

*"And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as [they were] from the beginning of the creation"* (II Peter 3:4).

- Mockers, claiming that there is a delay in the coming of Christ, are a sign of the end. Once again, a misapplication of the prophetic messages.
- The apostle says it is crucial to understand this. Why?
- Their claim is not true – a conclusive issue in his writing. It is leading others astray! Clearly, **if this is accepted**, the culmination of history – and the plan of redemption – won't be understood.

Much of Peter's logic and arguments reflect Jude's burdens. They both perceived that the era of final prophetic fulfillment had come.

- Mocking/scoffing is an act even beyond disbelief. It attempts to bring insult and derision to those adherents of prophetic fulfillment.
- Ultimately, it is a contemptuous spirit against God.

These evil persons scoff at the non-fulfillment of prophecy but are actually a sign of its fulfillment. Such skepticism was reported on by Ezekiel:

- *"Son of man, what is this proverb you have in the land of Israel: 'The days go by and every vision comes to nothing'?"* (Ezekiel 12:22 – NIV).
- He also unfurled the key sins of God's chosen in Ezekiel 8!

"The form of the question has a familiar ring for anyone who knows Scripture. The question of the false teachers is a demand for evidence regarding 'the promise of his coming' (on the advent or ..., *Parousia*, of the Lord). The heretics have given their own promise of 'freedom' (2:19) but at the same time place in doubt the divine promises (3:9; cf. Acts 26:6; Rom. 4:20; 9:8; 15:8; Gal. 3:17, 21; Heb. 10:36)."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Green, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

## The Last Days Orientation

The burden that the last days had arrived captivated Paul in his second letter to Timothy (cf. Acts 2:17, II Timothy 3:1, Hebrews 1:2, James 5:3, Jude 18).

- **“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come... Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away”** (II Timothy 3:1, 5).
- “Above all, this” – know that **in the “last days”** this apostasy will **infiltrate the church**.

Again, to many the generic “last days” is a period of time that extends between the two advents of Christ.<sup>8</sup> This is called by some, the Messianic Age – the period beginning immediately post-resurrection. The “last days,” however, was not an inaugural statement of an extended eschatological age!

- The “Messianic Age” of today was assumed by the apostles be the *Parousia Age*.<sup>9</sup>

In Daniel and Revelation, however, an **interlude** exists between the resurrection and the Second Coming. The *signs* and *timing prophecies* elsewhere provide major clues for **when** the latter begins (cf. Daniel 8 and 12; Revelation 13 and 17). They pinpoint an “appointed time,” when the final conflict occurs with the antichrist taking center stage.

The apostle’s conviction of the impending eschaton are riveting sentiments we are to adopt! Those messages are eschatological missives for us!

There are a large number of timing prophecies that **do tell “when”** it is “even at the doors” – the indictment becomes forensic. Tied to the “signs,” these prophecies provide stunning information which leaves no excuse for being unprepared.

- The imperative today is to address both the “apparent” delay (really a tarrying time within prophecy) and fulfillment.<sup>10</sup>
- The invitation is to clearly delineate the period between the fall of Jerusalem and the Lamb’s marriage to the New Jerusalem.

## The Judicial Message

Peter calls the verbal doubters “willingly ignorant” (vs 5). They could know otherwise, but are going to perish in a fire at the Day of Judgment like the antediluvian world did in the flood.

- His growing harbinger – the “day of judgement” (2:9, 1:19) or “day of the Lord” (3:10) or “day of God” (3:12), will bring destruction (2:1, 3).
- This judgment of the world will have personal consequences for the willingly ignorant.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Blum, Edwin A.; “2 Peter”; In Gaebelin, Frank E., general editor, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Zondervan; Grand Rapids, MI 49530; 1981), p. 284.

<sup>9</sup> Ellingworth, Paul; *The new International Greek Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI; 1993), p. 93.

<sup>10</sup> Bauckham, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>11</sup> Green, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

For the end of time believers must have faith in God's promises (Acts 26:6; Romans 4:20, 9:8, 15:8; Galatians 3:17, 21). There might be a sense of uncertainty, but the outcome is sure: *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13).

Paul touched on this "wait":

- *"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry"* (Hebrews 10:36-37).
- Here, he introduces an important message that was predicted in Habakkuk 2:2-3 that there will be a "tarrying time." "Wait, it soon will not tarry."
- It is not a delay – but a planned period – a tarrying/waiting time.

Could those early Christians have understood that? Probably! Part of Daniel's prophecy within chapters 8 to 12 (the *ha hazon*) was **sealed** until the end of time. But the 490 years and 2300 years (the *mareh*) was not. Jesus even told them they could know more if they went to Daniel (Matthew 24:15). Some timing issues, however, were not for the disciples to know (Acts 1:7)!

Their loyalty to God must rest ultimately on faith, on a personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. For them, time was not to be the main issue.

- Peter highlighted the spiritual by saying: *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promises"* (II Peter 3:9).
- God doesn't want anyone to perish and wants everyone to repent (vs 9).
- Time must not threaten faith. A day is as a thousand years; a thousand years as a day with God (vs 7)! He is the God of "whenever."

But – there is, perhaps, a unique caveat that Peter gives – an admonition: The "day of the Lord" will come as a thief, a surprise to the unprepared, and then the wicked will cease to exist.

*"Knowing this will all happen, what manner of persons ought you to be in all your conversations and lives?"* (vs 11).

- Then, in passionate language, he comes back to the promise:
- *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless"* (II Peter 3:13-14).

### **A Metaphor for Today**

Into the Christian community false teachers come who raise doubts about the timing of end-time prophecy – specifically the unique era when Christ would return.

- This is in itself a sign that the end is near.
- When Peter wrote this, approximately 66 A.D. (as did Jude), he was unaware of the impending fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., when over a million Jews would be killed.
- That sign was precise. It was one of the “ends” noted in the Olivet Discourse.

The apostle addresses issues that will antedate the eschaton! The problems then within the church are now eerily the same and crescendoing:

1. The *imminence* of Christ’s return takes a back-burner to His “soon” return!
2. The rise in sexual sin within the “*body*” of Christ intensifies (with a vast array of evils).
3. Rejection of Creation (a Peter issue in verse 5) is added to the list, most intriguingly. This is an issue which has spawned many “Christian agencies” to refute evolution.

His referencing of these signs needs enunciating within today’s eschatological discourse bolstered by Peter’s imperative, “Knowing this first....”

- Yet - within the Christian world, into most independent segments and denominations, these issues are minimized and even belittled – unless it relates to Israel (another topic).
- And – there is an attenuated interest in addressing sin. Jesus said twice, Go and “sin no more” (John 5:14, 8:11). In fact, it is tolerated and promoted by “Christian” leaders through the “doctrine” of “non-judgmentalism.”<sup>12</sup>

There has been a demise among pastors of emphasizing theology and Biblical truth and replacing it with popular psychology. This has been trending now for 25-30 years.<sup>13</sup>

“The infusion of psychology into the teaching of the church has blurred the line between behavior modification and sanctification. ***The path to wholeness is the path of spiritual sanctification. It is foolish to exchange the Wonderful Counselor, the spring of living water, for the sensual wisdom of earth and the stagnant water of behaviorism.***”<sup>14</sup>

The minimization of the end times is intensified through the doctrinal view that it began at the Cross. Many Protestant leaders have openly bruised eschatological concerns:

“Rick Warren openly discouraged readers of *The Purpose Driven Life* from studying prophecy. Taking unwarranted and unbiblical liberty in interpreting Acts 1:6-8, he stated that Jesus told His disciples that the details of His return “are none of your business”—that they needed to focus on “fulfilling” their “mission” rather than “figuring out prophecy.” [Contextually, trying to apply God’s purpose for today]

<sup>12</sup> <http://the-end-time.blogspot.com/2015/03/the-plague-of-non-judgmentalism.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/the-pulse/50413-how-preaching-moved-from-solid-theology-to-pop-psychology>

<sup>14</sup> McArthur, John; [http://www.sermonaudio.com/new\\_details3.asp?ID=26353](http://www.sermonaudio.com/new_details3.asp?ID=26353)

“In 2006 emerging church figure Brian McLaren said: “... he [Jesus] tells them it’s **none of their business** to speculate about how God plans to work out history, and then he **gives them a mission to accomplish.**” [Similar intent of Warren]

“The late Robert Schuller had been teaching for years: “**Don’t let eschatology stifle your long-term thinking.**”<sup>15</sup>

We are commanded to “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen*” (II Peter 3:18) – and rightly divide the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15).

- “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children*” (Hosea 4:6).

From what we now understand from Peter, we have convincing signs by which we may know Jesus is coming quickly because of what we now see happening to the **church**.

- That is quickly reinforced by the eschatological timing prophecies within Scripture – especially the gospels, Daniel and Revelation.

Apocalyptic changes are breaking upon the body of Christ. “*So then, dear friends, since you’re looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him*” (II Peter 3:14 – NIV).

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Prophecy Research Initiative – non-profit 501(c)3 © 2017  
*EndTime Issues...*, Number 199, March 2, 2017

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.spiritual-research-network.com/rick-warren-prophecy.html>