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# Apostasy on christian era: a brief study on the term “last days”

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This paper deals with a brief analysis on the term *last days* and its correlates throughout the Bible with emphasis on the Pastoral Epistles. The paper is split into three parts: the first one deals with some Old Testament passages containing allusions to the messianic age or to the end of History. The second one explores the Christological meaning of the term *last days* and its correlates in the New Testament. Finally, the third one focuses on the Pastoral Epistles by assessing the phrases *in later times* (1 Tim 4:1), *in the later days* (2 Tim 3:1), and *the time is coming* (2 Tim 4:3). The analysis of the data will show that Paul and the other New Testament writers understood that they were already living on the last days, and that the apostasy which was already at work in their own time would increase until reach its climax on the time immediately before the second Coming of Christ.

**Keywords:** Last days; Pastoral Epistles; New Testament.

## Apostasia na era cristã: um breve estudo sobre o termo “últimos dias”

Este artigo trata de uma breve análise do termo últimos dias e seus correlatos em toda a Bíblia, com ênfase nas Epístolas Pastorais. O

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papel é dividido em três partes: o primeiro trata de algumas passagens do Antigo Testamento que contêm alusões à era messiânica ou ao fim da História. O segundo explora o significado cristológico do termo últimos dias e seus correlatos no Novo Testamento. Finalmente, o terceiro enfoca as Epístolas Pastorais, avaliando as frases em *tempo posteriores* (1Tm 4: 1), *nos dias posteriores* (2Tm 3: 1), e *o tempo está chegando* (2Tm 4: 3). A análise dos dados mostrará que Paulo e os outros escritores do Novo Testamento entenderam que eles já estavam vivendo nos últimos dias, e que a apostasia que estava em ação em seu próprio tempo aumentaria até atingir seu clímax no tempo imediatamente anterior à segunda vinda de Cristo.

**Palavras-chave:** Últimos dias; Epístolas Pastorais; Novo Testamento.

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## The *last days* in the OT

The phrase *the latter (or last) days* (*ve'acharith hayyamim*) is mentioned 14 times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> In the Old Testament such a phrase had not yet developed a technical meaning, so that expressions like *in the following days*, *in the future*, and *in days to come* are frequently indicated as better translations than the expression *the latter (or last) days* (LARONDELLE, 1991). In fact, some scholars even argue that it is not possible to translate *ve'acharith hayyamim* as *the latter (or last) days* in any of its occurrences if one takes into account the context of the passages in which they occur (WILLIS, 1979). However, other scholars see several of such passages (e.g., Isa 2:2, Mic 4:1; Hos 3:5; Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28; 10:14) as revealing a “definite concentration on the Messianic hope or age to come” (LARONDELLE, 2007; WILLIS, 1979).

## The Messianic Age

Three of the passages mentioned above (Isa 2:2, Mic 4:1; Hos 3:5) seem to establish links with the Messianic Age. According to Gerhard Pfandl commentators agree that Isaiah 2:2 “describes the ideal future age

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 49:1; Numbers 24:14; Deuteronomy 4:30; 31:29; Isaiah 2:2; Mic 4:1; Jeremiah 23:30; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 2:28; 10:14; Hosea 3:5.

for Israel, which for many is connected with the coming of the Messiah. The question on which they differ is the fulfillment aspect” (PFANDL, 1990). He adds that there have been three main opinions on how to interpret the phrase *the latter days* in this passage: 1) a description of the Messianic age applied to the Gospel era; 2) a reference to the period after the second coming of Jesus, i.e., the Millennial Kingdom, so that God’s original purpose for Israel will be finally completed; and 3) an expression of the writer’s faith in the future of the Hebrew religion (PFANDL, 1990, p. 229-244).

Pfandl argues that the third view seems closest to the truth. However, he differs from most scholars who defend it in the sense that Isaiah 2:2-4 “is not simply the writer’s hope for the future, but what God had planned for Israel after the exile, if the nation had fulfilled the condition of obedience” (PFANDL, 1990, p. 242). He concludes that *the latter days* in Isaiah 2:2 “is eschatological in the sense that the ideal future kingdom which should have come after the exile, if Israel had remained true to God, would have issued into a golden age in which God’s plan with Israel would have been realized and at the end of which the Messiah would have appeared”. The same can be said regarding Micah 4:1 since it is almost a perfect parallel to Isaiah 2:2 (HILLERS, 1984, p. 49-53). Anyway, Pfandl synthesizes the usage of “the latter days” in Micah 4:1 by saying that in this context such an expression “seems to refer to the future which reaches down to the times of the Messiah who is announced in Micah 5”(PFANDL, 1990).

With regards to the expression “the latter days” in Hosea 3:5, Pfandl (1990) holds that it points towards the return from the Babylonian captivity after 539 B.C. However, he argues that there is something more to be considered, which has to do with the identity of “David their king”. He claims that biblical evidence seems to favor the idea that “Hosea looks beyond the exile to “the latter days,” i.e., the eschatological age of the Messiah, when Israel would be expected to return wholeheartedly to Yahweh and his Messiah” (PFANDL, 1990, p. 251-252). In accordance with that thought, Duane A. Garrett ensures that the phrase “David their king” is a messianic prophecy. He argues that

The phrase does not mean simply that the Israelites would again submit to the Davidic monarchy and so undo Jeroboam’s rebellion. Had that been the point, we would expect the text to say that they would return to the “house of David.” Instead we see “David their king” set alongside of Yahweh as the one to whom the people return in pious fear.



This “David” cannot be the historical king, who was long dead, but is the messianic king (GARRETT, 1997, p. 104).

## The End of History

The phrase *the latter days* in the Old Testament appear to vary in meaning according to the context of the passage in which it is found (PFANDL, 1990). Besides its messianic meaning in Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:1; Hosea 3:5, it seems that in Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 2:28 and 10:14 it is used to refer to the end of human history.

In Ezekiel 38:16, *the latter days* “refer first of all to the time after the exile when this prophecy could have found a fulfillment”. This verse is within a passage which is universally seen by conservative scholars as the background for Revelation 20 (STEFANOVIC, 2009, p. 575). As a matter of fact, in Revelation 20 we can find a reference to its complete fulfillment after the Millennium, which coincides with the end of history (PFANDL, 1990, p. 288-289).

In Daniel 2:28 the phrase *in the latter days* is the translation of the Aramaic expression *ve’acharith yomayya’*, which is an exact rendering of the Hebrew *ve’acharith hayyamim* (BENNETT, 1986, p.347).<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew counterpart appears in Daniel 10:14. Douglas Bennett argues that in both passages the phrase *the latter days* “represents a technical term for the end of the world”. In turn, Hartman and Di Lella (apud BENNETT, 1989, p. 349) explain that

The translation ‘future times’ is possible, but it is not what the author intended. ‘(God in heaven) has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the ‘*ah<sup>a</sup>ri<sup>t</sup>* of the days’ (2:28). The point of the vision does not lie in the course of future events but in the destruction of the colossus and in the coming of an indestructible kingdom (vs. 44). Thus the outcome [...] is what is intended, and not the future in general.

Pfandl (1990, p.289) develops the same reasoning by claiming that although the phrase *the latter days* in Daniel 2:28 and 10:14 refers “to the future history of earthly kingdoms viewed from the standpoint of

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<sup>3</sup> As to the specific case of Daniel 2:28 the phrase *the latter days* does not come from the Hebrew *ve’acharith hayyamim* but from the Aramaic *ve’acharith yomayya’*.



Danie, in both cases, it reaches down to the end of time when human history will be replaced by God’s eternity”.

In addition, it is remarkable the fact that the prepositional phrase *’aḥarê denah* (*after this*) in Daniel 2:29 and 45 was translated by the LXX as *ep’ eschâtôn tōn hēmerōn* (*in the last days*), precisely the same expression which is used in 2 Pet 3:3 and appears in Hos 3:5, Micah 4:1, and Ezekiel 38:16. The LXX reading of *’aḥarê denah* (*after this*) in Daniel 2:29-45 may suggest that the time of the fulfillment of this prophecy has to do with the end of the human history.

Therefore, on the basis of we have seen so far it is possible to conclude that while some occurrences of *ve’acharith hayyamim* in the Old Testament should be translated by generic expressions such as *in the following days*, *in the future*, and *in days to come* (Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Deut 4:30; 31:29; Jer 23:30; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39) — taking into account the context of the passages in which they are found — other passages point towards more specific meanings such as the messianic age and the end of the human history: 1) the messianic age (Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1; Hos 3:5); 2) The end of the human history (Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28; 10:14).

## The Last Days and its Christological Meaning in the NT

The phrase *last days* is found five times in the New Testament and is the translation of three similar Greek expressions: 1) *ep’ eschatōn tōn hēmerōn* (2 Pet 3:3); 2) *en [tais] eschatais hēmerais* (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1; Jas 5:3); and 3) *ep’eschatou tōn hēmerōn* (Heb 1:2). Three other combinations involving the term *éschatos* are also seen elsewhere: *en kairō(i) eschâtō(i)*/in the last time (1 Pet 1:5); *ep’ eschâtou tōn chrónōn* /in the last times (1 Pet 1:20); and *ep’ eschâtou chrónou*/in the last time (Jude 18). This section is divided into two parts. The first one deals with four passages containing the phrase *last days* (Acts 2:17; Heb 1:2; Jas 5:3; 2 Pet 3:3) and the second one deals with three passages containing a combination of *éschatos* with either *kairós* or *chrónos* (1 Pet 1:5, 20; Jude 18) (LARONDELLE, 1991, p. 32; LARONDELLE, 2007, p. 362).<sup>4</sup> The passage in 2 Timothy

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<sup>4</sup> On the Johannine literature it is possible to find other phrase presenting some degree of similarity to the term *the last days* and its correlates, i.e. *at the last day*. Never-

3:1 as well as two other ones in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 4:3) will be analyzed in the next section.

## The Last Days

In the New Testament the phrase *the last days* has been understood as a technical term for the Messianic or Christian age (LARONDELLE, 2007, p. 362). The apostles' usage of such a phrase imply "that the end of the ages of the old covenant era had arrived" (LARONDELLE, 2007, p. 30).

In Acts 2:17 the phrase *the last days* introduces a long and almost *ipsis litteris* quotation from Joel 2:28-32 (LXX, 3:1-5). It is remarkable the fact that when beginning his sermon by quoting a text from the Old Testament, Peter does not follow either the LXX or the MT. He replaces the Greek *metá tauta*— the equivalent for the Hebrew *‘atêrêy-ken* — (both meaning *after these things*) by an expression of greater eschatological purport such as *en tais eschátiais hêmérais*.<sup>5</sup> This fact reflects Peter's conviction that "the messianic age had already dawned in the resurrection of Christ, that we are indeed already living in the final days of God's saving history." (POLHILL, 1992, p. 109) Nevertheless, a close reading of Acts 2:17-21 in comparison to Joel 2:28-32 will demonstrate that the fulfillment of such prophecy is taking place only in part. LaRondelle (1991, p. 29) explains that "from the apostolic viewpoint the fulfillment of the 'last days' does not require an immediate fulfillment of each detail". In fact, the apostles' usage of the phrase *last days* "suggests that the first and the second comings of Christ are an inseparable unit" (LARONDELLE, 1991, p. 49) once the complete fulfillment of this prophecy is to take place before the second coming (NICHOL, 1977, p. 946).

In Hebrews 1:2 the author's usage of the demonstrative pronoun *these (toutôn)* to modify the phrase *last days* gives the certainty that the *last days* coincide with the time of the writer (ELLINGWORTH, 1993, p. 93). It also constitutes a *hapax legomenon* both in the NT and in the LXX,<sup>6</sup>

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theless, it will not be analyzed in this paper for distancing in meaning from the other ones. As LaRondelle observes, the phrase *at the last day* "is reserved to designate the apocalyptic events of the resurrection of the saints at the coming of Christ" in John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24 and "the final judgment of unbelievers" in John 12:48.

<sup>5</sup> For more details, see Josep Rius-Camps, "Las Variantes de la Recension Occidental De Los Hechos de los Apóstoles," *Filología Neotestamentaria* 8, n. 15 (1995), p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> We can find a similar structure in Zechariah 8:9,15 (*en tais hemérais tautais*) and in Acts 3:24 (in *oi profetai [...] elálêsen [...] Tás hêméras tautas*), but nothing equal to He-



and demonstrates the author's intention in linking the *last days* with the time the *Son has spoken*. Whereas the verb *having spoken* *lalēsas* /λαλήσας (v. 1) refers to God's revelation through the prophets of the Old Testament, the verb *has spoken*/*elalēsen* (v. 2) refers to God's revelation through Jesus in the New Testament. The perfect balance between OT times and NT times is given by the terms *pálai* (*in olden times*) and *epēschátou tōn hēmerōn toutōn* (*in these last days*) (LENSKI, 1938, p. 31). Accordingly, it can be affirmed that *has spoken*/*elalēsen* (v. 2) remits to the incarnation of Jesus as prophesized by the OT prophets and that the prepositional phrase *in these last days* is a reference to the Christian era. This concept is confirmed by a brief allusion to the Christ-event in verse 4: “*After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*”, and is fully developed throughout all the book of Hebrews.

In James 5:3 the phrase *in the last days* is within a paragraph (Jas 5:1-6) which contains both a denunciation against social injustice similar to those made by the prophets of the Old Testament<sup>7</sup> and striking links with Matthew 6:19-21.<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson explains that “the sins against which OT writers inveighed (see Lev 19:13; Deut 24:15; Mal 3:5) are taking place in James's day” (CARSON, 2007, p. 1009). Although it is clear that the author presents a denunciation against the social injustice, the context helps us perceive that there is something more in the text. James' usage of the phrase *Lord of Hosts* (5:4) — often used by the prophets in the threatening announcements of judgment (ROEHR; FRANZMANN, 1998)<sup>9</sup> — and other judgment imagery, as well as the fact that he mentions *the coming of the Lord* in 5:7-8, place the *last days* in the context of the *parousia*. In this sense, the passage allows us to make two observations. First, “*the last days* [...] refer to the present [apostolic] time

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brews 1:2. See Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 93. Another similar phrase can be found in Luke 24:18; however, the context easily indicates a completely different meaning. See Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida (1994, p. 6).

<sup>7</sup> Also noteworthy are the linguistic correspondences with the Wisdom Literature (Sir 12:10; 14:19; 29:10; Job 13:28; Ps 21:19) and particular passages of the prophetic section in the Hebrew Bible (Isa 30:27; 50:9; 51:8; Jer 22:13; Amos 5:6; Ezek 7:19; 15:7).

<sup>8</sup> A visible correspondence between the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew has called the attention of several scholars. See Alicia J. Batten (2011, p. 381-390), for a liberal point of view; and Virgil V. Porter Jr, (2003), for a conservative standpoint.

<sup>9</sup> Kurt Richardson (1997, p. 208) argues that the judgment imagery provided by James makes this passage essentially eschatological.



of fulfillment” (MOO, 2000, p. 215); second, there is a movement in the text from the apostolic times to the second coming of Jesus.

In 2 Peter 3:3, the *last days* are mentioned in the context of the fulfillment of the “predictions of the *holy prophets* and the commandment of the Lord and Savior *through your apostles*” (2 Pet 3:2; italics supplied) (DAVIDS, 2006, p. 260).<sup>10</sup> The fact that the phrase “the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles” is associated to “predictions of the holy prophets” indicates that the apostolic preaching is founded on the testimony of the prophets of the Old Testament, as it happened previously in the letter (see 2 Pet 1:16:21, especially v. 19). This fact locates the *last days* in the apostolic times. However, just as it occurs in James 5:3, it is possible to notice a movement from the apostolic times to the second coming of Jesus, since the motif of the scoffers has to do with the apparent *tardiness* of the *parousia* (2 Pet 3:4) (DAVIDS, 2006, p. 274).

#### *Eschatos associated to either kairós or chónos*

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The term *en kairō(i) eschatō(i)* (*in the last time*) in 1 Peter 1:5 is within a paragraph (1 Pet 1:3-9) which encompasses the three eras: past, present and future. In verse 3 Peter states that God “caused us to be born again to a living hope *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ* from the dead” (ESV). The resurrection of Christ is an event in the past that made possible the “being born again”. Even the “being born again” is also seen as a past event, which is confirmed by the usage of the verbal form *anagennēsas* (from *anagennāō*) — a participle in an aorist form translated as *to cause to be born again*. This means that Peter’s readers had already be born again. However just as children are not responsible for their birth, the human beings are not responsible for their “rebirth” (KELLY, 1969, p. 47–48).<sup>11</sup> The “being born again” is possible only because of what God has already done through Christ. For Peter, the resurrection of Christ is the basis for the current experience.

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<sup>10</sup> The reference to the *holy prophets* does not mean “the prophets active in the Jesus movement but the prophets of Israel”. Peter Davids argues that despite the terms *prophets* and *apostles* appear both in 2 Peter 3:3 and Ephesians 3:5, the case is not the same. The context of Ephesians 3:5 suggests that *prophets* and *apostles* belong to the same group, whereas in 2 Peter 3:3 there is no reason to think like that.

<sup>11</sup> Kelly calls attention to the resemblance of this statement by Peter with another one by Paul (See Eph. 2:4).





The outcome of what God has already done is introduced by a series of three *eis-* phrases: *eis elpída zōsan/to a living hope [...]*, *eis klêronomían/to an inheritance [...]*, and *eis sōtêrian/for a salvation [...]* Peter provides three adjectives (*imperishable, undefiled, and unfading*) and a participle perfect (*to kept, tereō*) to modify the noun *inheritance* in order to reinforce the idea that the results of the resurrection of Christ are already enjoyed in the present. Peter’s usage of the participle perfect of *têreō* indicates that the *inheritance* is really assured and its effects are at work. This concept is reaffirmed further by Peter’s suggestion that not only the *inheritance* has been kept (v. 4), but also the ones who receive it “are being guarded” (v. 5). Finally, the text moves to the future with the third *eis-* phrase. The ones who *were born again (past) to a living hope (present) and an inheritance (present) are being guarded by faith (present) for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (future), “at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (v. 7)* (ACHTEMEIER, 1996, p. 95, 97, 102).

In 1 Peter 1:20, one can perceive that the author is consistent with his allusions to the three eras. Even though it is clear by the context that “in the last times” is a reference to the apostolic times, since it is the time for the manifestation of the lamb that “was foreknown before the foundation of the world” (v. 20), the paragraph (1 Pet 1:13-21) presents a strong allusion to the future by mentioning the hope which is to be set “on the grace that *will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (v. 13). Regarding this statement, J. N. D. Kelly comments that “the object on which their hopeful gaze is to be focussed is the salvation which, as so loquently stated in the preceding paragraph, is already assured for baptized Christians and is about to be finally accomplished on the last day, when Christ will come again in glory” (KELLY, 1969, p. 66). That by *revelation of Jesus Christ* Peter meant the second coming seems to be clear by his usage of the term *apokálypsis (revelation)* in 1 Peter 4:13 (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:7). In short, Peter makes it clear that in the past “you were ransomed” (v. 18) “with the precious blood of Christ” (v. 19), i.e., *death*; God “raised him from the dead [i.e., *resurrection*] and gave him glory [i.e., *ascension*]” (v. 21). We have here a synthesis of the Christ-event. However, all the benefits of it will be fully concretized in the future (v. 13). The present is “the time of your exile” (v. 17) and a time of *faith* and *hope* (v. 21) since the fully concretization has not happened yet.

There seems to be no doubt that the phrase *in the last time* in Jude 18 refers to the time the readers of the letter were living (DAVIDS,



2006, p. 86). Jude writes the letter in order to warn the church as to the false teachers who were at work in his own time (v. 3-4). Thus he makes some comments regarding the sort of behavior he expects the members to demonstrate. The mainly one is probably found in verse 21, “keep yourselves in the love of God”, which must be performed through three present participles, i.e., *building* yourselves up [...], *praying* [...], and *waiting* [...] (v. 20-21). Peter Davids argues that the third one “involves eschatological hope, for[...] mercy is something experienced in the future rather than in the present” (DAVIDS, 2006, p. 96).

### *The Last Days/Times in the Pastoral Epistles*

Paul’s teachings regarding the *last days/times* indicate that his thought is not dissociated from the OT, neither from Christ’s nor the other apostles. Paul also understands that the first century church was already living on the so-called *last days*. This concept becomes clear by the fact that he introduces his view regarding the last days (1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1) within the context of an apostasy that was already at work in his own time (2 Tim 3:5; Titus 2:10-16; 2 Thess 2:7; 1 Cor 10:11). However, Paul points out that it there would be an increasing intensification of such an apostasy until the second coming of Christ (2 Thess 2:1-12).

## Apostasy in the First Century

In his monograph *Apostle of the Last Days: The Life, Letters, and Theology of Paul*, C. Marvin Pate claims that “there are a number of New Testament texts which indicate the eschatological apostasy began with Israel’s rejection of Jesus”.<sup>12</sup> In fact, a close reading of Paul’s statements concerning the false teachings will demonstrate that he sees them as a denial of Christ’s atoning sacrifice as the only means of salvation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See C. Marvin Pate, *Apostle of the Last Days: The Life, Letters, and Theology of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2013), 80.

<sup>13</sup> The false teachings are referred to several times throughout the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 1:3-11, 19-20; 4:1-10; 6:3-5; 2 Tim 1:15; 2:14, 16-18, 23; 3:1-9, 13; 4:3-4; Titus 1:10-16; 3:9-11). See Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann (1972, p. 65). The false teachings are mentioned for the first time in the Pastorals in 1 Tim. 1:3, which is within an unexpected structure consisting of a long sentence without a main clause. As

Although it is not easy to determine the nature of false teachings, since Paul “is not concerned to describe the teaching but to refute it” (KNIGHT, 1992, p. 72.), it seems that Paul has in mind at least three different groups: 1) Those who demanded for Gentile adherence to the Mosaic regulations; 2) Those who defended ascetic habits; and 3) Those with Gnosticizing tendencies.

## Demand for Gentile adherence to the Mosaic regulations

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Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton (1995, p. 15) observe, “an incomplete sentence in the Greek has some rhetorical functions”; in this case, an incomplete sentence “is in a context where the writer is deeply concerned with a problem and is writing about it in an extremely emotional state. Thus in the present passage one can imagine the concern of Paul with regard to what was happening in the Christian community to which Timothy belonged.” Max Turner highlights that “most (if not all) of Paul’s letters was written to particular historical circumstances” (see Max Turner, “Review of The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary by N. T. Wright,” *Themelios* 13, n. 2, 1988, p. 63). To use the words of Henry M. Shires (1996, p.34) in his letters Paul “answers specific questions”. Accordingly, a better comprehension of Paul’s theology in the Pastoral Epistles only is possible from a better comprehension of the teachings against which he is struggling. In general, it is assumed that the false teachings referred to in the Pastoral Epistles are of the same sort. See George W. Knight, (1992, p. 11); and Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, (Eds.) (1993, p. 662). A different opinion is introduced by Timothy Johnson. He argues that although Baur’s idea that the “myths and genealogies” (1 Tim 1:3) and the “falsely called *gnosis*” refer, respectively, to the developed Gnostic Systems and the heretic Marcion in the mid-second-century still influences the recent scholarship, “reconstructions have been frustrated by the fact that the combination of elements presented by all three letters (in composite) does not match precisely the profile of any known heresy”. The elements Johnson speaks about are the following: “teaching that the resurrection is already past (2 Tim 2:17-18); forbidding marriage and certain foods (1 Tim 4:3), advocating physical asceticism (1 Tim 4:8), being concerned with the observance of the Law (1 Tim 1:7; Tit 3:9), and practicing circumcision and purity regulations (Titus 1:10,15)”. See Luke Timothy Johnson (2001, p.73). In addition, he argues that there are two other difficulties to portrait Paul’s opponents in the second century: “The first is that each of the elements found in the Pastoral Letters can separately be found in Paul’s other letters (e.g., 1 Cor 7:1; 8:1-3; 15:17-19; Gal 4:8-10; Col 2:20-22). The second is the realization that a great deal of the characterization of the opponents is derived from the rhetorical conventions of antiquity governing polemic between opposing teachers” (JOHNSON, 2001, p. 73).



In Titus 1:10-16, Paul deals with the *circumcision* dilemma. T. R. Schreiner argues that “those who opposed Paul on the circumcision question have traditionally and probably rightly been called Judaizers. Judaizers were Jews who confessed Jesus as Messiah, believing also that the Mosaic Law and particularly the rite of circumcision should be required of Gentiles.” (AAGESON, 1992, p. 1089; KELLY, 1963, p. 44).<sup>14</sup> David Aune explains that at the core of the issue was the question whether or not a Gentile must first become a Jew in order to be a Christian. Even though, as Van Voorst postulates, the concern of the Judaizers has to do with the interest to maintain “the essence of Christianity and the unity of the Church” (VAN VOORST, 2000, p. 748), Paul rejects this foundation for faith and unity, once it lessens the significance of Christ’s sacrifice and, by this means, introduces an alternative path to salvation.

### *Asceticism*

The ones “who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods” in 1 Timothy 4:3 has been identified as an ascetic group. The New Testament shows that ascetic practices are not an end in itself, nor should they be seen as a means of salvation. In this sense, the New Testament perspective on ascetic practices differs from that of the Greco-Roman writers. Although the asceticism was not homogenous in the Greco-Roman world, all Greco-Roman philosophical schools “shared the view that the practice of self-restraint constituted the virtuous or holy life” (NYGAARD, 2016). The Cynics believed that their “asceticism would help them reach their goal of ‘happiness’ or ‘flourishing’ [...] [And] Philo viewed asceticism as a necessary preparation for ‘seeing God’ [...]” (NYGAARD, 2016). Rightly Cross and Livingstone classify this sort of asceticism as “an imitation of the sacrificial life of Christ and as a means of expiation of one’s own sins and those of others” (CROSS; LIVINGSTONE (Eds.), 2005, p. 115). In addition, “some Christians have overemphasized the role of ascetic practices. This prompted the apostle Paul to assert that ascetic practice alone is insufficient as a means of escaping from sin (see Col 2:20–23)” (GRENZ; GURETZKI; NORDLING, 1999, p. 16).

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<sup>14</sup> T. R. Schreiner (2003, p. 137). James W. Aageson (1992) argues that it is not possible assessing the “circumcision” dilemma without taking into account the problem Paul deals with in Galatians. For further details. In addition, J. N. D. Kelly (1963, p. 44) also sees Paul’s statements in 1 Timothy 1:3-4 under Jewish overtones. He claims that “the fables and genealogies must have had to do with allegorical or legendary interpretations of the O.T.”



For Paul, “salvation has been inaugurated because of the Christ event (1 Tim 1:15-16; 2:3-6; 2 Tim 1:9-10; 2:8-13; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7).<sup>15</sup> There is no alternative means of salvation.

### *Gnosticizing Tendencies*

The idea that by the term *gnōsis* (1 Tim 6:20) and mentioning those “saying that the resurrection has already happened” (2 Tim 2:18) Paul meant Gnosticism is, at best, no more than an anachronistic reading (HAWTHORNE; MARTIN; REID, 1993, p. 353). Edwin Yamauchi (1984, p. 23) argues that we should use the term *gnōsis* as a reference to the incipient Gnosticism and reserve the term Gnosticism for the fully developed system in the second century.

One of the main characteristics of the so-called proto-Gnosticism, or the Gnosticism itself, is that it denies or radically reinterprets the doctrine of the incarnation (AKIN, 2001, p. 228<sup>16</sup>), the resurrection and the last judgment (SCHREINER, 2003, p. 278), with emphasis on knowledge and wisdom as a means of salvation (FIENSY, 1997, p. 297)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> See C. Marvin Pate (2013, p. 267). As Pate observes, although salvation has been inaugurated because of the Christ event, it has a future dimension (1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 4:18; Titus 1:2; 2:13; 3:7). That is why “the Pastorals speak forcefully of the hope of Christ’s return (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:1, 8, 18; Titus 2:13)”. Nevertheless, none of this would be possible without the Christ event.

<sup>16</sup> See also Grant R. Osborne (2002, p. 204–205).

<sup>17</sup> All the ideas above and the ones who carried them are seen as forerunners of the fully developed Gnosticism in the second century. See Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 79. Douglas Mangum and E. Tod Twist notice that speaking of “gnostic or proto-gnostic or Gnosticizing makes little sense without a basic understanding of what the major ideas of Gnosticism were”. See Douglas Mangum and E. Tod Twist, 1 Timothy, ed. Douglas Mangum and Derek R. Brown, *Lexham Bible Guide* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 1 Timothy 1:4. For Fiency, a serious hindrance in addressing this issue is that defining Gnosticism is difficult since there were so many sects sharing certain Gnostic traits but quite different in other respects”. Fiency, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 221. See also Yamauchi, “Pre-Christian Gnosticism, the New Testament and Nag Hammadi in Recent Debate,” 23. Even though the Gnostic groups present remarkable differences as to its theology, ritual practice, and ethics (see Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 349),

David A. Fiensy (1997, p. 221-222) claims that “most [scholars] would accept that proto-Gnosticism or incipient Gnosticism existed before the New Testament. According to this view, some form of what became classical Gnosticism in the second century could well stand behind some of the problems alluded to in Paul’s letters”. In turn, Thomas D. Lea and David Alan Black observe that “this movement was growing during the last part of the first century” (LEA; BLACK, 2003, p. 553) and, therefore, it must have become a concern for Paul and other apostles.

That the New Testament community was concerned with an apostasy which was already going on can be also realized by John’s usage of the term *the last hour* (1 John 2:18). According to LaRondelle, this term “seems to be used by John to indicate the ultimate seriousness of the apostasy from the gospel truth within the apostolic church between A.D. 90 and 100”. For him, this crisis placed every church member in Asia Minor already in the eschatological ‘hour’ of decision”.<sup>18</sup>

In short, the fact that the false teachings Paul is struggling with present as common denominator a denial of Christ’s atoning sacrifice as the only means of salvation puts them at the same level of the apostasy aroused by the little horn (Dan 7 and 8), which was also foretold by Jesus in Matthew 24. In other words, probably Paul sees, in the current religious scenario, the roots of an apostasy to be fully developed in which a counterfeit of Jesus and His work would increasingly take place until reach its climax through the very fake of the second coming of Christ (2 Thess 2:9).

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## The End-Time Apostasy

Just as the other apostles, Paul also conceives the first coming of Christ as the inauguration of the last days.<sup>19</sup> Notwithstanding, some pas-

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many (or most) of them share certain features in common (see Cross and Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 687). A useful summary of such features is provided by Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999, p. 274).

<sup>18</sup> See Hans LaRondelle, *The Time of the End and the Last Days*, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> See Bernhard Mutschler, “Eschatology in the Pastoral Epistles,” In: Jan G. van der Watt, ed., *Eschatology of the New Testament and Some Related Documents* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), p. 386-387.

sages in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 4:1-5; 2 Tim 3:1-9; 4:1-5)<sup>20</sup> indicate Paul’s comprehension that the apostasy should continuously increase until it reaches its climax just before the second coming of Christ. This is the topic to be addressed next.

### The *Later Times* in 1 Timothy 4:1-5

The phrase *in later times* (*hystérois kairois* (1Tim 4:1) is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT. This fact makes its interpretation more complex since there are no parameters for comparison. However, it is usually taken as a synonymous for the term *the last days* in 2 Tim 3:1, although there has been some debate as to whether or not the two terms have the same meaning.<sup>21</sup>

The reference to the ones “who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods” (4:3) makes it clear that Paul is addressing a current problem. Besides, “the very fact that the mention of the false teaching is directly continued by its refutation (4:3–5) shows that the author regards it as a present danger” (DIBELIUS; CONZELMANN, 1972, p. 64).

On the other hand, some scholars have seen the term *later times* as “an idiomatic phrase for the period between Christ’s first and second comings” (BELLEVILLE, 2009, p. 81). Such a view is consistent with the way the New Testament uses the term *last days*, as we have seen above. Thomas C. Oden argues that “there appears to have been a prevailing tradition of prophetic expectation that the time between the first and second coming would be accompanied by apostasy, persecution, and the reign of evil (2 Tim 3:1; cf. Matt. 24:11–12; Mark 13:22; Acts

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<sup>20</sup> As Bernhard Mutschler notices, there are a series of other passages within the Pastoral Epistles with future and eschatological accents (1 Tim. 1:16; 2:15; 3:6,15; 4:6, 8, 10, 16; 5:6, 12, 24f.; 6:7, 9, 12, 14f., 19; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 2:5, 10, 11-13; 4:8, 18; Titus 1:2; 3:7). See Bernhard Mutschler, “Eschatology in the Pastoral Epistles, 362. Although a number of them might be eventually mentioned, they will not be assessed in this paper in view of the fact that its delimitation has to do with those texts containing, so to speak, *last days*-language. Also, a remarkable observation regarding Pauline Eschatology is made by Henry M. Shires. He says that “Paul [...] has given us more eschatological statements than any other New Testament writer”. For more details, see Henry M. Shires, *The Eschatology of Paul in the Light of Modern Scholarship*, 20, 42.

<sup>21</sup> For details, see Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, 88.

20:29–30; 2 Thess. 2:3–12; 2 Pet 3:3–7; Jude 17–18)”<sup>22</sup> Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann recognize that the opening of such passage has apocalyptic overtones. They claim that the adverb *rētōs* (*explicitly*) is found in prophecies (see Justin, *Apol.* 1.35.10; 63.10). They add that “what is *retos* meant is the ‘prophetic spirit’ (*pneuma profētikón*, see *ibid.* 1.63.10), which had prophesied the coming apostasy, e.g., in an apocalypse” (DIBELIUS; CONZELMANN, 1972, p. 64).

The phrase “the Spirit expressly says” (1 Tim 4:1) is quite similar to the phrase “the Spirit says” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). In fact, except for the adverb *expressly* it is the same wording. For George W. Knight, “the numerous occurrences of *tó pneuma légei* in Revelation demonstrate that this phrase can be used to refer to the revelation given by Jesus Christ[...] Such usage brings to mind the warning of Jesus concerning apostasy in Mt. 24:10, 11 and Mk. 13:22” (KNIGHT, 1992, p. 188).

A comparison as to the concepts in 1 Timothy 4:1-5 and Matthew 24 can show a close relationship between the two passages. Paul warns about an apostasy by using the verb *afistēmi* in 1 Timothy 4:1. Such a verb is interchangeable with *skandalízō*,<sup>23</sup> which is used in Matt 24:10 also in a context of apostasy. Thus it is “most likely that Paul has this source in view” (KNIGHT, 1992, p. 188). In Matthew 24, even though the events listed by Jesus have to be interpreted in the light of the questions introduced by the disciples (v. 1-3), also it is clear by the context that not only the destruction of Jerusalem, but also the second coming are focused by Jesus in His sermon. As Ranko Stefanovic observes, the Synoptic Apocalypse (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) shows “the experience of God’s people between the first century and the Second Coming”.<sup>24</sup> The idea that Paul has the apocalyptic sermon of Jesus in view and, consequently, not only the first century apostasy but also that one extending throughout the Christian age until the second coming can be reinforced by Acts 20:28-31 (NICHOL, 1980, p. 302), in which Paul mentions an apostasy to take place after his death.

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<sup>22</sup> See Thomas C. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: J. Knox Press, 1989, p. 58).

<sup>23</sup> Compare the Greek text of Matt 13:21; Mark 4:17, and Luke 8:13.

<sup>24</sup> See Ranko Stefanovic, p. 224. See also Richard Davidson, *This Generation Shall not Pass (Matt 24:34): Failed or Fulfilled Prophecy?*, and Paul Ray Jr., *Exegesis of Matthew 24:21-35: ‘This Generation’ and the Structure of Matthew 23-25*, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 8, n. 1-2, 1999, p. 206-217.





Another parallel between the two passages can be perceived by the *signs* and *wonders* performed by the false christs and false prophets in Matthew 24:24 and “deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” in 2 Timothy 4:1. The words *signs* and *wonders* appear together in the New Testament quite frequently. They are associated to either God (Acts 2:19; 15:12; Heb 2:4) and Jesus (John 4:48; Act 2:22; Rom 15:19) or the apostles (Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 2 Cor 12:12) and Moses, who is identified as a prophet of God and a type of Christ (Acts 7:36-37). Nevertheless, it is remarkable the fact that, in certain apocalyptic passages, they also appear together and associated either to false christs and prophets (Matt 24:24, Mark 13:22) or Satan himself (2 Thess 2:9). This fact places Matt 24:24 in the context of the great counterfeit to take place before the second coming of Jesus. Besides, the abrupt shift from the plural in Matthew 24:24 (*false christs and false prophets*) to the singular in Matthew 24:26 (*he*) “suggests that shortly before the coming of Christ a specific false christ will appear but not in the same way Jesus will come” (DYBDAHL, 2010, p. 1284).

The purpose of the *signs* and *wonders* in Matt 24:24; Mk 13:22, and 2 Thess 2:9<sup>25</sup> is clearly to deceive people, just as it is the case of the “deceitful spirits and teachings of demons”. Even though the phrase “deceitful spirits” is seen by some scholars as a reference to Paul’s opponents in Ephesus (LEA; GRIFFIN, 1992, p. 129), on the other hand the term “teachings of demons” is understood as applying to Satan and his rebelled angels as the primary source of the deception (MOUNCE, 2000, p. 237). Thus although the phrase “deceitful spirits” can be primarily applicable to Paul’s opponents, for extension it also can refer to spiritual beings. With respect to these terms, Ellen White comments, “In the epistle of Paul to Timothy, he foretells what will be manifested in the latter days. And this warning was for the benefit of those who should live when these things should take place. God revealed to his servant the perils of the church in the last days” (NICHOL, 1980, p. 326).

These agencies were at work not only in the first century, but throughout the Christian era, with maximum concentration in the time of the end (Rev 16:13-14), culminating with the greater of the counterfeits, which will be an attempt to imitate the second coming of Christ (2 Thess 2:9). In this

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed analysis as to the similarities between Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2, see Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible*, p. 52-65.

regard, the following comment to 1 Timothy 4:1 is very relevant: “Modern spiritualism, a prominent example of the ‘doctrines of devils,’ is merely a revival of the demon worship and witchcraft of the past. Its seductive influence will eventually sweep the world, Christian and non-Christian alike, and prepare the way for Satan’s last great delusion” (NICHOL, 1980, p. 303).

### The Last Days in 2 Timothy 3:1-5

Paul’s statement about the last days in 2 Timothy 3:1 is to be interpreted in the light of what he says in 1 Timothy 4:1 as well as in consonance with the way the term is used elsewhere in the New Testament. As to the time of fulfillment of this prophecy three opinions have been given. First, it is argued that the *last days* are in the present for Timothy (MOUNCE, 2000, p. 543); second, “it may refer to the time immediately before Christ’s second coming (ARICHEA; HATTON, 1995, p. 221); third, “Paul is describing what will be true from the apostolic age on, not just what is true for Timothy’s time” nor just what is true for the generation immediately before Christ’s second coming (KNIGHT, 1992, p. 341). The third view is preferable. it does not exclude the first and the second ones; rather it encompasses them.

Thus the conditions described by Paul in verses 2-4 fit on Timothy’s time (v. 5-6), on the time after Paul’s death (Act 20:28-31), and on the time immediately before Christ’s second coming (Matt 24:37-38). In other words, such a scenario would worsen continuously and gradually from Paul’s time up to the end (2 Tim 3:13; see also Rev 12:12). According to *The Seventh-Day Bible Commentary*, “it is in this setting that the words of the apostle concerning ‘the last days’ take on their full and complete meaning” (NICHOL, 1980, p. 341).

This train of thought can be seen through the list of vices in this passage (2 Tim 4:2-4). George Knight postulates that it follows somehow a chiastic arrangement.<sup>26</sup> He claims that “the list begins and ends with words expressing a misdirection of love” (KNIGHT, 1992, p. 430)<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Regarding the list of vices in the New Testament, see John T. Fitzgerald, “Virtue/Vice Lists,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992, p. 858).

<sup>27</sup> For a different opinion as to the arrangement of the vice list in 2 Tim 4:2-4, see Neil J. McEleney, “The Vice Lists of the Pastoral Epistles,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36, n. 2 (1974): 203-219.

Instead of being *lovers* of God (*filotheoi*, v. 4), people are *lovers* of self *filautoi* (, v. 2), *lovers* of money (*filargyroi*, v. 2), and *lovers* of pleasure (*filēdonoi*, v. 4). For Knight, the term *lovers of God* “summarizes in one word what Jesus (citing the OT) said to be mankind’s highest duty” (Matt 22:37-38), and is the concept Paul himself uses elsewhere (Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 2:9; 8:3; Eph 6:24).

In addition, other layer of terms “focuses on pride and hostility toward others. Associated, therefore, with self-love is an attitude of arrogant pride and disdain for others”. The term *abusive* (βλάσφημοι, v. 3) “is most likely used here of ‘abusive’ speech against other people” (KNIGHT, 1992, p. 430-431). Besides, several other terms, including a series of eight words initiated by privative *alpha* (ἀπειθεῖς, ἀχάριστοι ἀνόσιοι [v. 2], ἄστοργοι ἄσπονδοι, ἀκρατεῖς ἀνήμεροι ἀφιλάγαθοι [v. 3]) refer somehow to the lack of love for others. Incidentally, one of them is used in a formulation which points out to the break of the fifth commandment, “disobedient (ἀπειθεῖς) to their parents” (v. 2). Accordingly, such a list of vices summarizes a lack of love for God and for others, precisely the reverse of what Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37-38.

The idea that Paul — when formulating the lists of vices in 2 Timothy 4:2-4 — possibly has in mind a reversal of Jesus’s words in Matthew 22:37-38 can be reinforced by the fact that this is not the first time it takes place within the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>28</sup> An even clearer situation can be found in the list of 1 Timothy 1:9-10. In these two verses one can find a strong echo to the ten commandments (PATE, 2013, p. 270-271). The reason why Paul prefers only to make allusion to the commandments instead of quoting them straightly can be explained in the following terms: “[...] although Paul is a Jew and deals with Jewish materials, he writes in Greek and is convinced that God has called him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, i.e., to interpret the Christian message to the Greek mind” (SHIRES, 1996, p. 34).

The discussion above shows that the apostasy delineated by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 comes in the same spirit of the “lawlessness one” of 2 Thessalonians 2:8-9 (see also v. 3 and 7). Such a spirit of transgression of God’s law will be present in the world up to the second coming of Christ.

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<sup>28</sup> Indeed “many of the vices mentioned here are parallel to descriptions of the opponents elsewhere in the PE (if not using the same words, then parallel in thought)”. See William D. Mounce, 544.



To use the words of J. Stafford Wright, the activity of the *lawlessness one* is “an outburst of spiritual evil directed against the teachings of Christ” (1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-9) (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 166), which, in turn, stand in clear opposition to the doctrine of the “people” in 2 Timothy 3:2.

In addition, some of the characteristics supplied by Paul in 2 Tim 3:2-4 somehow correspond to the characteristics of the *lawlessness one*. Just as the *lawlessness one* “exalts himself” (2 Thess 2:4), the *people* in 2 Tim 3:2 are *proud* and *arrogant*; just as the *lawlessness one* “opposes [...] against every so-called god or object of worship” (2 Thess 2:4), “these men oppose to the truth” (2 Tim 3:8) and are lovers of *self*, *money*, and *pleasures* instead of lovers of *God*. This is a clear opposition to God and a deviation of true worship taking into account that their *self*, *money*, and *pleasures* are the actual object of cult and adoration. The fact that they openly transgress the commandments of God, as we have seen above, is an indication that they match with “those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth” (2 Thess 2:10). Just as “the mystery of lawlessness” was already at work in Paul’s time (2 Thess 2:7) “and then the lawless one will [would] be revealed” (2 Thess 2:8), the false teachers were also at work, but “their folly will [would] be plain to all” (2 Tim 3:9).

In 2 Thessalonians 2 God sends a strong delusion (v. 11) to the ones who are target of Satan’s wicked deception (v. 10), “so that they may believe [*pistéuō*] what is false (v. 11), in order that all may be condemned who did not believe [*pistéuō*] the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (v. 12). In 2 Tim 3 these men are “disqualified regarding the faith [*pistis*]” (v. 7), because, as the context indicates, they “oppose the truth” (v. 8). That they are also condemned it is clear by the affirmation “they will not get very far” (v. 9).

All the correspondences above allow to conclude that Paul seems to be referring to the same behavior which will be present in each generation from the first century up to the second coming of Christ.

## Time is Coming

Although the phrase *last days* or its similar *later times* does not appear in 2 Tim 4:1-5, such a passage is relevant to the current discussion taking into account the fact that, as William Mounce observes, the same idea expressed in 1 Timothy 4:1 “is repeated in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, also in an eschatological context” (MOUNCE, 2000, p. 234). Besides, the description of the apostasy here reveals points of contact not only with 1 Timothy 4:1, but also with 2 Timothy 3:1-9.



The main idea of the paragraph containing the expression “the time is coming” (v. 3) is given already in verse one, i.e., Paul adjures Timothy with a solemn charge, whose content is introduced by means of five imperatives: *preach, be ready, reprove, rebuke, and exhort* (v. 2). Such an expression is used by Paul in order to present the reason why it is crucial to take the charge so seriously. Next, he (2) *characterizes* the time he mentioned in the previous clause and shows why a charge is necessary: “people will not endure sound doctrine”, and (3) *explains* that instead of paying attention to the sound *teaching*, “they (people) will accumulate for themselves *teachers* to suit their own passions” (v. 3).

It is not necessary to say again that the background for Paul’s concerns has to do with the false teachers. Once this has been already done, our goal with this passage is to give more one example that the Pastoral Epistles introduce an increasing apostasy which breaks up at the second coming of Christ. The eschatological tone is given not only by the term “the time is coming” itself, but specially by Paul’s opening statement: “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who *is to judge* the living and the dead, and by *his appearing* and his kingdom” (v. 1).

The verbal form *is to judge*<sup>29</sup> and the term *appearing* places the exhortation in the context of second coming, even though Timothy and his hearers be the immediate audience. Here the idea that “the NT community used futuristic sounding language to describe the present age” (KNIGHT, 1992, p. 189) is not applicable to “*is to judge*” since the event which is meant is clearly the second coming. This idea is corroborated by the fact that, as Bernhard Mutschler notices, in 2 Tim 4:3-4 the “five grammatical future forms [*is coming, will not endure, will accumulate, will turn away, and [will] wander off*] show that this is really a matter of prophecy” (MUTSCHLER, 2011, p. 380). Yet, there are solemn exhortations to the current time because “the expectation of a heavenly ‘kingdom’ motivates on to live an appropriate and consistent life in the present” (MUTSCHLER, 2011, p. 391). In this regard, Walter C. Kaiser Jr. states that “in almost every context where a prophecy is recorded, there is usually some injunction, command, or word urging us on to holy living and acting” (KAISER JR., 2003, p. 26). Four out of the five verbs in 2 Timo-

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<sup>29</sup> As George W. Knight observes, “The articular participle *tou méllontos* with the infinitive *krinein* [where the rendering *is to judge* comes from] serves as a periphrasis for the future tense”. See George W. Knight, 452.

thy 4:3-4 describe the apostasy Paul has in mind. An assessment of these verbs can demonstrate that the characteristics delineated here correspond to those in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, 1 Tim 4:1-5, and 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

1. “People *will not endure* sound teaching” (v. 3). The verb *to endure* is the translation of *anéchomai*, whose meaning probably equates to the one in Hebrews 13:22, i.e., “hear or listen to willingly” (KNIGHT, 1992, p. 455). Such a view is consistent with the sequence of the text: “but having itching ears”. According to William D. Mounce, this expression is used figuratively as curiosity and “the imagery is that their itching ears are tickled by the false teachers who teach whatever is sensational or novel” (MOUNCE, 2000, p. 575). In other words, instead of listening to the sound doctrine, these people choose listening to false teachers. Paul is describing an attitude of deliberated rebellion characterized by the rejection of the gospel.
2. “They will *accumulate* for themselves teachers to suit *their own passions*” (v. 3). The Greek text reads “They will accumulate [...] *according to* their own passions”. This new clause reinforces the previous idea, but adds the information of the motivation behind their interest to heap up teachers. They do not want hear the truth, they want teachers to feed their lust. They are “without self-control” (2 Tim 3:3) and “lovers of pleasure” (2 Tim 3:4).
3. “Will *turn away* from listening to the truth” (v. 4). Basically Paul repeats the initial idea with more strong words. Paul had already used the verb *apostréfō* (to turn way) to refer to those who abandoned him (2 Tim 1:15). In this case, he refers to those people who not only abandoned the truth, but refused listening to the truth. This evokes his words in 2 Thessalonians 2:10: “they refused to love the truth” and in 2 Tim 3:8: “these men also oppose the truth”. They prefer “*devoting themselves* to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons”, 1 Timothy 4:1.
4. “*Wander off* into myths” (v. 4). The last verb concludes an idea of movement initiated by the first part of the verse. The Greek text is helpful at this point: “*kai apó mén tes alethēias tēn akoēn apostrepsousin epi dé tous mythous ektrapēsantai*”. The particles *μέν*

and δέ indicate that the second clause works as a counterpart of the first one. In addition, the grammatical structure ἀπό [...] ἐπί could be translated as *from [...] to*, just as it happens in Matthew 3:13, “Then Jesus came *from* (ἀπό) Galilee *to* (ἐπί) the Jordan”.

Also, the verb translated as *wander off* (ektrépō) by the ESV also means *to turn* (as in the KJV). As a matter of fact, it is a rare verb in the New Testament. Except for its occurrence in Hebrews 12:13, it appears only in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 1:6; 5:15; 6:20; 2 Tim 4:4). In 1 Timothy 1:6, Paul uses such a verb to refer to certain persons who “wandered away into vain discussion”. And in 1 Timothy 5:15, he applies the verb to some who “have already strayed after Satan”. From Paul’s statement in 1Tim 4:1 (“some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons) and his usage of the verb ektrépō elsewhere, it is possible to conclude that Paul identifies the “myths” in 2 Tim 4:4 as the outcome of the straight activity of Satan (cf. 2 Thess 2:9-10), who would cause the apostasy to increase since he was cast out of heaven (Rev 12:9-12)<sup>30</sup> on the occasion of the enthronement of Christ (Rev 4-5) (MOUNCE, 2000, p. 163-215), up to the second coming of Christ (2 Thess 2:8).

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Finally, to use the words of the *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, when stating that “the time is coming” (2 Tim 4:3), “the apostle was undoubtedly thinking of the great apostasy that was soon to develop in the church, and which would continue to imperil it until the second advent of Christ” (NICHOL, 1980, p. 348).

## Conclusion

This paper sought to demonstrate that the New Testament authors used the phrase *in the last days* and its correlates in order to refer to the Christian era as well as to an apostasy which, although already at work in the apostolic times, would increase until reach its climax on the time immediately before the second Coming of Christ. The understanding of the apostles regarding the last days is coherent with Old Testament passages like Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:1, Hosea 3:5, Ezekiel 38:16, and Daniel 2:28; 10:14. Even

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<sup>30</sup> See Ranko Stefanovic, p. 395-399.

though the starting point is their own time, some New Testament passages, such as Acts 2:17; James 5:3; 1 Peter 1:5, 20; 2 Peter 3:4, introduce a sort of movement from the first century to the second coming.

However, it seems that it is in the Pastoral Epistles that the term *last days* and its correlates are more closely associated to the apostasy. This can be seen through echoes from 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and the Apocalyptic discourse of Jesus within 1 Timothy 4:1-5, 2 Timothy 3:1-9, and 2 Timothy 4:1-5. The false teachings Paul is struggling with in the Pastoral Epistles present as common denominator a denial of Christ's atoning sacrifice as the only means of salvation. This fact puts these false teachings at the same level of the apostasy aroused by the little horn (Dan 7 and 8), which was also foretold by Jesus in Matthew 24. Indeed, the teachings of Jesus as to the end time are the basis on which Paul stands his thought regarding the apostasy to take place on Christian era, specially on the end time.

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