

Conditions at the Close of the Present Age

Development of Apostasy

1. Definition of Apostasy

Based upon the Biblical usage, apostasy is a departure from the faith. This involves truth concerning a cardinal doctrine and therefore apostates are unbelievers who at one time gave mental assent to Christianity.

This is in contrast with heresy. Heresy refers to a division or faction that may possibly involve deviation from doctrine. Heresy therefore does not necessarily make reference to the salvation of the heretic but rather only to their party spirit. The heretic may be an apostate, but not necessarily.

2. History of Apostasy

Apostasy has always been present, for example:

- Satan in Genesis 3
- Cain's refusal to offer a blood sacrifice (Genesis 4)
- Unbelief in the day of Noah (Genesis 6-8)
- Unbelief at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11)
- Apostasy of Israel, resulting in captivity
- Unbelief in the rejection of Christ by the Jews
- Modern liberalism

However, it appears there will be a climax of apostasy in the tribulation (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Apostasy will culminate with God's judgment (Revelation 17 - the judgment of the world church).

3. Problem of Apostasy

The New Testament gives much data regarding the conditions which the early church faced regarding apostasy:

- "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings;" (Hebrews 13:9)
- "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15)
- "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." (Acts 20:29-30)
- "But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3)

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- "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel." (Galatians 1:6)
- "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." (2 Peter 2:1)
- "Beloved, 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." (1 John 4:1)

In addition, there will be an increase in apostasy that will prevail in the last days:

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." (1 Timothy 4:1)

4. Nature of Apostasy

- A denial of Christ (2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:18)
- A denial of Christ's return (2 Peter 3:3-4)
- A denial of the faith (1 Timothy 4:1-2; Jude 3)
- A denial of sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3-4)
- A denial of Christian liberty (1 Timothy 4:3-4)
- A denial of morality (2 Timothy 3:1-8; Jude 18)

5. Proper Response to Apostasy

- Do not fellowship with false teachers (2 John 6-11)
- Do not cooperate with false teachers (2 Timothy 3:5)
- Do not join together with false teachers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
- Reprove (expose) wicked teachers (Ephesians 5:11)
- Purge yourself of wicked teachers (2 Timothy 2:21)

Specific Signs of the End of the Present Age

These signs are not conditions which must be met before the Lord returns but rather descriptions of conditions that will prevail during the tribulation. As we see these signs becoming more evident, the rapture of the church may be drawing nearer. Nevertheless it remains to be seen if one or all of these elements will develop prior to the tribulation period.

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1. The Revival of the Nation of Israel

From 70 A.D. to May 4, 1948, Israel did not exist as a nation. In history there have been three predicted scatterings of the people of Israel and their return:

- Genesis 15:13 predicted Abraham's seed to be exiled for 400 years and the return is seen in the exodus.
- Jeremiah 29:10 predicted that Israel would be taken captive for 70 years (cf. Isaiah 11:11) to Babylon, and their return is seen under Zerubbabel in 536 B.C.
- Deuteronomy 28:63-64 predicts a world-wide dispersion, where the nation will be scattered among all the peoples and would be torn from the land. The return is predicted in Jeremiah 23:7; Ezek. 39:28 and Amos 9:14-15, where they will not be rooted out from their land again.

The scatterings and first two returns were fulfilled literally to this point. We do not know if the return of Israel to the land in 1948 is the predicted return but possibly it is one step closer.

2. Increased Importance of the Middle East

The Middle East is the setting of events that culminate the end of this age and as increased activity occurs in the region it may prepare the way for the future.

The Middle East is not only the focus of the Bible, but is crucial to the world economically, militarily and religiously (Islam, Judaism).

3. Atheism in Government

Daniel 11:36-45 speaks of the anti-Christ, a king who will use his power to oppose God. Governments which deny the Creator allow a potential for such a world leader to rise to power.

4. The Military Power of Eastern Nations

Revelation 9:15-16 and 16:12-16 refers to the "kings of the East". East and Southeast Asia are more powerful than ever before, economically and militarily, and have an enormous population base.

5. Trend toward a World Government

Since the League of Nations after World War I, there has been an interest in consolidating the governmental powers. Today there is an unprecedented willingness for nations to cooperate together. Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 indicate there will be a world government just prior to the second coming of Christ.

6. The Rise of the World Church

The World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement seek to bring all churches together. Revelation 17 suggests there will be a large world "church" existing during the tribulation period.

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7. The Trend toward Apostasy in the Church

1 Timothy 4; 2 Timothy 3; 2 Peter 2-3; 1 John 2:18-22; and 2 Thessalonians 2-3 all point to an increase in apostasy in the last days.

8. The Rise of Satanism and the Occult

1 Timothy 4:1 appears to be an indication that there will be an increase in demonic teaching as the end of this age approaches.

All of these signs may not be valid but it appears that they will signal the unfolding of the end of this present age.

Should we actively oppose the development of each of these events?

The developments that are clearly opposed to the will of God (Satanism, apostasy) must not be supported. However, a united government is not inherently evil, it is simply descriptive of the world during the tribulation period. One thing is certain, uniting the world under a common government will not bring ultimate peace apart from the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.