

God Warns Apostates of Eternal Punishment

Apostasy is a very important word, and the concept is often misunderstood. There are two passages in the New Testament that use a Greek word, *apostacia*, that we translate as “apostasy.” But in Acts, 21:21, it is translated differently. You will be surprised when you see how the verse reads. The Jews had accused the apostle Paul of forsaking the teaching of Moses. Here is the verse:

And they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. Acts 21:21 (NASB)

In this verse, the word *apostacia* is translated as “forsake.” It has the same idea of leaving something or departing. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, *apostacia* is used again. The verse tells us what will happen before the Antichrist appears. The Antichrist will appear in the tribulation period. The Antichrist is the antithesis of Christ. Paul is trying to encourage the Thessalonians that the Second Coming of Christ had not yet occurred. In verse 3 he says,

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction . . . 2 Thessalonians 2:3 (NASB)

Paul tells the Thessalonians that the Second Coming is not going to occur until the apostasy happens. Then the man of

The Antichrist, who is called the son of destruction or the man of lawlessness, will be revealed. The Antichrist is lawless. He does not care about anybody else. He is in control. The other description is that he is a man of destruction who will destroy many people. But the word “apostasy” here is talking about the fact that there is going to be a massive forsaking of God. If you end up in the tribulation period, it will be very unpleasant. Becoming a Christian in the tribulation period will almost be akin to a death sentence.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF APOSTASY. Let me illustrate what is meant here by apostasy. In Matthew 24:9-14, Jesus was just asked what are the signs of His coming. We are in the middle of His answer, and He says,

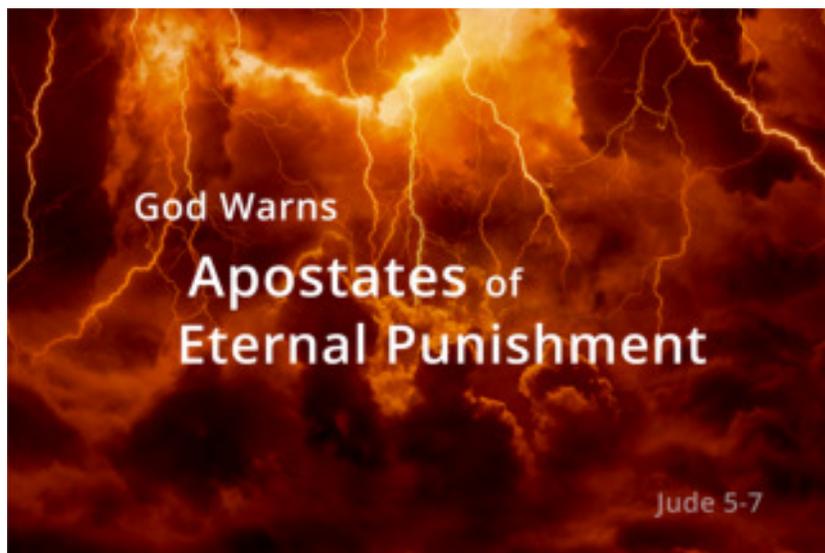
Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and

you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Matthew 24:9-14 (NASB)

Jesus is describing the events that will occur

before the Second Coming of Christ. In fact, He is describing the events that will occur before the tribulation and will continue into the tribulation. We are already experiencing some of these signs, because we are told that “they will deliver you to tribulation, they will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations.” We are seeing an increase of hatred toward Christians all over the world. That is Jesus’ point.

In verse 9 we are told they will be killing Christians. Verse



10 says friends and family will betray Christians. Verse 11 tells there will be false prophets or false teachers. In fact, there are many false teachers today. Verses 12-14 are really amazing. They say,

Because lawlessness is increased . . . Matthew 24:12 (NASB)

Did you catch that? Because lawlessness is increased. What is going on in our own country? Lawlessness is increasing. What is good is being called bad; and what is bad is being called good. There are any number of biblical principles that a major part of our country opposes.

Verse 13:

But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. Matthew 24:13 (NASB)

Now listen to verse 14:

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14 (NASB)

Jesus' point is that even though the gospel will spread throughout the entire globe, people are going to hate Christians. False teaching, a massive rejection of God, and a massive rejection of Christians will increase—even though the gospel will have spread worldwide. It is really incredible what will happen. That is a good description of apostasy. The gospel will be everywhere, and yet there will be this massive hatred of God and Christians. They are going to kill us if they can.

Mark 13:6 adds some things that Matthew does not include. Mark 13:6 says,

Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' . . . Mark 13:6 (NASB)

That is, "I am the Christ."

. . . when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. For

nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Mark 13:7-8 (NASB)

It is only the beginning of the description. The message is that life will get worse in the tribulation.

But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. Mark 13:7-8 (NASB)

Now verse 9 is really interesting because it tells us the Jews will be in their synagogues and be punished. That just means that there is going to be a hatred of anybody who stands for the God of the Old Testament. Christians and Jews are going to be dragged before governors and kings or before civil authorities. Christians are going to be hated, killed, and put in prison. That is apostasy. The gospel has gone around the globe. The gospel has reached into every nation and yet there is going to be a wholesale hatred of Christians.

In Luke 21:10-11 Jesus describes other things that are going to happen before the Second Coming. In verse 10 we are told,

Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven." Luke 21:10-11a (NASB)

The key word here is "plagues." Some people are wondering if the current pandemic is a sign, a foretaste or hint of things to come. It could be, but we just do not have enough information to say that dogmatically. Then the author of Luke continues writing about Christians and says they are going to be hated in verse 12, and he continues.

What is the apostasy in 2 Thessalonians 2:3? Apostasy is departing from the faith. There are two aspects to apostasy. Apostasy will occur outside the Church and inside the Church. Outside the Church describes the total rejection of

God and Christians by the world. Then there is the rejection within the Church. We see that today in our own nation. There are apostate churches that once preached what was true. They once held to solid doctrine, but not today. There are apostate denominations that now repudiate God. They claim that they believe in the Bible, but they do not follow the Bible; they do not even teach the Bible. They do not really believe the Bible. So we have apostate denominations, and apostate people who once claimed that they were Christians.

EXAMPLES OF APOSTASY. Let me give you a good example of apostasy. In Matthew 13:36, Jesus gave the parable of the tares. I think most of us are familiar with it. Just as in 2 Peter when the apostle told the people to whom he was writing that he wanted to remind them three different times, let me remind you of the parable of the tares. The tare looks like the wheat. Jesus' point is that wheat symbolizes believers. The tares are not Christians. They are not believers. Tares are actually a weed that grows alongside wheat, and you cannot tell the difference until it is mature. Only then can you know if a tare is not wheat because it just looks like the real thing. Apostates are tares. An apostate may look real, but is not real. In Matthew, chapter 7:23-25, Jesus said that on the judgment day there will be people who will tell Him, "Oh, we did this in your name, and we did that in your name, and we did this in your name." Then Jesus is going to tell them that "I never knew you." He did not say that He knew them once. He said, "I never knew you." A tare is someone who was never real—they just look real—they were not real and are not real.

So a way to define an apostate is that they are a tare. We are talking about apostates within a church. So who is an apostate? A tare.

There are two examples who come to mind quickly. One example is Judas. Judas was one of the twelve disciples. Judas looked real. He went out on a mission with the other disciples. They cast out demons. He did many other things along with the other disciples. Yet in the end he was never real. He was called the son of perdition. He was never, ever real—he just looked and acted like an apostle. He was an apostate, as it turns out.

Another example of an apostate is Dimas in 2 Timothy 4:10. In Jude 3 we are urged to contend earnestly for the faith

which was once for all handed down to the saints. "Contend," has the idea of a struggle. Jude says, "We must fight for the faith, because false teachers want to distort that." In verse 4 Jude said certain persons have crept in unnoticed. When I read that, I thought that was a very serious statement. He said, "For certain persons..." Jude does not tell us who they were, but I think the reason he does not tell us who they were in his time is that then we might stop and consider if they are in our time. Are there some who have crept into our churches? If so, they are tares.

We have tares in our churches today. They are in our pulpits. They are in our seminaries. They are sitting in the pews. They are in leadership teams in churches. They are not real. They just look real. Some of them do not know they are tares. Some of them may be self-deceived and think they are Christians. In fact, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:2 says that we can believe in Jesus but have vain faith. That is a scary thought. That is, you think you have true faith, but it is really empty faith. It will not save you. You will end up going to hell after all. So Jude says there are certain persons who have crept in, and they are in our churches. His point is that they are already here! The only question is, who are they?

God Will Punish Apostate Israelites. Now we come to our study in Jude 5-7. The message is that God will judge these apostates. God will judge the tares who are false teachers. These people claimed they were Christians. But they really were not Christians. They were tares. There are many false teachers in our country and around the world. Why they want to teach the Bible when they do not believe it is a difficult thing for me to understand. They write books. They are on the Internet. They are prolific writers. But Jude 5-7 tells us that God is going to judge them. It is a warning to apostates. Here is verse 5,

Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. Jude 5 (NASB)

Jude is describing the fact that God had saved His chosen people, Israel, out of the land of Egypt. I thought it was interesting that God made the point that He saved them. Then later, after saving His people out of the land of Egypt, God

destroyed those who did not believe. This is really interesting, because Jude is saying all of them came out of the land of Egypt and were going to the Promised Land. God brought both those who believed in Him and those who did not believe in Him out of the land of Egypt. God brought all of them out of the land of Egypt.

In Exodus 15:22-25 we learn the Israelites were without water, and God provided water. In Exodus 16:1-21 they complained about their lack of food. What did God do? God provided manna. In Exodus 17, they quarreled with Moses. We are told that they tested God. Psalm 95:8-9 leaves us with the impression that they intentionally knew what they were doing—they were testing God. We are told that they tested God because of unbelief, which introduces us to a very interesting thought that one symptom of unbelief is disobedience. That is the message of Psalm 95:8-9. Hebrews 3:16-19 sends us the same message.

In Exodus 32:1-10 Moses is on Mount Sinai. He had been there for forty days and forty nights, and all the Israelites were wondering, “Well, where is Moses? Is he ever coming back?” So they motivated Aaron to make the golden calf, and then worshiped the golden calf. They were disobedient. In Numbers, chapters 13-14, twelve spies were sent out into the Promised Land. They came back and two of them said, “It is a good land. God will be with us. Let us go!” But the rest of them, which were ten of them, said, “No, no, no, no.” That illustrates their unbelief. So they were disobedient because they were afraid. Not only were they unbelieving, but they were disobedient. So what did God do? God said anybody who is over the age of twenty cannot go into the Promised Land. God also said they would walk in the wilderness for forty years until everyone who was 20 years of age and over had died. That is what verse 5 is all about. It says,

... after saving a people out of the land of Egypt ... Jude 5b (NASB)

That is, they fled Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. Then we are told,

... subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. Jude 5c (NASB)

Those who did not believe were complaining. That is also the message of Hebrews 3:16.

For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He ... Hebrews 3:16-17a (NASB)

That is, God was ...

... angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were ... Hebrews 3:17b-18a (NASB)

What?

... disobedient. So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. Hebrews 3:18b-19 (NASB)

So Hebrews 3:16-19 connects unbelief and disobedience together.

So Jude is describing those among the Israelites who were disobedient. The reason they were disobedient is that they were unbelieving. What did God do? God destroyed them in the wilderness. So Jude says, “God destroyed them.” Why? Because they were apostates, that is why! The unbelieving Jews were apostates. They knew about God. They had heard the teachings of God. They had heard what Moses had taught, and they rejected it. They were apostates. So Jude is making the point that the apostates that he is talking about in his day were just like the apostates in Israel who escaped Egypt and died in the wilderness. It is a warning to the apostates of Jude’s time. It is a warning to any false teacher.

GOD WILL PUNISH APOSTATE ANGELS. Verse 6 is about angels. This is a stunning passage of Scripture. You would think that if there was a group of beings with whom God would play favorites, it would be His angels because the angels are very special. Verse 6 says,

And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness

for the judgment of the great day, Jude 6 (NASB)

Probably the first thing you might say is, “Oh, these were the sons of God in Genesis 6:1-5 who caused women to have children who were called the Nephilim, the giants of old.” Notice he explained that to us. Therefore, I am not going to take the time to explain that here, but to support what Jude is trying to communicate to us. Now if you missed the study about the sons of God in Genesis 6, I encourage you to visit the study called, “Punishment and Judgment of False Teachers.” There we explain why we believe that the sons of God in Genesis 6 are in fact fallen or evil angels. So I am not going to take the time here, because Jude is not focused on that point. Jude is trying to make the point that the angels to whom he is referring are apostate angels. Jude said they did not keep their proper abode or domain. They were in heaven at one time. They fell when Satan fell. A third of the angels fell with Satan. They had been told how they were to obey. Limits were placed on their conduct. But then a subset of those angels sinned according to Genesis 6 and did not keep their proper abode. They were not permitted to habitat with women—they were not allowed to do that. So the message is that they were apostate angels. Notice their judgment is worse than what happened to the Israelites. In verse 5 we are told that God destroyed those who did not believe; but here we are told that God is keeping the apostate angels “in eternal darkness for the judgment of the great day.” The description is worse. Why is it worse? I believe Jude is making the point that God is serious about apostates. God does not play favorites. God is not partial even toward the evil angels He originally created as holy angels. It is a warning.

GOD PUNISHED APOSTATE SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

Verse 7 is another statement about apostates. It reads as follows:

... just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Jude 7 (NASB)

Notice that the verse says, “Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them.” There were actually five cities altogether

in this region. We believe Sodom and Gomorrah were located around the southern part of the Dead Sea. The other three cities were Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (Genesis 14:2). We know the sin of the five cities was that of homosexuality. But again, Jude is not interested in discussing this sin issue either. He only wants to make the point that God judged these apostates. They knew better than to commit the sin of homosexuality. To do so was an abandonment of God’s standard; so the message is that God judges sin. The disobedient cities were destroyed. We know that Genesis tells us brimstone came down out of heaven. Notice the description of the destruction at the end of the verse. It says, “are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.” This is the third time the description of punishment has gotten worse. It is interesting that God includes His chosen people, Israel, who we would have thought would have been treated with favoritism. You would have thought that He would have treated the angels with favoritism. It is questionable whether God would have treated Sodom and Gomorrah with favoritism. But the point is that God is serious, He is just, He does not show favoritism, and He judges sin. What can we learn?

MERCY OF GOD. There are four truths we can learn. The first truth is that all disobedience is rooted in disbelief. Or put another way, disobedience is a symptom of unbelief. The second of these four sobering truths is that apostates will be punished. The third truth is that those apostates who defect will suffer severe punishment. In Hebrews 10:29-32 we find that the writer of Hebrews talks about the severest of punishments. Many people are not aware that there are degrees of punishment in hell. Here, Hebrews tells us that those who are apostates will receive the severest of punishment.

The fourth, serious, sobering truth is that God is merciful, and He warns us to repent. Because God is merciful He warns apostates to repent. Another Old Testament example of God’s mercy was when He sent Jonah to urge the city of Nineveh to repent. They repented and consequently, God spared them. In the fourth chapter of Jonah, God told Jonah the reason that He spared them was because He loved them. God displayed His mercy. He warned the Ninevites; they repented and God spared them. Do you realize what God is doing in these verses in Jude? He is lovingly warning apostates to repent. This is a

warning to apostates to repent.

Amos 5 is a passage where God warns His own people, the Israelites, of coming judgment. Amos 5:4-6 tells us that God called them to repent, but they did not. Verse 4 says,

For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel,

“Seek Me that you may live.
But do not resort to Bethel
And do not come to Gilgal,
Nor cross over to Beersheba;
For Gilgal will certainly go into captivity
And Bethel will come to trouble.
Seek the LORD that you may live . . .”
Amos 5:4-6a (NASB)

The message is that they were not seeking the Lord. The message is that they were actually seeking false gods. So God said,

. . . Seek the LORD that you may live,
Or He will break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph,
And it will consume with none to quench it for Bethel,
For those who turn justice into wormwood
And cast righteousness down to the earth.
Amos 5:6-7(NASB)

In other words, the message is they are not into righteousness; they are into sin.

He who made the Pleiades and Orion
And changes deep darkness into morning,
Who also darkens day into night,
Who calls for the waters of the sea
And pours them out on the surface of the earth,
The LORD is His name.
Amos 5:8 (NASB)

The message is the sovereign, the all-powerful God, the God who is actually calling them to repentance, is in total control. If you skip all the way down to verses 14-15, we read God’s call for them to repent again. He says,

Seek good and not evil, that you may live;
And thus may the LORD God of hosts be with you,
Just as you have said!
Hate evil, love good,
And establish justice in the gate!
Perhaps the LORD God of hosts
May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.
Amos 5:14-15 (NASB)

Now what is the point? Jude 5-7 is a merciful call to apostates to repent and to turn to God. I think it is a wonderful passage that reveals the loving character of God.

CONCLUSION. In conclusion, there are four points for us to remember. The first point is that both those who are false teachers and those who do not teach can be apostates. The second point is that Jude 5-7 is an example of God’s merciful warning to apostates to repent. The third point is that God does not like His message distorted. Yet Christians often casually have an opinion about the meaning of a passage even though they have never studied it. The reason that God is upset with His apostates is that they distort His word. Remember that these apostates have crept in unaware. In verse 3 we were told to contend earnestly for the faith. That is, the apostates are distorting the truth, what God has said. Let me put it this way: they are distorting His message and God does not like His message to be distorted. He is going to punish those who distort His Word.

Then I realized that while we may not be apostates, we can be guilty of doing what they did. We can be guilty of distorting His word when we just quickly give an opinion about a passage of Scripture when we really are not sure about it or we have not studied it. So I encourage everyone that when someone asks for your opinion about a passage, and you are not sure about the right answer, just say, “I will check that out and get back to you.” That way we can accurately communicate what God said and give Him the honor for what He is trying to communicate. We honor God by how we treat Him. When we accurately represent what He said, we give Him honor.