

Six Catalysts of the Great Falling away from the Faith

A ‘catalyst’ is an agent which speeds up or produces a reaction. The six catalysts referred to in our title are pressure points which militate against the truth of God as it is revealed in Christ. Collectively these catalysts constitute a perfect storm so to speak in terms of giving rise to the coming apostasy from the faith.

In the first century church, amidst the affliction and deprivation borne of persecution, the Thessalonian believers were fearful about missing the Day of the Lord and about the resurrection of their deceased loved ones. This is why in the Thessalonian correspondence the apostle Paul spelled out the sequence of events which would occur at the end of the age. He desired to protect the Thessalonian believers from the instability, panic, and fear that can arise from rumors, counterfeit letters, satanic temptation, and severe persecution. In several places in the Thessalonian epistles Paul sets forth a clear eschatology to protect his converts from rash conclusions (see **1 Thess 3:3; 4:13-18; 5:1-10; 2 Thess 1:5-12; 2:1-12**).

Even faithful, Bible-believing Christians can be subject to fears during uncertain times of national and global crises. During chaos and instability true believers tend to become increasingly alert to the importance of doctrine and are eager to treat theology with the importance and practicality it deserves in *all seasons* (**2 Tim 4:2**). There is value in exploring the ‘big picture’ themes in eschatology. The apostles and our Lord have expounded these themes to stabilize and prepare the saints for the consummation of the age. God desires that His people grasp the ‘why’ behind the events which lead up to the *Day of the Lord*. For redemptive history’s consummation is about the King and His kingdom of light dramatically overcoming the worldwide thrall of the kingdom of darkness.

Regarding the ‘great and terrible Day of the Lord’ (Mal 4:5), puzzling questions arise in connection with the coming ‘mystery of lawlessness’.

For a global acceleration in lawlessness will surround the career of the *man of lawlessness* described in **2 Thessalonians 2:7ff**. The book of Revelation states that God put it in the hearts of national leaders to relinquish their countries’ sovereignty and give it to the beast—an action which helps propel forward the beast’s global agenda! See **Revelation 17:17**. God’s decision to temporarily grant a ‘long leash’ to the Antichrist bears similarities to God allowing Pharaoh to resist Moses after each of the ten plagues. “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My Name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth’” (**Rom 9:17**). God’s sovereignty over evil is truly a humbling doctrine. For God alone is good; He sees no moral good in the creature (**Rom 3:12**). Apart from His distinguishing grace, we each would have continued in our self-destructive paths.

Christians rightly regard the tribulation period to be a time of unimaginable carnage and suffering (**Mt 24:21; Rev 9:15**). But what professed believers contemplate to a lesser degree is that the tribulation period will be a time of unparalleled ‘spiritual holocaust’. In other words, global apostasy will reach its fever pitch when the Beast demands worship from the whole world. “He

exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed” (Rev 13:12).

A great falling away from the faith will precede the Day of the Lord.

The march toward this global spiritual holocaust is taking place through a long sequence of apostate actions and philosophies. In the last half millennium of history countless unbelieving thinkers, teachers, and leaders have each contributed deadly errors to the cumulative flow of apostate beliefs. They have mixed their lies into a toxic cocktail of plausibility structures and damnable heresies that have been eagerly embraced by the West. The Bible describes this promulgation of lies and rejection of the truth as follows: “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, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Tim 4:1-2). Global apostasy will not be a falling away into a vacuum of dogma or absence of belief, but rather to a deluding influence (2 Thess 2:11).

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power. . .” (2 Tim 3:1-5).

The coming great apostasy from the faith will immediately precede the Beast’s rise to power. The mass acceptance of this poisonous blend of religious philosophic stew will prove to be the precise preparation needed to ‘roll out the red carpet’ for the Antichrist. And as Dr. Peter Jones has said, the lie will serve him (the Antichrist), the allegiance of the world on a silver platter.

Scripture tells us in 2 Thessalonians chapter two and in the book of Revelation that the magnitude of this spiritual holocaust will be global in scope. In terms of the extent of the deception, the term ‘whole world’ or ‘world’ is used in Revelation 12:9; 13:3, 8, 12, 14, etc. God permits the powers of darkness to work through wicked political leaders to install a totalitarian world order. We are told in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 that because men have not received the love of the truth, the gospel, so as to be saved, God will send upon them a strong delusion so that they might be believe what is false and *consequently* be judged.

“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Lu 21:25-26). In the face of these disturbances genuine believers naturally long to be with their Lord and pray that the horrors which accompany the *Day of the Lord* will not be something they have to experience. But a respite may only be temporary, for the Lord tells us precisely how the end of this age will reach a climax of indescribable planetary destruction. Note the descriptions of unprecedented devastation in Revelation 6:12-17; 8:7-13; 9:15-21; 16:17-21.

What must not escape our focus is that God intends to publicly demonstrate the wickedness of the religion of man as it is inspired by the devil. For, the revolt in Genesis known as the Tower of Babel will be repeated in the campaign of the *beast that is to come* (Rev 18). Man will again set up his own religion of self-worship. This idolatrous worship of the creature and the creation

(**Rom 1:25**) will be accompanied by calamitous consequences. Note the plagues described in **Revelation chapters 6; 8; 9; 16; etc.** You and I live in an apostate culture which God is going to judge—His holiness and justice require that retribution. Scripture is clear, God has a controversy with the nations, His fury will be poured out on the nations (**Zeph 1:18; 3:8**).

The term, the *Day of the Lord* refers to decisive judgment from God that is concentrated in a series of destructive climactic events. Because fallen man is in league with the devil, there must be a very public crushing of the kingdom of darkness before God's everlasting kingdom is installed (**Zech 14:1-21**). God is justly filled with vengeance at the pride, idolatry, wickedness, and arrogance of the nations (**Jer 25:31**). The Lord is going to avenge His trampled honor. The destruction of 'political-economic' and 'religious' Babylon described in Revelation is a very visible event which will affect the whole world (see the judgment of Babylon in **Revelation chapter 18**).

The apostle Paul addressed the uncertainty of the Thessalonians regarding the coming Day of the Lord by affirming the order of prophetic events—namely that a great apostasy must come first before the Day of the Lord.

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 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 Thess 2:1-5).

In the above text, the word *apostasy* (v. 3) comes from the N.T. Greek word *apostasia*, which means to fall away, to depart from the faith. The sheer momentum behind the reception of the lie will defy natural reason—and therefore Scripture describes its unfathomable exponential growth as 'the mystery of lawlessness' (**2 Thess 2:7**). As John MacArthur has warned, you and I live in the most spiritually dangerous period in all of history. Therefore, it behooves us to prepare ourselves to recognize and resist a coming massive acceptance of religious deception.

Regarding the compelling nature of the lie, our Savior tells us something truly breathtaking, "For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Mt 24:24). Don't imagine that the deluding influence arrives as the jackbooted despotism and cruelty of a Hitler or Stalin. No, it comes in the garb of global harmony and human flourishing. Those not established in the gospel will fall away. To fall away from the faith does not mean that true believers will abandon the gospel. What it does mean is that millions who have made an outward profession of Christ but have remained unregenerate will turn to a form of religion which is a departure from the biblical gospel (**1 Jn 2:18-19**). The abandonment of the faith once for all delivered to the saints will gain momentum, not unlike a thunderous avalanche. It is 'catalyzed' by a set of simultaneous circumstances. ***The following six catalysts of the coming apostasy are, at least in their initial form, already presently at work:***

I. Scripture prophesies that a great falling away from the faith will occur in the last days (Mt 24:10; 2 Thess 2:1-4; 1 Tim 4:1-3). And that this departure from the faith will be accelerated by the abundance of false teachers (**2 Tim 4:3-4; 2 Pet 2:1-3; 3:17**). The message of the false teachers 'tickling their hearers' desires' will match the sentiment of the hearers and the ungodly times in which they live.

I solemnly 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: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths (**2 Timothy 4:1-4**).

II. The spirit of the age in the West has moved from post-Christian to anti-

Christian. The satanic notion that “sin is freedom” is embraced and propagated by the academy, by corporations, by the media, and by government. “Why are the nations in an uproar and the people’s devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!’” (**Ps 2:1-3**). The hatred of God in the hands of the technocrats and policymakers is putting things in place for an ever more invasive culture of control through surveillance.

Such conditions may change our lives overnight, or in God’s patience, do so in the not-so distant future. The monitoring of purchases lends itself to establishing ‘social credit scores’ used to rate the citizen upon his or her level of loyalty to the state-sponsored narrative. The freezing of assets and/or the confiscation of personal property may someday be the consequence of refusing to endorse an agenda of Diversity-Equity-Inclusion. Christians having their possessions taken is a repeated theme in church history. “But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one” (**Heb 10:32-34**). But false Christians will deny the faith rather than endure this kind of temporal loss (**Lu 14:25-35**).

III. The global hatred of Israel and the Jews will increase exponentially in the last days (Zech 12:2-3).

This abhorrence of Israel is demonically inspired and will lead up to an invasion of Israel by a coalition of nations (**Ezek 38-39**). Within the international community, the condemnation of Israel’s occupation of the land will rise to a fever pitch. So great will this enmity be that families will give their sons to become members of the armies sent to exterminate Israel once and for all (**Zech 12:1-3ff.**). Therefore, the cost of standing with Israel, befriending Jews, and seeking their salvation through the gospel will increase (note the social pressures upon Germany’s non-Jewish citizens during the Third Reich).

Remember, this historic antisemitism is satanically motivated (Rev 12:17)—both Jew and Christian are persecuted and slain during the Tribulation period (Rev 12:11; 13:7, 10, 15; 14:13; 18:24; 20:4). For the evil one knows that God has linked His unbreakable Word to His unbreakable promises to Israel. And God Almighty has synchronized the timing of Satan’s incarceration and ultimate destiny in the lake of fire with the redemption of Israel (**Zech 12:10-13:1; Rev 12:12; 19:11-20:3**).

IV. God will send a deluding influence throughout the world which will expose every person to eternal condemnation who has not received the love of the truth as

it is in Christ. Regarding the coming of the Day of the Lord and the saints gathering to Him, the apostle Paul declares,

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness (**2 Thess 2:8-12**).

The Beast does not begin his campaign with a reign of terror, but instead with miracles and with promises! His initial lie will offer what men long for: *peace, security, safety, supply (prosperity/resources)* (**1 Thess 5:3; 2 Thess 2:9; Rev 13:4**). This deluding influence which God allows to be sent upon the world is so convincing that—if it were possible, even the elect would be deceived (**Mt 24:24**). ‘Attesting miracles’ will accompany the Beast’s platform of global, political, and religious unity (**2 Thess 2:9-10; Rev 13:12-16**). World peace, military disarmament, ecological breakthroughs collectively make the Antichrist’s ‘messiahship’ irresistible to earth’s inhabitants. The leader that the world has hoped for, appears to have arrived. This offering of worldwide human flourishing appears so convincing that to oppose it would make a person *a veritable enemy of humanity*.

V. The persecution of the true followers of Christ will occur throughout the whole earth. Jesus said in John 15, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” (**Jn 15:19**). “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved” (**Mt 10:21-22**). As Paul Washer has said, our persecutors will not say that we are being martyred because we love Jesus, but rather because we have refused ‘what is best for humanity’, the worship of the will of the state. Christians will be cast as dangerous opponents of liberty and unity. Has today’s feel-good evangelicalism in any way prepared itself for this?

Under the pressures of persecution, false believers will fall away. Jesus warns in the parable of the soils that when faced with persecution, those who at first heard the gospel with joy will fall away because they have no firm root (**Mt 13:20-21**). Yes, true believers will not escape persecution (**2 Tim 3:12**), but they will persevere in faith because they are kept by faith and their Lord perseveres in preserving them (**Phil 1:6**).

VI. God will diligently test and refine His people. Perhaps we would not expect to see this final catalyst of apostasy listed among the six. For, this sixth point is altogether a most positive influence in the perfecting of the saints. But it is noteworthy that the same severe tests that will prove the saints’ faith genuine will also move false believers to abandon their profession of faith. The apostle Peter states,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls (1 Pet 1:3-9).

God intends to test His people that He might reveal to them and to those around them the actual 'species' of their faith. Is theirs a genuine faith or a spurious faith? The cloud of witnesses described in Hebrews 11 bore witness by their lives of faith that God is worthy of worship, and that He is as good as His Word, both of His promises and His threats. God grants saving faith but does not leave it static. He develops it, stretches it, nurtures it, tests it, refines it, and proves it so that He might reward it (1 Pet 1:7-8). Blessed is the believer who knows that these are God's ways! ***In his epistles,***

Paul often wrote to believers who were being tested. He says to the Thessalonian believers, "We ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. *This is* a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering" (2 Thess 1:4-5). In a very similar tone, Paul states in Acts 14, "After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:21-22).

Mature believers are to strengthen growing saints (Heb 3:13-15). For God's work of proving and refining faith is 'par for the course' for every true child of God.

Consider these passages: Psalm 66:10; Proverbs 17:3; Daniel 11:33-35; 12:16; Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 4:12; Revelation 13:10; 14:12.

There is great value in studying and applying biblical prophecy (Rev 22:7).

But it seems that many Christians have little interest in this big picture theme of eschatology—namely of God vindicating His great Name in the judgment of the nations on the ***Day of the Lord***. The sentiment tends to be, '*end time prophecy is a confusing quagmire of views with esteemed Christian leaders in disagreement, I don't have time to study that subject*'. Yet, one cannot escape the big picture truth that if one is to live in light of the *eschaton* and the coming Kingdom of God, then certain edifying behaviors are required in view of the suddenness of the *Day of the Lord*. Is our focus as Christians the building up of one another unto endurance and perseverance? "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13).

Are we prepared at all to step into local leadership if our neighborhood and community become characterized by chaos and anarchy? Or have we placed all of our eggs in the *rapture basket*, as if no preparation for opposition were needed? It is the opinion of the present authors that godly fathers who have habitually been leading spiritually will continue to lead faithfully within

their sphere and community even in apostate times of judgment. The continuous cultivation of our spiritual habits and disciplines are crucial if we are to be ‘dressed in readiness’ (Lu 12:35-37ff.) and if we are to remain ‘on the alert’ (Mk 13:35). Our Lord through the author of Hebrews admonishes the persecuted church, “for you have need of endurance” (Heb 10:36). If God says this to the persecuted church, what would He say to us, the pampered church? A great falling away and severe opposition are coming, prepare yourselves.

The Apostles’ exhortations from end time prophecy are also directed at us.

When studying Scripture, these are the kinds of verbs we observe which describe what believers will have to endure. They will be *worn down, arrested, flogged, killed, betrayed, taken before magistrates, assaulted with falsehood, imprisoned, falsely accused, abandoned by brethren, refined, and purified* (see Dan 12:10; Mt 10; Mk 13; Lu 17; Lu 21; Jn 16 etc.). Christian ministry must become a more intense form of preparation if the saints are to be equipped in battle readiness. We are not really helping our brethren if our gatherings are aimed merely at socializing and friendship. We need deliberateness in preparing our brethren for what is to come. As the *perilous times* spoken of in 2 Timothy 3:1ff. unfold, the pressure to compromise to have ‘security’ will be overwhelming. The strength to stand for gospel truth when the majority is ridiculing you must come from very intentional preparation—from daily loyalty to Christ, the Lord, and from faithful equipping by the spiritually mature (1 Thess 2:1-13).

Paul the apostle seamlessly joins the eschatological, or ‘end time’ promises made to believers with the godly behaviors that are to characterize those who walk in fellowship with God:

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing (1 Thess 5:1-11).

Our training and equipping of believers must incorporate the same eschatological dimensions exemplified by the apostles and by our Lord if we are to be faithful to the whole counsel of God. We must steady the saints who are worried and anxious, who have ‘overdosed’ on CNN. We must urge our brethren to ‘settle these things ahead of time’, before opposition hits the world of believers with vengeance. We must implore our brothers and sisters to stick with Christ and ‘ditch their idols now’ before affliction increases dramatically (2 Cor 2:1-11; 1 Thess 3:1-8).

Though their eschatological perspectives may differ, faithful Christian leaders can agree on this, that troubled times comprise a powerful message to the church to purify itself and to get

its house in order (2 Pet 3:11-14). For, these *last days* announcements in Scripture tend not to move us as much in times of ease, but now these prophetic words have our ears. We are listening more attentively. The apostle Peter warns, “For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?” (1 Pet 4:17, 18). “The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His sovereignty rules over all” (Ps 103:19).

There is not a maverick speck of dust in the galaxies that is not exactly where it has been appointed by our God. No man, no principality, no ruler can thwart the sovereign arm of the Lord. “There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the Lord” (Prov 21:30). “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Dan 4:35).

There is no greater perspective from which to view world events than Christ’s glory.

The best vantage point from which to view these troubled times as well as our circumstances is from the glory seat of Christ. At the very center of biblical eschatology is the glory of Christ. For His return will be in blinding glory (Rev 1:7; 19:11-16; 2 Thess 1:6-10). His Father will vindicate the honor, glory, and majesty of His Son in the events of the glorious second advent and the Day of the Lord, and the coming messianic age. Consider that the last view the unbelieving world had of Christ was a man more marred than any man—mouth agape, hollow eyes, blood, dust, flies, spittle—a spectacle of shame, dereliction, and ignominy. This theme of the vindication of Christ for the unimaginable humiliation and suffering He endured fills the book of Revelation. For the thrust of this book is “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:1).

The exalted Christ enthroned in Jerusalem, with His church by His side, ruling the nations with a rod of iron is His vindication in time-space history (Rev 2:26-28; 3:21). For the true believer, the glory of Christ is not merely a theological topic, for to behold His glory has a transforming effect on the soul of every person united in Him (2 Cor 3:18). God has applied his own ‘brand’ on our hearts. His name is written upon His people (Rev 3:12). We are His—His precious possession—grafted into His Body forever (Eph 2:11-13; 19; 3:6)!

To think correctly of God’s sovereignty and His providence over injustices, recent atrocities, and hostile enemies is to recognize that God is who He says He is. He is good, righteous, just, and almighty and He is performing His will. He is providentially working through all things in order to bring about His full and timely purposes. His ways are infinitely wise, but His ways are not our ways (Is 55:8-9). The consummation of the age will tie up and bring together the disparate strands and ‘loose ends’ of history. For our Lord has said, “And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time *came* for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev 11:18).

Therefore, we have great peace and comfort knowing that our God reigns over all events and is working them out for His glory and the eternal good of His people. Our Great High Priest is the perfect match to our ruin. A perfect savior for a sinful and cursed people (Heb 7:26-27). He bids us come in our distress and lay upon his bosom. Let all who know Him boast in this, that He is God, and we are the people of His pasture. Believers are the apple of His eye, a people for His own

possession (**Zech 2:8**). Praise be to God that He is true, who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on the earth (**Jer 9:24**).