

The Attackers: Alexander & Hymenaeus: Shipwrecked; Paul Assigns to Satan for Imposition of the Sin unto Death, 1 Tim 1:20; Gangrene of the Soul Caused by False Doctrine which Timothy Has Not Addressed, 2 Tim 2:16–19

50. Two of these shipwrecked souls are mentioned in:

1 Timothy 1:20 - Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.

1. It is rare that individuals are called out in Scripture by name yet when it does happen you can be confident that their violation of divine standards was so egregious a thorough description of their comeuppance is recorded by the Holy Spirit.
2. Such was the case for Hymenaeus \hĩ-mĕn-ĕ'-ũs\ and Alexander. Hymenaeus was spreading the false doctrine that the resurrection had already occurred. This is revealed by Paul in:

2 Timothy 2:16 - Avoid profane chatter, because those occupied with it will stray further and further into ungodliness,

v. 17 - and their message will spread its infection like gangrene. Hymenaeus and Philetus \fĩ-lĕ'-tũs\ are in this group.

v. 18 - They have strayed from the truth by saying that the resurrection has already occurred, and they are undermining some people's faith.

v. 19 - However, God's solid foundation remains standing, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his,"[†] and "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from evil." (NET)

3. These four verses are directed toward Timothy. If the communication of the pastor is unbiblical then the false doctrine will spread throughout the congregation as gangrene does in the physical body.
4. Timothy is the pastor of the First Christian Church of Ephesus. Subsequent to Paul's founding of that church other splinter groups developed and formed other congregations in the city.
5. Hymenaeus is identified by Paul as a reversionist. His heresy that has infiltrated Timothy's congregation is the false doctrine that the Tribulation was under way.
6. He drew his conclusion by falsely interpreting the Zeitgeist of the Roman Empire which at the time was under the rulership of Nero.
7. When dispensational theology is misinterpreted it results in serious damage to one's interpretation of history.
8. Paul taught that the Rapture was imminent which by definition means it could occur at any moment, only God knowing its day and hour.
9. However, since it is imminent then historical trends from the human standpoint have no significance in its timing.
10. Consequently, Hymenaeus assumed the historical downtrend during Nero's regime indicated that the Tribulation had begun. This caused him to not only be out of sync with God's timing, his promotion of the idea was leading members of Timothy's congregation astray.

[†] Cf., Numbers 16:5; Nahum 1:7; John 10:14, 27.

11. Thinking they had missed the Rapture, many were led to distrust the message from the pulpit which claimed the Rapture had not yet occurred and the Church Age was still in progress.
12. False doctrine in the soul of a believer is compared to gangrene in the body. Its definition is helpful in understanding the illustration:

Gangrene, localized death of soft tissue, caused by prolonged interruption of the blood supply that may result from injury or infection.

If not treated, the infection can spread beyond the wound and cause death. The administration of antibiotics is the principle treatment, which may be supplemented by the removal of diseased tissue to stop the spread of the infection.²

² *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010), 5:111.