

## **TTS Scripture S9 – 2 Tim 3:1-9**

*3 You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. 2 For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them! 6 For among them are those who make their way into households and captivate silly women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires, 7 who are always being instructed and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people, of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith, also oppose the truth. 9 But they will not make much progress, because, as in the case of those two men, their folly will become plain to everyone. [2 Tim 3:1-9]*

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### **[1] Introduction**

Having exhorted Timothy (in 2 Tim 2:14-26) to present himself as a worker approved by God, a kind and patient servant of the Lord, now Paul warns us that in these last days there will come “distressing times”.

In particular, he warns that a type of wolf will arise within the Church, whom he associates with Jannes and Jambres. Though not named in the Old Testament, Jannes and Jambres had long been identified with the magicians who opposed Moses in Exo 7:10-12. It’s possible that Paul had in mind Hymenaeus & Philetus, previously mentioned in 2 Tim 2:17.

The description Paul gives of the Jannes & Jambres ‘type’ (hereafter: the JJT) is similar to that given in Rom 1:29-32 – except in that instance, Paul was describing the general sinfulness of mankind. Here in 2 Tim 3, however, he seems to have something else in mind – something particular to the life of God’s people.

What we’re handling here is something extreme. The JJT is dark and deceptive, to the extent that such a wolf deceives even himself (2 Tim 3:13). Our minds might be taken to some of the early Church heresies, for example, or even the pre-Reformation Church – in which religious power became a deadly and misleading force.

## [2] The Challenges in Identifying the JJT

It's natural for us to wonder, in our time and context, who might now represent the JJT. We can all think of contemporary teachers famous for unsound theology.

We must be careful here. On the one hand, shepherds in particular must at times wield the crook. Jesus was not averse, for example, to describing the Pharisees as "*whitewashed tombs*" [Matt 23:27] and as a "*nest of vipers*" [Matt 23:33]. Paul's words to the Galatians must also have been hard for them to hear. It's necessary to speak the truth in love, but to speak the truth is still required of us.

Nevertheless, it is good to be attentive to God's purposes in giving us such warnings. Let's allow the JJT to sober us – may it provoke in us a petition for God's spirit to keep us on the straight and narrow. ("*Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge!*" [Ps 16:1].) After all, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

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## [3] Having the Form of Godliness, But Denying Its Power

Of course, the standout verse here is 2 Tim 3:5 – the JJT holds "*to the outward form of godliness*", but denies "*its power*". What does this mean?

Undoubtedly, the power of the HS is in view here. It is easy to go along with the motions, without possessing that genuine, supernatural power that raised Christ from the dead [Rom 8:11]. We do not want that, for it is the life of a whitewashed tomb. But let's unpack this a little more.

First, what are the characteristics of the JJT? (Re: 2 Tim 3:1-4.) They are overwhelmingly worldly – "*lovers of money*", "*unholy*", "*lovers of pleasure*", etc. Something else is missing, though; something crucial. In short – the JJT is Christless and Cross-less.

Second, what characteristics does Paul put forward by way of contrast? His sound teaching, his conduct, his aim in life, his faith, patience and love, and his suffering for the Gospel [2 Tim 3:10-12]. In other words – the exact opposite of the JJT. Instead of worldliness and Christlessness, there is service and a cruciform life.

This, then, seems to explain what Paul has in mind when he describes the JJT as having the form of godliness whilst denying its power. They lack the true power of the HS – “*For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*” [1 Cor 1:18]. To proclaim this message – and to live this message – is nothing less than supernatural. And yet it’s this that the JJT lacks, for all their public displays of religious power and worldliness.

The cruciform life is central here. This is what Luther termed the *theologia crucis* – a theology of the Cross. Like James and John’s mother in Matt 20:20ff, the JJT wants all the worldly trappings of Godliness. They want the *effects* of God’s glory, but not its *substance*. They want to be the greatest, the strongest, the most bejeweled. But God’s crown is the crown of the martyrs. And like Peter in Matt 16:21ff, the JJT has its mind on human things not on divine things – for the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So if we wish to avoid the JJT, we must crucify it in ourselves. We must search it out, wherever in our flesh it might hiding, and we must nail it to the cross, saying: “I must decrease, but Christ must increase!” [John 3:30]