

1 Timothy 4:1–5 as a neglected eschatological passage



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Dates:

Received: 17 Feb. 2025
Accepted: 30 Apr. 2025
Published: 20 June 2025

How to cite this article:

Scholtz, J.J., 2025, '1 Timothy 4:1–5 as a neglected eschatological passage', *In die Skriflig* 59(1), a3162. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v59i1.3162>

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In 1 Timothy 4:1, the Spirit explicitly states that in later times some will devote themselves to the teachings of demons. While acknowledging the future implications of these doctrines, most commentators focus on their historical origins. To demonstrate that 1 Timothy 4:1–5 is an overlooked eschatological passage, this article examined the expression 'later times' (1 Tm 4:1), reconsidered the content of these demonic teachings (1 Tm 4:3a), and linked the passage (1 Tm 4:3b–5) to the Noahic covenant – and subsequently to end-time texts. It is argued that 1 Timothy 4:1–5 should be recognised as an eschatological passage that has often been neglected. The 'later times' (1 Tm 4:1) of the church age could serve as the backdrop for prophecies destined for fulfilment during the Tribulation Period.

Contribution: The fallen world may well be prepared for the 'end game' (1 Tm 3:16; 6:15) of the later times of the church age – even the Tribulation Period – but nothing can thwart the plan of God in Christ (1 Tm 1:4), for the true Sovereign and great mystery of godliness will return (1 Tm 3:16; 6:15).

Keywords: teachings of demons; eschatology; Noahic covenant; 1 Timothy 4; later times; climate change.

Introduction

The World Economic Forum (2016) predicted that by 2030, 'You'll eat much less meat. An occasional treat, not a staple. For the good of the environment and your health'. The United Nations, however, has not merely called for moderation in meat consumption, but rather for 'ditching red meat and swapping to vegetarian or vegan diets to prevent climate change' (Joshu 2023). While legislation has not yet banned meat, proponents of the climate change agenda appear intent on moving in that direction. The Netherlands nearly introduced a meat tax; New Zealand threatened its farmers with taxes on cow burps (and other emissions); and Britons may be required to eat less meat to meet their government's carbon emission target (cf. Tapsfield 2024). To substitute the meat that is to be removed from people's diets, Gates proposes synthetic alternatives (Temple 2021), while *The Economist* (2021; 2022) suggests worms, insects, and crickets as untapped food sources.

Readers of 1 Timothy might be forgiven for thinking that this sounds vaguely familiar. Timothy was instructed to remain in Ephesus and to command certain individuals not to teach 'strange doctrines', nor to devote themselves to 'myths and endless genealogies' (1 Tm 1:3–4a, NASB20). A few years earlier, near Miletus, the Ephesian elders had already been warned that 'savage wolves would come in among them, not sparing the flock' (Ac 20:29). The epistle to the Ephesians highlighted the mystery of God's plan in Christ – and now Timothy is instructed to advance this plan (Eph 1:9–10; 3:2, 8–12; 1 Tm 1:4). The first letter to Timothy arguably reaches its crescendo in the revelation of the great mystery of godliness (1 Tm 3:16). Yet, the text continues: 'But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons' (1 Tm 4:1). These teachings originate from demons but will be spread by apostate teachers described as hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared (1 Tm 4:2). According to 1 Timothy 4:3, these doctrines include the prohibition of marriage and abstinence from certain foods (or meat).

God's plan has been under attack since creation: Satan fell, deceived Eve, Adam followed, and many have been deceived since (Gn 3:1–6; Eph 2:1; 1 Tm 2:14; 5:15). The rejection of truth and receptiveness to the teachings of deceitful spirits is not novel (Unger 1994:27, 101). Why, then, is the warning in 1 Timothy 4:1 – but the Spirit explicitly says – framed in such distinctive and urgent terms? What is it about these heresies that is so especially relevant in the 'later times'? Or was this warning only applicable to the Ephesian church era – or perhaps for a few centuries thereafter? Is 1 Timothy 4:1–5 a neglected eschatological passage? This article explores the 'later

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times' referred to in 1 Timothy 4:1, revisits the content of the two demonic teachings, and links 1 Timothy 4:1–5 with eschatological passages.

Before proceeding, three relevant presuppositions are outlined. Today, the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and the letters to Timothy and Titus is disputed. According to Köstenberger (2020:16), when the authorship of the letters to Timothy and Titus is questioned, three possibilities arise: (1) Paul wrote 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus (authenticity); (2) they were written in Paul's name (pseudonymity); or (3) they were forgeries. As Towner (2006:17) notes, scholars such as Roloff, Oberlinner, Weise, Hultgren, Houlden, Hasler, Merkel, Bassler, and Collins argue for pseudonymity. However, the letters to Timothy and Titus unequivocally claim to be written by the apostle Paul (1 Tm 1:1; 2 Tm 2:1; Tt 1:1). The view taken in this article (though admittedly a minority view) is that, since all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tm 3:16; 2 Pt 1:19–21) and God cannot lie (Tt 1:2), when the texts claim Paul as their author, this must be true. It is therefore believed that the apostle Paul wrote Ephesians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. The second relevant presupposition concerns eschatology. Ephesians 2:7 refers to the 'ages to come' (plural), during which God will 'show the boundless riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus'. According to Vlach (2017:525), these 'ages to come' could include 'multiple future ages, including both a millennial phase and an eternal kingdom phase'. In agreement with Waymeyer (2016:93–94), the dual-age framework of 'this age' and 'the age to come' includes an intermediate kingdom between this present age and the eternal state. This intermediate kingdom is considered an initial or first phase of the 'age to come' (Waymeyer 2016:90). For example, Isaiah 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–3 speak of the 'last days', describing a worldwide kingdom in which nations will no longer learn warfare, yet will still journey to Jerusalem, where the Lord will 'judge between the nations' and 'mediate for many peoples'. Because these conditions have never occurred in history and cannot refer to the eternal state, they must describe an intermediate kingdom. Waymeyer (2016:19–171) explores numerous Old and New Testament texts such as Psalm 72, Isaiah 65:17–25, Zechariah 14:16–19, and Revelation 20, requiring an intermediate kingdom between this age and the eternal state. 'Just as "this age" has various eras and dispensations, the millennium and the eternal kingdom are two phases of the "age to come"' (Vlach 2017:524). This article is written from a pre-tribulation, premillennial eschatological perspective. In the third place, when this article refers to the 'Noahic covenant', it is specifically referencing Genesis 9:1–17 as well as verses related to that covenant (e.g. Gn 8:21–22). For a detailed discussion of various perspectives on the Noahic laws in Paul, and their significance for Jewish-Christian dialogue, see Du Toit (2013:631–656).

The period covered by 1 Timothy 4:1–5

The future tense used in the construction *ἐν ὑστέροις καιροῖς ἀποστήσονται τινες* [in later times some will fall away] (1 Tm 4:1)

may indicate something already present. The use of the perfect passive participle to describe the consciences of false teachers as already 'seared' (1 Tm 4:2), suggests that this apostasy had already begun. When the apostle penned this epistle, certain false teachers were, in fact, already present (1 Tm 1:19–20; cf. 2 Tm 2:17–18). These false doctrines were taught by hypocritical liars active at the time Paul wrote this letter – a view shared by most commentators. For example, Litfin (1983:739) states that the 'false teachers plaguing the Ephesian church were the forerunners of the Gnostics of the second century'. Koessler (2014:1900) notes that the 'apostates' teaching mixed an unhealthy disdain of marriage with Jewish dietary restrictions'. However, the text also states that the falling away from faith will occur in the 'later times' [*ἐν ὑστέροις καιροῖς*] (1 Tm 4:1). The expression 'later times' is in the comparative form, focusing less on chronological sequence and more on a certain season during which certain events or a special crisis will transpire. While 'times' refers to 'a point of time or period of time', the term 'later' qualifies the times as pertaining 'to a point of time subsequent to another point of time', even a later or future time (Bauer et al. 2000:497, 1044). Granted, false teachers were already spreading heresies when 1 Timothy 4:1–5 was written. Nevertheless, these demonic doctrines also seem to have a future dissemination during a certain season in the later times – a view again shared by many. Koessler (2014:1900), commenting on 1 Timothy 4:1–5, says that 'Paul described a great falling away yet to come'. Ray (2008:65) writes that the 'apostasy will be quite evident at some point in the future'. Köstenberger (2020:140) notes that 'the final apostasy envisaged for the end times is already looming on the horizon (cf. 2 Tm 3:1; Jud 17–18; 2 Pt 3:3; 1 Jn 4:1)'. But is this warning of apostasy limited to the first and second centuries AD, or does it extend to a broader period?

In 2 Timothy 3:1, the apostle warns that in the 'last days' [*ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις*] difficult times will come – followed by a description of 19 characteristics of moral and ethical declension which will be prevalent (2 Tm 3:1–9). The expressions 'later times', 'last days', and related variants are not technical terms. The Old Testament refers at least six times to the 'latter days' (Dt 4:30; 31:29; Jr 30:24; 48:47; Dn 2:28; 10:14) and six times to the 'last days' (Is 2:2; Jr 23:20; 49:39; Ezk 38:16; Hs 3:4–5; Mi 4:1). In the New Testament, 'later times' appears only once (1 Tm 4:1), whereas 'last days' appears at least four times (2 Tm 3:1; Heb 1:2; Ja 5:3; 2 Pet 3:3). The context of each passage determines the specific period 'later times' or the 'last days' refer to. In this article, the 'church age' refers to the period from the birth of the church in Acts 2 until the rapture of the body of Christ (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Th 4:13–18). Because many aspects of the church are New Testament mysteries – not made known to mankind in other generations (Eph 3:5a); hidden from the past ages and generations (Col 1:26a) – Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah (2:2), Micah (4:1), and Hosea (3:5) could not have envisioned the church age in their references to the 'last days'. Sometimes, Old Testament authors describe the 'last days' as an evil or difficult period that will occur immediately preceding Christ's return (cf. Dt 4:30; 31:29; Jr 30:24). As Towner (2006:554) notes, it was 'a stock belief in the early

church, as inherited from the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, that the time before the End would be characterised by an unprecedented upswing in evil' as well as 'a falling away from believers'. Simultaneously, Old Testament prophets used 'last days' to refer to conditions on earth after Christ's return (cf. Is 2:2–4; Mi 4:1–3). Regarding 1 Timothy 4:1 and 2 Timothy 3:1, Marsh (2022) remarks:

The phrase 'latter times' should not be equated with the superlative term *ἔσχατος* denoting the eschaton or 'very last' days. This level of comparison was a diminishing feature in Koine Greek and stands out as an exception in the GNT along with its opposite, *πρῶτος* or 'very first' (cf. Rv 22:13). (p. 2)

New Testament uses of 'last days', such as in Hebrews 1:2, 2 Timothy 3:1 and 2 Peter 3:3, include the church age. However, 1 Timothy 4:1 emphasises a later segment of the church age. In agreement with Dean and Ice (2013):

What does the term later times mean? It very likely refers to the 'later times' of the current church age. Notice that Paul did not say 'in these last days', as the writer of Hebrews did to refer to the whole church age. Paul used a different expression to convey the clear idea that the Holy Spirit is talking about the 'later times' of the current church age. (p. 220)

How, then, does the church age relate to other references to ages and times? The Bible speaks of two primary ages: 'this age' and 'the age to come' (cf. Eph 1:21; 1 Tm 6:17–19). Intertestamental Jewish literature drew a distinction between this age [חַיַּי הַזֶּה *ha-'ôlām hazzeh*] inaugurated by creation, and the age to come [חַיַּי הַבָּא *ha-'ôlām habbā'*] inaugurated by the Day of the Lord (Helyer 2004:597; cf. Price 1996a:103). The church age forms part of 'this age'. The 'age to come' describes conditions on earth after Jesus returns (Vlach 2017:524).

The eschatological Day of the Lord (cf. 1 Th 5:2; 2 Pt 3:10) emphasises the Tribulation Period, although it also encompasses events occurring in the subsequent age. The Tribulation Period will function as a transitional phase between this age and the age to come and is often viewed as a seven year period that precedes Christ's return to establish God's kingdom on earth (Price 1996b:412–415). At his first coming, through his death and resurrection, Christ defeated the devil's works and disarmed the rulers and authorities (Col 2:15; 1 Jn 3:8). Despite Christ's victory, the New Testament nevertheless still refers to Satan as the 'prince' or 'god of this world' (Jn 12:31; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4), even the 'prince of the power of the air' (Eph 2:2). This tension between a defeated foe and his continued influence will be resolved during the Tribulation Period. Although Satan has legally been defeated, his influence and kingdom have not yet been evicted from the earth (cf. Eph 6:11; Col 1:13; 2 Tm 2:26). During the Tribulation Period, Satan's kingdom, embodied by the antichrist and false prophet, will be forcefully overthrown (cf. Is 24:21–23; Rv 19:20–21). Viewed chronologically, and assuming a pre-tribulational rapture of the church, the church age will be followed by the Tribulation Period, which concludes 'this age'. Immediately after the Tribulation Period, Christ will return to the earth to establish and rule the Messianic kingdom from Jerusalem during the age to come (Mt 24:29–30; 25:31, 34).

While false teachers were already propagating doctrines of demons in Ephesus when Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, these heresies are expected to re-emerge prominently in the 'later times' of the church age. Furthermore, developments during the 'later times' of the church age may serve to prepare the stage for prophecies that will be fulfilled during the Tribulation Period. But what is the content of the two doctrines of demons identified in 1 Timothy 4:3?

The content of two demonic doctrines

The construction *κωλύοντων γαμεῖν, ἀπέχεσθαι βρωμάτων* literally means 'forbidding to marry, to abstain from foods'. The word 'foods' (plural) generally refers to 'that which is eaten' but may also denote 'solid food' (cf. 1 Cor 3:2) as opposed to milk (Bauer et al. 2000:184). The King James Version (KJV) and American Standard Version (ASV) translate *βρωμάτων* as 'meats', whereas more recent translations prefer 'foods'.

The demonic teaching that forbade marriage stands in direct contradiction to the Creator's commands (cf. 1 Tm 4:3). God blessed Adam and Eve and instructed them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Gn 1:28; cf. Eph 5:31). Similarly, in the Noahic covenant, God twice reiterated this command to humanity to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Gn 9:1, 7). The Mosaic covenant that God entered with Israel, does not forbid marriage. While the Law of Moses does contain certain prohibitions on marriage to prevent spiritual idolatry (Ex 34:16; Neh 13:23–28), regulating whom the Israelites may marry is not equivalent to forbidding marriage altogether nor is there a universal command to marry. Jesus himself acknowledged that some do not marry, and others abstain from marriage to dedicate themselves solely for the sake of the kingdom (Mt 19:12). Some are uniquely gifted for dedicated service to God (1 Cor 7:7–8). Christians are free to marry in accordance with God's will (1 Cor 7). However, a blanket prohibition against marriage is a demonic doctrine that contradicts the Word of God.

The second demonic teaching noted in 1 Timothy 4:3 calls for abstinence from foods (such as meat) that God created to be received with gratitude by believers. Although humanity followed a vegetarian diet prior to the flood, the Noahic covenant explicitly permitted the eating of meat – excluding blood (Gn 1:29; 9:2–4; cf. Towner 2006:295). God introduced certain food restrictions under the Mosaic covenant aimed to prevent the Israelites from spiritual idolatry (e.g. consuming food offered to pagan deities – Ex 34:15), and to preserve the Israelites as a holy people unto God (Dt 14:21). The Law prescribed detailed guidelines on permissible foods and preparation methods (cf. Dt 14:3–21). As Marsh (2022:12) rightly observes, 'like Jewish marriage laws, Israel's food laws were never prohibitions in toto'.

In Acts 15, the Holy Spirit and the apostles established four prohibitions to regulate the social interaction between Jewish and Gentile believers in the church (Ac 15:28–29). The first,

third and fourth of these prohibitions relate to dietary restrictions: avoidance of defilement from idols (likely referring to meat sacrificed to idols), abstention from meat not properly drained of blood, and avoidance of blood consumption or food derived from blood (cf. Bock 2007:505–507; Ger 2004:213–214). The second prohibition concerns sexual immorality (Ac 15:20, 29). According to Garland (2003:362), Paul forbade participation in pagan banquets held in pagan temples as well as the consumption of food knowingly offered to an idol. An individual can, of course, resolve to fast or moderate the consumption of certain foods for health or other reasons, but such choices are personal and not to be imposed as universal commandments for all Christians across the world.

In 1 Timothy 4:3b–5, Paul responds to the false teaching introduced in 1 Timothy 4:1–3a. By affirming that ‘everything created by God is good’ (1 Tm 4:4a), Paul echoes God’s declaration in Genesis 1:31 that his creation was good – even very good. By adding, ‘nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude’ (1 Tm 4:4b), Paul alludes to Genesis 9:3, where God gave humanity the right to eat all food. Paul’s teaching ‘consists in a corrected interpretation of the Genesis account’ (Köstenberger 2020:142). ‘The entire logic of Paul’s engagement with the heretics at this point is dependent on his utilisation of the Genesis creation story’ (Towner 2006:299). The ‘error of the false teachers is that by forbidding God’s good gifts to the community they had denied God as Creator and the created order as His good work’ (Campbell 1997:195). On 1 Timothy 4:3–4, Towner (2006) explains:

[T]here is no doubt that Paul has drawn on Gen 9:3 as a historical/theological precedent for the specific eating of meat, subsequently backing this by allusion to the more fundamental statement in Gen 1:31 of the goodness of God’s creation. The tougher question is why. (p. 301)

Towner (2006:301) answers his question by suggesting that an, ‘overly enthusiastic [*too realised*] eschatology’ led some to ‘anticipate the end by living according to a pre-fall pattern’. Köstenberger (2020:142) similarly suggests that the false teaching may have fostered an ‘over realized eschatology’ which rejected sexual activity in pursuit of a ‘higher’ spiritual state. Mappes (1999:455) notes that the heresy Paul opposed in 1 Timothy 4 may be related to one or more of these categories: Jewish false teachers, a type of proto-Jewish or pre-Christian Gnosticism, proto-Marcionism or Montanism, or a developed form of Gnosticism. However, as previously noted, the question is not only what historically gave rise to these demonic doctrines, but also why they might reappear in ‘the later times’, that is, near the end of the church age. As Musser (2024:80, *author’s own emphasis*) succinctly states, ‘in 1 Timothy 4:1–5 Paul warns of the *end game* of a legalism that will eventually lead to a false *worldwide* ascetism that has its ultimate source rooted in “deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons” (1 Tm 4:1)’. In what kind of world will these demonic doctrines gain global acceptance – even be preached within churches? Can 1 Timothy 4:1–5 be linked to other eschatological passages that indicate how the world may be prepared for the Tribulation Period? To answer these

questions, it is necessary – just as Paul does in 1 Timothy 4:3b–5 – to return to God’s purposes for creation before connecting 1 Timothy 4:1–5 to the Noahic covenant, and finally to eschatological passages.

1 Timothy 4:1–5 and eschatology

The Ephesian church was aware of the mystery of God’s will, namely his plan to unite all things in Christ in the fullness of the times (Eph 1:9–10; 3:11; cf. Hoehner 2002:216).¹ Not only was the Son of God the agent of creation – through him all things in heaven and on earth were created – but he is also its goal or purpose, as all things were created ‘unto him’, or ‘for him’ (Col 1:16). As the King of the ages (1 Tm 1:17; cf. Is 9:6), he who is before all things, both sustains creation and directs it towards its teleological and eschatological goal (Col 1:17; Henebury 2021:2–3). Yet, God’s good creation has suffered the rebellion of certain angelic beings as well as the fall of humanity’s first representative (cf. 1 Tm 2:14; 3:6; 4:1). After the fall, God promised a Redeemer-King, and this promise will be fulfilled in two phases: firstly, by procuring salvation through Christ’s initial coming (1 Tm 1:17; 2:5–6; 3:16; 4:10); and secondly, by restoring creation and establishing his kingdom rule on earth at his second coming (1 Tm 6:14–16; 2 Tm 4:1; cf. Mt 25:34). Henebury (2021) describes this as God’s ‘creation project’:

[T]he role of Jesus Christ comes in two phases: In the first phase He suffers and dies and rises again on behalf of sinners and because of the curse. In so doing He becomes the [n]ew covenant through which the other divine covenants are guaranteed and empowered. In the second phase, the phase to which creation is tending (Rm 8:18–23), He rules over the world that was made for Him (Col 1:16), bringing it all into compliance with the original pre-temporal intention, destroying the serpent and presenting creation back to His Father (Cor 1 15:24), thus completing the Creation Project. (p. 3)

Both ‘protology (doctrine of first things) and eschatology (doctrine of last things) point to Christ as the focal point of divine history’ (Barrick 2012:178). The unfolding of God’s plan in Christ is revealed in various biblical covenants – and confirmed by God’s oaths. Not only do the covenants associated with Noah, Abraham, Moses, Phinehas, David, and the new covenant ‘form the main framework that God is utilising to bring about His will for the world’, but ‘each covenant “passes through” the New covenant, who is Jesus Christ, on its way to fulfillment’ (Henebury 2021:3). The unconditional covenants serve as the ‘means or vehicles through which the kingdom program is fulfilled’ (Vlach 2017:96). Ultimately, God’s plan for the fullness of the times will be manifested in and through Christ, who will rule over all creation in the kingdom (cf. 1 Tm 1:17).

Until then, however, there is still an ‘anti-kingdom programme resulting from Satan’s rebellion and mankind’s fall’

1. It is noteworthy that the administration [οἰκονομία] and realisation of God’s plan in Christ is noted thrice in Ephesians (1:10; 3:2, 9) and once in 1 Timothy 1:4. The term οἰκονομία is found only nine times in the New Testament (cf. Bauer et al. 2000:699–700). Paul uses the term six times (cf. Hoehner 2002:217). Ephesians 1:10; 3:2, 9 and 1 Timothy 1:4 therefore share some of the rare New Testament occurrences of the term οἰκονομία.

(Barrick 2012:178). One may argue that if 'kingdom through covenant' is correct, then perhaps an 'anti-kingdom through anti-covenant' may emerge during the 'later times' of the church age, reaching its peak in the Tribulation Period at the end of this age. If so, the first biblical covenant to be under attack would likely be the Noahic covenant, because it undergirds the subsequent biblical covenants. God established the Noahic covenant not only with Noah as representative of humanity, but also with every living creature and the earth itself (Gn 9:9–10, 13). Many scholars highlight the significance of the Noahic covenant. According to Henebury (2021:117), the Noahic covenant 'sets the stage for the story of the Bible until Christ finally destroys the Evil One (cf. Gn 3:15; Rv 20:10), before the Eternal State is ushered in'. The reliability of later biblical covenants is sometimes anchored in the order of nature affirmed by the Noahic covenant. Busenitz (1999) notes:

In Jeremiah 33:20–21, God employs the unfailing regularity of the natural order as a guarantee of the covenant with David (2 Sm 7) and the covenant with Levi (Nm 17; 25:10–13). (p. 186)

Vlach (2017:26) likewise observes that the Noahic covenant 'promises stability of nature as the platform for God carrying out His kingdom purposes'. Given the foundational nature of the Noahic covenant for the other biblical covenants, and as further discussed below, it is unsurprising to see this covenant increasingly under attack – and the teachings of demons, referred to in 1 Timothy 4:1–3, are part of this assault.

The Noahic covenant commands humanity to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Gn 9:1, 7). In agreement with Chalmers (2009:211), this command not only affirms human life but through the mandate given to humankind in Genesis 1, also promotes animal life. 'The proliferation of human life is thus not just for the benefit of humanity but for creation as a whole' (Chalmers 2009:211). But 1 Timothy 4:1–3 highlights that in 'later times', demonic teachings will forbid marriage, thereby attacking the Noahic covenant (1 Tm 4:3). Any attempt to discourage the propagation of human life is thus an attack on life itself – and on God the Creator.

In terms of the Noahic covenant and for the continuation of humankind, God also permits humanity to eat from every moving creature, including meat (excluding blood) (Gn 9:3–4). Yet, in the 'later times', demons (through human agents) will promote abstention from certain foods (1 Tm 4:3). This doctrine of demons likewise contradicts the Noahic covenant.

Furthermore, God unconditionally promised that while the earth remains, 'seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease' (Gn 8:22). According to Chalmers (2009):

God guarantees the stable conditions necessary for the production of crops and food, which are, in turn, essential for the growth and spread of both human and animal life on the earth. (p. 209)

Busenitz (1999:185, *author's own emphasis*) affirms that the 'cycle of seasons after catastrophic interruption would be *permanently*

reestablished (Gn 8:22)'. God remains in control of the seasons, the day-night cycle, and even climate and temperature changes. This natural order will remain uninterrupted until the final judgement (Robertson 1980:114; cf. Street 2007:39). Nonetheless, the World Economic Forum (2016, *author's own emphasis*) predicts that by 2030, 'a billion people will be displaced by *climate change*'. This statement denies that God has unconditionally promised to maintain the stability of the earth's climate. Further, God delegated authority to his image bearers, resulting in humanity that has dominion over fish, birds, livestock, everything that crawls on the earth – even dominion over the earth (Gn 1:26; 9:6; cf. Ps 115:16). The earth is not to be worshipped as 'mother earth' or 'Gaia', and certainly not to be appeased by abstaining from marriage or certain foods. The created order must not be inverted.

The Noahic covenant emphasises that humankind is made in the image of God (Gn 9:6). God demands a penalty for taking a human life – even from animals that shed human blood (cf. Gn 9:5). To protect God's image bearers and to prevent a return to the violence of the pre-flood era, in the Noahic covenant, God instituted capital punishment for pre-meditated murder (Gn 9:5–6; cf. Gentry & Wellum 2015:63). This established human government (McClain 1959:47). Today, however, not all governments administer the death penalty; in fact, God's creation order suffers violence, as some societies impose harsher penalties for harming animals or plants than for pre-meditated murder. Despite humanity's sins, the Noahic covenant remains unconditional. At the end of this age, however, the Creator will judge his creation (2 Pt 3:7; cf. Chalmers 2009:215).

1 Timothy 4:1–5, with its connections to Genesis 1 and the Noahic covenant, can be related to eschatological passages. Isaiah's 'little apocalypse' describes kingdom blessings (cf. Is 25), but only after God has judged the entire earth (Is 24:1–23). This eschatological judgement comes because the 'earth is also defiled by its inhabitants, for they violated laws, altered statutes, and broke the everlasting covenant' (Is 24:5). As a result of various idolatries, a curse devours the earth and the guilty suffer for their sins (Is 24:6). Few will survive this judgement (Is 24:6b; cf. Mt 24:21–22). Several scholars (Gentry & Wellum 2015:220; Henebury 2021:249; Street 2007:42; Watts 1985:318) identify the 'everlasting covenant' in Isaiah 24:5 as the Noahic covenant. There are at least three key reasons that may be proffered to justify this view. Firstly, as the judgement depicted in Isaiah 24 is cosmic in scope (cf. vv. 4, 18, 21), the 'everlasting covenant' referred to in Isaiah 24:5 should likewise be creation-wide in its range. Only the Noahic covenant fits this description, being made with all humanity, all creatures, and even with the earth. The nations are not related to God through the Sinaitic covenant and cannot be judged on this basis (Chisholm 1993:241). The Mosaic covenant, made with Israel, cannot be the source of the cosmic judgement described in Isaiah's 'little apocalypse'. Moreover, all descendants of Shem are still under the Noahic covenant. Secondly, God judged the entire pre-flood world for corruption, violence, and bloodshed (Gn 6:11, 13; 9:5–6; 2 Pt 3:6). After the flood, God

TABLE 1: Shared pattern of eschatological events.

Pattern	Isaiah 24–27	Daniel 12	Zechariah 14	Matthew 24–25	Revelation 6–20
Tribulation	24:1–20; 26:20–21	12:1	14:1–3	24:4–28	6:1–18:24
Cosmic signs	24:23a	-	14:4b–7	24:29	6:12–17
Christ's return	24:21a; 26:21a (implied)	-	14:4a	24:30	19:11–16
Judgement	24:21–23; 27:1	12:2	14:12	25:31–46	19:17–20:3
Kingdom	24:23b; 25:6–8	12:3 (cf. Mt 13:43)	14:9, 16–21	25:31, 34	20:4–10

Source: Vlach, M.J., 2012, 'The kingdom of God and the millennium', *The Master's Seminary Journal* 23(2), 225–254

established the Noahic covenant with his creation. In agreement with Street (2007:42), the antediluvian corruption of the earth arose because of the violence and bloodshed of that generation. The Noahic covenant 'seemed to have been aimed at preventing the kinds of sins which brought about the flood, especially violence and bloodshed'. Isaiah 24–27, however, notes that God will judge the entire earth because it has yet again been defiled (or corrupted) by its inhabitants and polluted by bloodshed (24:5; 26:21; cf. Chisholm 1993:246–247). One basis for the judgement at the end of this evil age will likely be the Noahic covenant that humanity has broken. Thirdly, like the reference in Isaiah 24:5, the Noahic covenant is named an 'everlasting covenant' (Gn 9:16). Although other covenants are also called 'everlasting' (e.g. Gn 17:7; 2 Sm 23:5; Heb 13:20), the Noahic covenant seems to be the only 'everlasting covenant' that encompasses all creation.

It is proposed that the everlasting covenant of Isaiah 24:5 refers to the Noahic covenant. If Isaiah 24:5 indeed refers to the Noahic covenant, then one reason God will judge the earth and the earth dwellers at the end of 'this age', that is, the Tribulation Period, will be its violation. The teachings of demons referred to in 1 Timothy 4:1–3, however, encourage the transgression of the Noahic covenant. Since God will judge his creation during the Tribulation Period at the end of this age for (inter alia) disobeying the Noahic covenant, 1 Timothy 4:1–5 is eschatologically significant for the 'later times' of the church age – even into the Tribulation Period. It is therefore submitted that 1 Timothy 4:1–5 is a neglected eschatological passage.

Assuming the above is correct, and if Isaiah 24–27 corresponds with other eschatological passages, then parallels with 1 Timothy 4:1–5 can be further drawn. Four arguments support linking Isaiah 24–27 with other eschatological passages:

Firstly, Isaiah 24 states that, when the Lord lays the earth waste, the inhabitants of the earth will decrease in number, and 'few people are left' (Is 24:1, 6). This is consistent with Jesus' warning of a time of 'great tribulation' such as 'has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will again', and, if those 'days have not been cut short, no life would have been saved' (Mt 24:21–22). Referring to the nation Israel, the prophet Daniel (12:1) also refers to an unprecedented 'time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation'. Another prophet mentions a 'time of Jacob's trouble', describing it as a 'great day', and there is 'none like it' (Jr 30:7). It is out of the 'great tribulation' that a great multitude of martyrs from all nations will come

(Rv 7:9, 14). In agreement with Garland (2004:138), such an *unprecedented* time has not occurred in history, and since there cannot be more than one unparalleled time of global trouble, these references must refer to the same period. This unique period may be referred to as the Tribulation Period that the eschatological Day of the Lord emphasises. Consequently, Isaiah 24–27, Daniel 12:1–3, Matthew 24–25 and Revelation 6–19 may refer to the same period when God will judge the earth and the earth dwellers.

Secondly, as Vlach (2012:227–237) demonstrates (see summary in Table 1), many eschatological passages share a common structure: (1) a period of unique, global tribulation such as the world has never seen or will ever thereafter experience; (2) cosmic signs; (3) Christ's return; (4) judgement; and (5) the establishment of the kingdom.

Thirdly, (see Table 2), since both Isaiah 24:21–23 and Revelation 19–20 appear to depict a two-stage judgement of God's enemies following Christ's return to the earth, this strengthens the case for understanding these passages as references to the eschatological Day of the Lord.

Fourthly, (see Table 3) there are significant correspondences between the Olivet Discourse and Revelation 6, suggesting that the Tribulation Period will commence when these global events unfold.

In summary, Isaiah's 'little apocalypse' can be connected to other passages that also describe an unprecedented, unique period of global tribulation. Many eschatological passages include a general pattern of end-time events. Isaiah 24:21–23 shares significant similarities to certain events depicted in Revelation 19–20, and it appears that both the Olivet discourse and Revelation 6 describe (inter alia) the onset of the Tribulation Period. For these reasons, it is submitted that Isaiah 24–27, Daniel 12:1–3, Zechariah 14, the Olivet Discourse, and Revelation 6–19 all portray the Tribulation Period or aspects thereof.² If this is the case, then further parallels may be identified between 1 Timothy 4:1–5, the Noahic covenant, and these eschatological passages of which only one possible link is considered here.

Arguing for a Christian environmental ethos, J. Moo (2010:25) rightly observes that a biblical eschatological perspective 'can provide a distinctive lens for understanding the created

2. In Luke's version of the Olivet discourse, the disciples ask for a sign as to when the temple will be destroyed (21:7). The sign of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple is provided in Luke 21:20–24, 'when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, flee'.

TABLE 2: Two-stage judgement of God's enemies.

Isaiah 24		Revelation 19–20	
Verse	Referring to judgement	Chapter and verse	Referring to judgement
21	Mentions 'kings of the earth' that are opposed to God.	19:19	Refers to 'kings of the earth' who are opposed to God.
21	States that both the kings of the earth and the host of heaven will be incarcerated.	19:21 20:1–3	Tells of the defeat of the kings of the earth and Tells of the binding of Satan.
22	Mentions imprisonment in a dungeon or pit.	20:1	Mentions Satan's confinement in an 'abyss' which is also called a 'prison' in 20:7.
22	States that final punishment takes place 'after many days'.	20:7–10 20:11–15	States that after a 1000 years Satan is released for a short time and then sentenced to the lake of fire. States that all unbelieving dead are sentenced to the lake of fire after the 1000 years are completed.
23	States the Lord will reign as King.	20:6	States that Christ will reign for a 1000 years.

Source: Vlach, M.J., 2012, 'The kingdom of God and the millennium', *The Master's Seminary Journal* 23(2), 225–254

world and the Christian's role within it'. According to D. Moo (2006), eschatology:

[I]s not intended to foster Christian passivity but to encourage God's people actively and vigorously to align their values and behaviour with what it is that God is planning to do. (p. 484)

In agreement with D. Moo (2006):

Christians must avoid the humanistic 'Green utopianism' that characterizes much of the environmental movement. We will not by our own efforts end the 'groaning' of the earth. But this realism about our ultimate success should not deter our enthusiasm to be involved in working toward those ends that God will finally secure through his own sovereign intervention. (p. 484)

Those who have not placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ hold onto a variety of eschatologies. It would be unfortunate if Christians, under the banner of saving the planet, inadvertently contribute to establishing a global system that will ultimately enforce the beast's rule upon the world (cf. Rv 13). According to Revelation 11:18b, God will 'destroy those who destroy the earth'. The verb for *destroy* comes from διαφθεῖρω [*diaphtheirō*] which may denote either physical decay or outright destruction, or moral and spiritual corruption (Fanning 2020:342; Garland 2004:464). Idolatry leads to the defilement of the earth (cf. Dt 11:16–17). Consequently, the emphasis in Revelation 11:18b lies on those who destroy the earth (through idolatry) and who will themselves be destroyed.

Earlier in Revelation 11, the 'earth dwellers' rejoiced when the two witnesses were killed by the beast from the abyss (Rv 11:10). According to Beale (1999:290), 'earth dwellers' in Revelation is a technical term for unbelieving idolaters. Garland (2004:265, 281) rightfully observes that not only will these earth dwellers place their trust in humanity and the environment, but many of the judgements in Revelation will fall upon the natural systems of the earth because the earth will have become an object of worship for them. During the Tribulation Period, God will judge the unholy triad: Satan,

TABLE 3: The Olivet discourse and Revelation 6.

Events / Seal judgements	Olivet discourse	Revelation 6 (verse)
False messiahs	Matthew 24:5; Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8	2
Wars	Matthew 24:6–7; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9	4
Famines	Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:10	5–6, 8
Pestilences	Luke 21:11	8
Persecution	Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9–13	9–11
Earthquakes	Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11	12
Cosmic phenomena	Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24–25; Luke 21:11	12–14

Source: Garland, A.C., 2004, *A testimony of Jesus Christ – Volume 1: A commentary on the Book of Revelation, Spirit and Truth*, Camano Island

the antichrist, and the false prophet, along with their followers such as the earth dwellers (Rv 19:20–20:3). Yet, even leading up and into the Tribulation Period, promoters of extreme environmentalism – those who deny God and his promises in the Noachic covenant (cf. Gn 8:22) – may attempt to save the earth but end up being the ones who will destroy it (cf. Farag 2022:7). Garland (2004) comments on Revelation 11:18b:

Here is God's assessment of modern environmentalism – which purports to radically care for the earth while denying the Creator behind the creation and creatures which it panders to. At the Second Coming, the condition of the earth has reached the equivalent of the time of the flood where 'the earth is filled with violence' (Gen. 6:13). This corruption was due to the great wickedness of man in that 'every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Gen. 6:5). This is the predictable end of unregenerate men once the Restraint is removed and the mystery of lawlessness reaches full flower (2 Th. 2:7). 'The word "destroy" is the same, actually, as "corrupt". Man had destroyed the earth by corrupting the earth, using it not for God's glory, but instead to satisfy his own greed and lust'. (p. 464)

Conclusion

After examining the time period addressed in 1 Timothy 4:1, this article not only linked the two demonic teachings mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:3 to the Noachic covenant, but also to numerous eschatological passages. It is proposed that 1 Timothy 4:1–5 may indeed be a neglected eschatological passage. If this is so, further research may uncover additional correspondences between 1 Timothy 4:1–5, the Noachic covenant, and eschatological passages.

But in what kind of world will the demonic teachings of 1 Timothy 4:3 gain global acceptance – even be proclaimed from church pulpits? It will be a world that denies the Creator and his created order (cf. Rm 1:18–32). By promoting asceticism in the form of sacrifices, such as forbidding marriage and abstaining from certain foods (such as meat), God's design for life on earth will be subverted; in effect resulting in a form of earth-worship, or the elevation of animal and plant life above that of God's image bearers. Nevertheless, nothing can thwart the plan of God in Christ (1 Tm 1:4). Through the cross, Jesus has secured salvation from sin and laid the foundation for the restoration of creation in accordance with God's plan in Christ. As part of Christ's second coming, creation itself will be liberated from its 'slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rm 8:21). At the appointed time, God the Father will cause our Lord Jesus Christ to be

revealed – He who is the great mystery of godliness, the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 3:16; 6:15).

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contribution

J.J.S. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's findings, and content.

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