

The Great Apostasy & Catholic Authority - LDS Apologetics

Why Apostolic Succession Was Broken | Loss of Keys & Revelation | "Gates of Hell" Explained

1. DEFINING THE GREAT APOSTASY

The Great Apostasy is NOT merely doctrinal corruption. It is the loss of apostolic KEYS and the cessation of revelation.

James E. Talmage:

"We affirm that with the passing of the apostolic period the Church drifted into a condition of apostasy, whereby **succession in the Holy Priesthood was broken**; and that the Church as an earthly organization operating under Divine direction and **having authority to officiate in spiritual ordinances ceased to exist.**"

— *The Vitality of Mormonism*, pp. 109-110

2. "GATES OF HELL" — THE PROOF-TEXT

Catholic Claim: Matthew 16:18 ("the gates of hell shall not prevail") proves the Church can never apostatize.

The Problem: "Hell" Is a Mistranslation

Greek: πύλαι ᾗδου (*pulai haidou*) = "gates of Hades"

Hades (ᾗδης) = Hebrew **Sheol** = realm of the dead, the grave
Gehenna (γέεννα) = place of punishment (actual "hell")

Jesus said "gates of Hades" — death/grave, NOT Satan's kingdom.

Old Testament Usage:

Isaiah 38:10: "I must go through the **gates of Sheol**" — Hezekiah speaking of death, not Satan.

Wisdom 16:13: "You lead mortals down into the **gates of Hades** and back again" — speaking of **resurrection**.

"'Gates of Hades' is a Semitic idiom for death, found in **Job 38:17; Psalm 9:13; Isaiah 38:10; Wisdom 16:13.**"
— *Encyclopedia.com*

What Jesus Actually Meant:

A better translation: "Upon this rock I will build my church, and **the power of death will not defeat it.**"

This is about **resurrection**, not institutional indefectibility.

Rev 1:18: Christ has "the **keys of Hades and of death**" — He conquered death through resurrection. **This is the promise.**

The Grammar Problem:

Gates are **defensive** structures. They don't attack. Scholars note: "There is an awkwardness in having **stationary gates** actively attempting to prevail. **How can gates attack?**"

Even IF It Meant Protection...

The LDS response: The gates didn't prevail.

- Christ was resurrected — death conquered
- Gospel was preached throughout ancient world
- Fragments of truth preserved through apostasy
- **The Restoration occurred** — God's Church is on earth today

The apostasy was **temporary**, not permanent!

The Rock = Revelation:

Peter received his testimony by revelation (Matt 16:17). If the "rock" is continuing revelation, then when revelation ceased, the foundation crumbled.

3. KEYS VS. SUCCESSION

Catholics claim bishops = successors of apostles.

LDS: Bishops hold **delegated** authority. Apostles hold **keys of the kingdom**.

- Apostles receive **revelation** for the Church
- Bishops **preserve tradition** (by their own admission)
- When last apostle died without successor → keys lost

4. BISHOPS ≠ APOSTLES

Ignatius of Antioch (~110 AD):

"Follow the presbytery **as you would the Apostles...**"
Note: "As you would" = analogy, not identity.

Irenaeus (~180 AD):

"The function of apostolic succession was to **preserve apostolic tradition** (not new traditions added over time)."

The Problem: If bishops PRESERVE tradition rather than ADD to it through revelation, they are NOT functioning as apostles did.

5. FATHERS ADMITTED REVELATION CEASED

Hippolytus: "There could not be a fuller or greater revelation following the apostolic age."

Epiphanius: "Prophetic revelation received its **completion during the apostolic age.**"

Muratorian Fragment (~170 AD):

"**Nothing after the prophets and apostles is to be considered Scripture.**"

If the fathers were right that revelation ceased, the Church was left without divine guidance — no new scripture, no resolution of disputes.

6. PAPACY = LATER DEVELOPMENT

Century	Development
1st-2nd	Rome led by council of elders, no single bishop
2nd-3rd	Monarchical bishops emerge; "Pope" for ANY bishop
6th	"Pope" begins to be reserved for Rome
1073	Gregory VII restricts "Pope" to Rome only
1870	Vatican I defines papal infallibility

Orthodox View: "Papal authority was **not established by Christ**. It was developed by the popes many centuries later."

7. MIRACLES ≠ AUTHORITY

Lanciano "Miracle": No contemporary evidence — first reports date to **1574**. Supposed WHO report "was found to be a **fraud.**"

Even IF miracles were genuine, they do NOT prove apostolic authority, papal succession, or Catholic doctrine. **God works miracles through imperfect instruments.**

8. THE PARALLEL

Religion	Claim
Catholicism	Revelation ended; Magisterium interprets
Protestantism	Revelation ended; Bible alone
Islam	Muhammad is seal of prophets

All three claim revelation has ceased.

LDS Question: Why would God stop speaking?

9. BIBLICAL PROPHECIES OF APOSTASY

2 Thess 2:3: "...except there come a **falling away first...**"

Acts 20:29-30: "After my departing shall **grievous wolves** enter in..."

Amos 8:11: "A **famine...** of hearing the words of the LORD."

10. THE QUESTION

**If revelation ceased after apostles (Montanism)...
If bishops preserve tradition, not add to it...
How can bishops be true successors to apostles?**

The apostolic keys were lost. They could only be restored by those who held them — **Peter, James, and John** appeared to Joseph Smith in 1829.

SOURCES

LDS: Talmage, *The Great Apostasy*; FAIR LDS

Greek: *Israel Bible Weekly*; Dr. Eitan Bar; *Encyclopedia.com*

Fathers: *Ignatius, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Epiphanius*

Historical: *Wikipedia (Papacy, Montanism)*