

What and When are the Last Days?

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Introduction

“Each generation is defined by memorable events: triumphs, tragedies, and travesties. Though each generation has left its mark, only one generation will experience the ultimate event. Only one will have the distinction of being...the final generation. That generation is here.” So begins a program of a televangelist called, “The Final Generation,” which well represents the popular belief that we are living in the “End Times.”

There have probably been people in every generation since the time of Christ who believed that they knew Jesus would come in their own lifetimes. Some in modern times have even been so bold, so arrogant, as to predict the date on which the Christ would come.

- In defiance of the Lord’s warning against date-setting, William Miller, founder of the sect which later became the Seventh Day Adventists, said it would be March 21, 1843. After that date passed, and still no final coming of the Lord, he changed it to October 22, 1844.
- Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormon cult, announced the coming of the Lord “was nigh” in 1835, predicting that “56 years should wind up the scene.” He was shot to death trying to break out of a Carthage, Missouri jail in 1844, and so did not live to see his prophecy fail.
- The founder of the “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” Charles T. Russell, first said the Lord returned invisibly in 1874, then changed it to 1914. His successor, Joseph Franklin Rutherford published a book entitled *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, predicting the return of Christ would be in 1925. He died in 1942, and his book remains an embarrassment to the Jehovah’s Witnesses. His successor, Nathan Knorr, set September 5, 1975 for when the Lord would come, and still the Lord has not come. After some five failed prophecies, the Jehovah’s Witnesses merely contends “we are living in the time of the end.”
- Hal Lindsey has done much to popularize and profit from dispensational premillennialism. In his best selling 1976 book *The Late Great Planet Earth* he confidently declared that the generation that would see the so-called “rebirth of Israel” would be the end-times generation. Since Israel

was re-established as an independent state in 1948, and since Lindsey viewed a generation as about 40 years, he suggested that by 1988 Christ would come. As the 1980's approached he stretched his 40-year timetable to as long as 100 years. But in his book 1980's: *Countdown To Armageddon*, he said, "All these signs, and many more which are just as visible, point to the fact that this generation is one that will see the end of the present world and the return of Jesus Christ. We are the generation he was talking about."

- Now we have the immensely popular *Left Behind* series (some thirty million copies sold), leading people to believe we have biblical prophecies which indicate we are in the end-times, and that Christ is about to come. Its authors, Dr. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, said in *Are We Living in the End Times?*, "We twenty-first century Christians have more reason than any generation before us to believe that Christ will return to take us to His Father's House."
- A man knocked on our door one morning and when I answered he immediately started spouting off 2 Timothy 3:1ff, to convince me we were in the "last days," meaning that Jesus would come very soon.

What Are the Last Days?

As you can see from the previous notes, many people believe that when there is talk about the "last days," the discussion is dealing with the final days of the end of time. Here is a good representation of that: "The signs are coming to pass before our very eyes, and the day is drawing near when a bloody holocaust such as this world has never known will occur. The stage is now set, events are now unfolding which will soon lead to the great and horrible battle at the end of the world. Are you ready for Armageddon?" This was on the cover of a video. That is what many, if not most, in the denominational world believe. These people believe we are now in the "last days," meaning by that, the generation that will see the Lord's return.

Others suggest the expression "the last days" may at times refer to the last days of the Jewish or Old Testament dispensation. J.E. Wright makes this comment on the "last days" mentioned in Acts 2:17: "What they were hearing and seeing was the transition into the powerful regime of the Holy Spirit. In verse 17, the author of Acts speaks of the 'Last days,' referring to the end of the Jewish age. The Law of Moses had lived out its days of usefulness as the great, 'School Master that should bring them to Christ.' It is now about to succumb to death. As Jesus died on the cross, so also was the Law nailed to the cross" (12-13). Wright teaches the truth concerning the end of the law of Moses, but I believe he misses the mark on the idea that the "last days" refer to the end of the Jewish dispensation and not the beginning of the Christian age.

I am convinced that the "last days" referred to in the scriptures is discussing, not the final days of the end of time, but the final age or dispensation of man.

The line needs to be clearly drawn that by saying we are in the "last days," does not mean that we know that it will be in our generation that the Lord will return and this world will come to an end. In the Bible, the "last days" does not mean the last few days before the end of all things. The "last days" the

Bible refers to is talking about an age or dispensation (i.e. Patriarchal Age, Mosaic Age, Christian Age).

The “Patriarchal Age” is normally thought to have lasted some twenty-five hundred years, continuing from Adam to Moses. Of course, we understand that the twenty-five hundred years is up to the beginning of the Mosaic Age. The Patriarchal Age continued to last for the Gentiles to the cross. For example, the Ninevites were exhorted to repent or die (according to the book of Jonah). They were to repent of sin, but sin is a transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). Therefore, we know that the Ninevites were accountable to a law for they were in sin and transgression of law. Were they under the Jewish law? No, they were Gentiles. The only other law God had enforced is what we call the Patriarchal Law, which is what they were under. Under this system God dealt with the father as the representative of the family (thus, “patriarchal”). Their laws were simple, yet God demanded obedience. Animal blood was offered during this age (Hebrews 11:4).

The second age of man’s history is known as the “Jewish or Mosaic Dispensation (Age).” With this system there was a change from a family system to a national one. God had placed His law in writing. This law was intended only for a short time and would pass away. Paul commented, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3). Neither could animal sacrifices blot out their sins (Hebrews 10:1-4). The law made nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:19), but it remained for a better covenant to do this (Hebrews 8:6-13). Finally, the law was intended as a tutor or schoolmaster to bring the Jews to Christ (Galatians 3:23-29). Jesus was born under the law and was the only one ever to keep it perfectly. He honored it perfectly and then took it out of the way by nailing it to His cross (Matthew 5:17-18; Colossians 2:14).

The third great period is our current age, “The Christian Age” or “the last days.” Christ has been given all authority (Matthew 28:18-20). All are to hear Him (Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 6:19-20). He is our mediator (Hebrews 9:15). We obtain remission of sins through His blood (Hebrews 9:22; 10:9, 10). His is “a better covenant which hath been enacted upon better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). This is the period or age that the Bible refers to as “the last days.”

The Christian Age – the Last Age

The Bible mentions the “last days” nine times. We will list them here:

Genesis 49:1, Jacob calls his sons together to tell them what will become of them. Nehemiah 8:18 is dealing with a period of time of about a week during a feast. Isaiah 2:2 deals with the prophecy concerning the establishment of the church in the Christian Age. Micah 4:1 deals with the same prophecy as did Isaiah. That is all the Old Testament says about the “last days.”

We begin reading in the New Testament and we find mention of “the last days” first in Acts 2:17. Peter quotes Joel’s prophecy, from Joel 2:28ff, and said, “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God...” (Acts 2:16-17). There is no mistaking that Peter clearly identified what was happening on that day 2,000 years ago as

characteristic of the “last days.” Both Joel and Peter were inspired, therefore, we must accept Peter’s interpretation of Joel 2:28-31. “The last days” refer to the time of Acts chapter two, the beginning of the Christian Age, until the end of time. The last days are not just those few that occur immediately before the end.

There are other passages in the New Testament that discuss the “last days.” To Timothy, Paul wrote, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Tim. 3:1). This passage clearly shows that grievous times would occur during the Christian Age. We read in Hebrews 1:1-2, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” The conclusion is that the last days were presently in effect. Another important passage bearing on this subject is 2 Peter 3:3: “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” Again, it is clear that this passage refers to the present Christian Age. It is during this age that men would scoff at the last things, particularly the second coming of our Lord. Lastly, James 5:3, James is warning the rich, that by trusting in their riches and not God, they are laying up God’s wrath for that final judgment that will come upon them.

It seems clear that the writers of the New Testament used the expression “the last days” to refer to the time between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ.

The Last Day of the “Last Days”

That last day will indeed be a momentous day. The importance of the events of that day, and the dramatic swiftness with which they will be executed, create awe and humility; for, on this day the return of our Lord will occur (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Matthew 25:31-34; Acts 1:9-11). For those who believe that a silent or secret return is coming, the Bible mentions a “...shout...voice...trump” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, noisiest verse in the Bible), and “...a great noise...” (2 Peter 3:10). There isn’t going to be anything silent or secret about the Lord’s return at all. It is going to be grand and glorious, the most spectacular event the world has ever seen and no one is going to miss the last day of the “last days!”

Not only will the Lord return in the air, another momentous event of the last day will be the destruction of the world by fire. Peter wrote, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass a way with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). He follows it up with the solemn exhortation, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of person ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11).

There are several expressions used to describe the last of the last days. Such as: “the coming of the Lord;” “the day of Christ;” and “the day of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 5:1,2; Hebrews 9:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:1,3). These passages make clear that “the day of the Lord” is the day of His return. What are some of the things that will happen on that momentous day? Death, his last enemy, shall

be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26). Jesus affirms that the resurrection will occur on the “last day.” “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). See also John 6:44; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; John 5:28-29. At this time the judgment of the Lord will occur and Christ will give unto every man his reward. If He raised only the righteous dead, and then reigned with them on the earth for a literal period of one thousand years before the resurrection of the wicked to render unto them according to their deeds (which is what most of the denominational world believes), He would not have said that He would render to every man according to their deeds.

Conclusion

Are we living in the last days? I believe the Bible teaches that we are living in the “last days,” and that we have been for nearly 2,000 years. The Christian Age or Dispensation is the last Age of God’s dealings with mankind. There is nothing in the Bible that suggests that we know our present time is the final generation, but there is enough in the Bible to teach us that our dispensation, or Christian age, is the last age of man.

Our generation may see the last day, that final day when the Lord returns in the clouds and calls us to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16). But Jesus warned all concerning this subject: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew 24:36).

This is the last age of man. Is it the last day, or the end of the last days of man? According to Jesus, no one knows for sure. We can only follow His instructions to, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matthew 24:42).

Works Consulted

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