

# The Meaning and Significance of the Term "The Last Days" In New Testament Prophecy

By Brian Abshire

The debate between the various eschatological views extends all the way back to the first century heretic Cerenthus' combination of Ebionite theology, Gnostic speculation and sensual chilianism. Since that time, though certain positions have been recognised as heresy (and hence vigorously condemned), from Augustine's germinal Amillennialism, through Puritan Postmillennialism to even Darby's Dispensational Premillennialism, the historic church has not made eschatology itself a test of orthodoxy. Sincere men coming to the same passages have arrived at different conclusions. Christianity has thus made room for a variety of views. In different ages, some views have often enjoyed more popularity than others. But the issue must never be "which view has the most proponents" but rather, "which view best interprets the Scriptural data in a proper manner".

This principle is especially important when considering the New Testament phrase, "the Last Days". Various attempts have been made to determine the prime referent with varying degrees of success. Furthermore, the resulting interpretations have profound effects on the development of the rest of one's eschatology. Perhaps the most common popular understanding of the "last days" is the futurist position that understands it to refer to the Second Coming of Christ. Dispensational Premillennialism understands the phrase purely in reference to the brief period of time before the second coming (Ryrie 152). Historic Premillennialism and traditional Amillennialism often accept a modified futurist view which equates the entire New Testament era from the resurrection of Christ to the Second Coming as the "Last Days" (Hoekma 152). "The term is not to be thought of as a single calendar day, but as the entire period that will witness the final redemptive visitation of God in Christ" (Ladd 555).

## Various Views Rejected

The key passage in determining the meaning of the "Last Days" is Matthew 24, the Olivet Discourse. While other passages hint, suggest and offer tantalizing glimpses, Matthew 24 lays out a specific prophetic agenda. But just what is the content of the Olivet prophecies? There are four major approaches; (1) Matthew 24 speaks to the events leading up to a future Great Tribulation which will occur shortly before the Second Coming of Christ, (2) Matthew 24 refers both to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming of Christ through the medium of "prophetic perspective" or "dual referent", (3) Matthew 24 speaks specifically of the Second Coming which actually occurred in 70AD (Groh vii) and (4) Matthew 24 speaks primarily to the destruction of Israel in 70AD and does not address the Second Coming of Christ at all (at least until verse 36 which may mark a transition from the destruction of Jerusalem to the Lord's Return).

Possibility number three is rejected immediately because the orthodox Christian church has always believed and taught the literal second coming of Christ. While history and tradition do not replace Scripture, the witness of the entire church should be given considerable weight

here. If the doctrine were true, then surely someone, somewhere would have accepted and taught it. Instead, this view is associated primarily with heretics. Yet even so there are some today who hold to this view who are evangelicals with a high view of Scripture (Groh ix).

The Dispensational Premillennialist proposal necessitates convoluted reasoning to escape the conundrum caused by the New Testament authors writing as if they saw themselves living in "the last days" (e.g. [1 Thess 4:17](#), [2 Thess 1:7](#), [Jas 5:3](#), [1 Jn 2:18](#), 1 Ptr 1:5,20, [Jude 18](#) etc.). Thus either the authors were wrong (i.e. expecting and teaching that something would happen which then did not happen) or much of the New Testament was incomprehensible (or at least inapplicable) until fairly recently. The cultural implications are even more profound. If the "last days" refers to the end of the gospel dispensation and are characterised by spreading apostasy, persecution of the church and the growth of the parasitical kingdom of Satan, then the church can expect to see no significant cultural expression of Christianity as time progresses. Rushdoony notes that such a pessimistic understanding of the hope of fulfilling the Great Commission forces the church to adopt a sort of Manichaeism; i.e. the necessity of withdrawing from the inherently evil world of darkness in order to retain one's own purity (Kik ix).

Traditional Amillennialists, who often adopt a mixture of a futurist and preterist hermeneutic, also face a similar dilemma. While acknowledging that one referent has to be the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, they are yet faced with the problem of the expectation and delay of the Parousia (Berkhof 700). Borrowing a concept from liberals such as Strauss, Schweitzer and Dodd, a view known as "Realized Eschatology" has become widely accepted (Hoekema 292). Essentially, this view is summarized by the concept of "already" but "not yet" (Hoekema 14); i.e. a partial fulfilment now of a coming eschatological reality. The "signs of the times" were not intended to provide a specific eschatological time table, but rather to warn of conflicts to be expected throughout history until the Parousia (Ferguson 230). Thus, Jesus in the Olivet discourse is both talking about the coming judgment on Israel, as well as his own Second Coming. By juxtaposing the two, the early church (including Paul, Peter and John), did not clearly differentiate between an imminent judgment on Israel and the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. They therefore saw them as contemporaneous. Thus, though there is some relationship to 70AD, the prime referent of the phrase, "the last days," is, again, the Parousia.

Several objections to this view need to be considered. First of all, the terminology itself argues against this position. Last days are exactly that, a brief period of time at the end of an age. Yet the "last days" have now lasted almost as long as the entire age from Abraham to Jesus! Though one might stretch the period for a few decades, surely not 20 centuries!

Secondly, the futurist view implies that the writers of Holy Scripture were implicitly confused because they did not clearly differentiate between the Second Coming and the judgment of Israel. This view has fuelled Liberal scepticism concerning the authority of Scripture. Even the Liberals see that Jesus taught, and the disciples clearly expected, Matthew 24 to be fulfilled in their lifetimes. Thus the futurist view requires some fancy foot work to avoid saying that Jesus made a mistake (if the prime referent is to the Second Coming). In the same way, the context of the Olivet discourse is clearly the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. In [Matthew 23:29](#) Jesus

pronounces judgment on the Pharisees with the time table set in verse 36. He then weeps for the coming desolation of Jerusalem in verses 37-39. In 24:1-3 Jesus predicts the coming destruction of the temple and answers the disciples question when this will happen. Everything from that point on is Jesus answer to their question regarding the destruction of Jerusalem.

Because of the prophetic language used in 27-31, the Olivet Discourse is assumed to refer to the Second Coming. Since this event "obviously" did not happen in 70AD, the entire passage must therefore be manipulated to make the Second Coming fit into the schema of events that Jesus details. Premillennial Dispensationalists go so far as to require a new temple, new sacrifices, new abomination of desolation, etc. in order to replay 70AD all over again. While the "double referents" do not necessarily have to go quite so far, even so, the interpretations sometime stretch one's credulity. It is a difficult passage to interpret.

Yet Jesus Himself gives a temporal marker in verse 34 that specifically says that all these things will happen during the lifetime of "this generation". All sorts of exegetical and hermeneutical gymnastics are attempted in order to get around the clear implications of this passage (i.e. generation really means "race", the generation that sees the "fig tree" etc.). But the text seems clear that whatever is happening in Matthew 24 is supposed to happen completely and fully within the lifetime of the people Jesus is addressing. This is the normal sense of the terms. However if the Olivet Discourse was supposed to be fulfilled during the lifetimes of the disciples, and if it does refer to the Second Coming, then Jesus did make a mistake and the disciples were confused. Obviously this cannot be accepted by evangelicals. Thus another solution must be found.

This paper will postulate that the phrase "the last days", "end times" etc. primarily refers to that period of time between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and God's final judgement and destruction of Israel in 70AD. The "last days" is not the brief period of time before the Second Coming, nor the entire 2000+ years since the Ascension. The "Last Days" were the final days of the Jewish dispensation culminating in the first judicial act of the Lord Jesus Christ ruling the nations. It will be shown that the expectation of "coming" in the Olivet Discourse (and other passages) referred to the coming of Christ in judgement on Israel and the end of that age (as opposed to His Second Coming at the end of the world). The Apostles and early church would have therefore have understood the phrase "last days" as a reference to the period of time lasting to 70AD. The individual instances of the phrase "the last days" will then be demonstrated to have their best interpretation within a preterist framework. Finally, the implications of this view will be briefly examined.

### An Alternative Interpretation

In [Matthew 24:30](#), the tribes of the earth will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory. Many immediately conclude this is a clear reference to the Second Coming. This view is so common that it has actually skewed the translation. For example, it can be argued that the phrase "tribes of the earth" is better translated "tribes of the land" since this is a common referent to the land of Israel (Abbot-Smith 91). Thus it is not the entire earth that will mourn, but rather the tribes of Israel. This changes the entire perspective on the passage. If

it is the whole earth that will mourn, this leads to a universal event. If it is Israel that will mourn, it refers to something that could be quite local.

In the same way the phrase, "the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky" is literally rendered, "and then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven" (Chilton 100). This translation makes two important points: First, the location spoken of is heaven, not just the sky; and secondly, it is not the sign which is in heaven but rather the Son of Man. This retranslation is the only way to make sense of the prophecy from [Daniel 7:13](#) which is quoted here. In the Daniel passage, the perspective is not on earth but the throne room of Heaven. The ancient of Days is sitting on His throne and the Son of Man is presented to Him and receives from Him power and rule and dominion. [Daniel 7:13ff](#) and [Matthew 24:30](#) are not prophecies of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ but of His Ascension and Kingly inauguration. This majestic event is not for us a future event because it occurred at the Ascension! Jesus right now sits at the right hand of the Father and right now rules heaven and earth ([Acts 7:56](#)).

#### The Use of "Coming" in the Old Testament

Contemporary Christians, influenced by 150 years of millenarian and adventist agitation, are preconditioned to interpret the term "coming" almost exclusively in regards to the Second Coming. Yet the Scriptures themselves do not necessarily use the term in that way. Though there indeed will be a physical, bodily return of Christ at the fulfilment of time (e.g. [Acts 1:11](#)), Christ can also said to "come" many times in history. It can be shown that the term does not necessitate a physical appearance, but is rather a metaphor for Christ exercising His power and dominion over the world and exercising His right to judge the nations. For example, the phrase "coming on clouds" is a well known Old Testament term for God coming in salvation to His elect and judgment on His enemies. ([Psa 104:3](#), [Isa 19:1](#), [Nah 1:3](#)). "God's coming on the clouds of heaven is an almost commonplace Scriptural symbol for His presence, judgment, and salvation" (Chilton, 102). For further development, see Russell, page 251ff.

Regardless of one's view of a future earthly kingdom, all must agree that Jesus right now rules the world and judges it temporally. "For the wrath of God is being revealed against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rms 1:20). It is the Lord God who sets up kings and earthly powers (Jer 43:10, Rms 13:1). It is the Lord who also judges those powers and removes their thrones (Psa 2:12, 9:4-5, 19-20, 10:16, 22:28, 47:8, 94:10, Hagg 2:22 etc.). In the same way, the term "Day of the Lord" does not just refer to the final day of judgment that occurs at the end of time before the eternal state. "...the Day of the Lord could designate a day in the immediate historical future when God would visit His people in judgment..." as in Amos 5:18 and Isaiah 2:12ff (Ladd 554).

#### The Use of "Coming" in Revelation 2-3

Corollary evidence is found in the Seven Letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Jesus specifically warns/promises the churches in 2:5, 16, 3:3, 3:11 that He is coming soon. In each case, the context is coming in judgment. This judgment cannot be at the end of the world since it involved activities occurring right up to the coming itself. It cannot refer to the future at all because none of these churches now exist. While the Historicists argue that the churches

represent the entire panoply of Church history, none of them agree which church represents which age. Even the best argument, that these churches are symbolic of the problems of all churches in all ages, fails to do justice to the text itself. Seven historical churches are encouraged, exhorted and warned of impending judgment. Jesus promises specifically to come to 4 of them. Since He did not come to them physically, therefore His coming cannot refer to His Second Coming. It must refer to something else. Since the term is used of coming in judgment, therefore the simplest and best explanation is that Jesus is here warning His churches of impending trials (most likely of 70AD and its earth shaking effects). (Note; This paper assumes a pre-70AD authorship for Revelation. While acknowledging this as problematic, it should be remembered that the only external evidence for a late date comes from a single quote from Irenaeus found in Eusebius which in itself is linguistically ambiguous.)

Thus, Jesus as Lord of Heaven and Earth rules the nations with His rod of iron. He visits the nations in time, rising up and setting down according to His good will. Whenever He exercises His judicial powers in time, it can be said that He is "coming". The significance of the coming in Matthew 24 is that the destruction of Jerusalem was the sign that all authority had been given to Jesus and He was now exercising that authority by bringing about the prophesied destruction of apostate Israel. By Jerusalem and the temple being destroyed (as prophesied by Jesus), then all would know that Jesus was indeed Lord of Heaven and earth. "...the Lord comes upon the clouds to the judgment of Jerusalem, as a manifest proof that we are not to think merely of His coming at the last day, and that the words do not point to a visible appearing" (Russell 39).

#### Heaven & Earth Shaking Terminology

Some may argue that the earth shaking, heavens trembling terminology here does not fit 70AD. While a full analysis is beyond the meager scope of this paper, note that this is typical prophetic imagery used throughout the Old Testament in regards to God bringing judgment against a nation. It is especially relevant in regards to Israel because it was the end of one age and the beginning of another. For comparisons see the following texts: Isaiah 13:9-10, 34:4, Amos 8:9, Ezekiel 32:7-8. In each instance, the same "heaven shaking" phraseology is used to describe the judgment on a historical nation. In each case, God did do just as He had promised, but the signs did not "literally" come true. This is figurative, prophetic language used in the Scriptures to describe the cosmic judgment by the Ruler of Creation. "What Jesus is saying in Matthew 24, therefore, in prophetic terminology immediately recognizable by His disciples, is that the light of Israel is going to be extinguished; the Covenant nation will cease to exist. When the Tribulation is over, old Israel will be gone (Chilton 100)."

There are of course other interpretive issues that need to be addressed; e.g. it can be shown that the "angels" gathering the elect refers to the preaching of the gospel (i.e. angelos can refer to either human or divine messengers, depending upon context). However, at this point enough evidence has been marshalled to warrant a re-examination of the use of the term "last days" in other passages. It can be noted here that in historical narrative passages, the disciples might not always have clearly understood the distinction between the impending temporal judgment on Israel and the future second coming of Christ (cf. Acts 1:6). However, in the didactic

passages, it must be maintained that they knowingly taught that the imminent judgment on Israel would usher in a new age.

### The "Last Days"

#### The Disciples Expectation

The disciples fully understood that they were living in a time of transition between one age and the age that was to come (Russell 255). The defining point between these ages would be the outpouring of the covenant curses upon an apostate Israel. The first sign of Israel's impending destruction was at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in power and gave the gift of tongues. Contemporary debates about tongue speaking seldom address the fundamental reason why God gave this gift in the first place. Tongue speaking was a fulfilment of prophecy that God had removed His covenant from Israel and was about to bring judgment against them. Paul specifically teaches this in 1 Corinthians 14:21 when he quotes Isaiah 28:11:

*"By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers will I speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me..."*

The context of Isaiah 28 is the beginning of Covenantal judgment on Israel for her apostasy and rebellion. It also includes a messianic prophecy concerning the corner stone. But the implication is clear. As a final indication of His righteous wrath on a rebellious and stiff necked people, God would speak to them in strange tongues. Hence Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:22 that tongues are a sign for unbelievers. The unbelievers here are clearly non-believing Jews.

Thus at Pentecost, the judgment clock began ticking down on Israel's future. God had abandoned them and was going to bring upon them the Covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28. Paul clearly understood this, and so did Peter, since he quotes Joel 2:28-32. The Joel passage (using the same prophetic, heaven shaking terminology as in Matthew 24) is a clear prophecy of the coming judgment on Israel. The Apostles thus from the very beginning understood that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and the gift of tongues were the definitive signs that Israel's judgment was about to come. Thus, the Disciples would have had this understanding in the back of their minds whenever they discussed future events. Israel was going to be judged within their lifetimes. Jesus Himself would do so as an indication of His own rule and authority (Matt 28:19-21). The coming of the Spirit ushered in a new age and a new covenant (Jer 31:33-34). The disciples therefore understood that they were living in a transition period between the judgment of the Old Covenant people and the New Covenant promises.

#### Specific Uses of "Last Days"

The specific phrase "last days" (or "latter times") occurs 9 times in the New Testament in the writings of Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude. A careful investigation of each of the occurrences shows that in context, the best understanding must refer to the impending judgment on Israel in 70AD. For example in 1 Timothy 3:14-4:6 Paul warns Timothy of the importance of sound doctrine to the household of God because the Spirit has predicted that in "later times" some will fall away from the faith (1 Tim 4:1). Paul tells him this so that he can warn the brethren and if Timothy does so, he will be commended as a faithful servant of Christ Jesus (1 Tim 4:6). But if

the later times is in reference to a future event 2,000+ years in the future, what is the point of Paul addressing the situation in Timothy's church? Likewise, if the "later times" is in reference to the entire period of time between the First and Second Coming, all he is really saying is that "this age is characterized by apostasy". This does not make sense. Why warn of something that is to come, if it is already here and is characteristic of the time?

Yet if the "later times" refers to the period up to the judgment on Israel, then it makes good sense for Paul to issue this warning. As the time progresses and the judgment of Israel grows closer, apostasy will grow greater and greater. Therefore do not be alarmed when men desert you, or turn aside to foolish myths and genealogies, for all this has already been prophesied and taken into consideration. It will not affect God's plan and it will soon be over. Therefore, do not be afraid, warn the people, prepare them for what is going to shortly come to pass and trust in God. This makes sense. **For Paul to be warning Timothy of something that will never happen to him or his people, or of a characteristic of an entire age does not fit the context.**

Similar language in 2 Timothy 3:1 requires a similar interpretation. Why should Paul warn Timothy of future events that neither he nor his church would ever live to see? In the same way if these were characteristic of the entire age, why specify "the last days". There is also the problem of understanding how an entire age can be characterized by apostasy. From what are the apostates apostasizing, if the entire 2,000+ period of time is already apostate? One has to have growth and fruit in the kingdom before one can then have massive defections from it. But if the entire age is characterized by such defections, when, where and how did they ever join the kingdom in the first place? However, if the apostasy was in fact a brief period at the end of a specific age (Matthew 24:10), then one can easily understand why Timothy needed to be reminded of it.

In Hebrews 1:1-2 the reference is clearly to the time when the Apostles were living. "God, after He spoke long ago...in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things...". Here the reference is to the giving of Scripture, both Old and New Testament. Since the Son was "appointed" heir at the Ascension, the speaking must refer to the Spirit's work through the Apostles and therefore can be equated with Scripture. The point is that Christ was giving Scripture in the "last days". There is no compelling reason to suggest that this refers to anything except the period of time between His Ascension and His judgment on Israel. One could make an argument that Hebrews was written post-70AD, but the evidence for doing so is at best ambiguous. A better understanding is that the book was written on the eve of the destruction which then makes 10:26ff perfectly clear.

James 5:1-3 also fits perfectly well within the context of an impending judgement on Israel and makes no sense otherwise.

*"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are come upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasures."*

James is warning the rich of a soon to come judgment. They are not to trust in their material possessions. In fact because they have done so, their very wealth will be a cause of their destruction. The rich Jews had stored up their wealth in the "last days" and it would be useless to them. This makes no sense unless it is a direct reference to the impending judgment on Jerusalem. If the entire age is the "last days", then the prophecy here makes no sense. People buy and sell and amass great wealth and leave this life in luxurious coffins. Granted it does them no good in the age to come, but James is saying that it does them no good in the "last days". However if it refers to the coming judgment in 70AD it makes perfect sense. All their pomp and circumstance and oppressive use of wealth and power would not prevent their utter destruction. (One is reminded here of the Jews who tried to escape from Jerusalem during the siege with some of their wealth by swallowing gold. Josephus records that when the Roman soldiers discovered what they were doing, all fleeing Jews were murdered and eviscerated on the spot in the hopes of finding booty.) Thus a "realized eschatology" and a futurist application do not fit even reasonably well the historical context of James' remarks while a 70AD interpretation fits perfectly.

The passage in 1 Peter 1:5 is a little less clear. Peter says that there is an imperishable inheritance reserved in heaven "for you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time...". Here the phrase could be understood as a reference to the Second Coming but it can be argued otherwise as well. In 70AD Israel was destroyed, but the Christians living in Jerusalem were spared (they left the city when Vespasian was called back to Rome). Furthermore, as Christ brought judgment against Israel, He was revealed as indeed the Lord of Glory. Thus Israel's destruction was also the Christian hope of salvation vindicated. Thus our salvation was revealed in 70AD. Yet even if this explanation is not accepted and if it is insisted that this reference must be to the Second Coming, please note that the term here is "last time" which can be equated with the "last day". There is a Day of judgment coming at the end of the world (Matt 7:22, Rms 2:16, 1 Cor 3:13, 2 Tim 4:8 etc.). There is a final Day that is yet to come. Thus the reference here could be well be to that Day, which still leaves the "last days" as a primary referent to the period of time between 35-70AD.

The specific terminology here may also be significant. As opposed to "the last time" in 1:5, Peter refers to the "last times" in 1:20 as existing during the lifetimes of his hearers. The "last times" were clearly times that the original audience of Peter's letters were living. The plural use of the term in 1:20 contrasts significantly with the singular use in 1:5. They could well be speaking of two different events, using similar terminology (since one is a type or prefiguring of the other; e.g. all temporal judgement is a down payment on hell).

The context in 2 Peter 3:3 is again a reminder from Peter to strengthen the disciples concerning events they themselves were having to face. Peter is thus relating their experience to a prophetic event.

*"Know this that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation..."*

While it is commonly accepted to take this passage as a reference to the Second Coming, the text itself does not require us to do so. The major reason for insisting on an end of the world scenario is the "heavens shaking" terminology in verse 7. As noted before, this same terminology is technically used in prophetic language to describe the cosmic events occurring when God brings salvation/judgement. Peter may well be referring here not to the end of the world, but the end of the Jewish age. Again, why else would he warn people of things that were not in their future, or in any one else's future except those few living at the end of the world? "He is patient about you...!"; a specific group of people Peter was addressing with specific problems and specific needs.

The "last days" passage in 1 John 2:18 fits beautifully in the above scenario. The internal evidence for assuming that John was written prior to 70AD is potent. He no longer uses the phrase "last days" but instead says that it is the "last hour". No longer is the consummation in even the near future, but rather John fully expected it to happen at any moment. John specifically says that the antichrist has come (as had been prophesied). All prophetic ground work has been laid. The promised event is about to happen. If John is referring to the Second Coming then he was dead wrong. If he was implying some long period of eschatological preparation, why speak in such imminent terms? But if the destruction of Jerusalem was about to occur, if the land was invaded and the city about to be surrounded, how much clearer could he make it? The 70AD scenario is the only one that really does justice to John's sense of expectancy.

Finally, Jude 17-18 contains the last specific reference to the "last days".

*"But you beloved ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, 'In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.' These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly minded, devoid of the Spirit..."*

Notice the tense of the verb. The promised mockers had already come and were causing problems in the church. They were not a future problem to be encountered, but rather a present reality. The "last time" had come and the church needed to be encouraged to endure and to resist the promised apostasy. Does apostasy come in every age? Yes. Is it more characteristic in some ages than others? Yes. Is it characteristic of all ages? NO! As mentioned earlier, if this is supposed to be the character of this age, how then is the New Covenant any better than the Old? Our covenant is not like the one at Sinai, we have the Law written on our hearts. The Biblical characteristic of the church is not a defeated organization that barely manages to hold the loyalty of a few stalwart members but rather a victorious army, marching to the gates of Hell! Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world! We are not a defeated people! Yes, there are times when the situation may be grim. But that is not the characteristic of the age, but only of that brief period of time at the end of the last age. That age ended 2,000 years ago. This age is an age of the wonderful victory of Christ over sin, death, Satan and his parasitical kingdom (Rms 16:20, Col 2:15, Hebs 2:14, 1 Jn 3:8, 2 Cor 2:14 etc.)

Conclusion

If the above reasoning is correct, then this will have profound effect on our concept of Christianity and its relation to contemporary culture. Rather than defeatism being the characteristic of this age, we ought to expect to see the Lord Jesus lead His church to victory. The mindset that says that Christian progress in the world will be ultimately undermined by an end times apostasy is no longer valid. Yes, apostasy and heresy come, but Christ is greater than either and has already defeated and disarmed their ruler (Col 2:15). Christians ought to expect the gospel to go forth with power, to meet the devils of this age and scatter them to the pit.

**There is nothing that stands between the Christian church and the expectation of victorious fulfilment of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-21 than our own obedience.**

Some may complain that this would lead us to Postmillennialism. Though that discussion is beyond the scope of this paper it must be answered, "so what?". Though now largely out of favour in American evangelicalism, it ought to be remembered that Postmillennialism is the historic eschatological system of American Presbyterian and English Reformed groups. In New England, Postmillennial Puritans settled the wilderness in hopes of building "a city on a hill" which was further fuelled by the expectations of world wide revival during the Great Awakening. In Northern Presbyterianism, Alexander, Both, Hodges, Warfield and Machen all taught general Postmillennialism as a part of the Princeton theology. In the South, Postmillennialism was taught by such giants as Thornwell and Dabney (Kik 6).

A final objection is that our experience does not fit the doctrine. We do not see this promised victory in the world, that our age is especially one of growing apostasy and departures from the true faith and that the forces arrayed against the church seem insurmountable. There are two quick responses to this objection. The first is that we need to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, not the headlines in the papers. We must place our faith in the promises of God, not the fears of the enemy. We must take our eyes off the "giants in the land" and keep them fully on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

The second reason why the church has not been more successful in seeing the promised victory is because she has been disobedient. When called to trust and obey, we encourage fear and dismay. When called to "Be holy for I am holy" we have settled for a sentimental religion of pious affections and insipid doctrine. Christianity in the past 150 years has been characterized by pietism and antinomianism. In some respects Enlightenment Humanism flourished only because Christians accepted it on a presuppositional level. Consequently, our faith has been undermined and the church's ability to meet the challenges of the modern world undercut by a pessimistic eschatology. But to automatically concede defeat, in fact to encourage it because of recent defeats is completely unwarranted. The Church has faced great heresies before (Arianism, Docetism, Sabellianism, Donatism, Islam, Romanism) and the Lord was pleased to grant victory. Why should not the present heresies of Arminianism, Marxism and Humanism not go the same way. But wars are not won by single combats, unruly mobs, rebellious troops or a people convinced defeat is inevitable.

How we view the period of time in which we live has a direct affect on how we conduct our lives. It colors our expectations and priorities. It determines the values we hold, and the use of our resources. If these are "the last days" then this world has no real value, no genuine

purpose, no meaningful future. It is simply a waiting room for transients. Furthermore, it is a waiting room destined to fall into decay, to become a breeding ground for vice and crime. And nothing we can do will ever significantly alter its condition. Therefore, there is no motivation to even try. However, if we view this present reality as a task that has been given to us, as a thing of value in God's sight that we are responsible to care for, if we believe that this age is the age which has been entrusted to our care, then we will be motivated to work for victory, because we expect victory. We are motivated to make a difference because it is not just a lay over spot, but our home for a good long time to come. There is nothing standing between us and a safe, clean healthy domicile except obedience to God's Word.

There were some last days before King Jesus came and exercised His royal judgment over Jerusalem. There is a last day wherein King Jesus will come and exercise His royal judgment over all men, living and dead. For Christians, a significant portion of that future judgment will concern what we have done in the time between.

## **Why I Believe We Are Not Living in “The Last Days”**

**By Rev. Brian Abshire**

### **Introduction**

Christians have been debating views of the end times since the second century. Though certain positions have been recognized as heresy (and vigorously condemned), the historic church has not made a particular view of the “Last Days” a test of orthodoxy. All true Christians will agree that Jesus is going to come back. All agree that He will resurrect His saints, judge evil and usher in the eternal state. However, in regards to the details, sincere, godly men coming to the same passages, have arrived at different conclusions. Thus the church has made room for a variety of positions.

In different ages, some views have enjoyed more popularity than others. But the issue must never be “which view has the most proponents” but rather, “which view best interprets the Scriptural data in a proper manner.” This principle is especially important when considering the New Testament phrase, “the Last Days.” Many Christians are so certain that they already understand what it means, they never really examine its use in Scripture. They assume that the “last days” refers to the Second Coming of Christ. But is this really how the Bible expects us to understand this? Many Christians will close this booklet right now saying, “Of course! What else could it mean?” But be careful. What we think really does affect what we do. Our theology of the last days really does have a great influence on our ministry, time, money and efforts. If you’re willing to do a little work, I think you may be surprised at what the Bible actually says. Go on, take a chance! Truth will bear investigation. And who knows, God just may want to teach you something you’ve never thought about before.

## What Does Matthew Really Mean?

[Matthew 24](#) is one of the best known prophetic passages in the New Testament. But just what exactly is Jesus prophesying here? Many assume it is His second coming. But is this necessarily so? The greater context is clearly the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. In [Matthew 23:29](#) Jesus pronounces judgment on the Pharisees with the time table set in verse 36 [**“Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation”**]. He then weeps for the coming desolation of Jerusalem in verses 37-39. In 24:13 The disciples marvel at the beauty of the temple. Jesus then predicts that the temple, and the city will be destroyed. The disciples then ask “when will this happen?” Everything from that point on is Jesus answer to their question.

The only real reason why this passage is assumed to refer to the Second Coming, and not the events of 70 AD seems to be the prophetic imagery in 27-31. Since these events “obviously” did not happen in 70 AD, the entire passage must therefore be manipulated to make the Second Coming fit into the schema of events that Jesus details. Some even go so far as to require a new temple, new sacrifices, new abomination of desolation, etc., in order to replay 70 AD all over again.

While other views do not have to go quite so far, even so, their interpretations sometime stretch one’s credulity. It is a difficult passage to interpret.

Yet Jesus Himself gives a temporal marker in verse 34. Jesus specifically says that all these things will happen during the lifetime of “this generation.” Again, all sorts of exegetical and hermeneutical gymnastics are attempted in order to get around the clear implications of this passage (i.e., generation really means “race”, the generation that sees the “fig tree,” etc.). But the text seems clear, whatever is happening in [Matthew 24](#) is supposed to happen completely and fully within the lifetime of the people Jesus is addressing. This is the normal sense of the terms. However if [Matthew 24](#) was supposed to be fulfilled during the lifetimes of the disciples, and if it does refer to the Second Coming, then Jesus made a mistake. Obviously this cannot be accepted by evangelicals. Thus another solution must be found.

There is another alternative. This is the view that **the phrase “the last days”, “end times,” etc., refers primarily to that period of time between the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and His judgment and destruction of apostate Israel in 70 AD. The “last days” are not the brief period of time before the Second Coming. The “Last Days” were the final days of the Jewish dispensation culminating in the first judicial act of the Lord Jesus Christ ruling the nations.**

Some people will ask, “Why all this emphasis on 70 AD?” Modern Christians do not understand just how significant an event the destruction of Jerusalem was in Biblical theology. God had repeatedly warned Israel throughout her history that if she refused to obey Him, committed spiritual adultery with other Gods, rejected His Law and commandments, that He would utterly destroy her (cf. [Deut 28](#)). When Jesus the Messiah came, he was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament images, shadows, types, sacrifices, feasts and festivals. **Everything in the Old Testament Law was designed to lead people to Christ.** Thus when Israel rejected Christ, they were rejecting God. The Jewish nation also cooperated with the Roman Empire in persecuting those who did recognize Jesus as Lord. Therefore God brought the promised covenant curses

against them in 70 AD. The Apostles and early church would have understood the phrase “last days” as the period of time from the Lord Jesus ascending into Heaven to when He exercised His Kingly judgment by destroying Jerusalem.

Now this view is not something that should just be accepted. It will have to be proved. Therefore we need to look at how the individual instances of the phrase “the last days” is used in Scripture, as well as what was meant by the word “coming.” Finally, we need to look at the “heavens shaking” terminology in [Matthew 24](#) and see how Jesus expected us to understand it. This study requires us to be submitted to the Scriptures and to learn to read them as they were expected to be read. But you’ll be amazed what you can see if you learn to open your eyes!

### Bad Translations

So many people look at [Matthew 24](#) with preconceived ideas, that it has actually skewed the translation from the Greek. For example, in [Matthew 24:30](#) states that *the tribes of the earth will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory*. Many immediately conclude this must be a clear reference to the Second Coming. And if one just looked at the English translation, this would appear to be the case. The phrase seems to say that “everybody in the world will see Jesus in the sky.” However, the phrase “tribes of the earth” is actually better translated “tribes of the land.” In Greek, the words “land” and “earth” are interchangeable. But in this context, “land is better because this phrase is a common referent to the land of Israel (Abbot-Smith 91).” Thus it is not the entire earth that is mourning, but rather Israel. This changes the entire perspective on the passage. If it is the whole earth that mourns, this suggests a universal event. But if it is only Israel that will mourn, it refers to something that could be quite local.

In the same way the phrase, “*the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky*” is literally translated, “and then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven” (Chilton 100). This translation makes two important points: First, the location spoken of is heaven, not just the sky. Secondly, it is not the *sign* which is in heaven but rather the Son of Man.

This translation is not only linguistically legitimate, it is also the only way to make sense of the prophecy from [Daniel 7:13](#) quoted here. In the Daniel passage, the perspective is not on earth but the throne room of Heaven. The Ancient of Days is sitting on His throne and the Son of Man is presented to Him and receives from Him power and rule and dominion. [Daniel 7:13ff](#) and [Matthew 24:30](#) are not prophecies of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to earth, but of His Ascension into Heaven and Kingly inauguration! This majestic event is not for us a future event because it occurred at the Ascension! Jesus right now sits at the right hand of the Father and right now rules heaven and earth ([Acts 7:56](#)). Thus the sign mentioned in [Matthew 24](#) is not Jesus appearing in the sky to the whole world, but rather Jesus being taken up into Heaven in [Acts 1:11](#)! This changes the whole focus of the prophecy.

## The Use of Coming in the Old Testament

But the text does talk about the Lord Jesus' coming doesn't it? What else could His coming be except when He returns? Contemporary Christians, influenced by 150 years of millenarian agitation, are preconditioned to interpret the term "coming" almost exclusively in regards to the Second Coming. Yet the Scriptures themselves do not necessarily use the term in that way. Though there indeed will be a physical, bodily return of Christ at the fulfillment of time (e.g. [Acts 1:11](#)), Christ can also be said to "come" many times in history. The term does not require a physical appearance because it is a metaphor for Christ exercising His power and dominion over the world and judging the nations.

For example, the phrase "coming on clouds" is a well known Old Testament term for God coming in salvation to His elect and judgment on His enemies. ([Psa 104:3](#), [Isa 19:1](#), [Nah 1:3](#)). "God's coming on the clouds of heaven is an almost commonplace Scriptural symbol for His presence, judgment, and salvation" (Chilton, 102). For further development, see Russell, page 251ff. Regardless of one's view of a future earthly kingdom, all must agree that Jesus right now rules the world and judges it temporally. "For the wrath of God is being revealed against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rms 1:20). It is the Lord God who sets up kings and earthly powers ([Jer 43:10](#), Rms 13:1). It is the Lord who also judges those powers and removes their thrones ([Psa 2:12](#), [9:4-5,19-20](#), [10:16](#), [22:28](#), [47:8](#), [94:10](#), [Hagg 2:22](#), etc.).

In the same way, the term "Day of the Lord" does not just refer to the final day of judgment that occurs at the end of time before the eternal state. "...the Day of the Lord could designate a day in the immediate historical future when God would visit His people in judgment..." as in [Amos 5:18](#) and [Isaiah 2:12ff](#) (Ladd 554).

## The Use of "Coming" in [Revelation 2-3](#)

Substantiating evidence for this understanding of the Lord's coming is found in the Seven Letters to the churches in Revelation two and three. Jesus specifically warns /promises the churches in 2:5, 16, 3:3, 3:11 that He is coming soon. In each case, the context is coming in judgment. This judgment cannot be at the end of the world since it involved activities occurring right up to the coming itself. It cannot refer to the future at all because none of these churches now exist! It must refer to something that happened within the lifetimes of those specific churches.

While some have argued that the churches represent the entire array of Church history, no one has ever agreed which church represents which age. Even the best argument, that these churches are symbolic of the problems of all churches in all ages, fails to do justice to the text itself.

Seven historical churches are encouraged, exhorted and warned of impending judgment. Jesus promises specifically to come to four of them. Since He did not come to them physically, therefore His coming cannot refer to His Second Coming. It must refer to something else. Since

the term is used of “coming in judgment”, therefore the simplest and best explanation is that Jesus is here warning His churches of impending trials (most likely of 70 AD and its earth shaking effects). Thus, Jesus as Lord of Heaven and Earth rules the nations with His rod of iron ([Psa 2:1ff](#)). He visits the nations in time, rising up and setting down according to His good will. Whenever He exercises His judicial powers in time, it can be said that He is “coming.”

The significance of the coming in [Matthew 24](#) is that the destruction of Jerusalem was the sign that all authority had been given to Jesus and He would exercise that authority by bringing about the prophesied destruction of apostate Israel (cf. [Deut 28](#)). By Jerusalem and the temple being destroyed (as prophesied by Jesus), then Israel would know that Jesus was indeed Lord of Heaven and earth. “...the Lord comes upon the clouds to the judgment of Jerusalem, as a manifest proof that we are not to think merely of His coming at **the last day**, and that the words do not point to a visible appearing” (Russell 39).

### Heaven & Earth Shaking Terminology

Some may argue that the earth shaking, heavens trembling terminology in [Matthew 24](#) does not fit 70 AD. But this is typical prophetic imagery used throughout the Old Testament in regards to God bringing judgment against a nation. The Bible is a divine book, but it is also literature. God inspired the authors to write in literary styles that were well known and well understood. For comparisons see the following texts: [Isaiah 13:9-10](#), [34:4](#), [Amos 8:9](#), [Ezekiel 32:7-8](#). In each instance, the same “heaven shaking” phraseology is used to describe the judgment on a historical nation. In each case, God did do just as He had promised, but the signs did not “literally” come true. This is figurative, prophetic language used in the Scriptures to describe the cosmic judgment by the Ruler of Creation.

It is especially relevant in regards to Israel because it was the end of one age and the beginning of another. “What Jesus is saying in [Matthew 24](#), therefore, in prophetic terminology immediately recognizable by His disciples, is that the light of Israel is going to be extinguished; the Covenant nation will cease to exist. When the Tribulation is over, old Israel will be gone (Chilton 100).”

There are of course other interpretive issues that need to be addressed. It can be shown that the “angels” gathering the elect refers to the preaching of the gospel (i.e., the Greek word *angelos* can refer to either human or divine messengers, depending upon context). It is only our preconceived bias that interprets the Greek to mean a heavenly messenger when it well could be an earthly one.

However, at this point enough evidence has been marshaled to warrant a reexamination of the use of the term “last days” in other passages. **In historical narrative passages, the disciples may not always have clearly understood the distinction between the impending temporal judgment on Israel and the future second coming of Christ (cf. [Acts 1:6](#)). However, in the didactic passages, (i.e., when doctrine is being taught) we will see that they knowingly taught that the imminent judgment on Israel would usher in a new age.**

## The Last Days and The Disciples Expectation

The disciples fully understood that they were living in a time of transition between one age and the age that was to come (Russell 255). The transition between the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New was the outpouring of the covenant curses upon an apostate Israel. The first sign of Israel's impending destruction was at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in power and gave the gift of tongues. Contemporary debates about tongue speaking seldom address the fundamental reason why God gave this gift in the first place. Tongue speaking was a fulfillment of prophecy that God had removed His covenant from Israel, given it to the despised Gentiles and was about to bring judgment against them. Paul specifically teaches this in [1 Corinthians 14:21](#) when he quotes [Isaiah 28:11](#): *"By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers will I speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me..."*

The context of [Isaiah 28](#) is the beginning of God's covenantal judgment on Israel for her apostasy and rebellion. As a final indication of His righteous wrath on a rebellious and stiff necked people, God would speak to them in strange tongues. Hence Paul says in [1 Corinthians 14:22](#) that tongues are a sign for unbelievers. The unbelievers here are clearly non-believing Jews.

Thus at Pentecost, the judgment clock began ticking down on Israel's future. God had abandoned them and was going to bring upon them the covenant curses of [Deuteronomy 28](#). Paul clearly understood this, and so did Peter, since he quotes [Joel 2:28-32](#). The Joel passage (using the same prophetic, heaven shaking terminology as in [Matthew 24](#) which did not "literally" occur) is a clear prophecy of the coming judgment on Israel.

Thus the Apostles, from the very beginning, understood that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and the gift of tongues were the first signs that Israel's judgment was about to come. The Disciples would have had this understanding in the back of their minds whenever they discussed future events. Israel was going to be judged within their lifetimes. Jesus Himself would do so as an indication of His own rule and authority ([Matt 28:19-21](#)). The coming of the Spirit ushered in a new age and a new covenant ([Jer 31:33-34](#)). The Disciples therefore understood that they were living in a transition period between the judgment of the Old Covenant people and the New Covenant promises.

### Specific Uses of the "Last Days"

The specific phrase "last days" (or "latter times") occurs 9 times in the New Testament in the writings of Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude. A careful investigation of each of the occurrences shows that in context, the best understanding must refer to the impending judgment on Israel in 70 AD. For example in [1 Timothy 3:14-4:6](#) Paul warns Timothy of the importance of sound doctrine to the household of God because the Spirit has predicted that in "later times" some will fall away from the faith ([1 Tim 4:1](#)). Paul tells Timothy this so that he can warn the brethren and if he does so, he will be commended as a faithful servant of Christ Jesus ([1 Tim 4:6](#)).

But if the later times is in reference to a future event 2,000+ years in the future, why is Paul addressing the situation in Timothy's church? Why should the Apostle Paul warn Timothy of something that neither he nor his people would ever see? Yes, it might be relevant to us, but what about the last two thousand years of Church history when this passage would have been completely irrelevant?

Some people have suggested that the phrase "later times" refers to the entire period of time between the First and Second Coming. Thus all Paul is really saying is that "this age is characterized by apostasy." This does not make sense. The terminology itself argues against a prolonged period of time from the giving of the prophecy until its fulfillment. Last days are exactly that, a brief period of time at the end of an age. Yet the "last days" have now lasted almost as long as the entire age from Abraham to Jesus! Though one might stretch the period for a few decades, surely not 20 centuries!

Furthermore, how can an entire age be characterized by people deserting from the faith? If everyone, always deserts the faith, what are they deserting from? Some ages are characterized by great faith and obedience (e.g., the Reformation). Other ages are characterized by people leaving the faith (e.g., ours). But if all ages are characterized by apostasy, then no one would ever have been saved in the first place!

Yet if the "later times" refers to the period up to the judgment on Israel, then it makes good sense for Paul to issue this warning. As the time progresses and the judgment of Israel grows closer, many people who have made professions of faith will desert the true Church. Therefore Timothy, do not be alarmed when men desert you, or turn aside to foolish myths and genealogies, for all this has already been prophesied and taken into consideration. It will not affect God's plan and it will soon be over. Therefore, do not be afraid, warn the people, prepare them for what is going to shortly come to pass and trust in God. This makes sense. For Paul to be warning Timothy of something that will never happen to him or his people, just does not fit the context.

Similar language in [2 Timothy 3:1](#) requires a similar interpretation. Why should Paul warn Timothy of future events that neither he nor his church would ever live to see? In the same way if these were characteristic of the entire age, why specify "the last days." Again, there is the problem of understanding how an entire age can be characterized by apostasy. One has to have growth and fruit in the kingdom before one can then have massive defections from it. But if the entire age is characterized by such defections, when, where and how did they ever join the kingdom in the first place? However, if the apostasy was in fact a brief period at the end of a specific age ([Matthew 24:10](#)), then one can easily understand why Timothy needed to be reminded of it.

In [Hebrews 1:1-2](#) the reference is clearly to the time when the Apostles were living. "God, after He spoke long ago... in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things..." Here the reference is to the giving of Scripture. Since the Son was "appointed" heir at the Ascension, the speaking refers to the Spirit's work through the Apostles and therefore can be equated with Scripture. The point is that Christ was giving Scripture in the "last days."

There is no compelling reason to suggest that this refers to anything except the period of time between His Ascension and His judgment on Israel. One could make an argument that Hebrews was written on the eve of the destruction of Israel. This, by the way, then makes 10:26ff perfectly clear.

[James 5:1-3](#) also fits perfectly well within the context of an impending judgment on Israel and makes no sense otherwise. "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are come upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in *the last days* that you have stored up your treasures."

James is warning the rich of a soon to come judgment. They are not to trust in their material possessions. In fact because they have done so, their very wealth will be a cause of their destruction. The rich Jews had stored up their wealth in the "last days" and it would be useless to them when the Romans sacked the city, murdered most of the inhabitants and sold the survivors into slavery. This verse simply makes no sense unless it is a direct reference to the impending judgment on Jerusalem. If the entire age is the "last days," then the prophecy here is incomprehensible. People buy and sell and amass great wealth and leave this life in luxurious coffins. Granted it does them no good in the age to come, but James is saying that it does them no good in the "last days."

However if it refers to the coming judgment in 70 AD it makes perfect sense. All their wealth and power would not prevent their utter destruction. One is reminded here of the Jews who tried to escape from Jerusalem during the siege with some of their wealth by swallowing gold. Josephus records that when the Roman soldiers discovered what they were doing, all fleeing Jews were murdered and eviscerated on the spot in the hopes of finding booty!

The passage in [1 Peter 1:5](#) is a little less clear. Peter says that there is an imperishable inheritance reserved in heaven "for you who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in *the last time*..." Here the phrase could be understood as a reference to the Second Coming but it can be argued otherwise as well. In 70 AD Israel was destroyed, but the Christians living in Jerusalem were spared (they left the city when Vaspasian was called back to Rome). Furthermore, as Christ brought judgment against Israel, He was revealed as indeed the Lord of Glory.

Thus Israel's destruction was also the Christian hope of salvation vindicated. Thus our salvation was revealed in 70 AD. Yet even if this explanation is not accepted and if it is insisted that this reference must be to the Second Coming, please note that the term here is "last time" which can be equated with the "last day." There is a Day of judgment coming at the end of the world ([Matt 7:22](#), [Rms 2:16](#), [1 Cor 3:13](#), [2 Tim 4:8](#) etc.). There is a final Day that is yet to come. Thus the reference here could be well be to that Day, which still leaves the "last days" as a primary referent to the period of time between 35-70 AD.

The specific terminology here may also be significant. As opposed to "the last time" in 1:5, Peter refers to the "last times" in 1:20 as existing during the lifetimes of his hearers. The "last times" were clearly times that the original audience of Peter's letters were living. The plural

use of the term in 1:20 contrasts significantly with the singular use in 1:5. They could well be speaking of two different events, using similar terminology (since one is a type or prefiguring of the other; e.g. all temporal judgment is a down payment on hell).

The context in [2 Peter 3:3](#) is again a reminder from Peter to strengthen the disciples concerning events they themselves were having to face. Peter is thus relating their experience to a prophetic event. "Know this that in *the last days* mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?'. For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation...". While it is common to take this passage as a reference to the Second Coming, the text itself does not require us to do so. The major reason for insisting on an end of the world scenario is the "heavens shaking" terminology in verse seven. As noted before, this same terminology is technically used in prophetic language to describe the cosmic events occurring when God brings salvation / judgment. Peter may well be referring here not to the end of the world, but the end of the Jewish age. Again, why else would he warn people of things that were not in their future, or in any one else's future except those few living at the end of the world? "He is patient about **you**...!"; a specific group of people Peter was addressing with specific problems and specific needs.

The "last days" passage in [1 John 2:18](#) fits beautifully in the destruction of Jerusalem understanding. The internal evidence for assuming that John was written prior to 70 AD is potent. He no longer uses the phrase "last days" but instead says that it is the "last hour." No longer is the event even in the near future. John fully expects it to happen at any moment. John specifically says that the antichrist has come (as had been prophesied).

All prophetic ground work has been laid. The promised event is about to happen. If John is referring to the Second Coming then, frankly, he was dead wrong. If he was implying some long period of eschatological preparation, why speak in such imminent terms?

But if the destruction of Jerusalem was about to occur, if the land was invaded and the city about to be surrounded, how much clearer could he make it? The 70 AD scenario is the only one that really does justice to John's sense of expectancy.

Finally, [Jude 17-18](#) contains the last specific reference to the "last days." "But you beloved ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, 'In *the last time* there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.' These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly minded, devoid of the Spirit..." Notice the tense of the verb. The promised mockers had already come and were causing problems in the church. They were not a future problem to be encountered, but rather a present reality. The "last time" had come and the Church needed to be encouraged to endure and to resist the promised apostasy. Does apostasy come in every age? Yes. Is it more characteristic in some ages than others? Yes. It is characteristic of all ages? NO! As mentioned earlier, if this is supposed to be the character of this age, how then is the New Covenant any better than the Old? Our covenant is not like the one at Sinai, we have the Law written on our hearts.

The Biblical characteristic of the church is not a defeated organization that barely manages to hold the loyalty of a few stalwart members but rather a victorious army, marching to the gates of Hell! Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world! We are not a defeated people! Yes, there are times when the situation may be grim. But that is not the characteristic of the age, but only of that brief period of time at the end of the last age. That age ended 2,000 years ago. This age is an age of the wonderful victory of Christ over sin, death, Satan and his parasitical kingdom (Rms 16:20, [Col 2:15](#), Hebs 2:14, [1 Jn 3:8](#), [2 Cor 2:14](#) etc.)

## Conclusion

If the above understanding of the “last days” is correct, then it has profound effects on our concept of Christianity and its relationship to the world around us. Rather than defeat, we ought to expect to see the Lord Jesus lead His church to victory. **The assumption that Christian progress in the world will be ultimately undermined by an end times apostasy is no longer valid.** Yes, apostasy and heresy come, but Christ is greater than either and has already defeated and disarmed their ruler ([Col 2:15](#)). Christians ought to expect the gospel to go forth with power, to meet the devils of this age and scatter them to the pit. **There is nothing that stands between the Christian church and the victorious fulfillment of the Great Commission of [Matthew 28:19-21](#) than our own obedience.**

Some may complain that this sounds like Postmillennialism. Though that discussion is beyond the scope of this paper it must be answered, if this is what the Bible teaches, so what? Though now largely out of favor in American evangelicalism, it ought to be remembered that Postmillennialism is the historic eschatological system of American Presbyterian and English Reformed groups. The Westminster Confession is unabashedly postmillennial in the Longer Catechism. In New England, Postmillennial Puritans settled the wilderness in hopes of building “a city on a hill” which was further fueled by the expectations of world wide revival during the Great Awakening. In Northern Presbyterianism, Alexander, Both Hodges, Warfield and Machen all taught general Postmillennialism as a part of the Princeton theology. In the South, Postmillennialism was taught by Thornwell and Dabney (Kik 6).

A final objection is that our experience does not fit the doctrine. We do not see this promised victory in the world, that our age especially, is one of growing apostasy and departures from the true faith and that the forces arrayed against the church seem insurmountable. There are two quick responses to this objection. The first is that we **need to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, not the headlines in the papers. We must place our faith in the promises of a sovereign God, not the fears of the enemy. We must take our eyes off the “giants in the land” and keep them fully on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.**

The second reason why perhaps the church has not been more successful in seeing the promised victory is because she has been disobedient. When called to trust and obey, we encourage fear and dismay. When called to “Be holy for I am holy” we have settled for a sentimental religion of pious affections and insipid doctrine. Christianity in the past 150 years has been characterized by pietism and antinomianism. In some respects Enlightenment Humanism won the battle for American culture because Christians failed to show up for the

war. Consequently, our faith has been undermined and the church's ability to meet the challenges of the modern world undercut by a pessimistic eschatology. But to automatically concede defeat, in fact to encourage it because of recent defeats is completely unwarranted. The Church has faced great heresies before (Arianism, Docetism, Sabellianism, Donatism, Islam, Romanism) and the Lord was pleased to grant victory. Why should not the present heresies of Arminianism, Marxism and Humanism not go the same way? But wars are not won by single combats, unruly mobs, rebellious troops or a people convinced defeat is inevitable.

Perhaps the real reason why Christians are willing to accept an eschatology of defeat is that it gives us an excuse for irresponsibility. One of the first results of Adam's sin was to try and shift the blame from himself to his wife and ultimately to God (i.e., the woman, you gave me...). When we live in disobedience, and God spans us with trials, tribulations, adversity and afflictions, rather than repent, we look for something else to blame our problems on. Christians don't tithe, don't witness, don't send out missionaries, and use the Church of God for a religious social club. How convenient, then to blame the widespread lack of faith, the acceptance of vice, the growth of crime, etc., on the "last days." The simple fact is that Christians right across the world are living in open disobedience to God. We flaunt His laws and commandments, we choose churches that tickle our ears, we fight and bicker among ourselves and the world ignores us.

Some say it's because it's the "last days" and nothing can be done. I say it's because we are in sin and God is disciplining us! How many Christians are horrified by abortion, yet would never think of having a prophetic witness by carrying a sign outside a clinic? How many Christians are aghast at the humanism of our public schools, but are too busy to take responsibility for their children's education? Why did 46% of American evangelicals vote for a pro-abortion, pro-homosexual, openly immoral man for president in 1992? And will God just stand idly by while we sin? Does He not love us as much as ancient Israel on whom He brought correction, after correction, so that they might repent? Maybe all the bad things happening in the last 50 years are God's warning signs, not of the end of the world, but of His displeasure with a sinful, irresponsible and disobedient Church. And if we repent, and start obeying Him, will He not bless?

How we view the period of time in which we live has a direct affect on how we conduct our lives. It colors our expectations and priorities. It determines the values we hold, and the use of our resources. If these are "the last days" then this world has no real value, no genuine purpose, no meaningful future. It is simply a waiting room for transients. Furthermore, it is a waiting room destined to fall into decay, to become a breeding ground for vice and crime. And nothing we can do will ever significantly alter its condition. Therefore, there is no motivation to even try.

However, if we view this present world as a ministry God has given to us, as a thing of value in His sight that we are responsible to care for, if we believe that this age is the age which has been entrusted to our care, then we will be motivated to work for victory, because we expect victory. We are galvanized to make a difference because it is not just a layover spot, but our

home for a good long time to come. There is nothing standing between us and a safe, clean healthy domicile except obedience to God's Word.

There were some last days before King Jesus came and exercised His royal judgment over Jerusalem. There is a last day wherein King Jesus will come and exercise His royal judgment over all men, living and dead. For Christians, a significant portion of that future judgment will concern what we have done in the time between.

---

#### Works Cited

- Abbot-Smith, G., *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*. Edinburgh: Clark, 1977
- Berkhoff, Louis, *Systematic Theology*. London, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971
- Chilton, David, *Paradise Restored*. Tyler: Reconstruction Press, 1985
- Chilton, David, *The Days of Vengeance*. Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987
- Ferguson, Sinclair B., ed., *New Dictionary of Theology*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1988
- Hoekma, Anthony A., *The Bible and the Future*. Grand Rapids:
- Wm Kik, J. Marcellus, *An Eschatology of Victory*. Philipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 71
- Kimball, William R., *What the Bible Says About the Great Tribulation*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984
- Groh, Ivan, *Jesus Has Returned to Planet Earth*. Peterborough: Inspirational Publications, 1984
- Gundry, Robert H., *The Church and the Tribulation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979
- Ladd, George Eldon, *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991
- Morris, Leon, *Apocalyptic*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974
- Russell, J. Stuart, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985
- Ryrie, Charles C., *Dispensationalism Today*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1981
- 

1<sup>st</sup> part posted: [http://preteristarchive.com/PartialPreterism/abshire-brian\\_pp\\_01.html](http://preteristarchive.com/PartialPreterism/abshire-brian_pp_01.html)

2<sup>nd</sup> part posted on May 12th, 2008:

<http://christian-civilization.org/articles/why-i-believe-we-are-not-living-in-the-last-days-2/> [link since dead]