

Sun, 20 Feb 2005

Are we living in the last days?

There are many today who believe we are in the last days because they see all of the middle-east turmoil, technological advancements, "new world order" etc. They claim that these are fulfillments of Biblical prophecy that prove that we are in the last days. However, in order to determine whether we are in the last days, we should determine how the phrase was originally used in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Ward Fenley

There are many today who believe we are in the last days because they see all of the middle-east turmoil, technological advancements, "new world order" etc. They claim that these are fulfillments of Biblical prophecy that prove that we are in the last days. An example of this would be Jack Van Impe's statement in July that the way that people will worship the "image" of the Beast is through the scientific achievement of "cloning." They will clone the Beast, Impe says, and therefore it will provide his image everywhere around the world for people to worship this Beast. Consequently Impe is a few dollars richer and many gullible yet fleshly people are a few dollars poorer.



In order to determine whether we are in the last days, we should determine how the phrase was originally used in the Hebrew Scriptures. This will help us immensely in regard to our interpretation of the New Testament usage of the term "last days." First, I would like to consider the first usage of the phrase "last days" and consider those who are primarily addressed:

Gen 49:1 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days.

Jacob, in this swan song, basically pronounced the general evil that would come upon the twelve tribes. So, clearly, Israel is the subject of the last days and the last days concern the Jews.

Numbers 24:13-14 'If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LORD says, that I must speak?' (14) And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days."

Here again the vision is concerning the Jews. It was concerning what would happen to Israel in the last days.

Isaiah predicts these last days as well:

Isaiah 2:1-2 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. (2) Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of

the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

The vision was concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Nowhere is the passage referring to the last days of the physical planet but, rather, the last days of Judah and Jerusalem.

Moses confirms that the latter days of the Jews would be devastation and their ultimate scattering:

Deut 4:27 And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you... Deut 4:30 When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice

He continues this omen toward the end of the book:

Deu 31:29 For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands."

Moses says, "evil will befall you in the latter days." Moses was leading the company of Jews. There is no reference to Gentiles being the subject of these latter days.

Jeremiah 23:16-20 "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD. (17) They continually say to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, "You shall have peace"'; And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, ' No evil shall come upon you.'" (18) For who has stood in the counsel of the LORD, And has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard *it*? (19) Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD has gone forth in fury—a violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked. (20) The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.

Throughout the book of Jeremiah God condemns the Jewish false prophets. Here Jeremiah predicts that when these latter days come the people of God will understand what He will do to the nation in destroying it and punishing it for its wickedness.

Ezekiel identifies Israel also concerning its doom under the nations

Ezek 38:16 You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes."

Michael the archangel spoke to Daniel associating the latter days with Daniel's people:

Dan 10:14 Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision *refers to many days yet to come.*"

Hosea has at least an optimistic outlook for the elect remnant of national Israel who would be saved:

Hosea 3:5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.

Finally in Micah, the prophet states with no uncertainty that the last days involves the reduction of Israel to heaps at that time: Micah 3:12 Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.

Micah 4:1 But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

It is evident that national Israel was the main subject involved in these last days. One might try to argue that this concerned the spiritual Israel of God, however, in light of the evil said to come upon Israel one would be hard pressed to find God bringing such evil upon His beautiful bride. The nation of Israel has not existed for nearly 2000 years. Those in the middle east who affirm themselves as Israel have no more right to do so than a twentieth century man would to claim He was Jesus Christ manifested in the flesh.

Those who would agree that God has been finished with national Israel for nearly two millennia would be forced to conclude that, in light of the above evidence, the latter days are concerning the nation of Israel. Therefore if they agree that God has been finished with the nation of Israel for 1900+ years they must agree that the latter days have also been finished for the same length of time.

In the book of Acts we find a profound statement made by Peter (a Jew) to a multitude of Jews out of every nation:

Acts 2:14-21 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. (15) For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day. (16) But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: (17) ' *And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. (18) And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. (19) I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. (20) The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. (21) And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*

Peter explicitly says, "This is that." He then explains that what this multitude of Jews was experiencing was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel. Peter is telling this multitude that they were in the last days. Beyond this he goes on to describe what would take place during these last days: dreams, visions, prophesying, wonders in heaven, signs in the earth, blood, fire, vapor of smoke, the sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood. Peter said, "This is that." Jesus predicted strikingly similar events to take place before His return:

Mat 24:29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

As we have seen, the latter days concerned the nation of Israel. In fact, the very first mention of the last days was by Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. More importantly Jacob was addressing the twelve sons or tribes in speaking about the evil that would befall those tribes in the last days. The question is, how does this relate to the language of Jesus and Peter in speaking of the sun, moon, and the stars? Our attention should be immediately drawn to the dream of Joseph concerning His family:

Genesis 37:9-10 Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me. "(10) So he told *it* to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What *is* this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?"

This description of the foundation of national Israel would no doubt be an imprint upon the hearts of those born as Israelites. This description basically identified Jacob, his wife, and the heads of the twelve tribes, as the sun, moon, and stars respectively. They represented the foundation of the whole Jewish nation. The Jews were dangerously confident in their nationality and foundation to the point of believing that their nationality along with their works secured them a place in the eternal Promised Land. When Jesus, therefore spoke of the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, and the stars falling from heaven, He was referring to the complete dissolution of the Jewish state. Peter was very likely addressing the same event.

What is significant about Peter's statement is that he was claiming that they were in the last days. The writer of Hebrews expressed this identical sentiment as he began his discourse comparing the fading Old Covenant with the Everlasting New Covenant:

Hebrews 1:1-2 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, (2) has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

"Has in these last days" the writer confirms. Without any speculation those in the first century believed they were in the last days. Certainly the writers of the New Testament were very aware of those passages we have studied involving the last days of Judah and

Jerusalem. Therefore it is safe and logical to say that the New Testament writers believed that they were in the last days of the Jewish age. The writer of Hebrews confirmed this:

Heb 9:26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Paul believed they were living in the end of the Jewish age as well:

1Cor 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Paul was describing the history of the Jews and their rebellion against God in the wilderness. We should not ignore the fact that Paul, in discussing the ancient rebellion which took place in the 40-year period between the giving of the Old Covenant and the entering into the earthly promised land, was describing the rebellion taking place during the 40-year period in which he was living: the period between the giving of the New Testament and the entering into the heavenly Promised Land.

Consider the statement of James as he addressed the unbelieving Jews:

James 5:1-9 Come now, *you* rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon *you!* (2) Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. (3) Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. (4) Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. (5) You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. Be patient and persevering (7) therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. (8) You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (9) Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

Clearly James taught that these men were in the last days. To prove this with even more authority, James declares that the coming of the Lord was drawing near and that the Judge was standing at the door. This corresponds very well with the previous statement declaring the unbelieving Jews to be in the last days ready for the slaughter.

Jude, in describing the same group of unbelieving Jews, also speaks of this period, although with a different phrase:

Jude 1:17-18 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: (18) how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.

The word "time" is the Greek word *chronos*, defined by Strong's Exhaustive Concordance as:

5550. *chronos*, *khron'-os*; a space of time

The word "last" is defined as:

2078. *eschatos*, *es'-khat-os*; a superl. prob. from G2192 (in the sense of contiguity); farthest, final (of place or time):--ends of, last, latter end, lowest, uttermost.

Certainly we can conclude from Jude that they were in the farthest or uttermost space of time of the Jewish age. They were in the last days of the Jewish state.

The apostle John made a similar statement:

1 John 2:18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

Here, the same word "*eschatos*" is used for "last." However, the Greek word for "time" is slightly different, though very related: it is the Greek word "*hora*" defined by Strong's as:

5610. *hora*, *ho'-rah*; appar. a prim. word; an "hour" (lit. or fig.):--day, hour, instant, season, X short, [even-] tide, (high) time.

John believed they were in the last or farthest season or hour of the Jewish age. Paul believed the same:

Rom 13:11 And *do* this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we *first* believed.

There are two different Greek words used here translated as "time." In the first clause Paul says "knowing the time." The Greek word here is "2540. *kairos*, *kahee-ros'*; of uncert. affin.; an occasion, i.e. set or proper time:--X always, opportunity, (convenient, due) season, (due, short, while) time, a while. Comp. G5550." Strong's. In the second clause Paul uses the phrase "high time." "High time" is the same Greek word used in first John. Both Paul and John firmly believed that they were in the last time or days of the Jewish age.

There are many other passages that could be used to support the fact that the first-century believers and particularly the apostles believed unanimously that they were in the end of the Jewish age or the last days of the Jewish age.

When Jesus spoke of the last day, He was making strong reference to the final day of the Jewish age in which the elements of the Temple, rituals, and curse would be done away. There are many futurists who would say there was nothing spiritually significant

concerning the destruction of the Jewish state. However, consider this very confusing, nevertheless profound statement by Arthur Pink concerning Hebrews 10:25 which reads:

Heb 10:25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Arthur Pink:

On Hebrews 10:25 "and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." There seems little room for doubt that the first reference here is to the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth, which was now very nigh for this epistle was written within less than eight years before Jerusalem was captured by Titus. That terrible catastrophe had been foretold, again and again, by Israel's prophets, and was plainly announced by the Lord Jesus in Luke 21. The approach of that dreadful "day" could be plainly seen or perceived by those possessing spiritual discernment: the continued refusal of the Nation to repent of their murder of Christ, and the abandoning of Christianity for an apostate Judaism by such large numbers, clearly presaged the bursting of the storm of God's judgment. This very fact supplied an additional motive for genuine Christians to remain faithful. The Lord Jesus promised that His followers should be preserved from the destruction of Jerusalem, but only as they attended to His cautions in Luke 21:8, 19, 34, etc., only as they persevered in faith and holiness, Matt. 24:13. The particular motive unto diligence here set before the Hebrews is applicable to other Christians just to the extent that they find themselves in similar circumstances. Pink-Volume 2 Commentary on Hebrews (10:25).

The approaching day was the same day that would come in a little while according to the author of Hebrews:

Heb 10:37 *For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry.*

Pink again with incredible insight, still employs a hermeneutic that radically distorts the text: A little while: "The Greek is very expressive and emphatic. The apostle used a word which signifies 'a little while,' and then for further emphasis added a particle meaning 'very,' and this he still further intensified by repeating it; thus, literally rendered this clause reads, 'For yet a very, very little while, and he that shall come will come.'... 'For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.' The reference here is to the person of the Lord Jesus as is evident from Hab. 2:3, to which the apostle here alludes. Like so many prophecies, that word of Habakkuk's was to receive a threefold fulfillment: a literal an initial one, a spiritual and continuous one, a final and complete one, The literal was the Divine incarnation, when the Son of God came here in flesh, The final will be His return in visible glory and power. The spiritual has reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 when that which most obstructed the manifestation of Christ's kingdom on earth was destroyed - with the overthrow of the Temple and its worship, official Judaism came to an end, The Christians in Palestine were being constantly persecuted by the Jews, but their conquest by Titus and their consequent

dispersion put and to this, That event was less than ten years distance when Paul wrote: compare our remarks on 'see the day approaching' (10:25) We trust that none will conclude from what has been said above that we regard v.37 as containing no reference to the final coming of Christ. What we have sought to point out was the immediate purport of its content unto the Hebrews. But it also contains a message for us, a message of hope and comfort, It is our privilege too to be waiting for God's Son from Heaven. Let us add that it is a big mistake to regard every mention of the 'coming' of Christ in the N.T. Scriptures as referring to His 'appearing the second time' (Heb 9:28). Pink-Commentary on Hebrews-Pg 145

John Brown also makes some unique remarks:

John Brown commentary on Hebrews 10:25: "The day' here referred to seems plainly the day of the destruction of the Jewish State and Church. That day had been foretold by many of the prophets, and with peculiar minuteness by our Lord Himself:

Luke 21:8-12 And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am *He*,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them. (9) But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end *will not come* immediately." (10) Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. (11) And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. (12) But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.

"These events were now very near; and the harbingers of their coming were well fitted to quicken to holy diligence the Hebrew Christians, that they might escape the coming desolation."

John Brown commentary on "these last days" of Hebrews 1:2: "...the meaning is, towards the conclusion of the Jewish dispensation. It seems equivalent to the expressions used by the Apostle, 1 Cor, 10:11, 'the ends of the world (age) are come'-the conclusion of the Mosaic economy; Gal. 4:4, 'the fullness, or the fulfillment of time'-the accomplishment or termination of the period assigned for the duration of the Mosaic economy; Eph. 1:10, 'the dispensation of the fullness of times'-the economy which was to be introduced when the times of the Mosaic economy were fulfilled; Heb. 9:26, 'the end of the world,' literally 'of the ages'-the period of the termination of the Mosaic economy-the time when the present age or world was about to be changed into the coming age-the world to come. The Christian revelation was begun to be made in the conclusion of the Jewish age. It was before the conclusion of that age that God spake to the Jews by His Son, who, according to our Lord's parabolical representation, was sent last of all to the husband men: 'He sent forth His Son made under the law.' His personal ministry, and for some time that of His Apostles, was confined to them; and though by His death the Mosaic economy was virtually abrogated, yet it was not in fact dissolved till forty years

afterwards, in the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, and the consequent final cessation of its services."

John Owen comments on Hebrews 10:25:

John Owen--"It is not such a day, such a motive, as is always common to all, but only unto those who are in some measure in the same circumstances with them...Wherefore this day was no other but that fearful and tremendous day, a season for the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, city, and nation of the Jews, which our Saviour had forewarned His disciples of, and which they had in continual expectation"--Commentary on Hebrews

With the exception of this last comment by Owen, it is manifestly evident that the preceding quotations are in gross error of applying a hermeneutic that is completely unwarranted both contextually and historically. Nevertheless, we have seen that even the greatest scholars cannot ignore the particular reference given to the Jews and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 and the last days.

A question should be raised: if, as we have seen, the last days were concerning Judah and Jerusalem, and we believe that God is done with the nation of Israel, then how can we affirm that we are in the last days?

Also, if we have proven that they were in the last days and the end of the age, and that those last days have come and gone and the Jewish age has come and gone, then in what age are we now? Jesus spoke of two ages:

Matt 12:32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

Interestingly, the Greek phrase used is *aeoni houtay en toe mellonti*, literally translated "age about to come." Jesus spoke of the present Jewish age and the ensuing New Covenant age. Because of the obvious overlap, which, even the authors cited recognized, Paul could say:

Eph 1:21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is about to (mello) come: This age is synonymous with the city of the living God:

Heb 13:14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

With the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, Jesus Christ brought to complete establishment the eternal Jerusalem from above. The last days concerned Israel and its covenant and nation. We are now in the age that was about to come, the everlasting Covenant through the blood of that great Shepherd of the sheep.