

THE LAST TIMES

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I. Introduction:

"And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever. Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:17,18; NASV).

- A. This and similar passages are used to suggest that Christians are now living in the last days of earth's existence!
- B. Should this be the proper interpretation, it would create serious doubt regarding much of Christ's, as well as the apostles teaching during the first century.
- C. Who then was John exhorting to remain through a crisis known as the tribulation?
- D. Should we in the 20th Century consider John's letters to be incomprehensible, or should we understand that John's letters were written to a particular people, dealing with a particular time?

II. The Passage Setting. (1 John 2:18)

- A. John had obviously written to those Christians who left Jerusalem as the remnant.
- B. John wrote to exhort the Christians living in that period to remain faithful to the teaching they had received.
 - 1. Gnosticism was rampant, thus John warns against false teachers that they, the apostles, had not sent.
 - 2. Peter wrote to the same remnant, 1 Pet. 1:1.
 - 3. The remnant had left Jerusalem with the expectation that the land of Israel, Jerusalem and the temple would soon be destroyed.
 - 4. After leaving Jerusalem, the remnant's communication regarding the affairs of Jerusalem was extremely limited.
 - 5. The apostles were their only source of communication.
 - 6. Thus James wrote one letter, James 1:1; Peter wrote two letters 1 Pet. 1:1, and 2 Pet. 3:1, and John wrote 3 letters, to the remnant informing them of events "at hand" James 5:7-9. The passage in question in the KJV reads "last time". The literal translation of Greek text reads "last hour". "The last hour" denotes a thing then in progress of being fulfilled, not way off in the future.

III. Other phrases which speak of "last times".

A. Phrases dealing with an appointed time warrant a Biblical study, not a traditional one.

B. Some of the different phrases are:

1. "Latter days" (or last days) Dan. 10:14 has reference to the total annihilation of Judaism in the first century. Daniel 12:7 confirms as much. The power of the once holy people was destroyed by Rome in 70 A.D.
2. And it shall be in the "last days". This is almost universally accepted as prophecy of the beginning of the Lord's Kingdom on Pentecost, and on that day Peter stood and quoted Joel 2:28-32, and said, this is-that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. But, it took place in the "last days". The "last days" was the beginning of the end of the "last days" of Israel, and Judaism.
3. "The great and terrible day of the Lord," Malachi 4:5, this phrase, and passage represent the forthcoming Judgment upon all Israel who would not receive Christ. Lk. 21:20; Mt. 23:38, Zech. 14:1-3.
4. Elijah was to come before the "great and terrible day of the Lord".
5. Elijah did come, and was John the Baptist Mt. 11:13,14, 17:10-13.
6. "The day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 5:5, 2 Cor. 1:14) was to be an exhortation to individual Christians who might live until "the day of the Lord". 1 Cor. 1:7 none of me miraculous gifts until "the day of the Lord".
7. "The day of God" 2 Pet. 3:12. A day of judgment like that of Ezek. 7:1-13. 2 Pet. 3:1 informs the Christian remnant that this was the second letter written to them, reminding them of what the prophets, and apostles had taught them regarding the destruction of Israel. The first prophet was Moses (Deut. 28:49-68), the minor and Major Prophets followed the pattern of Moses, regarding the destruction of Israel. Jesus said that this nation was responsible for the death of all the prophets sent to them. Thus Peter outlines a complete destruction in 2 Pet 3:10-12, and then follows with his exhortation to those who would remain after the calamity (3:17).
8. Have we been so eager to teach dooms-day lessons that we have misunderstood 1 Pet. 4:17 "The household of God" to mean in our generation the household of Christ?
9. "At hand" "Already as it were in thy mind (Rom. 10:8). Of a time concerning things imminent and soon to come to pass, Mt. 10:23, 16:28, 24:32, 26:18, 26:64. Mk. 13:30,31. Rev. 1:1 3; 22:10. Of the near advent of persons (or) of Christ's return from Heaven Phil. 4:5 with the addition "right at the door". James 5:9". Thayer Greek English Lexicon, pages 164,165.

IV. Does John 3:18,19 teach a Renovation or Annihilation of Earth?

- A. John was aware of the impending destruction of Israel, he was also aware that he, himself would be living when the Lord returned to fulfill all prophecy regarding Himself, and Israel John 21:22, Lk. 21:22,22:37; 24:44.
- B. With this knowledge, did John mislead the Christian Remnant into believing that he was speaking to, and about a generation some 2,000 years later? Of what interest would such information have been to this Christian Remnant, then in dire distress?
- C. I suggest that John warned the Remnant, of the passing of Israel, which when done would bring into being a new order of things.
 - 1. Gen. 8:21 And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth, and I will never again destroy every living thing as I have done".
 - 2. Eccl. 1:4 "A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever".
 - 3. Psalm 93:1 "The Lord reigns; the Lord is clothed with majesty; the Lord has clothed and girded Himself with strength; indeed the world is firmly established, it will not be moved".
 - 4. Psalm 104:5 "He established the earth upon its foundation, so that it will not be moved".
 - 5. Psalm 119:90 "Thy faithfulness continues throughout all generations; Thou didst establish the earth, and it stands".
 - 6. Psalm 148:1-6 The Heaven, the heights, and all His angels. Sun and moon all stars of light, highest Heavens, the waters, earth..."For He commanded and they were created. He has also established them forever and ever. He has made a decree which will not pass away".
 - 7. That decree was made as an oath to Himself in Gen.8: 21, "never again".

V. What Some Writers say about annihilation of Earth:

- A. Christian System. Alexander Campbell, page 140. "Jesus was to have appeared, and did appear in the end of the world or last days of the first kingdom of God".
- B. Christian System. Alexander Campbell, page 228: "It is almost universally understood to mean a new state of things, not of persons. A peculiar era, in which

all things are to be made new: such as the formation of a new Church on the day of Pentecost".

- C. Christian System. Alexander Campbell, page 258 "God re- creates, regenerates but annihilates nothing; and therefore the present earth is not to be annihilated".
- D. Adam Clarke. Commentary on John, 1844 edition. "Little children, it is the last time 1 John 2:18 this is the last dispensation of Grace, and mercy to mankind; the present age is the conclusion of the Jewish State, as the temple and holy city are shortly to be destroyed".

E. J. Stuart Russell. Parousia, page 328, 1887 edition. "Of John 2:18 New Testament writers speak of the end, as fast approaching, we have also seen what that expression refers to. Not the close of human history, nor the final dissolution of the material creation; but the close of the Jewish Aeon or dispensation, and the abolition and removal of the order of things instituted and ordained by divine wisdom under that economy".

Comments:

I suggest that antichrist already existed among the remnant in Asia. Paul in the middle of the century warned against antichrist, and said "The mystery of lawlessness is already at work" 2 Thess. 2:7. I further suggest that neither John, Peter nor James wrote letters in regard to the annihilation of earth. They were instead talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. We need to carefully examine the teaching of those who would preach such scare tactics from 1 John 2:18,19. For God said "I will never again destroy earth".