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400 - The Last Days & End Times

1. Introduction

Wars, natural disasters and catastrophes usually attract the attention of Bible believers looking for signs of Christ's return and the end of the world. Christ's disciples, who later became his apostles, had questions about this as well. Speculation, interpretation and confusion have clouded the simplicity of what the scriptures teach. As we begin our study of the subject it's vital that we make some critical distinctions. In this lesson we'll start by defining **The Last Days & End Times**.

2. An age old question

When will Christ come back? When will the world end? These questions aren't new and over the centuries have given rise to predictions and ideas about when these events will take place. In our time there are those who talk about the end times and do so by pointing to things that are indicators of the last days. In some interpretations, the term end times appear to point to a general state of the world that will develop, while the last days refers to events believed to mark the imminent return of Christ. In some peoples' minds these are synonymous with each other. But are they the same thing? In this lesson we'll discuss

- a. Eschatology or the study of the end times
- b. The scriptural definition of the last days
- c. The Difference between the last days and the end of the world

Let's take a look at each of these.

3. Eschatology or the study of the end times

Eschatology simply defined means the study of last things. In reference to the world, humanity and Christ, eschatology concerns itself with events directly related to the prevailing beliefs about the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. The most common system of eschatological interpretation most people are familiar with is the Premillennial view which presents a series of events that will occur at the time leading up to the second coming. There are several variations of this belief that offer slight changes in the timeline of events, but the core elements are present in each of them. We'll examine this doctrine in depth as the series continues but for now we need to understand that the study of end times is directly related to things believed to take place at the end.

Those who advocate for these interpretations base their ideas on passages from the Old Testament, notably Daniel and Ezekiel, and statements from the New Testament primarily from

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

400 - The Last Days & End Times

Matthew, 1 Thessalonians and the book of Revelation as well as a few others. This belief poses that world conditions will develop reflecting their interpretation of biblical prophecy. A progression of conditions and events then will ultimately lead to the actual time of the end identified as the last days. The last days will then present the unfolding of specific prophetic elements heralding the actual end of the world, the return of Christ and the regeneration of creation.

Other world religions have a view of last things and often hold to a cyclical interpretation of birth, growth, deterioration, destruction and regeneration. These ideas aren't new and can even be seen in ancient religions. These ideas incorporate many of the same concerns regarding an afterlife, disposition of the soul after death and judgment. These ideas are represented in nearly every culture throughout the world. For Bible believers there are differing views of eschatology regarding the ultimate fate of the Earth and the disposition of souls.

What we need to remember is that the prevailing biblical interpretation appears to identify the last days as a final series of events concluding the end times. The last days therefore are a subset of the end times and the end times are marked by specific prophetic events being fulfilled. But is that accurate?

4. The scriptural definition of the last days

In previous lessons I pointed out that the historical narrative of the Bible can be divided into three distinct spiritual time periods. These are the Patriarchal, Mosaic and Christian dispensations. Each of these is characterized by the way in which God interacted with and revealed his will to humans. In the Patriarchal dispensation God spoke with heads of households who then were to teach and direct their families to follow the Lord's instructions. Over time God separated a special people to bring the Messiah into the world. The Hebrews were chosen due to the faith of their progenitor Abraham. During this period God gave a law to the Hebrews through Moses at Mount Sinai. A confusing aspect of this period is that while the Hebrews, or children of Israel as they're later known, were given a specific law, the gentiles were still under the Patriarchal dispensation. The Mosaic dispensation and Patriarchal dispensations both came to an end when Christ died on the cross and the church was established on the day of Pentecost fifty days after the crucifixion.

The final dispensation, the Christian, is also referred to as the last days. There are three conditions that were to be met that would indicate when the last days began. Those are:

- a. The appearance of the Messiah
- b. The establishment of a new kingdom
- c. And the giving of a new law

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

400 - The Last Days & End Times

The first condition - the appearance of the Messiah is clear. Christ was the Messiah who was foretold. His appearance in the world signaled that the last days had come. Numerous prophecies in the Old Testament, statements Christ made while in the world and later notes in the New Testament all point to the fact that Christ was the Messiah who came to offer the final sacrifice for sin. Christ's appearance and sacrifice fulfilled elements of the Law, as Christ stated in **Matt 5.17**, and God's promise made to all humans in **Genesis 3.15**.

The second condition was to be the establishment of a new kingdom. In **Acts 2**, the church was established in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The church is the kingdom that was foretold and statements in the New Testament as well as the Old reinforce this.

The third condition to be met was the issuing a new law. Jeremiah prophesied of this and also notes that the new law wasn't going to be like the Old Law (**Jer 31.31-32**). The New Testament presents the Gospel as the new law that fulfilled the prophecy recorded by Jeremiah. The writer of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah and confirms that the Gospel message is a law and is that which Jeremiah spoke of (**Heb 8.8-13**).

I've covered these conditions in more detail in a previous lesson and I'll supply a link for it. Aside from this there are statements in the New Testament identifying the fact that we're living in the last days. We can see that revealed clearly in the New Testament.

Isaiah speaks of an event that will happen in the last days that will affect all nations. "***And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.***" (**Isa 2.2**).

Micah makes an identical statement in his prophecy. "***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.***" (**Mic 4.1**)

Both statements refer to the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two. Some believe that the kingdom hasn't been established, and we'll discuss that as we continue, but for now we see that the last days begin with the founding of a new kingdom.

On the day of Pentecost as Peter spoke to the crowds, he clarified that the things they were seeing were the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Joel. Peter states, "***And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams...***" (**Acts 2.17**). The writing Peter quotes is **Joel 2.28**. The conditions Joel spoke of were in regard to both the miraculous and general gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

400 - The Last Days & End Times

all peoples beginning on Pentecost. The point here is that this shows that the last days formally began on the day of Pentecost.

The writer of Hebrews discusses the nature of the Law of Moses and the superiority of the law of Christ. The writer states, “**God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds...**” (Heb 1.1-2). The book was probably written in the mid to late first century and as we can see the writer indicates that the last days were in effect referring to them as “**these last days**”.

The last days in which we now live were characterized by the writers of the New Testament. Peter describes the attitudes of unbelievers in his second epistle. “**Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.**” (2 Pet 3.3-4). Anyone who professes faith in God, Christ and the Bible understands that these attitudes were not only in existence in the first century but have multiplied and been refined in modern times. Evolutionists and others discount the idea of God, the Bible and anything related to it simply because they don’t understand the power of God. We need to note that these developments are not reserved for some shadowy time in the future but are with us now confirming that we’re living in the last days and have been for some time.

Paul addresses trends in the church and the world in general as he wrote to the young preacher Timothy. Paul states, “**This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.**” (2 Tim 3.1-5).

As the first century reached its end, the development of apostasy in the church was already appearing. Paul, who was executed around 68 A.D. warned of this in his writings to both Timothy and the Thessalonians. To Timothy, so he knew to preach and stand against error, and to the Thessalonians who were being assailed by false teachers. This process was already starting as Paul noted in **2 Thessalonians 2.7**. I emphasize again that the last days in these references, began in the first century and continue today. Historically we can see how the warnings of Paul and writings of the New Testament confirm that the conditions described in these passages were not only underway in the first century but are thriving in the world today.

Paul deals with a number of problems and questions that the Christians in Corinth have

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

400 - The Last Days & End Times

and as he answers them he provides confirmation that we're living in the last days. Paul reviews judgments against the children of Israel by God as he encourages them to be faithful. Listing events in which God judged his people in the Old Testament Paul states, "*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*" (1 Cor 10.11). Paul told the Romans that "*whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*" (Rom 15.4) and uses the events discussed in 1 Corinthians 10 as a reminder. His statement that we're living in the time in which the "*ends of the world are come*" reinforces the fact that we're living in the final era of time. If we want to think of it this way the end times and last days in this sense are the same thing and began on the day of Pentecost with the establishment of the church.

Bottom line is that the end times are now. The end times are the last days and they've been going on for a while.

5. The Difference between the last days and the end of the world

The end times as presented in some beliefs consist of a number of conditions that will emerge globally. These conditions will be marked by events signaling the approach of the end, or last days. The last days themselves will be identified when certain characters and events appear as fulfillment of prophecy. We'll examine each of these in the following lessons in more detail. As presented in these interpretations the end times refer to a period immediately preceding the beginning of the end. The last days in that same view are therefore presented as a subset of the end times and herald the actual end of the world.

In some interpretations the end of the world isn't really the end. It's a regeneration of the existing world in which Christ will reset everything and restore creation to the state it was in at the beginning. There are several variations of this belief as well. As the study progresses I'll discuss each of these points in more detail and compare them to what the scriptures have to say.

6. Next

I've heard presentations about how FBI and law enforcement agents are trained in regard to counterfeit money. It was stressed that the training didn't focus on counterfeit bills but rather on studying actual bills to the point that agents knew all of the subtleties of how they were printed. The idea then was that if one encountered a counterfeit bill it would stand out because it was distinctly different from the real thing. The same principle holds true for the Bible.

In regard to the last days and second coming the best thing to do is understand what the Bible says about the second coming and be able to recognize ideas that don't fit the scriptural

TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons
400 - The Last Days & End Times

narrative. In order to do that in the next lesson I'll discuss what the scriptures say about **The Second Coming Of Christ**.