

# The Basics of Christianity

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# The Basics of Christianity

## Are We in the Last Days?

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#### INTRODUCTION:

This morning we are continuing with "The Basics of Christianity" series. The purpose for this series is so we can be more effective in our witness to those who have not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. During this series we have learned that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament. He came to show us the ways of God and bring us salvation by paying the price of our sins by dying on the cross. He also performed miracles among us to prove that what He had taught was approved by God, the Father. His ultimate miracle was when He rose from the grave on the third day after His death.

This morning we are going to look at what the scriptures say about The Last Days. Everyone is trying to develop a chart trying to put together a timeline of how everything is going to end. They will say Revelation is a timeline of the end times. Many people define the "**Last Days**" as the last few 24 hour periods before the Lord comes again and the whole world is destroyed. Thus the urgency of being prepared for the Second Coming of Christ is lacking in their lives. The scriptures, however, warn us that Christ's return is imminent and could happen at any time and we **MUST** remain steadfast and endure to the end.

This morning I would like to examine the "**Last Days**" texts in order to understand the Biblical definition of "**Last Days**" or "**Last Times**" (Both plural).

My question would be "Should I define the phrase "Last Days" the same way the Bible does or should I take my own definition and enforce it on what the Bible is saying?"

How does the Bible define the phrase "**Last Days**"?

There are only six times that the New Testament uses the words "Last Days" or "Last Times". There are many references to "Last Day" (Singular) and "Last Time" (Singular) which DO refer to the end of the age when Christ returns.

#### All Stand and Read Scripture

##### **Acts 2:14-24 (NASB95)**

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. <sup>15</sup> For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day; <sup>16</sup> **but this** is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> 'And it shall be in the **last days**,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on **all** mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; <sup>18</sup> Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup> 'And I

will grant wonders in the sky above And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. <sup>20</sup> The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. <sup>21</sup> ‘And it shall be that **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

<sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. <sup>24</sup> But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

## Prayer

### BODY:

#### I. THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF "LAST DAYS".

So, what is the context? It is the Day of Pentecost. All of the disciples are together in one place and there came from Heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as fire and rested upon them and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages. The noise attracted the crowd into the area. Some wondered what was happening while others claimed that the disciples must be drunk from too much wine.

Now, here is the question. How does this define the last days? Did you catch where it was? Verses 16 and 17.

<sup>16</sup> but **this** is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

What does the pronoun "this" point to? Peter is saying that what is happening **right now** as he speaks is fulfilling what Joel prophesied in **Joel 2:28-32**. In context Peter is saying that some of you think you are hearing gibberish. What you are actually hearing is the Holy Spirit that is being poured on us allowing us to speak in each of your native languages at the same time! Peter quotes Joel as also saying **“That I will pour forth of My Spirit on **all** mankind”**. and a second promise **‘And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’**

Peter even tells them what they must do to receive the Holy Spirit and be saved.

#### **Acts 2:38 (NASB95)**

<sup>38</sup> Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; **and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

In other words, Peter says, what you are experiencing at this precise moment is what Joel called the **last days!**

You might ask then, when did the moon turn red and the sun turn dark? I guess it might have happened on the day of Pentecost, but it is not recorded is it?

So does that make the prophet Joel wrong?

No! This is most likely symbolic language. Joel is speaking of the mysterious and wonderful works of God. His images and symbols predicted cataclysmic changes in creation itself.

Joel says we will see the sun darkened and the moon turned to blood before the dreadful day of the Lord. Some interpret this to have occurred when Christ died on the cross. We know that the day turned dark.

Others believe it will happen when Christ comes again. But if the sun literally turns dark and the moon turn blood red just before His return, would His return be like a thief in the night? Would the world be caught off guard? Some feel that if this is a literal, the "**great and dreadful day of the Lord**" could refer to Judgment Day after Christ's return.

Now let's look at another section of scripture that refers to the "Last Times".

### **1 Peter 1:17-21 (NASB95)**

<sup>17</sup> If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear **during the time of your stay on earth**; <sup>18</sup> knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup> but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. <sup>20</sup> For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these **last times** for the sake of you <sup>21</sup> who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

What are the last times or last days in this context?

It was at least happening at the time that Peter was writing this letter. He is referring to the time of his writing as being in the "Last Times". Peter is putting himself in the era that he is calling the "Last Times". Again he points to Jesus and presents the gospel message.

### **Hebrews 1:1-3 (NASB95)**

<sup>1</sup> God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, <sup>2</sup> in these **last days** has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. <sup>3</sup> And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. **When He had made purification of sins**, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

How does the author of Hebrews define "Last Days"?

Again, it is at least at the time that he is writing. He is referring to the time that he is writing as "**In these Last Days**". But notice that he refers to Christ again and summarizes the gospel by stating that Christ "**had made purification of sins**".

### **2 Timothy 3:1-7 (NASB95)**

<sup>3</sup> But realize this, that in the **last days** difficult times will come.

OK. That sounds a little more like we talk about. Right?

Difficult times in the last days. Maybe the time of tribulation?

Let's see how the difficult times of the last days are described.

<sup>2</sup> For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-

control, brutal, haters of good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. <sup>6</sup> For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, <sup>7</sup> always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

My question is this.

When, in the history of mankind, has this **never** existed?

When was there ever a time in history when all kids honored their mother and father?

When was there a time in history since the fall of man, when no one was immoral or loved the things of the world?

So what he describes is really no different than what we have experienced throughout man's time on earth. Right? So, what is he saying?

Well to understand **why** he described the actions of unholy people and how the "Last Days" will be difficult, we need to read verses prior to and after these verses.

In chapter 2, Paul gives direction to those who are saved.

### **2 Timothy 2:22-26 (NASB95)**

<sup>22</sup> Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. <sup>23</sup> But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. <sup>24</sup> The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, <sup>25</sup> with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Timothy tells us that we are living among enemies of God. He exhorts us to pursue righteousness and to gently proclaim God's word to these men of the world. Then he describes what the worldly man will be like in the last days as we just read in verses 2-7. Followed by how the **last days** will be **difficult**.

### **2 Timothy 3:12-15 (NASB95)**

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. <sup>13</sup> But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Ah! That will be difficult won't it?

When we live for Christ, we are going to be persecuted!

Evil men and fake believers are going to progressively become more evil and will persecute us and attempt to deceive us. Yet we are to gently correct them with God's word and hope that God will grant them repentance and cause them to turn from their evil ways and escape the snare of the devil.

We do this even when faced with persecution. Paul continues with this exhortation.

<sup>14</sup> You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, <sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known

the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The unmistakable message is that we are living in the last days and it will be accompanied with difficult times!

This is very similar to the next passage.

## **2 Peter 3:3-9 (NASB95)**

<sup>3</sup> Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, <sup>7</sup> But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

If I stopped right there it could be future. Correct? Let's keep reading.

<sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> For when they maintain this, (notice how Peter words this. "For when they maintain this". It sounds like present tense.) it escapes their notice that by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water, <sup>6</sup> through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

Here is my question. If the church that Peter was writing to was NOT experiencing scoffers that were saying "Where is Jesus? I thought He was coming back!" Then WHY would Peter put it in the letter?

If Peter was saying "I know you are faced with many problems and are struggling in your faith but I am going to talk about things that are going to happen thousands of years down the road. Their response would be "That is interesting Peter! Thanks!" **It would not help them!** In other words, **is** Peter writing something **specific** to them or is he writing down **random** thoughts?

What I am suggesting is this...considering that he is writing to a people for a purpose, then they are probably experiencing scoffers at the time that this is being written and some may be **questioning their faith a little bit!** It **has** been a while since Jesus left this earth and He hasn't returned. Maybe the apostles were mistaken. Maybe Jesus was not the Messiah as He claimed to be. Is this really worth the struggle?

What does Peter go on to say?

<sup>7</sup> But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. <sup>8</sup> But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

**God is waiting for the last sheep to be found!!!** He wants more people to come into the fold. He is waiting for the very last name that is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life to be saved!

Mockers existed at the time of Peter's writing and they still mock today! Is the purpose of Peter's letter to predict the future **or** is it to reveal Who God is, What He desires, and what He expects from us? In other words...if this does not apply to the first century then why write it?

## **James 5:1-3 (NASB95)**

5 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup> Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup> 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 treasure!

Just like Matthew told us.

### **Matthew 6:19-21 (NASB95)**

<sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; <sup>21</sup> for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

When do we store up this treasure? During our lifetime, of course, which is in the **last days** according to James. *It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!*

### **CONCLUSION:**

I want to point out that we have looked at passages from multiple authors.

Acts was written by Luke.

I & II Peter were written by Peter.

II Timothy was written by Paul.

Hebrews was written by an unknown author but possibly Paul.

James was written by James, the brother of Jesus.

So a consistent Biblical definition of "Last Days" and "Last Times" are being presented by multiple authors and they are all from the New Testament. But it is also critical to point out that even though the passages are written by multiple authors, they were all inspired by the same source, the Holy Spirit.

The consistent Biblical definition of the “**last days**” is the time between Christ’s first and second coming.

People in the first century were living as if Jesus could come today. I'm not sure that we take it quite as seriously today. What the scriptures are telling us about the **Last Days** is that we are living in the them now and have been ever since Jesus first came to this earth.

**We learn who God is.** He is a God who loves us and sent His Son to die on the cross for us in order that we can have salvation through His sacrificial death on the cross. He is patient and is waiting for all who will repent to come to Him.

**We learn what God desires.** He desires that no one should perish but for all to come to repentance and have everlasting life with Him.

**We learn what God expects from His people.** That we accept His plan of salvation and remain faithful to Him.

Jesus is coming again! We **DO NOT know the day or the hour!** He is coming as a thief in the night. God has done His part. Have you accepted His free gift of salvation? He is patiently waiting for you to make your decision.

### **The Family of God**