

The Last Days: Then or Now?

Dan Delagrave

(I thank Dan Delagrave for use of this article which Jerry Wayne Bernard published in his Bible Study Group on April 10. I thank both men for permission to pass it on to you in this mailout. Jerry's website is <jerrybernard.com> CH)

The Apostles, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declared the days which THEY were living in to be "*the last days*" and "*the last time*" (Heb.1:2; I Pet.1:5,20; I Jn.2:18). For futurism to be true it has to necessarily make "the last days" to be the last 2000 years and running, which is indeed what the majority of futurists teach. But that is a totally untenable view of the term "the last days" in light of all that the New Testament teaches. As the saying goes, "something ain't quite right" about that belief!

Much of Christendom has been claiming that we have been in the last days for the last 2000 years. It is exciting to think that one today is living in "the last days", and, for many, no amount of common sense exposition, or "intellectualism", is going to change that. No theology, no covenantal understanding, no exegesis or exposition, just "we have been in the last days for the last 2000 years". A wrong view of the nature of the kingdom is at the root for sure. The fact is, it is UNTENABLE to view "the last days" as the last 2000 years!

Those who teach the futurist view have had to necessarily ALLEGORIZE all the imminency statements ("near", "shortly", "quickly", "a little while", "at the door", etc..) that went hand-in-hand with the term "the last days", written in the first century.

It is no wonder that atheists, liberals, and Jewish and Muslim scholars alike all have a field day with futuristic eschatology, which they constantly use to discredit Christianity altogether. 2000 years is simply not "near"!

In order to justify allegorizing the imminency statements, futurists have conjured up the theory that "God has a different view of time". They usually cite II Peter 3:8, which says "*one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*". In other words, those poor Christians in the first century didn't have a chance at understanding those statements because, after all, "God has a DIFFERENT view of time"! Such thinking about the inspired time-words is PATENTLY FALSE, not to mention INCONSISTENT with how the same words are used elsewhere in scripture.

The Holy Spirit would not have inspired the Apostle Paul to tell the Corinthian believers that "*the time is short*" (I Cor.7:29) if the time, as THEY understood time, actually wasn't short. The Apostle James would not have told his original readers that "*the coming of the Lord draws near*" (James 5:8) if the coming of the Lord actually wasn't drawing near according to his own understanding of time and the word "near". John the Revelator

would not have told the seven Churches of Asia Minor of "*things which must shortly come to pass*" (Rev.1:1; 22:6) if those things were not to come to pass "shortly" from the time he wrote and relative to the lifetime of the very ones he wrote to. The "day is as a thousand years with the Lord" statement by Peter was simply a metaphor for God's "longsuffering" (vs..9) to that time. The end, however, was certain and imminent - really, truly and actually!

Folks, how long is it before imminency loses all semblance of meaning whatsoever?? Think about that. Those statements were not the wishful and flexible opinion of a few persecuted disciples of Jesus. Rather, they were inspired statements that the early Christians could easily understand, not ones by which they would have been sorely misled.

The ONLY accurate approach is to take those imminency statements at face value and in their first century, pre-70 A.D. historical context. Then and only then does N.T. eschatology and "the last days" make sense. The day of the Lord REALLY WAS near at that time, since it pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, the Old Covenant, and Judaism. The author of Hebrews flatly said that all of that was near its end at that time - read Heb.8:13, 10:9, 12:26-28. Jesus himself said that the end would happen before the generation of his day had passed, and that is EXACTLY what did happen in 70 A.D.

When one understands "*the tribulation of those days*" (Matt.24:29) to be the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D. and all the theology that accompanied that destruction, then the whole thing makes sense. One simply cannot make "the tribulation of those days" to be a future global disaster in light of the historical indicators that are attached to it in the text itself; such as:

1. "Holy place" (Matt.24:15) - The then-standing holy place for sure! Nothing is said about a "rebuilt temple" after 70 A.D. Jesus was literally pointing to Herod's Temple.
2. "Judea" (Matt.24:16) - The then-present Judea for sure. There is no "Judea" today.
3. "Flee to the mountains" (Matt.24:16) - An ancient custom of fleeing to the fortified caves and caverns surrounding Judea. It happened to a "T" in 66 A.D.
4. "On the housetop" (Matt.24:17) - A first century custom in Judea - read Acts 10:9.
5. "Sabbath day" (Matt.24:20) - The law of the land in Judea at the time of Jesus.
6. "Jerusalem compassed with armies" - One has to be in utter denial to say that this didn't happen during the Jewish War. Josephus says it did!
7. "This generation" - OBVIOUSLY, in context, the first century generation, as is consistent with other references throughout the gospels.

It is foolish beyond scope to say that these characteristics of "the tribulation of those days" are describing a global disaster and a rebuilt temple sometime in the future, a whopping 2000 plus years removed from the time Jesus spoke.

The Church has bought a bill of goods in viewing "the last days" as the last 2000 years. The TRUTH is, the Apostles were in the last days of the eschaton of Israel, i.e., the Old Covenant. It was all about a change in covenants, not a global conflagration and melting of the universe. A little theology would go a long way in bringing the Church back to New Testament realities.

With many Christians on all levels converting to the past-fulfilled position today, the only thing that may be in its "last days" at this time is futurism itself! []

(Cecil Hook: May 2005)

Talkin' Texas: In 1852 a small group of free-thinking German immigrants traveled westward from New Braunfels and settled in a pleasant place they named "Comfort." They were opposed to slavery and favored the Union in the war. About 65 men defected to Mexico, but Confederate troops surprised them on the bank of the Nueces River and killed 28 of them (one source says 36).