

How Is Christ’s Coming Related to the “Latter Days”?

Imagine you've come to my office to talk. Of course, we can't do this right now, but let's use our imagination a little.

You ask, "When is it going to end?" I assume you mean, "When are the Covid restrictions going to end, so we can have chapel services again?"

You explain, you've been reading the Bible. In fact, you read last week's lesson about the "latter days." So, you say, "The Bible talks about the 'latter days,' so when will they begin?"

I tell you that I know the answer to this question. I can give you the exact day.

If you've studied the Bible very much, my answer might alarm you. Jesus said, "Concerning that day or hour, no one knows" (Matthew 24:36; see also Mark 13:32). If Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour, how can Chaplain



Haslett claim to know it?

I explain. I know it because we're talking about two different things. The words "latter days" can refer to the second coming of Christ, and that's what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32. But that's the final, ending of the "latter days." What I know is the beginning of the "latter days". I don't know their ending. Just look above, the question was, 'When will they begin?"

Let's suppose you ask, "Okay, then, tell me, when do the "latter days" begin?"

That's my first point in this lesson. This week we will look at the phrase "latter days" as it is found in the New Testament. In this lesson we will be looking to the Bible to learn:

- When do the latter days begin? (Acts 2:17)
 - When we get near to the end of the latter days, what should we do? (2 Timothy 3:1)
 - What will every person do at the conclusion of the latter days? (James 5:3)
 - Tell me again, when did the latter days begin? (Hebrews 1:2)

I have a suggestion. You might try reading the rest of this lesson one section at a time. You could read one section, put it down, pray about it, and think about it. Then, later, pick it back up and read some more. Some of this material is “heavy” and it may take some time to absorb its meaning. Try not to give up if it is heavy. God’s Word has a way of blessing us as we struggle to understand it.

When do the latter days begin? (Acts 2:17)

We might ask, “When do the latter days begin, and why should it matter to me?”

On the Day of Pentecost Jesus sent the Holy Spirit in power, to dwell with those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Apostle Peter preached a long sermon. I won’t go through the entire sermon, but I will draw your attention to Peter’s discussion about a prophecy from the prophet, Joel.

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ ¹

Peter preached these words to the Jewish people who were gathered from all over the Mediterranean world. They came to the Temple in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Peter begins by referring to “the last days”, which is another way of saying, “latter days.” “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,” (Acts 2:17) Peter says. These words come directly from the prophecy in Joel, as you can see below.

²⁸ “And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
²⁹ Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

³⁰ “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. ³² And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls. ²

Peter says, “This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel.” (Acts 2:16). Notice that in Joel’s prophecy, and in Peter’s quotation of the prophecy, we read, that there will be miraculous signs in the heavens and on the earth

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ac 2:14–21). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Joe 2:28–32). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

(Acts 2:19, Joel 2:30). These signs had not taken place, but Peter says Joel's prophecy had been fulfilled: "This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel." Why did Peter say that Joel's words had taken place?

The "latter days" speak of the time when Jesus would come, both his first and second coming. Do you remember that I had you ask the question when the "latter days" would begin? Throughout Jesus ministry He said that His hour had not yet come (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20). The hour that was coming was His death on the cross (John 12:23&27; 13:1; 17:1), and His resurrection. Jesus' death and resurrection mark the beginning of the new age when all things will become new (2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 21:5). You could say that they mark the beginning of the "latter days". **So, the latter days begin with Jesus' death and resurrection and will end when He returns.** That's my understanding.

We know when Jesus came.
When He was born in Bethlehem. But,
He came into His eternal Kingdom when
He died on the cross and rose again. We
know about both times of Jesus coming.
However, the time of His return is
known only to God the Father
(Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32).

You might ask, "Why does it matter for me?" Let's look at this another way. Jesus' life and ministry all led up to His death on the cross and His resurrection. When Jesus rose from the dead He became the first of those who will rise from the dead. A multitude of people will believe in Him, and because of Him they will be raised from the dead as well. The prophecies about the latter days are God's prediction that all this will take place.



This is an artist's conception of the day of Pentecost. Notice the tongues of fire over the believer's heads.

When we get near to the end of the latter days, what should we do? (2Timothy 3:1)

"The Bible says that near the very end of the latter days things will get much worse. How can we be prepared for those hard times?"

Another New Testament passage that uses the phrase "latter days" or "last days" is found in 2Timothy 3:1. I will include the verses that follow because it gives us a sense of the context of the phrase the Apostle Paul is using in his letter to the young pastor, Timothy:

3 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. ³

You might ask, "So is Paul talking about the beginning of the 'later days' or the 'end of the latter days,' or both?" My answer would be that Paul is talking about the entire period of the "latter days." So, he is referring to the beginning, middle, and end of the "latter days."

If we understand that Jesus' death and resurrection started a new creation, we might wonder why evil still continues. If we are living in the new creation then why don't we see new creation everywhere we look? Paul is saying

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (2 Ti 3:1–5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

that we should not be surprised. As the Kingdom of Christ is growing stronger in this evil, fallen world of the old creation, the Kingdom of Satan is also growing at the same time. Not surprisingly, there is tension between the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of Satan. Both are hard at work.

As Christians we have the promise that Christ has already won. He rose from the grave. Already, we are made new, spiritually. We can have victory over sin as we grow to be more and more like Jesus.

At the same time, Satan is hard at work. He can't defeat those who are in Christ Jesus, but He can make believers lives very difficult. He can destroy everyone who is not in Christ. That is why we must be witnesses for Christ, so that those Christ has called might hear that Christ has died for them. We present that witness with our words and actions. We do the best job when we simply live the kind of life that shows Christ has transformed our thoughts and actions. Sometimes we don't actually have to say very much for others to see Christ at work in our lives.

So, when we see evil at work we should continue to put our hope and trust in Jesus Christ. He has won already when He rose from the dead. We now struggle against sin, but He is victorious. All who are not in Christ will be destroyed by evil. So, keep your spiritual eyes on Jesus Christ and follow the course He has marked out for you (Hebrews 12:1&2). The time will come when the struggle will end.

What will every person do at the conclusion of the latter days? (James 5:3)

We might ask, "Doesn't the Bible say something about every person will have to give an account of his or her life to God at the final judgement? How can I be ready for that?"

At the conclusion of the "latter days," or after the destruction of the old creation, everyone will be judged by God. Read what James has to say:

5 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. ² Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. ⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. ⁴

As the end of the "latter days" approaches those who know of Christ but refuse to turn to Him should reconsider. Consider the "rich" (James 5:1). For those who put their trust in the riches of this world, and the fine clothes they wear, all these things will become "rotted" and "moth-eaten" (James 5:2). Instead of helping you face judgement, at the conclusion of the "last days," your treasures will become "evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire" (James 5:3).

What about those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? How will they do when God judges them?

In the year 368 a pastor named Basil, who became known as Basil the Great, preached to the rich people in his flock. He begged with them to release their food to the poor who were starving. Many of them did what Basil asked. Basil sold land that he had inherited, and used the money to feed the poor. He said this: "If you are reduced to your last loaf of bread and a beggar appears at your door, then take that loaf from your closet and lift your hands to Heaven, and say this prayer: 'O Lord, I have but this one loaf, which you see before you: Hunger lies in wait for me, but I worship your commandments more than all other things, and therefore this little I have I give to my brother, who suffers from hunger.'"

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jas 5:1–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

As Christians we should care for those who are in need. Christ forgives the sins of those who trust in Him (Ephesians 1:7). However, we should never use Christ's promise of forgiveness as an excuse to do what we know is sinful (Romans 6:1&2). Instead, we should show the love of Christ to everyone (2 Corinthians 5:14).

If we are not showing the love of Christ to others, we must ask ourselves if we have really given our life to Christ or not. If we have not given our life to Christ, then we must pray to Him. Once we have committed our lives to Christ, then we must seek to serve Him in every way that we can. It should not be a burden, rather an act of celebration that gives the believer joy.

A lot of people have asked how they can be sure that they are saved. The best way is to take a look at your actions. Do they demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is transforming your soul? Is there evidence that you really do love Jesus Christ in word and deed? I don't mean that you never stumble. Perhaps there were times when you did something for someone, and you know in your heart that it was not characteristic of you. The big test is showing forgiveness to someone who has treated you badly. This evidence of Christ at work in you. Consider this as evidence that you belong to Jesus, and He is living in you. Your walk with Christ is evidence that He lives in your heart.

Tell me again, when did the latter days begin? (Hebrews 1:2)

We might ask, "When do the latter days begin? Are we living in the 'latter days'?"

At the very beginning of the book of Hebrews we read:

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵

The writer of Hebrews identifies the days when Christ was on earth as the "last days", or the "latter days." He goes on to explain that Jesus Christ, before being born as a baby in Bethlehem, was the Creator of the universe. He is the "exact imprint" of God's nature. He holds the universe together. At the end His earthly ministry He made "purification for sins" (Hebrews 1:3). We know this as His death on the cross, when He paid the price of sin. The word used in the Bible for explaining how Christ paid our debt is that we are "redeemed" by Christ (Galatians 3:13; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 9:15).

Throughout the rest of the book of Hebrews we are told of many different ways that Jesus fulfilled the patterns of God's revelation. These patterns are called "shadows" or "types" (Romans 5:14; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1). Jesus was a more perfect priest than the priests of the Old Testament. He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). In the Old Testament Israelites gave animal sacrifices day after day. Jesus the perfect sacrifice, offered once for all (Hebrews 9:26). So, these "shadows" foretold what Jesus Christ would do.

When did the latter days begin? When Jesus came and revealed Himself as the one who fulfilled every description of God's plan for humanity and creation. The book of Hebrews is a stunning description of how God revealed His plans in the Old Testament and fulfilled every one of those plans in the New Testament.

Are we living in the latter days? Yes.

What's left to say about the "latter days"?

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Heb 1:1–4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

If you were in my office, and we were talking face to face, now would be the time to consider what you want to do with what we've been looking at here. Do you want to live for Christ? Do you want to receive His gift of new life, eternal life?

If you've made that commitment before, then it may be time to recommit your life to Christ. If you've never committed your life to Christ, then this can be the time that you do.

Ask Jesus Christ to forgive your sins. Every Christian should do this on a regular basis. Ask Him to change your heart. The change will be real, but it will be incomplete until the end of the "latter days", and you are in Heaven, or Christ has returned. Be ready to study the Bible faithfully so that God can continue to teach you how to live for Christ. Be committed to spending time learning from other Christians. In normal times this means coming to church services regularly. At this time, it will mean staying in touch with the chaplain, or your pastor back home. It can mean having a conversation with another believer where you live.

Expect God to be at work. Expect to struggle but know that Jesus Christ has already won. If you remain in Him, He will give you victory. So, stay faithful to Jesus. He will be faithful to you.

Acts 2:14–20

But **Peter**, standing with the **eleven**, lifted up his **voice** and **addressed** them: "Men of **Judea** and all who **dwell** in **Jerusalem**, let this be **known** to you, and **give** ear to my **words**. For these **people** are not **drunk**, as you **suppose**, since it is **only** the **third hour** of the day. But this is what was **uttered** through the **prophet Joel**: " 'And in the **last** days it shall be, God **declares**, that I will **pour** out my **Spirit** on all **flesh**, and your sons and your daughters shall **prophesy**, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall **dream** **dreams**; even on my male **servants** and female **servants** in those days I will **pour** out my **Spirit**, and they shall **prophesy**. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, **blood**, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to **blood**, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

(ESV)

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Would you like a devotional book that would have blanks for you to fill in? Would you like a very large book that might take a year or more to complete, or a much simpler study guide that would take a matter of a few weeks?

Would you like a book to read? Give me some idea of what you would like to read about. I may not have a title you request but I should be able to find a book that will be interesting for you.

I would like to pray for you. Do you have special prayer requests that I can pray about?