



## When Do the ‘Latter Days’ Begin?

Occasionally, God “pulls back the curtain” to reveal to His people part of His plan for what He is going to do for them. God’s prophecies provide His people with a better understanding so that they will grow to trust Him more.

In the Old Testament the phrase “latter days” or “last days” is repeated several times. When the phrase is used it is a signal to the people readying the scripture that a message about the latter days runs throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. People who wrote the Bible often quoted earlier prophecies of the Bible. As they quoted earlier prophecies, they gave an interpretation of that prophecy. Then they added a new prophecy that God had revealed to them. By quoting the earlier prophecy they were showing that the prophecy was rooted in the foundation of the earlier prophecy. Both were part of God’s big plan.

The first time the phrase, “latter days” is used in the Bible is Genesis 49:1. God used this phrase to reveal part of His plan for His chosen people. God used the phrase again in Numbers 23 & 24 to reveal more details about this plan. In Isaiah 2:2, and Micah 4:1, God used this phrase to reveal more in information about this plan. And in Acts 2, Peter preached that God’s plan for “the latter days” was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the tomb.

- God’s plan for His people (Genesis 49:1, Numbers 23&24)
- More details about God’s plan (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1)
- God makes His plan a reality (Acts 2)

### God’s plan for His people (Genesis 49:1, Numbers 23&24)

The phrase “latter days” first appears in Genesis 49:1. However if you look for the phrase in an English translation, you won’t find it. A look at the original Hebrew shows that the phrase is there. In the other verses we will quote as using the phrase, the same words in Hebrew are used, and in those verses it is translated as “latter days,” but just not in Genesis 49:1.

Before he died, Jacob blessed his sons. All of his descendants were now living in Egypt. Jacob called his sons together. He told them that he was doing this so “that I may tell you what shall happen to you in the” latter days (Genesis 49:1, ESV). I underlined the words “latter days” because I changed the translation. I changed it to “latter days” because it is word-for-word the same phrase in Hebrew that we find translated “latter days” in the other passages we

will study here (Numbers 24:14; Isaiah 2:2; and Micah 4:1). I will try to show that this passage is a prophecy about the “latter days”. I think you will agree with me that this is a prophecy about Judah and his descendants:

<sup>8</sup> “Judah, your brothers shall praise you;  
    your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;  
    your father’s sons shall bow down before you.  
<sup>9</sup> Judah is a lion’s cub;  
    from the prey, my son, you have gone up.  
He stooped down; he crouched as a lion  
    and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?  
<sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
    nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
until tribute comes to him;  
    and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.  
<sup>11</sup> Binding his foal to the vine  
    and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine,  
he has washed his garments in wine  
    and his vesture in the blood of grapes.  
<sup>12</sup> His eyes are darker than wine,  
    and his teeth whiter than milk.

Genesis 49:8-12 has quite a bit to tell us about “the latter days.” We are told that Judah’s brothers will bow down to him (Genesis 49:8). In fact, Judah became far larger than any of the other tribes. When Moses took a census, during the time the Jewish people wandered in the wilderness, Judah was much larger than any other tribe (Numbers 1:27; 26:22). In Revelation 5:5 Jesus is called, “the lion of Judah,” which is quoting that phrase from Genesis 49:6. We are also told that “the peoples” will obey him (Genesis 49:10). The word “peoples” refers to all different kinds of people, not just the Jewish people. In other words, people from other nations will be ruled by Judah. They will obey him. The word “scepter” refers to a king. This repeats the idea that in the “latter days” a descendant of Judah will be a great king who will rule over other nations.

In Genesis 49:11 we find a description of a future time when harvests will be very fruitful. Jacob says that in “the latter days” when a king from the tribe of Judah rules over all of Israel and other nations the land of Israel will have incredibly good harvests. The curse God put on the ground at the time of Adam will be reversed (Genesis 3:17&18). Some of this was fulfilled when David was king, but a greater fulfillment will come through Jesus Christ when He will rule as the King of Kings. The description of tying a donkey to a grape vine provides a picture of such an abundance of grapes that a donkey will be tied to enormous grape vines, and allowed to eat the grapes until it doesn’t want any more. Remember this is spoken by Jacob to his sons, who have moved to Egypt due to a terrible famine in the land God would give them as their own. In later generations the Jewish people would hear these words and marvel that God promised such bountiful harvests in the dry, desert-like land of Israel.

There are three basic types of fulfillment of a prophecy. (1) the prophecy is fulfilled in the time period that it is given, or at least before Christ’s birth. (2) the prophecy is fulfilled by the birth, ministry, or resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, (3) the prophecy is fulfilled in the second coming of Christ. Most of the prophecies about Judah are fulfilled as #2 and #3 fulfillments, but King David fulfills part of the prophecy as a #1 type of fulfillment. Usually, “latter days” is understood to refer to either #2 or #3 types of fulfillment, but not #1.

If you were only looking at this passage as a description of what is going to happen to Judah, these words wouldn’t describe many events that happened in Judah’s lifetime. However, if you interpret them as a prophecy concerning Judah’s offspring, especially his descendant, Jesus Christ, then you will understand that this is a prophecy.

Let’s take this a step farther. If you understand this as a description of the world that God has in store for those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, then believers have a lot of assurance from God. There will be a great abundance of everything a person needs to have a good life. The entire world will be at peace. All of the things that the ancient Israelites feared most will no longer exist as a threat. Likewise, all of the things we today fear the most, God will remove, and they will no longer be a threat.

While there are a lot of details about the prophecies of the world to come that we can’t understand, these words from Genesis 49 provide great assurance. When a promise of abundant harvests was given to people barely

surviving a famine, these were welcome words. We may not be living in the midst of a famine, but these promises from God assure those who are in Christ that God will provide for their every need. Not only will God provide the minimum of what is needed, He will provide an abundance. So, hold on to God's promises. He will get you through the seasons when you lack many things that make life good. God has a plan, if you are in Christ. If you don't know Christ, turn to Him now, and ask Him to save you so that you can be assured of His promises.

You might remember that some of the phrases used here are repeated in Numbers 23&24 when Balaam makes a prophecy about Israel. In fact, the phrase in Hebrew, "the latter days" is repeated in Numbers 24:14.

## More details about God's plan (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1)

A search of the Bible shows that the phrase "latter days" also occurs in Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1. Take a look at Isaiah 2:2,

<sup>2</sup> It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the Lord  
shall be established as **the highest of the mountains**,  
and shall be lifted up above the hills;  
and all the nations shall flow to it,

Notice once again the phrase "latter days" (underlined). I put some other phrases in bold so you can see them easily as I refer to them. Another important phrase is the "house of the Lord", or the Temple, will have "all the nations flow to it." That seems clear , people from all over the world will go to the Temple of the one, true God. The part that may seem confusing is that it is on a mountain that is the "highest of the mountains" and is "lifted above the hills." That can be understood literally to mean that God will raise Mount Zion, the hill where Jerusalem and the Temple were located, so that it will be higher than any other mountain on earth. Another possible interpretation is that it will be a place with the "highest" authority in all the earth. The expression, "the highest authority" doesn't necessarily mean that something is physically of a higher elevation, only that it has more authority than anything else. In fact, both could be meant, so that the new Temple will be both at the highest elevation on earth, and have more authority than any other authority on earth. Of the two meanings, however, authority is most important. The new Temple could be of a lower elevation than another mountain and still have people from all over the earth going to it. However, it could not be of anything other than the highest authority to have people from all over the earth going to it.

Isaiah is drawing out the meaning of Genesis 49:1, when he uses this phrase "latter days". As we learned in Genesis 49, in the "latter days" a king will rise from the tribe of Judah who will rule all of Israel and other nations. In Isaiah 2:3-4, we learn more about "the latter days."

<sup>3</sup> and many peoples shall come, and say:  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths."  
**For out of Zion shall go forth the law,**  
**and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**  
<sup>4</sup> He shall **judge between the nations**,  
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;  
and they shall beat their **swords into plowshares**,  
and their **spears into pruning hooks**;  
**nation shall not lift up sword against nation,**  
**neither shall they learn war anymore.**

Not only will this future king "judge between the nations," (vs. 4), but this king from Judah is identified as making judgments according to "the law and the word of the Lord." (vs. 3). There will be peace between "the nations" and "peoples." "Swords" will be beaten "into plowshares," and "spears into pruning hooks." There will be no war between nations (vs. 4).

If you look at Micah 4:1 and the verses that follow, you will find that most of the words used by Isaiah are repeated by Micah. (Notice that Micah added to what was said). He mentioned that there will be a time of abundant harvests in the “latter days.” We saw that already in Genesis 49:11&12, and that message is repeated here in Micah 4:4. This is not so much of a new revelation from God as it is an interpretation by Micah, bringing the prophecy of Isaiah 2:2-4 together with the prophecy of Genesis 49:11&12.

Let's tie everything together that we've said so far. Isaiah 2:2 focuses on a king who will rule from Jerusalem. There will be a Temple in Jerusalem, and people from all over the world will go there to worship God. In Micah 4:1 we find this prophecy repeated. When we turned to Genesis 49:1 we found that in the blessing

given by Jacob to his sons, especially his promise to Judah, we find many of the same promises. A time will come when God will send a great king who will rule the world. Some of these prophecies can be taken symbolically, or spiritually, or both. For example, Jesus said that His body was the Temple (John 2:21). And Paul said that the body of believers is a temple (1Corinthians 6:19). So, the Temple in the new creation might be a very different kind of Temple than what had been in Jerusalem in Isaiah's lifetime. In fact, in Revelation 21:22 John says that in the new creation there will be no temple in Jerusalem because God Himself will live among His people. So, the whole earth, or even all of the new creation, will be the Temple where God's presence dwells.

What does the information we've considered here tell us about how to live today? All of the things that give us difficulty on this earth will not continue after the “latter days.” True believers in Christ will survive the destruction of this creation, but evil, sin, and even temptation will be removed so that they will not continue into the new creation.

## God makes His plan a reality (Acts 2)

So, when are the “latter days”? Peter preached a sermon in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came in power, He actually uses the phrase “latter days” in his sermon.

<sup>17</sup> “ ‘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;  
<sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.  
<sup>19</sup> And I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;  
<sup>20</sup> the sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.  
<sup>21</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ (Acts 2:17-21)

Peter was interpreting the prophecy of Joel 2 in light of Isaiah 2:2. He wove together portions of both passages of prophecy. From Joel 2:28 Peter quotes, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall

<b>Isaiah 2:2-4</b>	<b>Micah 4:1-4</b>
<p><sup>2</sup> It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, <sup>3</sup> and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.</p>	<p><b>4</b> It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, <sup>2</sup> and many nations shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; <sup>4</sup> but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.</p>

prophesy." Then, from Isaiah 2:2, he brings the prophecy that in the "last days" "all the nations shall flow" to Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost Jewish people from all over the Mediterranean world came to Jerusalem. As Peter saw the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the believers, he realized that the two prophecies were connected and that both told parts of what was going to happen.

Joel's prophecy had spoken only of the Jewish people. Isaiah's prophecy had spoken about how all the nations would come to the Temple in Jerusalem. Peter realized that the Holy Spirit was being poured out on all the Jewish people who came to believe in Jesus Christ. At that point they were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. However, at the conclusion of the Feast, many of them would return to their homes which were scattered throughout the Mediterranean world. Peter must have remembered Jesus' command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:19&20). This was one way that the Holy Spirit was going to make this happen. The people who had just recognized Jesus as the Messiah would bring this message with them. Not only would they bring the message, they would bring the indwelling Holy Spirit. So, not only were people from all over the world coming to the physical Temple in Jerusalem. Those people who believed in Jesus Christ, were leaving Jerusalem as living Temples, filled with the presence of God, the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22). So, the spiritual, living Temple, was going to spread out into the world. And, by the way, if you believe in Christ, you are a living stone in that Temple (1Peter 2:5).

Jesus has come. The Holy Spirit brought the message and presence of Jesus Christ throughout the world. The prophecies were fulfilled. There is something tricky going on here that I need to point out. Throughout the New Testament there is a sense that the "new creation" has already begun, but it has not yet fully arrived. Sometimes this is called the "already/not yet" Kingdom of God. It has truly arrived. But it has not yet taken full control. When it does take full control the old creation will be wiped away, and only the new creation will remain. We can say that the "new life" Christians have through Christ, is fully present spiritually. However, it will not be fully present physically until Christ returns, and believers have their new resurrection bodies (see 1Corinthians 15). Until then, we will wrestle with sin, but when Jesus returns sin will be removed completely.

For myself this explains so much about the struggles Christians experience. The Holy Spirit is working in each believer, and making them like Christ. However, until believers have their new resurrection bodies they will struggle with sin. New life in Christ is real, but what is new is the believer's heart. Sometimes God will cause a believer to be healed physically, but not always. Believers can still cut a finger or stub a toe. Believers can still experience physical death. Believers can still lapse into acts of sin. The promise Christ has given is that one day these struggles will be over, when the Kingdom has fully come, when Christ returns.

At times most believers grow weary of this struggle and feel like giving up. These promises assure believers of both good and bad realities. The bad reality is that the struggle will never end until Christ returns. We should not expect it to go away until then. On the other hand, the good reality is that the change of the believer's heart, including an attitude of love for God and others, is real. There is a genuine, real change that has taken place in the believer's heart and soul. It is not something The believer has done. It is what God has done in the heart of the believer.

Believers have a taste of heaven. They taste heaven when they read the promises in the Bible. They taste heaven when they feel the love of other Christians. They taste heaven when they enjoy worshipping God and praying to Him. But the fullness of Heaven has not yet arrived. But it will.

Until Christ returns, all Christians must persevere. We are given the promise that it will be worth it in the "latter days."

The **word** that **Isaiah** the son of **Amoz** saw **concerning Judah** and **Jerusalem**. It shall **come** to pass in the **latter days** that the **mountain** of the **house** of the **LORD** shall be **established** as the **highest** of the **mountains**, and shall be **lifted** up above the **hills**; and all the **nations** shall **flow** to it, and **many peoples** shall **come**, and say: “**Come**, let us go up to the **mountain** of the **LORD**, to the **house** of the God of **Jacob**, that he may teach us his ways and that we may **walk** in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the **word** of the **LORD** from **Jerusalem**. He shall judge between the **nations**, and shall decide disputes for **many peoples**; and they shall beat their **swords** into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; **nation** shall not **lift** up **sword** against **nation**, neither shall they learn war anymore. O **house of Jacob**, come, let us **walk** in the light of the **LORD**. For you have rejected your **people**, the **house of Jacob**, because they are full of things from the east and of fortune-tellers like the Philistines, and they strike **hands** with the children of foreigners. Their **land** is **filled** with silver and gold, and **there** is no end to their treasures; their **land** is **filled** with horses, and **there** is no end to their chariots. Their **land** is **filled** with idols; they bow down to the work of their **hands**, to what their own fingers have made. So man is humbled, and each one is brought low— do not forgive them!

(ESV)

B	F	P	W	J	G	F	H	O	D	D	B
E	L	P	O	E	P	D	Z	D	R	O	W
G	N	I	N	R	E	C	N	O	C	T	S
S	I	Z	I	U	S	O	L	A	M	M	N
O	A	F	B	S	T	M	J	U	D	A	H
S	T	T	I	A	A	E	Y	L	A	N	D
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I	U	L	T	E	L	B	A	C	S	N	L
W	O	L	F	M	I	E	N	H	B	A	U
A	M	I	G	Z	S	O	D	L	T	T	L
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A	W	C	P	D	D	R	O	W	S	N	T