

## If These are the Last Days How did we get Here and what's Going on?

### Introduction

Covid-19 has raised lots of discussion about many things. Including whether this pandemic is a sign of the Last Days. Which raises the question as to when are the Last Days. Is it the period at the very end of history – in the future for us – or possibly just starting now? Or some other period. And how will we know? Are there signs? Or is this a big distraction?

Since the apostle Peter refers to the Last Days in Acts 2 we could take our cue from him.

He is giving an explanation for the strange behaviour of the 120 disciples of Jesus who have started speaking in other languages to the astonishment of a growing crowd of people who actually spoke those languages. There is no doubt the crowd is impressed, They hear the disciples “declaring the wonders of God” in their own languages (Act 2.11). What does it mean? Are they all drunk as some think?

No says Peter,

    this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

    17 “In the last days it will be, God declares,  
    that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,...

For Peter this event is an event of the Last Days. What the event is, Peter goes on to explain. We will come back to that.

### 1. If this is the Last Days How did we get here?

Why does Peter think it is the Last Days and what does that mean?

Peter has got his understanding from his Bible, what we call the Old Testament. In that part of the Bible there are a variety of terms that describe the same thing:

The Last Day; the Last Days; the Latter Days; the Days are Coming; The Day of the Lord; In Those Days and so on.

There is an expectation part way through the OT that something momentous will happen later.

To get an understanding of the Last Days we need to go back further to “the Former Days”. What some might have called the “good oLast Days days”. Here is a sample.

For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of? 33 Has any people ever heard the voice of a god speaking out of a fire, as you have heard, and lived? 34 Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by terrifying displays of power, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? Deut 4.32-34

The exodus from Egypt was the great “Former Time”. Nothing had ever happened like this before. It was up to that point the greatest thing God’s people had known. Coming out of the slavery of Egypt and eventually into the land God had promised Abraham was the glory of God’s people.

Those promises to Abraham (Gen 12.1-3) eventually came to a fulfilment in the reigns of David and Solomon.

Here is the summary:

During Solomon’s lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees. 1 Kings 4.25

But it didn’t last. The introduction of foreign gods and idol worship, a civil war, a divided nation, and further idolatry, apostasy, and wickedness led to dire warnings by a succession of prophets of God’s judgement. A judgement they had been warned about by Moses (Deut 28).

Isaiah chapter 1 is a typical prophetic description of the state of both halves of the nation three hundred years or so after David.

Ah, sinful nation,  
people laden with iniquity,  
offspring who do evil,  
children who deal corruptly,  
who have forsaken the LORD,  
who have despised the Holy One of Israel,  
who are utterly estranged! Is 1.4

The prophets heaped up these accusations together with warnings of invasions and exile. The Day of the Lord was coming (Is 13.8-10). First the northern kingdom (Israel or Ephraim) was taken over by the Assyrians. Later the southern kingdom (Judah) was taken off to Babylon.

All seemed lost. The promises seemed to have failed.

But while this was happening the prophets began a new theme.

Remember the past: what I did before I will do again, "I will bring salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel" Is 46.8-10

And paradoxically Isaiah says,

Forget about the past. A new thing is coming. Something greater than before (Is 43.16-19)

For I am about to create new heavens  
and a new earth;  
the former things shall not be remembered  
or come to mind. Is 65.17

In the last days  
the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established  
as the highest of the mountains;  
it will be exalted above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.  
Many peoples will come and say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.”  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. Is 2.2-3

Jeremiah says the Days are Coming.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’ Jer 23.5-6

A King called the Lord our Righteousness – what a wonderful name. He is coming.

And the Lord is establishing a New Covenant.

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ... this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ... for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. Jer 31.31-34

Ezekiel looked forward to the day when the Lord would put his Spirit in every one of his people, and give them a new heart.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezek 36.25)

Daniel had a terrifying vision of a man coming with the clouds of heaven and being given everlasting and universal dominion.

...there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Dan 7.13)

So the promises were made. The people returned from exile and looked forward to the new thing the Lord would do. For another 500 years or so, not much changed.

But the promises were remembered.

Later prophets like Malachi promised and warned that the Lord would certainly come.

“The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple... but who can endure the day of his coming (Mal 3.1-2).

His coming would not be good news for everyone.

Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. 2 But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. (Mal 4.1-2)

For some the Day will burn. For others the sun will rise with healing.

And so we reach the end of the OT and still there is this waiting and expectation for the coming day of the Lord.

And finally Jesus comes proclaiming the kingly rule of God and announcing that the time is fulfilled.

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1.15)

## 2. Now the Last Days are here what's going on?

Here is the beginning of the Last Days. Not at Pentecost but at the birth of Jesus.

Old Simeon knew it. He was waiting for the comforting of Israel. And Anna was waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. Simeon prays,

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel.' Lk 2.29-32

According to the NT the really big events in the Last Days are:

1. The anointing of Jesus as Messiah with the Holy Spirit (Lk 3.21-22; 4.16-21)

...the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Lk3.21)

This is what the OT said would mark out the Messiah (Isaiah 61.1). The word Messiah and the word Christ both mean anointed.

2. The life and ministry of Jesus Messiah, the Righteous Branch from David  
Part way through Jesus' ministry it had become clear to the disciples that all the wonderful deeds he was doing and his amazing authority in teaching, all pointed to him being the Messiah. (Even though they did not yet understand what it meant). On one occasion he asked them who they thought he was.

"Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Mk 8.27f)

3. The death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah for the sins of the world. The writer to the Hebrews puts it like this:

...he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Heb 9.26-28)

4. His exaltation to the right hand of the Father. The ascension and exaltation of Jesus is the pivotal event for the carrying out of the future work of the Last Days.

That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Eph 1.19-23)

5. His receiving and pouring the Holy Spirit out on all of God's people. (Is 44.3; Joel 2,28-32; Ezek 36.27; 39.29). Peter said it this way.

Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. (Acts 2.33)

The Holy Spirit is now given to all of us who believe. The Spirit brings God's presence to us. This is the really significant thing. As well the Spirit brings power to proclaim and to persevere, develops the character of God in us, and brings gifts to serve.

6. The proclamation of repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus to all the nations (Lk 24.47). Or the carrying of the testimony of Jesus to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8)

“This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. (Lk 24.46)

These look like the main salvation events in the Last Days.

1. The anointing of Jesus as Messiah with the Holy Spirit
2. The life and ministry of Jesus Messiah, the Righteous Branch from David
3. The death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah for the sins of the world.
4. His exaltation to the right hand of the Father.
5. His receiving and pouring the Holy Spirit out on all of God’s people.
6. The proclamation of repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus to all the nations

But there is more going on.

The Last Days have at least four other elements that involve us and which must be seen in the context of Jesus as the Lord of heaven and earth.

1, The judgement of God has been part of human life from the beginning. It will reach its final climax when Jesus returns. And during the Last Days it continues. Paul describes it like this,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth (Rom 1.18).

In a similar way the book of Revelation describes current and ongoing events as God’s judgment (eg Rev 6.1-17; 8.6 – 9.21; 16.1-21).

Jesus commented on some current disasters in his day and made clear the calamities were not directed to particular people but were warnings of the same judgement hanging over everyone (Lk 13.1-9).

We live in that world, and while we are in no danger of the final judgement, we do share life in the world under judgement. And we have roles in it. As salt, light, and bearers of Christ's love and compassion. We act as Christ's agents bringing good and righteousness to the creation and to society.

2. We have another wonderful and crucial role in God's world. We are called into the proclamation of God's great gospel, as we said before.

3. And we are called into the building of Christ's church, his body. Here is Paul's angle on it.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph 4.15-16)

These are things the church needs to give better priority to.

4. The enemy is fighting back during the Last Days. Satan was defeated at the cross, but is still waging a war of destruction against God's people. Opposition to the gospel and God's people and the suffering that goes with it is always present (eg 1 Thess 2.1-2; 2 Cor 1.3-11). We will come back to this next week.

So the Last Days are under way. The period between the first and second comings of Jesus are the Last Days according to the scripture. The end of the ages is here. Indeed we live in the overlap of the ages. The Age to Come has broken in to this Present Evil Age by the coming of Jesus and the pouring out of the Spirit.

The consummation of God's purposes for humanity and the creation is at hand. It will come to its culmination on the Last Day when Christ returns.

And on that Last Day, he will be the man to judge the living and the dead (John 12.47-48; Act 17.31). But he will also be the one to raise up all those who have trusted their lives to him.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.' (John 6.39-40. Also 6.44,54; 11.24)

That is where we are headed

### **3. So What is the Take Away from this?**

- Don't be afraid ((1 Pet 3.13-15). Trust Jesus who is the Lord of heaven and earth.
- Pray for boldness to speak the gospel (Col 4.3-6). Remember these are the Last Days.
- Avoid godless chatter, controversies, and distractions, and live holy lives. The Lord is coming (1 Tim 6.3f; 2 Tim 2.16)
- These are momentous times. Prophets and angels longed to see this. Be glad you are here.

Remember the Lord

I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is no one like me,  
10 declaring the end from the beginning  
and from ancient times things not yet done,  
saying, 'My purpose shall stand,  
and I will fulfil my intention', Is 46.9-10