

Born to Win

Surviving the Last Days #2

by Ronald L. Dart

If you want to know about “the last days”, well, one of the places (naturally) you’re going to go looking is the Bible. If you grab a concordance and you do a standard search on the expression “in the last days”, you’ll find exactly six occasions where that expression is found—Old Testament and New Testament. However, if you run the Hebrew, you’ll find the expression 13 times in the Old Testament alone.

Now, the reason is that in over half the occasions where it is used, it is rendered (by the King James Version) “in the *latter* days”. And, of course, NIV, the New Revised Standard Version, all follow that same pattern. Now, I presume there are contextual reasons for choosing “in the last days”, or “in the latter days”, depending upon what it is the prophet is saying. We would like to insist, usually, (amateur theologians do) that the expression always means exactly the same thing everywhere you find it. But English doesn’t work that way, and we shouldn’t expect Hebrew to be any more precise than English. We run afoul of some very bad interpretations because amateurs will find a meaning of the Hebrew that fits their assumptions and then they *impose* that rendering on every other place in the Bible where it’s found, because it suits their particular bias.

Now, we need to understand that some of these things that the amateurs can use are really useful tools for Bible study, but it doesn’t make you an authority on Hebrew or Greek. Just because you can find the definition in a lexicon doesn’t get you there. *I’m* far more impressed when a writer sends me a paper that has found a reputable translation or commentary that agrees with his assumptions.

So, in the Bible we have an ambiguity in the use of the expression “in the last days”. We should try to keep that in mind when we go through this. Now, I have the impression that God wants us to be less dogmatic and more inquiring in our approach to the Bible, but that’s a hard adjustment for some people to make. Now, the last time I talked about this [*Surviving the Last Days #1*], I introduced the topic of the last days by pointing out what Paul said in one of his letters. He said:

2 Timothy 3

AKJV

¹ This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

And I don’t know what made me look it up (I had never really wondered about it one way or the other) but the word he used here [for “perilous”: *chalepos*, χαλεπός, Strong’s G5467] does not suggest “difficult” or “hard” or “dangerous”; it suggests “weakening” or “debilitating”. In other words, times are going to come that are going to weaken you—to leave you debilitated—and this is in itself a kind of peril that a person needs to know about. And Paul goes on to describe the character traits of that kind of an age in which men would live. And it’s just terribly close to the kind of world we live in today. As he starts off with a simple description:

2 Timothy 3

AKJV

² For men shall be lovers of their own selves, [...]

I suppose there has been a more selfish generation than ours; I don't know where to point to find it. Then there also comes Peter's powerful admonition about the latter days—that is, the last days. He wrote in Second Peter 3:

2 Peter 3

AKJV

³ Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

⁴ And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

So, what are we talking about here? Are we talking about in *the last days*? Or are we just talking about in *days to come*? Well, I suppose you could take it either way you want to, but Peter goes on to tie this expression—"in the last days"—to the "Day of the Lord". He says in Second Peter 3, verse 10:

2 Peter 3

AKJV

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Well now, we haven't gotten there yet, have we? So when he says "in the last days", it's certainly sounds like he's talking about the real thing. Then he went on to speak as Paul said:

2 Peter 3

KJ2000

¹¹ Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conduct and godliness [*reverence*][.]

And this is what Paul was driving at in his letter to Timothy when he says, "In the last days *debilitating* times will come, and you need to understand what kind of people you ought to be and how you ought to live your life." Peter finished by saying:

2 Peter 3

AKJV

¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

Now, *that* is pretty strong stuff. I was watching a documentary just the other night called *Hyperspace*, and it had one of the clearest and, kind of, most sobering demonstrations of the end of the world that I have ever seen. I mean, I'm not talking about a Biblical source for the end of the world; I'm talking *science*. If there's one thing that's clear in science, it is that there *will be* an end of the world. And they presented it in documentary style with all the graphics to really impress upon our minds. There is *nothing* we can do to keep it from happening, and there's really—in spite of all they attempt to think about—there's no way that we (that is, "we" being the human race) can escape it, either.

Now, the point of prophecy is to remind us of *what* we are, *who* we are, *how small* we are, and how temporary. And it's only when you begin to look at the scope of the universe—even of our little solar system—that you really come to understand it. The point of prophecy is not to satisfy our curiosity about the future, or to encourage us to play a game of “Ain't It Awful?” (“Well, look what these awful people are doing.”) It's to just let us know we are only here for a little while. And I mean *all* of you are only here for a little while.

Now, there was another occasion when Peter addressed the question of the last days. It was on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell on the Church in power. It was, in fact, a fulfillment of a prophecy. Peter, after he made his initial steps and told the people who had gathered together on that day... You know, the Church had had the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, they were speaking in other languages, and sometimes all speaking at once. And men came by and said, “They're just drunk. Look at these drunks!” And Peter says, “No, they're not drunk. It's only the third hour of the day.” He said, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.” (He's in Acts 2:16) And here's what Joel said, says Peter:

Acts 2

KJ2000

¹⁷ And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God [*There we are, “in the last days...”*], I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

Now, some look at this scripture and say, “Well, then that means that the last days began on Pentecost. So we've been living in the last days for the last 2,000 years.” Well, maybe. Or perhaps what Peter was describing was a *type* of what Joel was aiming at in his prophecy.

Acts 2

KJ2000

¹⁷ And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: [...]

Now, this is interesting, because on the Day of Pentecost it was poured out on the disciples; not upon everybody. Although their sons and their daughters, I think, *did* prophesy, and there's every indication that there were women present. And, I guess, they were preaching just like the men on this occasion. But what about this “all flesh” reference? You know, I thought about that and I thought: When the time comes that God's Spirit is poured out upon *all* flesh, Peter could be meaning it's going to be *available* to all flesh. Or he could mean, quite literally, it's poured out on everybody. But then what happens to *wicked people* when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them? Probably, when you consider the effect of being brought into the close proximity of the goodness of God on the part of an evil man, he will do one of two things: He will either repent and turn his life around, or he will become *even worse*. It might, in fact, drive a man into his own private hell.

Peter goes on citing from Joel. And it's interesting to know that Peter didn't hedge on this. He said:

Acts 2

KJ2000

¹⁷ [...] I will pour out of my Spirit upon 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 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

And you'll have to understand, by the way, that the world "prophecy" does not necessarily mean foretell the future; it means to preach under inspiration.

Acts 2

KJ2000

¹⁹ And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke:

²⁰ The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord comes:

²¹ And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Now, this really seems to be talking about a kicking open of the door to salvation—of an opening of the door to *anyone* who is willing to take that step. But when you read this in context, you know, you have to understand that what Peter *thought* "in the last days" meant—it was in those days when the sun would be turned to darkness and the moon into blood—that *didn't happen* in Peter's lifetime. So, consequently, all he could possibly have been talking about was the end time. And what was happening before their eyes on *that* day was a type of something that is to come.

Now, to call upon the name of Jesus is to accept his name, to enter covenant with him. It is not merely to use a formula. Now, I don't know what Peter *thought* about all this, I only know what he *said* about it.

Now, when I stop with Peter and I go back to look at the context that he's quoting from the book of Joel, it's clear to me that what Peter was talking about...or what he was *seeing* (let's put it this way) was only a type of what Joel was talking about. Peter saw some of it; he didn't see all of it. Joel says (this is in the second chapter of the prophet Joel):

Joel 2

KJ2000

¹ Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD comes, for it is near at hand;

Now, before I go on, I want to pause for a moment. This is another one of those expressions in the Bible that people have difficulty with. There are times in prophecy where the Day of the Lord coming *seems* to apply to a cataclysmic event, or a cataclysmic time, in Israel's history. In other words, God's judgment comes down on them in the form of the Assyrian army, which invaded them and took them all into captivity. That was *a kind of* Day of the Lord. But there is also a Day of the Lord in the Bible that is unique. It is *one day* in all of human history. There will never have been a day before it like it; there will never be a day like it again, according to Scripture. So, consequently, when you look at it and you find "the Day of the Lord" mentioned like this in prophecy, you kind of have to stop and say, "Okay, now which is it that he's talking about? Is this just a historical event, or is he looking down to something bigger?" He calls it:

Joel 2

KJ2000

² A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great and strong people; there has not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, through the years of many generations.

Now, what follows in this is a description that's *highly* poetic. It's a description of an invading army *sacking* a city. They have besieged it; they have taken it; they've come through the walls, over the

walls, and in the windows; and they are taking the whole thing from one end to another. They are disciplined. They can be hit with weapons and they're not wounded (which is kind of suggestive of body armor, but never mind that). But they climb up on the houses. They enter the windows like a thief. In other words, they are just everywhere, all of sudden, in a city.

I suppose...you know, if you look at the movie *Troy*—the last scenes in it where the sacking of the city of Troy takes place—you might have some sort of an idea of what this was like. Although the description in Joel seems to be of something even more overwhelming than that. And I suppose, in type—that is, in the historical fulfillment—it was looking at the invasion of the Assyrians. Verse 10, he continues by saying:

Joel 2

KJ2000

¹⁰ The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining:

¹¹ And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executes his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can endure it?

Now, when you get to this kind of language, it's *awfully* hard not to take yourself back to the Book of Revelation and read some of the descriptions that are there—of a time that is *so* great and *so* terrible that men are going into the holes and caves of the earth and calling upon the mountains to *fall on them* and hide them from what's happening [**Revelation 6:15–16**].

Now, what does he mean by God's army—"his army"—in this situation? There's a certain amount of ambiguity in this, as well. Because, in a sense, the Assyrian was the rod of God's chastisement. At one point in all of this—in all this Biblical history—the Assyrian was God's sword in his hand. It was a people he used to punish. He condemns the Assyrian because he says, "They went *far* beyond anything that I ever commissioned them to do", and then *they* were punished for it [**Isaiah 10**]. You can see it that way, but when you look at it in context and at the whole scope of it, you can begin to see why Peter would invoke the Day of the Lord in connection with the last days because this sounds like something reaching far out into the future—even into the future *for us*. Then there is this *fascinating* little statement in Joel, chapter 2, verse 12:

Joel 2

AKJV

¹² Therefore also now, said the LORD, turn you even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:

¹³ And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn to the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repents him of the evil.

And, you know, that's true. You would think, "Oh, we're too far down the road. We've just gone too far. Nothing we do now is going to make any difference. We're just going to hell." He says, "No, don't think that of you," because the Bible is just *full* of descriptions of times when God's chastisement was coming down on someone and he said, "I'm sorry, Lord. I'm sorry", and he turned away. And God said, "Well, look at that. I will *also* turn away from the evil that I was going to do." And Joel asks:

Joel 2

AKJV

¹⁴ Who knows if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering to the LORD your God?

¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly:

¹⁶ Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and

those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.

You know, this is a fast not unlike the Day of Atonement, where no one was exempt. *Everyone* had to be fasting and everyone had to come and assemble because the priest was going to make an atonement for *all* the people on that day. What's interesting to me, in a way, about this is that when the Assyrians came into Israel from the north (that's the invasion route into Palestine; it was *always* from the north)... When they came in there, they actually sacked the city of Samaria. They took all those cities up there, carried off hundreds of thousands of people into captivity (and who knows how many hundreds of thousands of them died in the invasion). And they came all the way down to Jerusalem. They took Lachish. They surrounded the city of Jerusalem. But then there's this section in the middle of Isaiah's prophecy, where the king turns to God and leads the people to turn to God, and calls on them to repent [2 Chronicles 32, Isaiah 37]. And they do, and God sends the Assyrian home in defeat from around Jerusalem. All this fits into the historical perspective. And I've often said: If you don't understand the history, you haven't got a *chance* of understanding the future dealing with some of these prophecies. So, this is something that happened. The one people did not repent. They went captive. The Jerusalem people *did* repent, and they were saved. After this, Joel sees a time of prosperity, of peace, of safety, of God dwelling in the midst of Israel, and that everyone knows:

Joel 2

AKJV

²⁷ [...] that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.

Now, having looked at this in its historical context, now we can go back to Peter's citation of this in Acts 2. All this is what Peter had in mind when he said:

Acts 2

AKJV

¹⁷ And it shall come to pass in the last days, said God, I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh[....]

Later he said:

Acts 2

AKJV

²¹ And it shall come to pass, that whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Now, when you understand what Peter is driving at here, it's clear enough that the way to *survive* in the last days is to turn to God—to “call upon the name of the Lord”, which basically means to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ, into *covenant* with him. For it is those who are *in* covenant with Christ who are delivered.

It seems to me, also, that Joel and Peter see Pentecost in terms of opening the door of this to *everyone*. There is a serious problem, I think, with the perceived doctrine of election on some people. They just think that some people are going to be saved and some people are just going to be lost. But Peter doesn't seem to think so. Neither did Joel. And it's not really new on Pentecost; this is not really a new thing. Because, when you go back through the Old Testament, you'll find strangers could *always* call on God. They could *always* come to him. They could even offer sacrifices in some circumstances. It was the tradition of the elders of the Jews that blocked these people from the Temple and from social intercourse with Jews.

Now, there are those who think that the door was not opened wide even on Pentecost; that this will only happen in the last days. And I think they are stumbling over the ambiguity of the expression. The door is open. It always has been. When a man decides to repent and turn to God, God is *always* there. As Jesus said:

Revelation 3

AKJV

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him[....]

But you've got to hear and you have to open.

There's another prophet that uses this term. His name is Micah. In chapter four, verse one, he says:

Micah 4

AKJV

¹ But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow to it.

² And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

My, what a prophecy! You know, one thing that begins to kind of come through in all this is that “in the last days” is a fairly broad expression, and it deals with those days that lead up to and culminate in this Day of the Lord—this tragic time of destruction. And then on the other side of those days of destruction: the government of God. His kingdom is established above all the nations of the earth and everyone will come and say, “Let's turn to God. Let's go up to his house.” (That is, to his government.) “Let's walk in *his* paths.”

So those people who think maybe someday they'd like to see a one-world government...well, I think they will. But it won't be anything that *Man* can put together; it's going to have to be something else *entirely*. And so the “in the last days” means a period of time *also after* the Day of the Lord, *after* the return of Christ, *after* God has finally brought peace.

Then there is Isaiah who also uses that term.

Isaiah 2

AKJV

¹ The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

Well, look at that, he's actually talking the same precise prophesy that Micah (not surprising) was. And then he adds this:

Isaiah 2

AKJV

⁴ And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: 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 any more.

Wow. No, we're not there yet. No, we're not living in these times. We are still looking *forward* to it. We hope to survive *into* it.

So what is the word to all of us, from God, about all of this? Well, Jesus said in Matthew 24—the Olivet Prophecy—verse 32:

Matthew 24

AKJV

³² Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near:

³³ So likewise you, when you shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

In fact, he goes on to say this is within a generation that this will happen.

Matthew 24

AKJV

³⁵ Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

³⁶ But [...]

Then he adds this caveat. And I don't know why people can't get this straight. You know, you might want to write this down and don't let it ever get away from you.

Matthew 24

AKJV

³⁶ But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Which I think suggests even Jesus didn't know at this time.

So, for all we know it is a time to come, a time not yet established. But *we* have to realize that, for us, it could come at a time when we have *no clue* that it's coming. And Jesus goes on to warn, "Look, don't take this lightly. You'd better keep yourself ready *all the time*."

Matthew 24

AKJV

⁴⁴ Therefore be you also ready: for in such an hour as you think not the Son of man comes.

Now, Matthew 24 and 25 are one prophecy. They actually deal with the same answers to the same questions. And the first parable of Matthew 25—of the wise and the foolish virgins—is worth taking a good, hard look at; but not to make the mistake of trying to be overly literal or specific with it. Take it this way: You need to be ready, you need to find a *modus operandi*, a *modus vivendi*—a way of living that you can maintain over the long haul—so that somehow or other you can hold on to the end.