



The Book of Hebrews 1:2_These Last Days!

November 12, 2023

Holy Text: Hebrews 1:2

In our Text, the Author of Hebrews uses the phrase, “These Last Days.” As much as we wanted to move to preaching on the beauty, majesty, and glory of our LORD, we felt the eschatological context, and subsequent epistolary motivation was important.

Recall from the first week of our study¹ from William MacDonald’s excellent *Believer’s Bible Commentary* ²:

In a general way, Hebrews deals with the tremendous struggle involved in leaving one religious system for another. There is the violent wrenching of old ties, the stresses and tensions of alienation, and the formidable pressures exerted on the renegade to return.

But in this Epistle the problem was not just a question of leaving an old system for a new one of equal value. Rather it was a matter of leaving Judaism for Christ, and as the writer shows, this involved leaving shadows for the substance, ritual for reality, the prior for the ultimate, the temporary for the permanent—in short, the good for the best.

The problem also involved leaving the popular for the unpopular, the majority for the minority, and the oppressors for the oppressed. And this precipitated many serious problems.

We can almost hear the first-century Jews presenting all these glories of their ancient, ritualistic religion, then asking with a sneer, “And what do you Christians have? We have all this. What do you have? Nothing but a simple upper room, a table, and some bread and wine on the table! Do you mean to say that you have left all this for that?”

The Epistle to the Hebrews is really an answer to the question, “What do you have?” In a word the answer is Christ.

Just as the stars fade from view in the greater glory of the sun, so the types and shadows of Judaism pale into insignificance before the greater glory of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus.

Yet there was still the problem of persecution. Those who professed to be followers of the Lord Jesus faced bitter, fanatical opposition. For true believers this could lead to the peril of discouragement and despair. They therefore needed to be encouraged to have faith in the promises of God. They needed endurance in view of the coming reward.

¹ <https://calvaryreformationchurch.org/sermons/2023/10/the-book-of-hebrews-a-preview-and-key-verses>

² *Bible Believer’s Commentary*, William MacDonald, 1995.

The message of Hebrews is as timely today as it was in the first century of the church. We need to be constantly reminded of the eternal privileges and blessings that are ours in Christ. We need encouragement to endure in spite of opposition and difficulties, and all professing believers need to be warned against reverting to ceremonial religion after having tasted and seen that the Lord is good.

- The author was writing to distressed people in danger of great discouragement! After reminding them that our Great God “Hath Spoken” in sundry times and divers manners through the prophets, he frames his letter in “these last days,” and points them to their eschatological hope in Christ!

We think the author wanted them to know:

- **They lived in the last days...therefore hold on and endure!**
Hebrews 2:1 (KJV) Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.
- **Their labor was not in vain; God would recompense!**
*Hebrews 10:30 (KJV) For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.*
- **Christ was soon to “come!”**
*Hebrews 10:36-39 (KJV) For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. **37** For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. **38** Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. **39** But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*

May we hear and know the same!

Last Days?

1. But what about this “last days” language? What does it mean?
2. “Last” is the word *eschatos* in Greek: “*farthest, final* (of place or time): - ends of, last, latter end, lowest, uttermost.”³
3. This is where we get the word *Eschatology*, or the doctrine or study of the last things or the end times.
4. Again, a part of the author’s motivation, and perhaps even the urgency one senses while reading Hebrews, flows from the perspective that the hearers were in the “last days.” (Some NT verses say the “end of the world,” the “end of ages” or the “last hour.”)
5. **Therefore, they were to endure with joy, offering God the sacrifice of praise continually (Heb 13:15), because they were “receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved.” (Heb 12:28)**

Last Days Language in the New Testament

Beloved, this language isn’t just in Hebrews. The New Testament is replete with the idea that something eternally significant was on the *near* horizon:

³ Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

Acts 2:14-18 (KJV) But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: **15** For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day. **16** But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; **17** And it shall come to pass **in the last days**, saith God, 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:⁴

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 (KJV) Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; **2** And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; **3** And did all eat the same spiritual meat; **4** And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. **5** But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. **6** Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. **7** Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. **8** Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. **9** Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. **10** Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. **11** Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, **upon whom the ends of the world are come**. **12** Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

2 Timothy 3:1-9 (KJV) This know also, that **in the last days** perilous times shall come. **2** For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, **3** Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, **4** Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; **5** Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. **6** For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, **7** Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. **8** Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. **9** But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.

Hebrews 9:26 (KJV) For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once **in the end of the world** hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

1 Peter 1:16-20 (KJV) Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. **17** And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: **18** Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; **19** But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: **20** Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest **in these last times** for you,

⁴ Peter also used similar language to Jesus in the Olivet Discourse in the following verses: **Acts 2:19 (KJV)** And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke. (See Matt 24:29-31)

1 John 2:18-19 (KJV) Little children, **it is the last time**: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. **19** They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

Jude 1:17-21 (KJV) But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; **18** How that they told you there should be mockers **in the last time**, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. **19** These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. **20** But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, **21** Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Christ Himself indicated that an eschatological doom as quickly approaching:

Matthew 23:33-39 (KJV) Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? **34** Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: **35** **That upon you** may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. **36** Verily I say unto you, **All these things shall come upon this generation.** **37** O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! **38** Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. **39** For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Matthew 24:29-35 (KJV) Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: **30** And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **31** And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. **32** Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: **33** So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. **34** **Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.** **35** Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Revelation 1:1-3 (KJV) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which **must shortly come to pass**; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: **2** Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. **3** Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: **for the time is at hand.**

Interpreting “Last Days”

There are three exegetical ways to interpret prophetic, apocalyptic, and eschatological language in Scripture. That such refers to:

1. The **fore**-future, which describes events that are relatively imminent, perhaps within a generation from the hearers.
2. The **far**-future, which describes events that are a “long” way off.
3. The **final**-future, which describes events that are *final consummation* in nature, i.e. the return of Christ and Final Judgment.

In our view, the phrase “last days” in Hebrews 1:2 (and several other NT verses as well) prophesies a “fore-future” event: the destruction of the Temple in 70AD.

This is NOT to discount the “final-future” coming of Christ! There is a sense in which we all live in the “last days.” To us, Christ can return at any moment!

But again, immerse yourself in the context. You are a Jewish man or woman who has publicly confessed Jesus Christ. All you’ve ever known and believed in is Old Testament Judaism. The still-standing Temple of God is your whole world. Indeed, to you, the Temple is considered the center of all things on earth, and the one place where Yahweh Elohim consistently meets with Man! Your entire life is built around its liturgical calendar. This holy structure is the locus of your life and the center of your theological, sociological, ethnic, familial, and even economic identity.

Christ prophesied that it would be destroyed however, and it was in 70AD:

***Matthew 24:1-2 (KJV)** And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. **2** And Jesus said unto them, *See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.**

In 70 AD, The Roman generals, Vespasian and Titus, laid siege against the land, and finally completely destroyed the city, killing an estimated million people by the starvation and the sword. Here are a few quotes on the destruction of Jerusalem from the Jewish/Roman historian, Flavius Josephus⁵:

...the rebels shortly after attacked the Romans again, and a clash followed between the guards of the sanctuary and the troops who were putting out the fire inside the inner court; the latter routed the Jews and followed in hot pursuit right up to the Temple itself. Then one of the soldiers, without awaiting any orders and with no dread of so momentous a deed, but urged on by some supernatural force, snatched a blazing piece of wood and, climbing on another soldier's back, hurled the flaming brand through a low golden window that gave access, on the north side, to the rooms that surrounded the sanctuary. As the flames shot up, the Jews let out a shout of dismay that matched the tragedy; they flocked to the rescue, with no thought of sparing their lives or husbanding their strength; for the sacred structure that they had constantly guarded with such devotion was vanishing before their very eyes.

Most of the slain were peaceful citizens, weak and unarmed, and they were butchered where they were caught. The heap of corpses mounted higher and higher about the altar;

⁵ <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/j/josephus/complete/cache/complete.pdf>

a stream of blood flowed down the Temple's steps, and the bodies of those slain at the top slipped to the bottom.

When Caesar failed to restrain the fury of his frenzied soldiers, and the fire could not be checked, he entered the building with his generals and looked at the holy place of the sanctuary and all its furnishings, which exceeded by far the accounts current in foreign lands and fully justified their splendid repute in our own.

As the flames had not yet penetrated to the inner sanctum, but were consuming the chambers that surrounded the sanctuary, Titus assumed correctly that there was still time to save the structure; he ran out and by personal appeals he endeavored to persuade his men to put out the fire, instructing Liberalius, a centurion of his bodyguard of lancers, to club any of the men who disobeyed his orders. But their respect for Caesar and their fear of the centurion's staff who was trying to check them were overpowered by their rage, their detestation of the Jews, and an utterly uncontrolled lust for battle.

Most of them were spurred on, moreover, by the expectation of loot, convinced that the interior was full of money and dazzled by observing that everything around them was made of gold. But they were forestalled by one of those who had entered into the building, and who, when Caesar dashed out to restrain the troops, pushed a firebrand, in the darkness, into the hinges of the gate. Then, when the flames suddenly shot up from the interior, Caesar and his generals withdrew, and no one was left to prevent those outside from kindling the blaze. Thus, in defiance of Caesar's wishes, the Temple was set on fire.

The Temple Mount, everywhere enveloped in flames, seemed to be boiling over from its base; yet the blood seemed more abundant than the flames and the numbers of the slain greater than those of the slayers. The soldiers climbed over heaps of bodies as they chased the fugitives.

Such an event would be considered the metaphorical "end of the world" by a 1st Century Jew. Prophetically, Christ "came" in judgment just as He prophesied. This is the way the prophets used such language when prophesying God's judgment upon Israel, Judah, and pagan nations:

Jeremiah 4:13-14 (KJV) ***Behold, he shall come up as clouds,** and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled. **14** O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?*

Ezekiel 30:1-5 (KJV) *The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, **2** Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Howl ye, Woe worth the day! **3** **For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near, a cloudy day;** it shall be the time of the heathen. **4** And the sword shall come upon Egypt, and great pain shall be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in Egypt, and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundations shall be broken down. **5** Ethiopia, and Libya, and Lydia, and all the mingled people, and Chub, and the men of the land that is in league, shall fall with them by the sword.*

Zephaniah 1:14-18 (KJV) *The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. 15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. 16 A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. 17 And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. 18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.*

Isaiah 13:9-10 (KJV) *Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. 10 For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.*

Isaiah 19:1-4 (KJV) *The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it. 2 And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom. 3 And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards. 4 And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts.*

What does this mean for us?

1. The hearers of Hebrews were encouraged to hold fast to Jesus in their fore-future “last days.” Their whole world was about to be shaken, all they knew was about to collapse, and the old remnants filled with types and shadows were soon to be spectacularly destroyed.
2. They were encouraged (throughout Hebrews) not to trust in those things that were fading away, soon to be dissolved, but in the Mediator of a better covenant (Heb 8:6): **Christ!**
3. Therefore, they were to be willing to abandon all for Christ!
4. **Although we live in their “far-future,” we too await the final coming of Jesus. We too have often built lives and identities based on lesser things rather than greater things. We too are tempted to trust in those things that will pass way. We too must be willing to leave all to follow Jesus.**
5. The LORD “came in judgment” in 70AD and a *Great Tribulation* fell upon those who rejected Him.
6. **The LORD “will come in final judgment” in a day yet ahead, and an even greater calamity will befall those who reject Him: eternity in Hell.**
7. Let us live like “last days” Christians: loving, bold, fearless, hopeful!
8. Let us live with an urgent joy as we await His final coming!
9. Let us preach the Gospel to lost souls everywhere...the Day of Final Judgment draws near!
10. Let us worship Him with our lives; the Judge of all the earth is coming!

Revelation 22:20 (KJV) *He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*