



## *The Last Days: Not a Test of Knowledge But Faith*

*But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. **For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power;** Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for **their folly will be obvious to all**, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also.*

– 2 Timothy 3:1–9 (NASB)

*I have never doubted that sin and wickedness and every aspect of evil would increase as the Day of the Lord draws closer. We are warned in Scripture of the particular intensity of Satan's wrath to come when he is thrown down to the earth in the waning days leading up to Christ's return. So in the course of my life whenever I have read passages like this I have thought, "How awful things on earth are going to be in the Last Days for those who don't know Christ." But what I did not realize in my youth which has become painfully clear in my twilight is that everything spoken of here has already begun to occur, and it is not limited to non-believers. Every single behavior listed here has been adopted by a host of people claiming the title "Christian" and operating within the walls of the church –*

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*in stunning depth and not simply as an aberration here and there. Is there a Bible-believing, born-again Christian with even an ounce of discernment who does not recognize that the Great Apostasy – the “falling away” – signaling the imminent return of Christ is not **already** underway?*

Intellectually I know that when we see these things occurring we should “*straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near*” (Lk. 21:28). Our faith is supposed to be affirmed by the approach of such things. But in all honesty, I have wondered if something is basically wrong with me. For the vast majority of my life I have been the “glass is half full” kind of a guy who usually picks the mood up for most everyone else in the room. Lately, however, I have been at best a borderline downer. I freely admit that I seem to be incapable of cheering on the return of our Lord while witnessing the corruption and falling away of God’s people. Every new trend of sin becoming entrenched in the church disturbs me deeply; every additional teacher who at one time solidly held to God’s Word who has in latter years themselves fallen away doctrinally grieves me beyond words; every secular reference to the documented hypocrisy and misbehavior in the name of Christ brings me to my knees. I cannot seem to “get happy” that people, organizations, and entire movements are going down the earthly drain as a prelude to His return. I expect such from the world’s institutions, not from those with a Christian heritage.

And, to be frank, part of it is probably my pride. I have clung to the notion that by holding to God’s Word and ways alone that it would have a greater influence on others that it has. Part of my increasingly dismal outlook is sustained by the falling away of those I had some hope of reaching. While I have had a minimum of success, I thought more battles would have been won than has been the case, so part of my despair is rooted in the search to determine to what degree I am personally responsible for the results. After all, the Bible is prolific in

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examples of the success of a faithful remnant or even a single, faithful individual in spite of the times in which they lived and operated.

Because of the fact that in my heart of hearts I am the ever hopeful optimist who does not think time has completely run out, I have turned again to God's Word to determine what should be done. In doing so I have come to believe that while End Times prophecy is important, that even if I were to chart and graph and document the exact timeline of the Last Days with Holy Spirit perfection, I would still fall short of the purpose for which God provided prophecy in the first place. Like everything else in God's Word the question is whether or not we believe God's Word to the degree that we are willing to put it into practice and allow it to change our behavior. Scripture is not merely information. And in regards to the Last Days and what to do about them scripturally, I have found great comfort in the last chapter of James and his discourse on what God's people are supposed to do during the Last Days.

James is not often quoted where End Times discussions are concerned because he does not provide visions or symbols or the kind of information we might normally ascribe to books like Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation. But when it comes to the End Times, James begins at a very interesting and telling place in the timeline of these events. He is focused on what Believers are supposed to **DO** during these times.

*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you. (James 5:1-6, NASB)*

There are four basic, sinful behaviors which James tells us will be present in the days leading up to Christ's return. In verses 1-3 we are presented with spiritual blindness to the signs of the times such that many will hoard for themselves all the earthly resources possible. Their sole concern is for personal comfort and pleasure.

In verse 4 this personal greed spins further out of control so that it results in stealing wages, a way of showing the utter disregard people will have for the commandment of the New Covenant to "*love one another, even as I have loved you*". (Jn. 13:34) Mistreatment of others will be rooted in the pursuit of personal gain.

In verse 5 they are characterized as not being content with having their basic needs met but pursuing extravagant living. Using their hoarded resources and those garnered from fraud and theft, they become self-absorbed to the exclusion of everyone and everything else.

*Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. (1 Timothy 6:17, NASB)*

And all of this culminates in the final sinful behavior in verse 6 which can be labeled "injustice". And not just injustice to people in general, but in particular for those still adhering to God's Word and ways.

In other words, the Last Days are characterized by people focused on material things, a consumer-driven group giving no real thought to how their behavior in this life shapes the outcome of the next. And this is not just a general indictment of non-believers in the world at large, James is specifically including people within the church! A blind, materialistic church who is more concerned with earthly comfort and wealth than almost anything else. Does this sound at all familiar? Jesus clearly identified these people as the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22). At best they are nominal Christians entrenched in false

teachings such as the Faith-Prosperity nonsense; at worst they are completely fallen away in pursuit of the things of this world.

Fortunately James is not as overwhelmed at these things as I am. He is realistic about the situation, but provides a remedy – at least for those still holding fast to His name.

*Therefore be **patient**, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being **patient** about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be **patient**; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. As an example, brethren, of **suffering and patience**, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who **endured**. You have heard of the **endurance of Job** and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. (James 5:7-11, NASB)*

Yes, "*patience*" and its behavioral partner "*endurance*" are the obvious and repeated admonition to Believers. James gives four illustrations of what it means to bear the burdens and fight the spiritual battles in the shadow of Christ's return.

**"The Farmer"**. We can plant and tend the soil but it all still depends on God to water the crop and bring about the harvest. It is no coincidence that it here refers to "*the early and late rains*", the repeated biblical metaphor for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We are to continue working in the field, preaching the Gospel and living as an example of it, and have faith in the outcome because it is in God's hand, not ours. In other words, "Keep going about your business as usual."

**"The Judge"**. If we truly understand that Jesus is "*standing at the door*" we would be less likely to question or complain, knowing He is not only near but can so very clearly hear us. Knowing that judgment is coming for all – ourselves included – we should be extremely reluctant to hold anything back. In fact, we should be motivated even

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more knowing that time is, indeed, running out. The admonition to *"not complain...against one another"* is a way of stating that even our speech should show patience.

**"The Prophets"**. Find a prophet who is **NOT** an example of being that lone voice in the wilderness, of feeling overwhelmed by the majority around them rejecting the message they carried. James reminds us that the very nature of the Last Days is characterized by the faithful few and the unfaithful many. But every prophet is also characterized as successfully enduring in spite of the circumstances.

**"The Endurance of Job"**. I think this is James' most powerful example to us. Job was someone who was not merely enduring hard times, he was not merely ignored in terms of what he had to say, but he was completely isolated and alone. He had to endure the falling away of his family and even his closest friends. Every teacher failed him. Yes, Job is the classic example of a Believer who suffered at the hands of sinners, but at the same time had to endure the "apostasy" – the falling away, if you will – of everyone who was supposed to stick with him. Job found it very difficult to understand what God was doing in the midst of his trials, but by enduring to the end reaped all the benefits of true, biblical faith.

*But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment. (James 5:12, NASB)*

In such dire times we are tempted to make some kind of "extra" commitment to God. We might desire to show our serious desire to change the circumstances to such a degree that we want to prop up our promises with oaths and some kind of visible, extra effort. James reminds us it is enough to simply maintain our daily faithfulness in all things, that all that is required is to meet the minimum requirements of a life dedicated to daily carrying its cross. Our speech needs to exhibit the spiritual constraint of our heart.

*Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:13-18, NASB)*

In fact, James takes us back to the essentials of prayer and confession of sin, the staples of a committed, Christian life. But it is important to note that James does not guarantee that **all** prayer will be effective; he qualifies it as "*prayer offered in faith*" and as coming from "*a righteous man*". In other words, the requirements for the End Times Christian is really no different than for **any** day or age. The call is not for us to be extra special as much as it is to be extra faithful to what defines **every** true Believer. The example of Elijah is characterized as "*a man with a nature like ours*". Elijah was not supernaturally gifted where patience and endurance were concerned but had to learn and submit the same as us. He had to battle all the same issues of sin, temptation, trials, and overwhelming circumstances just like us, but successfully endured through obedience as an example for us.

*My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20, NASB)*

And what is the final quality James associates with an End Times faith? Soul-winning.

*Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)*

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*Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)*

No matter how bad the situation – prison, in the midst of a shipwreck, persecution, being put on trial, etc. – the apostles always provided the example that every situation is an opportunity to win souls for the Kingdom.

So many books, conferences and websites are today dedicated to the discussion of the End Times which overwhelmingly focus on dates, events, and signs which will accompany it, but far less often on what God's Word teaches that His people should do during those times. James' admonition is:

- Be patient and endure, even if you are wronged. (v.1-11)
- Remain pure in speech. (v.12)
- Remain prayerful, continuing to confess one's sins. (v.13-18)
- Be persistent in winning souls for the Kingdom. (v.19-20)

In other words, we are called to live exactly the same during the End Times as during every single, normal day of our life. Being faithful to God's Word and ways alone in the course of everyday life is what will enable us to remain faithful during the increasingly turbulent Last Days. Like Job and the prophets it may seem like everyone and everything has fallen away, but we have the assurance of having already read the end of The Book and already know how it all ends. Biblical faith is living as if the end we know to come has already occurred.

In His Love,

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