

THE TIME OF THE END AND THE LAST DAYS

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One feature of Daniel's apocalyptic prophecy calls for special attention—the predetermined "time of the end" (Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:35, 40). Daniel's book emphatically has been closed and sealed "until the time of the end" (12:4, 9). What is meant by "the end?" Obviously this phrase determines the meaning of the phrase "time of the end." From the internal evidence of Daniel's chapters, "the end" is characterized by the divine judgment on the "king of the north" (11:40, 45), and the final deliverance of the saints, which includes the resurrection of the dead (12:1, 2) and that of Daniel himself "at the end of the days" (12:13). This apocalyptic portrait of "the end" is of decisive importance for determining the meaning of "the time of the end."

Daniel's "time of the end" does not take its point of reference from the *first* advent of Christ but rather from the *second* advent, as the establishment of God's kingdom and the resurrection of the dead. This point of orientation qualifies Daniel's "time of the end" as a specific end-time that takes place a relatively short time before the end.

The phrase, "the time of the end," is found only in the Old Testament, exclusively in Daniel 8-12, and is said to *start* "at the appointed time" (11:35). Its start is connected with the termination of the three and one-half symbolic times of rule by the antichrist in Daniel 7 (vs. 25; see also 12:7). It also is related to the time of

fulfillment of the longest prophetic time period of the book that is contained in a vision that is sealed until the time of the end—the 2300 symbolic “days.”

He said to me, “It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated” . . . As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. “Son of man,” he said to me, “understand that *the vision concerns the time of the end.*”

. . . He said: “I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because *the vision concerns the appointed time of the end*” (Dan. 8:14, 17, 19, NIV, italics supplied).

Both in Daniel 8:26 and 12:4 the heavenly command is given to “seal up” the vision or to close up the words of the prophecy. Both the vision of Daniel 8 and the angelic interpretation found in Daniel 10-12 are said to pertain to the “distant future” (8:26, NIV) or to “the time of the end” which climaxes in the resurrection of the dead (12:2, 4). This strongly suggests that the vision of Daniel 8 runs parallel to the structural outline of Dan. 11-12. This is an important conclusion. The 2300 prophetic “days” of Daniel 8:14 must reach into the Messianic or eschatological age, and extend to the final phase of redemption history, the apocalyptic “time of the end.”

Greater Understanding of Daniel Foretold

When the “time of the end” shall arrive in history, “many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase” (12:4, NASB). The original text speaks of “*the*” knowledge, that is, the insight of the wise in Daniel’s vision concerning the sanctuary truth and its restoration in the worship of God’s people (12:3, 9, 10, NASB). Taken in the context of the angel’s command to seal the words of the scroll (12:4), this going “back and forth” strongly suggests a scanning of the eyes to and fro, here and there, in the book of Daniel (cf. 2 Chron. 16:9; Zech. 4:10, NIV). It conveys the sense of “thoroughly to search into it” (C. F. Keil). The result will be that “those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many” (Dan. 11:33, NASB). True worship of God will be restored among all the nations of the world.

In God’s providence, at the proper time in the divine plan, the symbolic prophecies of the book of Daniel will be increasingly

understood while the predicted events are taking place. This is in accordance with the principle expressed by Jesus: "I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe" (John 14:29, NIV).

During that "time of the end," many will be aroused to search intensely for the meaning of Daniel's end-time prophecies: "Many will go here and there to increase knowledge" (12:4, NIV, second part). This phrase has often been divorced from its context and applied to the technical advances of modern science. In his editorial "The Time of the End" in *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1880, James White pointed to Daniel 12:10 to prove that the understanding of Daniel's book was meant and that "the increase of knowledge does not refer to the progress in scientific discoveries." Daniel explicitly stated: "Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of these wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand" (12:10, NIV). The focus of the wise will be on the book of Daniel that previously had been sealed to human understanding.

LeRoy E. Froom's comment on Daniel 12:4 is therefore valid:

It obviously is a forecast of a great revival in prophetic exposition that came under the simultaneous awakening in the nineteenth century, in both the Old World and the New.—*The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 4, p. 1209.

This prophetic awakening arose most dramatically in America through the work of the Baptist preacher William Miller of Low Hampton, New York, between 1831 and 1844. His specific burden was the message that Christ's return was imminent, being expected between 1843 and 1844. He based his conclusion mostly on the time prophecy of Daniel 8, which assures that in "the time of the end" the defiled "sanctuary" would be restored to its rightful use (8:14) through the priestly work of atonement and reconciliation with God. Unfortunately, he identified this predicted restoration of the sanctuary, and its true worship of God, completely with the final judgement at the second advent of Christ. However, Daniel's promise of a great restoration of true worship on earth was intended for "the time of the end."

The Latter (Last) Days in the Classical Prophets

The question may be raised, How is Daniel's apocalyptic "time of the end" related to the phrase "the latter [or last] days," mentioned 14 times by the classical prophets? Are both periods the same and thus co-existent?

In Old Testament times the prophetic term "in the latter days" (*be'acharith hayyamim*) had not yet developed into a fixed technical meaning. It is properly translated in the English Bible versions (especially the *Revised Standard Version*, the *New International Version*, the *New American Standard Version*, and the *Jerusalem Bible*) by "in the following days" or "in the future" or "in days to come" (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Isa. 2:2; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Eze. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14). Some versions are inconsistent, however, when they translate the Hebrew phrase sometimes by "in days to come" or "in the future," and other times by "in the last [or latter] days." The Hebrew root *'achar* means "afterward" and not "last" or "end." (The Hebrew word for "end" is *qets*, Amos 8:2; Eze. 7:2; Dan. 8:19; 11:27, RSV, NKJV.)

Several passages which use the phrase do not refer to the Christian age but simply to either the immediate future (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; see also 2 Sam. 8:2) or to the coming Assyrian-Babylonian exile (Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Jer. 23:20; 30:24). However, other passages reveal a definite concentration on the Messianic hope or age to come (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1; Hos. 3:5; Eze. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14). The context must decide in each case what specific era is intended. Also in Daniel, the phrase does not yet function as a fixed technical term for the Christian era. Daniel 2 takes into view the whole sweep of history from Daniel's own time until the Kingdom of glory. The *New International Version* translates Daniel 2:28, 44, 45; 10:14, simply with "in days to come," "in the future" (2 times).

It needs to be acknowledged that Daniel concentrates on the end-time and on the outcome of future history. This apocalyptic meaning (Dan. 2:44; 12:1, 2) is the intensified application of the "days to come." Daniel does not intend to predict the future in general, but the coming of the indestructible kingdom of God. For a detailed analysis of the Old Testament passages we refer to the article by John T. Willis in the bibliography.

New Testament Usage

The New Testament gives the expression, "the last days," a definitive Christological character. It becomes a technical term for the Messianic or Christian age. The "last days" have begun with the first advent of Christ and His Messianic rule (Acts. 2:17; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3). They continue with increased tribulation for the church until the second advent of Christ (2 Tim. 3:1; 1 Tim. 4:1). This apostolic view required a modification of the Jewish eschatological structure.

The era of the old covenant had come to an irrevocable end with the appearance of Christ. The cross of Christ signified the end or "the completion [*sunteleia*] of the ages" (Heb. 9:26, my translation). The apostolic church began its existence only *after* "the end [*ta tele*] of the ages have come" (referring to the old covenant times, 1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV, NASB).

Our conclusion, therefore, has to be that the New Testament expression, "the last days," must be defined by its orientation to the *first* coming of Christ. The "last days" begin their time of fulfillment with the incarnation of God's Son, "when the fullness of time had come [*to pleroma tou chronou*]" (Gal. 4:4, NKJV).

The phrase, "at the last day," is reserved to designate the apocalyptic events of the resurrection of the saints at the coming of Christ (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24) and the final judgment of unbelievers (John 12:48). In this sense, Peter uses the expression for our future salvation "in the last time" [*en kairoi eschatoi*] (1 Pet. 1:5).

The phrase "this is for a (or the) last hour [*eschate hora*, without the definite article], which occurs only in 1 John 2:18, seems to be used by John to indicate the ultimate seriousness of the apostasy from the gospel truth within the apostolic church between A.D. 90 and 100. John interpreted this apostasy as a fundamental heresy in which he recognized the false teaching of "many antichrists" (1 John 2:18; 4:3). This crisis placed every church member in Asia Minor already in the eschatological "hour" of decision. Jude likewise reminds the church of the apostolic prediction that "in the last time [*ep' eschatou tou chronou*] there shall arise scoffers from within" (Jude 18).

Conclusion

Daniel's apocalyptic phrase, "the time of the end," signifies a specific time period, predetermined solely by a sovereign decree of God. The "time of the end" constitutes the final phase of the Christian era, or of "the last days," and is determined only by Daniel's time prophecies. Although both expressions ("time of the end" and "the last days") finally overlap, they are not fully coextensive. Each has a different point of beginning. The prophetic "last days" have begun since the first advent of Christ. Daniel's apocalyptic "time of the end" begins only after his long-range time prophecies have expired. The arrival of "the time of the end" will greatly intensify the hope of the church in the last days. It will bring about an international revival of prophetic studies, particularly of Daniel and Revelation. (See Dan. 12:4.)

This revival movement, foreseen by the prophet Daniel, will be consolidated as the final reformation of the church. Its end-time emergence is pictured graphically in the symbolic experience of John in Revelation 10. With a solemn oath, borrowed from Daniel 12:7, a mighty angel declares that "there should be time [*chronos*] no longer" (Rev. 10:6). Although commonly translated as meaning that there will be no more "delay," a comparison with the original oath of the angel in Daniel 12:7 reveals that neither the end of world history nor the end of probationary time is in view, but the end of Daniel's prophetic time periods.

The angel who instructed John appeared in the splendor of the heavenly Messiah, "Robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars" (Rev. 10:1, NIV). Standing on both the sea and the land, He announces with divine power and authority the beginning of the end-time events. He *unseals* the little book of Daniel, an act suggested by His holding a little *open* scroll in His hand. (See Rev. 10:2.)

The new understanding coming from Daniel's end-time prophecies must be proclaimed to all peoples living on the islands and the continents of the earth. (See Rev. 10:11.) The essence of this final preparation message is set forth in the threefold message of Revelation 14:6-12. The world-wide presence of the "Elijah" movement will be the greatest sign of all that the End is imminent: "See, I will

send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes" (Mal. 4:5, NIV).

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