

1 Peter 4:7-11

1Pe 4:7 (NKJV) **But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.** ⁸ **And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."** ⁹ **Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.** ¹⁰ **As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.** ¹¹ **If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

In beginning this passage of Scripture, it is very important to look at the first phrase which says that “**the end of all things is at hand**”. Obviously, Peter wrote this nearly 2000 years ago, so it should be obvious that whatever Peter meant by using this phrase, it was not something that necessarily referred to the immediate end of all things at the time of Peter writing this epistle. However, in the use of eschatological terms, there are two definitive aspects relative to time and to fulfillment of prophecy. The first is what is referred to as the “near term” fulfillment of a prophecy and the second is the later fulfillment of a prophecy, or what is referred to as a “not yet” aspect. Both of those can be applied to the same prophecy – a near term fulfillment and a future fulfillment, and generally are especially in the New Testament prophecies. Throughout the Scriptures, the biblical writers used various terms such as “**the last days, end times, dispensations, kingdoms, ages, this present age, the day of the Lord, the time of Jacob’s troubles, these last times, the last hour**”, or simply “**the end**” as Peter uses in v7.

Now, theologically it has to be appreciated that there is great debate about these kinds of terms, and honestly there does not seem to be a great deal of consensus on any of them. However, just the fact that we have the Old Testament and the New Testament should at least bear witness to the fact that God has indeed divided biblical history into very distinct periods of time, and if we add the Great Tribulation, the Millennium and the Eternal State into that mix, we have at least four distinct periods. Obviously, there are more, but at least that helps give some definition to the issue. In each time period, what is often called “**dispensations**” or “**ages**”, God worked in the lives of His people in distinct ways that were characteristic of that period of time in biblical history. Each of these various periods of time appear to be fairly well-defined, as well as how God worked or will work in them.

Just for a moment, let us take a look at one of the terms – the “**last days**” – to gain some level of perspective on the issue of “**the end of all things**”. [2 Timothy 3:1](#) says,

2Ti 3:1 (NKJV) **But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:**

[Hebrews 1:2](#) says,

Heb 1:2 (NKJV) **has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;**

[2 Peter 3:3](#) says,

2Pe 3:3 (NKJV) **knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,**

If we take the term “**last time(s)**”, it is identified in [1 Peter 1:5 and 20](#).

1Pe 1:5 (NKJV) **who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

1Pe 1:20 (NKJV) **He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.**

The term “**the last hour**” is found in [1 John 2:18](#) and says,

1Jn 2:18 (NKJV) **Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.**

Obviously, the Antichrist has not yet come, and we are still in the “**last hour**”. [1 Timothy 4:1](#) speaks of “**the latter times**”.

1Ti 4:1 (NKJV) **Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,**

Obviously, we have not reached the fulfillment of these last days, last time, or the last hour, so all that we know is that they are yet future. So, when are the “**last days**” and when did they actually begin? Well, it is generally assumed that they began with the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.. In [Acts 2:17](#) it says the following,

Ac 2:17 (NKJV) *'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams.*

This prophecy was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when all believers were indwelt by the Holy Spirit at that time. So, if the “**last days**” began at that time, then we are still living in the “**last days**”. So, this term is actually referring to a very long period of time in history that began nearly 2000 years ago and is still ongoing. Theologians call this the “inter-advent” period, or that period of time from the rejection of Jesus Christ by Israel to the Second Coming of Christ as described in [Revelation 19](#). This period of time is also referred to as “**this present age**”, and it can refer to two distinct periods of time. The first would refer directly to the time in which the writer of the New Testament book actually lived and wrote (the near term aspect), as well as a much longer period of time (the not yet aspect), or what Scripture identifies as an “**age**”. For instance, [1 Timothy 6:17](#) says,

1Ti 6:17 (NKJV) **Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.**

What we know from [Galatians 1:4](#) is that “**this present age**” has a very evil aspect to it.

Gal 1:4 (NKJV) **who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,**

Here Paul describes this present age as being “**evil**” because it is marked by what [Ephesians 6:12](#) refers to as “**spiritual darkness**”.

Now, I clearly recognize that [1 Peter 4:7](#) is not necessarily an eschatological verse, but Peter is clearly addressing the conditions that had already begun to befall the believers to whom he is writing. They were already suffering various forms of persecution, and historically we know that it was not going to

get any better for them. In fact, simply notice the warning that Peter gives them in [1 Peter 4:12](#) which says,

1Pe 4:12 (NKJV) Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

[1 Peter 4:19](#) declares,

1Pe 4:19 (NKJV) Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

So, it is obvious that [1 Peter](#) is not an eschatological study. However, if we are going to be able to understand the phrase “**the end of all things**”, we must have some perspective on what that phrase means. Now, without going into any major detail about this, what is important to understand is that in the economy of God’s outworkings for the future, there are two distinct programs that are occurring simultaneously. The first relates specifically to the nation of Israel and the second relates specifically to the church. They are two separate entities. The church is not Israel and Israel is not the church. The church, as some describe it, is not “spiritual Israel”. The church is the church. We actually are living in what is called “the church age” which is described scripturally as a “**mystery**”, or something that was previously unknown, but has now been revealed. The whole idea of the “church” was completely hidden in the Old Testament. There was not a single Old Testament saint who even dreamed that there would be something like the church. The church was a completely new program that God was going to develop and it completely remained a mystery for the Old Testament believers..

Just several verses can give some clarity to this “**mystery**” and to the idea of the church age. For the most part, the period of time between the first coming of Christ and His Second Coming are outlined and addressed in two specific portions of Scripture. The first is [Matthew 13](#) which deals with the “**kingdom of God**” and the second is [Revelation 2-3](#) which deals with the church age. In understanding this, it is important to appreciate that Israel rejected the King, and in so doing, they rejected His kingdom. However, just because they rejected the kingdom of God in no way nullified or negated the fact that the kingdom of God as a part of God’s redemptive program would continue. In essence, if I can say it this way, God had to place Israel “on the shelf” for a specific period of time. The good news for Israel is that they will eventually receive the King they rejected and that is specifically described for us in [Matthew 24](#) and occurs at His Second Coming.

So [Matthew 13](#) deals with the characteristics and spiritual condition of God’s kingdom from the time of the rejection of Christ by Israel until they receive Him in [Matthew 24](#) at His Second Coming. The key verse to understand in this chapter is [Matthew 13:11](#) which says,

Mt 13:11 (NKJV) He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

I.e., Jesus is explaining to His disciples the “**mysteries**” that will surround the development of His kingdom in the interim period between His first and second coming. This verse is often referred to as the “mystery form of the Kingdom” where the mysteries describe the different conditions that will prevail during the church age while its King is absent. In [Matthew 13](#), there are seven parables and these parables are often only taught for what are considered to be both the moral and spiritual lessons as

they impact believers today. However, the real thrust of these parables is not moral, but are the teaching of Christ on the development of His “**kingdom**” during His absence, a word that is used 12 times in this chapter. It is specifically addressing the period from Pentecost until His Second Coming.¹

One of the truths that become self-evident in [Matthew 13](#) and the ensuing parables is that the church will be composed of both believers and unbelievers, of the saved and the lost. It uses the language of “**the wheat and the tares**”, of good fish and bad fish, and the separation of the wicked from the just where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. The point is that the church age and the local church itself will have both believers and unbelievers that make up its composition. Please appreciate that at times it is very difficult to distinguish between the saved and the lost. This is utterly critical to understand, and if you understand it, it will clear up many passages that seem difficult on the surface. For instance, [Matthew 8:12](#) says,

Mt 8:12 (NKJV) **But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

Obviously, this is a clear description of hell and it says that the “**sons of the kingdom**” will be cast into this “**outer darkness**”. We know that will never be the case for someone who is a true believer, but it will happen for those who are just superficially and outwardly attached to the institutional church, but not the true church of genuine believers.

Look at [Matthew 13:40-42](#),

Mt 13:40 (NKJV) **Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.**

This is a direct reference to what will happen within the church, in the kingdom of God. [Matthew 13:49-50](#) says something similar,

Mt 13:49 (NKJV) **So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just,⁵⁰ and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."**

The same principle is found in [John 15:6](#) where Jesus talks about the branches that never bear any fruit.

Jn 15:6 (NKJV) **If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.**

The principle to understand here is clear – there are people who outwardly identify with God’s kingdom, but who simply are not a part of it. The real evidence of genuine salvation is whether a person is actually bearing godly fruit in their life. This delusional fantasy that the church has created that someone is going to heaven just because they are a member of a church is very prominent in many churches in our culture. Please understand that a person can be superficially and artificially attached to the branch, but not really a part of it. Judas is a prime example of that.

¹ Pentecost, 139.

However, [Revelation 2-3](#) and the message to the seven churches provide a preview of what the church will be like until the return of Christ. What is absolutely strategic for us as believers to understand is that in those seven letters to the churches that there is absolutely no mention of politics, world powers, world conditions, economics – nothing, but is strictly limited to what the church itself is like during that period of time. These two chapters depict many in the church departing from the faith, and is a sobering picture of those who only have a form of godliness, but in reality deny its power for their life. No wonder it is called an “**evil**” age.

So when Peter says that “**the end of all things is at hand**”, he is absolutely correct. Christ and His return is imminent and could happen at any moment. It could be another 1000 years for all that we know, but that is very doubtful. In reality, what is even more imminent for everyone is death – something sudden, something unexpected, something tragic, something unwanted. Death is always imminent, and if a person has not come to faith in Christ through the precious blood of Christ, every day of their life they are in an eternal danger that simply cannot be overstated. No wonder Peter tells his audience in the remainder of this verse to “**be serious, and watchful in your prayers**”. What we will find is that the verb for “**be serious**” is in the aorist imperative tense which we have studied so often. It is the controlling verb of this entire passage. Why would you think it was in that tense? It is because Peter fully understood that many times people are not serious about their relationship to Christ or about His calling and demands on their life. For many in local churches, it almost seems like some kind of spiritual game that people are playing. What they must be serious about is that “**the end of all things is at hand**”, that Christ could come at any moment, and that death itself could be looming and just around the corner for them and they not even know it. May God help us to be incredibly serious about our lives and how they relate to Christ.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Pentecost, J. Dwight. *Things to Come*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1958.