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# 1

## Are we in the end times/last days?

**T**he answer depends in part on what we mean when we use those terms! If we're referring to the final period of worldwide turmoil just before Jesus returns to earth—the period of time described in Revelation 6–19—then the answer is no. We are not yet in *those* end times.

But in a broader sense the “last days” can refer to the entire period between Christ’s first coming and His promised return. In Hebrews 1:2 the writer says the “last days” began at the first coming of Jesus. “[God] in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.” But in John 6:40 and 11:24 we’re told the resurrection of believing Jews will take place “on the last day,” pointing to the time of Jesus’ return. Since humanity is still between these two mileposts of history, the period in which we live can be called the last days.

In 1 Timothy 4:1 the apostle Paul warned Timothy about the “later times” when people will “fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” Then in verse 7 Paul told Timothy to “stay away from” these false teachings, suggesting the “later times” were present since these false teachers were already here. But later, in 2 Timothy 3, Paul pictured a time that would become even more troubling as these last days progress. “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come” (v. 1). Paul then lists nineteen specific traits that will characterize humanity as the last days move toward their appointed end.

Peter added one final characteristic of the last days in 2 Peter 3:3–4. He said they will be characterized by the rise of scoffers and mockers who will deny the reality of Jesus' soon return. "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?'"

The increasing godlessness, pride, brutality, and scoffing pictured by both Paul and Peter suggest the climax of the last days will be a time when much of humanity will shake its fist in the face of God in active rebellion. Based on the description given by Paul and Peter, we could very well be nearing the end of the last days.

The "end times" refers to the specific events associated with the end of the age and the return of Jesus to earth. As the disciples asked on the Mount of Olives, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). We are living in the "last days," but the events associated with the "end times" leading up to Jesus' return have not yet begun. And yet, the curtain on the final act of God's drama could rise at any time!

## 2

### Is Bible prophecy being fulfilled today?

**O**ver fifty years ago Gordon Jensen wrote “Redemption Draweth Nigh,” a song that focused on the second coming of Jesus and that suggested signs pointing to His soon return were “everywhere.” But are there signs and prophecies currently being fulfilled that focus directly on the soon return of Jesus?

Some point to the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948 as a fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy of a valley of dead bones returning to life. “Behold, I am going to open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel” (Ezek. 37:12). Others see prophecy being fulfilled in modern Israel’s transformation of the land. “The wilderness and the desert will rejoice, and the desert will shout for joy and blossom; like the crocus it will blossom profusely” (Isa. 35:1–2). But are these actual fulfillments of Bible prophecy?

The problem is that many people understand the fulfillment of prophecy in much the same way they understand romantic love. They claim to “know it when they see it,” but they can’t provide a clear explanation of what “it” actually is. A prophecy has only one meaning, though it can have multiple applications. The best way to determine if a prophecy has been fulfilled is first to understand what the original prophecy actually predicted. Only then can we look to see if current events match that prediction.

The rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948 doesn’t actually fulfill Ezekiel’s prophecy. Ezekiel’s vision described both a physical

restoration (bones coming back together) and a spiritual rebirth (causing God's breath to enter the still-dead bodies) of the nation. But when God interpreted the vision, He said the spiritual rebirth would occur at the same time as the physical restoration. "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land" (Ezek. 37:14). The spiritual restoration of Israel hasn't yet happened, so the prophecy hasn't yet been fulfilled.

While we're not yet seeing the fulfillment of these prophecies, we could very well be seeing God setting the stage for His end-time program. The distinction is subtle, but important. The final act in God's prophetic drama hasn't yet begun. The curtain remains down. But from our seats we hear the sound of props

being moved into place and the muffled coughs of actors preparing to play their designated roles. This suggests the curtain could soon rise as the drama begins to unfold.

**Guard against finding the fulfillment of Bible prophecy in every current event.**

But remember, the actual fulfillment of end-time events hasn't yet begun.

The nation of Israel is back in the land because the final act in God's prophetic drama revolves around them. The land itself has experienced a renewal, but they have yet to see "the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God" (Isa. 35:2), which is also part of Isaiah's prediction.

Guard against finding the fulfillment of Bible prophecy in every current event. Those who have done so in the past have found themselves looking foolish when the "fulfillments" evaporated. During World War II some were convinced Hitler was the prophesied Antichrist, Mussolini was the false prophet, and Japan fulfilled the prediction regarding the kings from the east.

## QUESTION 2

Be cautious about claiming Bible prophecies are being fulfilled today. The prophecy will only be “fulfilled” when all the details of the prophecy come to pass.

### 3

## **Are natural disasters, like earthquakes and plagues, a fulfillment of Bible prophecy?**

**T**he Old Testament word for plague (*nega'*) originally referred to the physical blow a ruler would deliver as punishment. Most of the time in the Old Testament it was used to refer to God sending a physical judgment or disease. The plagues God sent against Egypt included physical sufferings, like boils or the death of the firstborn son; but most were external judgments like frogs, lice, locusts, hail, or intense darkness. In Ezekiel 5:12 and 6:12 the prophet connected the word “plague” with physical disease that would kill those inside Jerusalem. “A third of you will die by plague or perish by famine among you, a third will fall by the sword around you, and a third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them” (Ezek. 5:12).

The English word “plague” comes from the Greek word *plēgē*, which describes a plague, blow, or wound. In the book of Revelation the plagues associated with the seven trumpets and seven bowls include earthquakes and other physical destruction on parts of the earth, demonic attacks, physical diseases, and intense heat and darkness (Rev. 9; 16).

God did send both earthquakes and physical disease as judgment for sin, though these weren't the only kinds of plagues He used to punish individuals. This leads to an important question. How do we know if an earthquake or plague is actually intended

as a divine judgment to fulfill Bible prophecy? Job experienced loss of property and intense physical illness. His three friends were convinced Job was experiencing all this distress as judgment

from the hand of God, but the reader is taken behind the scenes in chapters 1–2 to discover this was not the case. The friends were wrong!

**In the absence of a direct, divine prediction, anyone assuming a specific disaster was sent as divine judgment is actually presuming on God.**

Apart from God raising up a prophet to announce it in advance, we have no way of knowing if such a natural disaster was sent from God as judgment. Amos was sent to announce God’s judgment “two years before the earthquake” (Amos

1:1). But in the absence of a direct, divine prediction, anyone assuming a specific disaster was sent as divine judgment is actually presuming on God, just as Job’s friends had done. Jesus used the illustration of a catastrophic tower collapse that killed eighteen people in Jerusalem to make a similar point in His day. “Or do you think that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse offenders than all the other people who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you” (Luke 13:4–5).

In theory someone could come forward claiming to be a prophet of God and announce that a coming natural disaster is God’s divine judgment. But that individual had better be sure he or she is indeed a true prophet being sent by God, because God set a very high standard for those claiming to speak in His name. “When the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, and the thing does not happen or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously” (Deut. 18:22). And two verses earlier God explained what

### QUESTION 3

was to be done to someone speaking “presumptuously” in His name. “But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name, a word which I have not commanded him to speak . . . shall die” (Deut. 18:20).