

2 Timothy: The Good Fight Finishing Well in Christ

Lesson 43—2 Timothy 3:1-13

Last Days

The Late, Great Planet Earth, first published in 1970, was the first book on end times to be published by a secular publishing company. To date it has sold 28 million copies. When it was first released in October of 1970 many were captivated by Hal Lindsey's narrative and read it nonstop from cover to cover. Such was the case of one elderly secretary from a small church in the Midwest. The secretary started reading the book after work on Friday and completed it just before dawn on Sunday morning. She finished her book in plenty of time to fulfill early Sunday morning church chores. The second to arrive at the church on that Sunday morning was the pastor who was shocked to see his faithful secretary slumped over a bench in front of the church weeping uncontrollably. Coming to her aide, the pastor asked, "What's the matter?" The secretary responded she was convinced the rapture had occurred and she was left behind because no one came to church this morning. The pastor gently explained to his secretary that in her frenzy to finish *The Late, Great Planet Earth* she had forgot to reset her clock back one hour for the fall time change on Saturday night and she was an hour early to church.

That church secretary is not alone in her belief and confusion about the last days. A 2013 survey found that 77% of Americans who identified themselves as Evangelicals believe we are living in the last days as compared to 54% of mainline Protestants and only 27% of the Catholics questioned.¹ Globally 54% of the world's seven billion people follow a religion (Judaism, Islam, or Christianity) that teaches an end-times or last-days reckoning. The Islamic belief that a worldwide caliphate (Muslim rule) is required before the start of the end times helps to explain the

¹ <http://www.christianpost.com/news/poll-4-in-10-americans-believe-they-are-living-in-the-end-times-104423/>

source of our current conflict. See the chart at the end of the study for comparison. Confusion and misinterpretation are not restricted to those outside the Christian faith. Jesus said clearly that no man knows the hour or date of His return (Matthew 24:36–44). However, in 1844 William Miller, leader of a group that would later become a major denomination in America, predicted, based upon his study of the Book of Daniel, that Jesus would return on October 22 of that year. When that date passed his followers termed it “The Great Disappointment” and said allegorically Jesus had returned but only into the heavenly temple.

There are certain prophetic landmarks in the Bible which, when fulfilled, mark the start of the end times. The last major one to be fulfilled was the regathering of Israel into a nation in 1948 as predicted in Ezekiel 37. Pastor Greg Laurie has used 2 Timothy 3 as textual evidence that we are indeed entering the last days as things go from bad to worse.²

Have you ever noticed that in a typical NFL game, the teams methodically play for the first 58 minutes of regulation time? Suddenly at the final two-minute warning the game’s tempo increases to a virtual frenzy of activity as the end of the game draws near. In a similar fashion, as the end times draw near, shouldn’t we redouble our efforts in ministry and sharpen our focus on God’s Word as Paul advises in the last half of this chapter? In Jesus’ longest teaching on the end times in Matthew 24, He concludes with these words in verse 44: “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (NKJV).

Prayer

Start by praying over the passage and asking the Holy Spirit to give you fresh insights and wisdom in understanding it. Then read through the entire passage two or three times. The depth of theology is so great that I would strongly advise using the New Living Translation for one of your Scripture readings.

Scripture Meditation/Memorization

One of the most fundamental and rewarding Christian disciplines that pays back in full spiritual dividends is Bible meditation/memorization. It is an absolutely fundamental in the formation of your spiritual development, spiritual walk and faith growth. In Psalm 1:1-2 (NLT), the Psalmist warrior, King David said,

²<http://www.christianpost.com/news/greg-laurie-on-end-times-isis-may-fulfill-bible-prophecy-us-needs-to-align-with-israel-in-last-days-130706/>

*“Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.
But they delight in the law of the Lord,
meditating on it day and night.”*

Memory Verse

*“[12] Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”—
2nd Timothy 3:12 (NKJV)*

Study Format

We have all had weeks in which the time available for preparation of our Bible study evaporates under an unexpected event or a pressing project at work. To enable everyone to complete the study, even when time is at a premium, questions are being divided into two categories: essential and expanded. The Essential Questions are those necessary to understand key points of the passage. The Expanded Questions or growth questions help expand knowledge and gain deeper insight into the Scripture.

If you are concerned about having enough time to complete the whole study, it is suggested that you start by first answering the Essential Questions for each day and answer the Expanded Questions as time permits.

2 Timothy 3:1—Last Days

Although the words of Paul to Timothy describing the “perilous times” of the last days read like today’s news, it is important to ascertain exactly what Paul means by “the last days.” Paul’s admonition to Timothy in verse 1 is translated “know,” “understand,” or “realize” in various versions. The verb is in the present tense meaning that the action starts now but we need to continue to be watchful. The word for “last” is *eschatos* in the Greek, from which we get *eschatology*, or the study of the end times.

Essential Questions:

1. Most conservative theologians believe that based upon the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, we are indeed living in the last days. What additional characteristics of the last days do we learn about from the following passages?

a. 1 Timothy 4:1–2

b. 1 John 2:18–19

c. Matthew 24:4–12

d. 2 Peter 2:1–3

2. At the end of Jesus' discourse on the end times is a little verse that should be of tremendous comfort to believers. Jesus is speaking of future events, yet in the past tense, implying that while trials and tribulation may await, they are all being filtered through God's sovereign will. A quote often heard from pulpits on this passage says, "We may not know what the future holds but we know who holds the future." What do you take away from Matthew 24:21–22?

3. Billy Graham once said, "If God doesn't judge America, He'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah." For decades people have preached that we are in the last days and some have attempted to set dates. While it is true that we are

closer than ever before to His return, what do the words of Jesus teach us about setting a date in Matthew 24:36–44?

Expanded Question:

4. What is the ultimate reason for the seeming delay in God bringing about the conclusion of the last days and the return of Jesus according to 2 Peter 3:3–9?

2 Timothy 3:2-7—Attributes of The Apostates

As we read this laundry list of bad behaviors, it is easy to dismiss them as being carnal non-believers acting poorly. Unfortunately, a closer read will show that these behaviors are found within those who profess to be Christians. Prosperity doctrine, self-esteem teaching, an accommodation of alternate lifestyles, and a general tolerance of sin within the self-proclaimed church show this is not a possibility but a reality in today’s church.

Essential Questions:

1. A quick look at verse 5 identifies those whom Paul is describing in verses 2–4.
 - a. Who are these people? (Note: “form” is *morphosis* in Greek, meaning the external appearance of someone or something)

- b. Jude gives us additional information about these people. What do you learn in Jude 12–13, 16–19?

2. The first characteristic mentioned is “lovers of themselves” (*philoautos*). It could be argued that all of the other characteristics stem from this root cause.

a. How is this particular sin so ingrained in our culture and personal nature?

b. How does this conflict with what Scripture clearly teaches in Philippians 2:3–4?

c. How does this clearly conflict with what Jesus modeled for His disciples in the upper room? (Hint: see John 13:12–17.)

3. Paul lists nearly a dozen and a half attributes of apostates in verses 2–4. While we often characterize some as more offensive than others, all of them are sins and fall short of God’s standard for behavior. For example, “slanders” translates *diabolos*, the word used to describe Satan in John 8:44. One commentator wrote, when we spread rumors about others, we are actually doing the work of Satan.

a. Which attributes in this list stand out to you?

b. Are there any in particular that you struggle with in your own walk?

Expanded Questions:

4. Watching documentaries about predators and prey, I've noticed that they target the most feeble or vulnerable.

a. Who are these counterfeit Christians targeting as they infiltrate the body?

b. A local middle school has paraphrased a proverb above its front door, "With all thy knowledge get understanding." Coupling this statement with verse 7, explain what Paul means in this passage.

5. *Why is "having a form of godliness but denying its power" dangerous?³

³ Stott, J., & Johnson, L. (1998). [2 Timothy: Standing Firm in Truth](#) (p. 35). Nottingham, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; IVP Connect: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

2 Timothy 3:8-13—*The Man of God*

We are introduced to two shadowy figures from Israel’s distant past—Jannes, (*he who seduces*), and Jambres, (*he who makes rebellion*). According to Jewish tradition, they were magicians in Pharaoh’s court who opposed Moses. You may recall they were able to make counterfeit miracles that mimicked those performed by Moses. They later pretended to convert to Judaism and followed Israel in the Exodus. They were the ones that aided Aaron in the crafting of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. They were killed by the Levites upon Moses’ return to the camp. They serve as examples of insidious false teachers slipping into the church and deceiving God’s people.

Essential Questions:

1. What do we learn about the behavior of future apostates within the church from the example of Jannes and Jambres given in verses 8–9?

2. Paul contrasts the poor example of false followers of Christ given in verses 8–9 with himself as an example for Timothy. What aspects of his life did Paul emphasize in verses 10–11?

3. *Timothy was not to catch the infection of false teaching, nor be carried away by its flood-tide, but to stand out boldly against the prevailing fashion. Why did Paul remind Timothy of what he already knew?⁴

⁴ Stott, J., & Johnson, L. (1998). [2 Timothy: Standing Firm in Truth](#) (p. 40). Nottingham, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press; IVP Connect: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

4. A great litmus test for how faithfully we are walking with Jesus would be to ask ourselves, “Could I give the same advice that Paul offers to the young followers in Corinth?” What advice does Paul give in 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1?

5. Paul warns Timothy in this passage not to be surprised at persecution but actually expect to receive it, saying in essence that it goes with the territory.

a. What do you learn about persecution from this passage?

b. What did Jesus teach His disciples on persecution in Matthew 10:16–26?

c. What perspective does James give on persecution or trials in James 1:2?

d. Likewise, what perspective does Peter give on the same subject in 1 Peter 1:6?

Expanded Questions:

6. Paul wrote a letter to the Thessalonians because some in that church were concerned, they had somehow missed the last days and the second coming of Christ. What definitive sign did Paul give them to look for that would earmark the start of the end times in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12?

Lesson 43 Summary/Take Away

If one of your friends at work or a neighbor were to ask you what you did on Tuesday, you would tell them you went to a Bible study. The next question would likely be, “What did you learn?” We often summarize an entire athletic contest or a movie in a few brief sentences and easily convey the essence of the event. Now apply these same skills to give a summary of the passage in a sentence or two. Then, in an additional sentence or two, describe what impact this passage will have on how you live.

Memory Verse

“[12] Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”—
2nd Timothy 3:12 (NKJV)

Key Words/Phrases

Write out the definition of these key words. You can use a regular dictionary or go to one of the Greek sources listed in the Tool Box at the end of the study. You may also use a concordance to see where else and how the word is used in the Bible.

Last Days (2 Timothy 3:1)

Form of Godliness (2 Timothy 3:5)

Tool Box

Step 1: The Bible. Read the passage in a couple of different versions. If you are having trouble understanding a passage, choose a more dynamic version such as *New Living Translation*. To focus in on the exact meaning of a verse, choose a more literal translation such as *New King James Version*, *New American Standard Bible* or *English Standard Version*. *The Amplified Bible* is another excellent version.

Step 2: Study Tools. Use these to help you dig deeper. Background Information: 1) Unger's Bible Dictionary, 2) Bible Dictionaries online at biblestudytools.com and blueletterbible.com. (recommend both David Guzik and Chuck Smith's commentaries/study notes); Word Studies: 1) Zodhiates' *The Complete Word Study New Testament*, 2) Vine's *Complete Expository Dictionary*, and 3) Strong's *Dictionary of Bible Words*.

Step 3: Commentaries. Commentaries should not be used in place of studying God's Word directly, but they can give you additional insights. Some good commentaries include: Warren Wiersbe, J. Vernon McGee, F.F. Bruce, *the Expositors Bible Commentary*, *NIV Application Commentary*, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (edited by Walvoord & Zuck), *the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, and William Barclay (*great for background and culture, but be careful of his spiritual applications).

Step 4: Online Assistance. Should you have a specific question about the study please e-mail your inquiry to: mannygwcm@gmail.com

