

## 2 Timothy Lesson 6 Articles

### The last days

‘But mark this: there will be terrible times in the last days’ (2 Tim. 3:1). What is meant by the ‘last days’? Some understand it to mean the final period immediately before the return of the Lord Jesus to establish his kingdom. But if we look carefully at this passage it cannot possibly mean that, since Paul warns Timothy to ‘have nothing to do with them’, meaning the kind of wicked people he mentions in verses 1–5.

From other passages in the New Testament, it is clear that by the ‘last days’ is meant the whole Christian dispensation from the first advent of Christ to his second advent at the winding up of history. For example, Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost, uses this expression in his quotation from the book of Joel. ‘In the last days, God says, “I will pour out my spirit on all people” ’ (Acts 2:17). Peter could not have applied that quotation to what was happening at Pentecost if it meant the days immediately before Christ’s return. Similarly in Hebrews the writer, speaking of God’s revelation says, ‘... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son’ (Heb. 1:2).

These and other passages therefore must mean that the ‘last days’ began with the advent of Christ and his gospel, and that we ourselves are also living in the last days. When Paul uses this expression, he is not talking about the distant future, but about the present situation and the terrible times that Timothy would face in the course of his ministry.

### Terrible times

In the light of what has been said, the description ‘terrible times’ does not mean that the whole of the Christian dispensation would be continuously evil, but that there would be periods, or seasons, in the church’s history when it would be hard pressed by the enemies of the gospel and would suffer persecution from increasing wickedness in the world. Furthermore, as history progresses and we draw ever nearer to the coming of the Lord, these ‘terrible times’ will increase both in number and in intensity.

This means that we in today’s church have to be realistic and not expect the Christian life to get any easier, but accept that ours is a fallen world and that such distress and ‘terrible times’ might yet come even in our own country. Indeed, in some respects it is clear that the forces of paganism are already on the march, and that bible-believing Christians, in particular, are being exposed to ever-greater hostility. And if we look to the political world scene, the picture is no less fearful. Speaking in Davos at the World Economic Forum in January 2004, Kofi Annan, Secretary of the United Nations, said:

The prevailing atmosphere has shifted from the belief in the near-inevitability of globalization to deep uncertainty about the very survival of our tenuous order. The global landscape is shifting profoundly, and in some respect adversely. Today, the global security climate and the very conduct of international politics have become far less favourable to the maintenance of the stable, equitable, and rule-based global order.<sup>6</sup>

But unstable though it is, John reminded us that this is the world we have to live in and witness to as God’s people. ‘We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one’ (1 John 5:19).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in *The Times*, 24 January 2004

<sup>1</sup> Williams, P. (2007). *Opening up 2 Timothy* (pp. 64–66). Leominster: Day One Publications.