

THE LAST HOUR . . .

BY

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“Little children, it is the last hour” (I John 2:18).

The marvel is that this scripture is written in the first century. John’s words have been interpreted by some to refer to the time immediately preceding the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Other think that he predicted Christ’s immediate return, and was mistaken. Both interpretations miss the real meaning of the text. If John did have reference to the fall of Jerusalem, his statement also encompasses a much wider time segment for he immediately admonished Christians to “abide with him; that if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed of him at his coming” (Vs. 28). Therefore, the time span of the last hour was to reach to the second coming of Christ. As to the idea that John might have believed in the immediate return of Jesus, it is irrelevant. Prophetic statements of inspired men were not always understood by the prophets themselves. We are not concerned with the apostle’s own judgment but with what the spirit of God has said through him.

The hour of which John writes could not mean a 60 minute hour as measured by man’s clock, but rather an era which would be brief according to God’s time. Commenting on this text, E.M. Blaiklock wrote, “Nothing is so demanding in the study of New Testament prophecies, it should be observed, as to imagine that the Eternal God, who stands above and outside of time, is bound by the clocks and calendars of men.” The last hour of John corresponds to the “last days” spoken of in Old Testament prophecy such as that in Joel (2:28 ff.) quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost. “And it shall be in the last days, said God, I will pour forth of my spirit, etc.” (Acts 2:17). Clearly the LAST DAYS here do not mean the time immediately preceding Christ’s return, for Peter explicitly stated that Joel’s prophecy began its fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost: “this is that,” Peter said, “which has been spoken through the Prophet Joel.”

Whatever ahs transpired in times past, beginning with creation, and however we may divide time into ages, the first coming of Christ was to mark the end of the ages, the last and final administration of God upon the present earth. Concerning Christ, it is written in Hebrews 9:26, “Now once at the end of the ages has he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” This “end of the ages” has already extended to almost 2,000 years.

The Epistle to the Hebrews begins by establishing our present era as the “last days”. “God, after he spoke long ago to the father in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:1–2, Greek: “eskaton ton emeron” = last days). The writer then proceeds to show that Christ, the Son of God is on his throne, in fulfillment of prophecy. The last days began with Christ’s victorious ascension and are to continue until the second appearing. Since these are the last days, there can be no era of time to follow.

The Apostle Peter speaks of an “end time” which covers the entire span of this Christian era, when he says that Christ “was manifested at the end of the times for your

sake, who through him are believers in God, that raised him from the dead, and gave him glory” (I Peter 1:20–21). Again he wrote, “but the end of all things is at hand: be you therefore of sound mind and be sober unto prayer...that in all things God may be glorified in Jesus Christ, whose is the glory and the dominion for ever and ever” (I Peter 5:7, 11). No one can possibly understand that Peter meant that the “end” in these two references has to do only with the time immediately preceding the second coming. Obviously he was saying that Christians of his day were living in the last dispensation of time. Plainly he says that this era is the “end of the times” and “end of all things.”

The last hour extends until the final consummation, the coming of Christ. The judgment and destruction of the present world order. After that there cannot be another hour; there can be no more days, for there shall be neither sun nor moon nor night by which to measure time (Rev. 22:5).

The only event that can equal the first coming of Christ to the world is the event of His second coming to judge the world in righteousness. The time in between these two events is “the last hour”, during which Christ reigns with “all power” from the “right hand” of God, the place of power. During this time believers are transformed from the power of darkness into His kingdom, and raised with Him as new creatures, to seek things above rather than things of the world (Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:12; Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1–3). The apostles and early church saw this present age as the last one. The church was not something to be organized with a view to some future role in world events; rather it was established for the last hour. It is the temple of God, living stones, “blameless and harmless children of God without blemish in a crooked and perverse generation”, seen as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15). It is not to look for a utopian “world of tomorrow” nor the re-establishment of the Israel of yesterday. Instead, the churches should be “looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ,” “Who shall judge the living and the dead, by His appearing and His kingdom (Titus 2:13, II Tim. 4:1).

Paul exhorts Christians to endure persecution with patience until the coming of Christ “from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might when he shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed...in that day” (II Thess. 1:7–10). At Christ’s coming, instead of establishing the one-world utopia which has been the Jewish desire for 2,000 years. He will execute the disobedient in a destruction that will end their rebellion forever, hence “everlasting destruction.” Thus Paul makes it clear that the coming of Christ will signal both judgment of unbelievers and glorification of saints. The same even which means perdition to one will mean glory and immortality to the other.

Peter teaches that the heavens and earth will pass away at the time of Christ’s coming. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (II Peter 3:10). According to Paul and Peter there can be no further age or dispensation on this earth after Christ comes. Jesus taught that men were to be ready at all times for His coming because of the fact that it will put an end to all possibilities of further preparations and will end all earthly endeavors.

There are certain conditions that were to mark the last days and the last hour. According to John, the last hour would be characterized by the work of anti-Christ. "Even now," He said, "have there arisen many anti-Christ; whereby we know that it is the last hour" (I John 2:18). The longer Christ's coming is delayed, the more the work and power of anti-Christ are accelerated.

Paul wrote that "in the last days grievous times shall come" (II Tim. 3:1). Both Jude and Peter warned that the last days would be marked by those who mock the truth of God (II Peter 3:3, Jude 18). These warnings were given to Christians in the first century, indicating that the last days had already begun. However, the animosity and hostility to Christians was to increase throughout the present era; "But evil men and imposters shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (II Tim. 3:13). Since the ascension of Christ the violence and evil have been accelerating through the centuries "waxing worse and worse." Jesus said that conditions at His second coming would be as in the days of Noah when "the wickedness of man was great in the earth," and this thought were evil (Gen. 6:4, Luke 7:26). But such violence and evil were already present in the persecution of the church in the first century, and covers the entire "last hour".

The fact that evil men wax worse and violence increases certainly makes us aware that Christ may come soon, but who knows how bad conditions may actually get? In Noah's day they were "marrying an giving in marriage"; that is, business was going on as usual, without any significant changes, until the flood came and swept them away.

Conflict and warfare will continue throughout the age until the end, but life will go on with the majority totally indifferent to the claims of Christ. The work of anti-Christ, which has not ceased since the time of John, will continually increase. The "falling away" from the faith will take its toll so much so that Jesus once asked, "When the son of man comes, will He find the faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). But in spite of all this, no one knows the date of Christ's coming. All who have set dates in centuries past have proven themselves to be false prophets.

Our task as Christians is not to fathom the details of the future nor ascertain the hour of His coming. Rather we are to confess Him as Lord NOW, and abide in Him, keeping His commandments so as to be ready either at His coming or at the time of death.

The only "world of tomorrow" or future age after this one is described by Peter: "We look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness" (II Peter 3:13), of which we are heirs (Rom. 4:13, 17) after "the first heavens and the first earth are passed away" (Rev. 21:1).

"It is the last hour...abide in Him; that, if He shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (I John 2:18, 28).

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