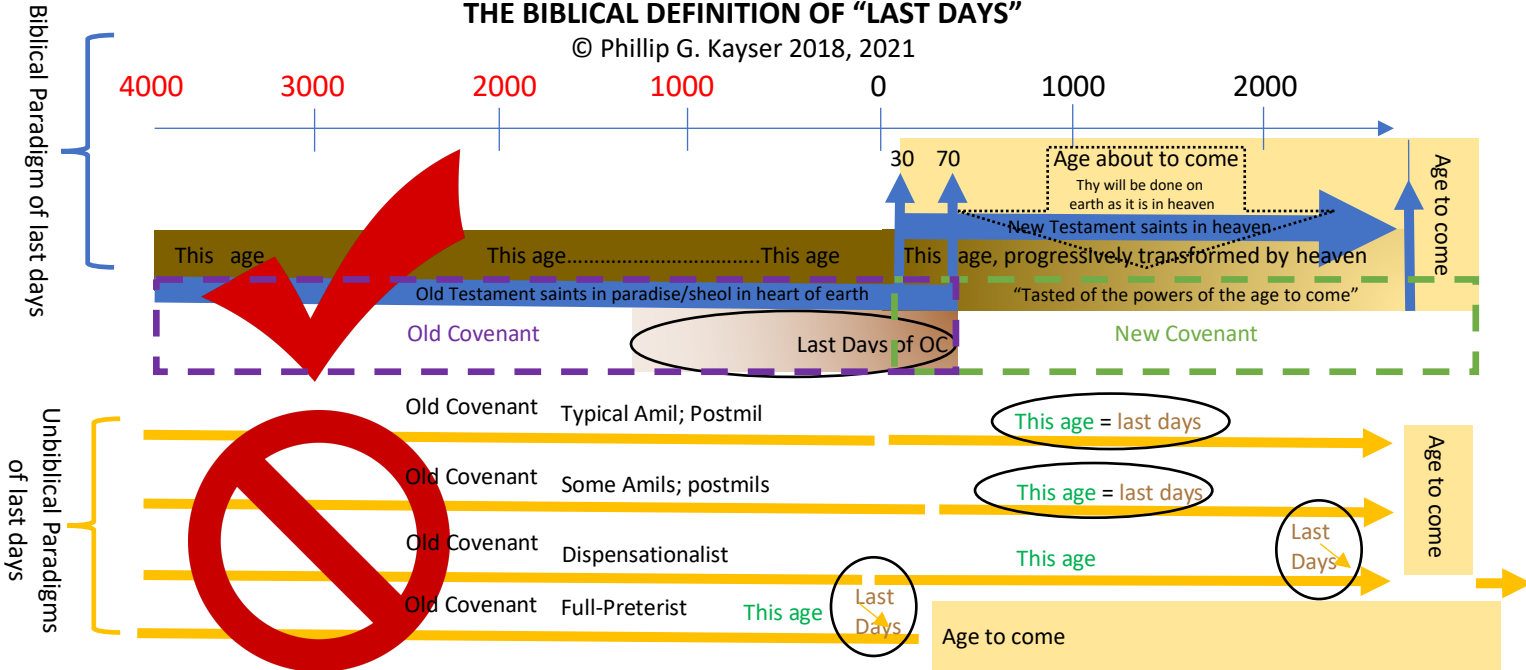


THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF "LAST DAYS"

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Notice that only one paradigm fits all the following "last days" (ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν) Scriptures

We would expect that since the New Testament writings are so steeped in Old Testament language, that the frequently used term "last days" would have a meaning consistent with the established meaning of the previous 2000 years of history. I have sought to show LXX translation equivalents to the New Testament Greek for "last days," and have documented a date for things that occurred in those last days. As can be seen "last days" prophecies mainly covered events fulfilled from 605 BC to AD 70. This proves that "last days" cannot have started at the birth of Jesus, or at AD 30, or at AD 70. It includes those dates since they fall within the last days of the Old Covenant, but they cannot start then.

Actual dates of "last days" events in the verses to the left

1. Gen. 49:1-26. ¹	Last (third of 4000 years BC??)	30??
2. Daniel 2:28,29,45 ²	604	70
3. Numbers 24:14 with vv. 18,20 ³	Last quarter of 4000 years BC	
4. Deut 31:29 ⁴	605	
5. Deut 32:20 ⁵	605	
6. Jeremiah 23:20 ⁶	586	
7. Jeremiah 30:24 ⁷	539	
8. Jeremiah 49:39 ⁸	539	
9. Jeremiah 30:24 ⁹	539	
10. Jeremiah 48:47 ¹⁰	539	
11. Ezekiel 38:14 ¹¹	511	?
12. Ezekiel 38:16 ¹²	511	?
13. Daniel 11:20 ¹³	187	
14. Joshua 24:27 ¹⁴	?	70?
15. Hosea 3:5 ¹⁵		30?
16. Micah 4:1 ¹⁶		30
17. Isaiah 2:2 ¹⁷		30
18. Acts 2:17 ¹⁸		30
19. Hebrews 1:1 ¹⁹		27-30
20. 1 Peter 1:20 ²⁰		5BC-30
21. James 5:3 ²¹		70
22. 1 Tim. 4:1 ²²		62-70
23. 2 Tim. 3:1 ²³		62-70
24. 2 Pet. 3:3 ²⁴		62-70
25. Jude 18 ²⁵		62-70

Dates that *only* fit the first paradigm above are highlighted in red. Note that other theories of "last days" fall to the right of even the black dates because they assume the dates in black are the *beginning* of the "last days." However, if even one of the red dates is correct, the other theories are disproved. None of the red dates fall within the time of the Messianic kingdom, therefore the "last days" must be the last days of the Old Covenant. See footnotes for info.

Endnotes

¹ This first reference (Genesis 49:1-26) and the third reference (Numbers 24) are the least clear of these proof texts since they seem to include events going even further back in Old Covenant history. Where most of the other references seem to indicate the last days of Israel, these two verses seem to expand the meaning of the phrase to the last days of the Old Covenant (unless of course, only a subset of these events was intended as last days events). For example, Genesis 49:7 was fulfilled in 1400 BC, verse 8 in 1000 BC, and verses 10-12 in AD 30. Yet verse 1 says the prophecies relate to what will happen ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν. But the point is still made that none of these events extend beyond AD 30, and therefore Genesis 49:1-26 certainly overturns the notion that the last days includes everything from AD 30 till the end of history. On the words “bow down before thee” Herbert Ryle says, “A reference to the Davidic monarchy which united the tribes of Israel.” **Herbert E. Ryle, *The Book of Genesis in the Revised Version with Introduction and Notes, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 429. On Shiloh, Hamilton says, “There is no doubt about how the Qumran community understood Gen. 49:10 [to mean]... until the coming of [*d bw*] the Messiah of Righteousness, the branch of David, for to him and to his seed has been given the covenant of the kingship over his people for everlasting generations.”¹ **Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*** (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 660. Thus the concept of “last days” in the Old Testament was the last days of their age, or the last days leading up to the Messiah’s kingdom. It cannot refer to post-AD 70 history.

² Daniel 2:28,29,45 all use the term “last days” - ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν, to describe the events being prophesied in Nebuchadnezzar’s entire dream. Since the dream covers the time from Babylon till Christ, the “last days” cover the period of time from Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom until the Messiah establishes His kingdom in AD 30. Baldwin accurately summarizes the meaning in these verses: “God has made known the dream to King Nebuchadnezzar, and what will be in the latter days, or at the end of this age.” **Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 23, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 102. Again, this fits the meaning I have proposed that “last days” always refers to the last days of the Old Covenant before Messiah’s kingdom is established. Most conservative commentators agree that these “last days” kingdoms are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the setting up of the Messianic kingdom in AD 30. Collins points out, “In Daniel, too, the reference is to a definitive change in the future but not to an end of history. The phrase occurs again in Dan 10:14, where the reference is to a prophecy about the Hellenistic period (the distant future from the perspective of Daniel) and the definitive transformation with which it concludes.” **John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*** (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 161. Stephen Miller points out that all four kingdoms leading up to Messiah’s must be included in the eschatological concept of “last days.” He says, “In this context the expression must involve the eschatological future, for it concerns the final phase of the fourth empire and the coming kingdom of God (see discussion at 2:41–45). Yet it also seems to include the record of all the future events God had divulged to Nebuchadnezzar in the dream, namely, the four earthly empires preceding the time of the end (cf. 10:14). Essentially, however, the account of the four human kingdoms may be regarded as a prelude to the climax of history—the kingdom of God ruled by the Messiah. This Old Testament phrase is paralleled in the New Testament (“in the last days”; cf. Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; Jas 5:3; 2 Pet 3:3).” **Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel, vol. 18, The New American Commentary*** (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 90

³ Numbers 24:14 shows that the vision of the next verses will describe what will happen in the last days - ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν. Though there is much debate on the timing of the fulfillment of verse 17, there are two facts that still support my thesis: First, all the other events were fulfilled in the last quarter of the 4000 years of BC history, and therefore “last days” cannot logically be referring to the whole of New Covenant history. Second, since Moab was exterminated and no longer exists, if we take the reference to Moab literally, it supports our thesis that “last days” refers to the last days of the Old Covenant leading up to the Messiah, not the last days of human history. Verse 18 was fulfilled in 1000 BC (see 1 Kings 11:16), and v. 20 was fulfilled in 1 Chron. 4:43 (time of Hezekiah). Of verse 20, Wenham says, “In fact both Saul and David defeated the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:18; 30:17) and they were finally destroyed in Hezekiah’s time (1 Chr. 4:43).” **Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 4, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 203. Whatever the meaning of verse 17 might be, this is still a solid proof-text that “last days” does not refer to the whole New Covenant era since most of it occurred in Old Covenant history.

⁴ The LXX of Deuteronomy 31:29 says that Israel would apostatize in the “last days” - ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν. While there were two apostasies of Israel (one in 605 BC and the other in AD70), this is likely referring to the first.

⁵ The Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 32:20 only speaks of the “end” of Israel, but Swete’s LXX has what will happen in the last days - ἐπ' ἐσχάτων ἡμερῶν. It is a general prophecy of what would happen to Israel in the last days should they rebel. This is perhaps a reference to AD 70, but is more likely applied to 605 BC. But it is difficult to see how it could be taken beyond AD 70 on any interpretation of prophecy.

⁶ Jeremiah 23:20 says that it will only be after Israel has been judged by Babylon (586 BC) that the false prophets would realize that Jeremiah was right. This was prophesied to take place in the last days - ἐπ' ἐσχάτων αὐτοῦ ἔσται. “The prophets should have begun to realize what Jeremiah meant in 597 B.C., but certainly after 586 B.C.” **J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*** (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 498. Certainly the post-exilic community was in the countdown to Messiah – the last days of the Old Covenant.

⁷ Jeremiah 30:3-31:3 is a pericope dealing with exile and restoration. When Israel returns, she will realize this prophecy to be true. 30:24 speaks of this realization to occur in the last days - ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν. Thompson says, “The last line, *In the days to come you will understand this* (cf. 23:20), is an affirmation that the purposes of Yahweh are already determined but will

be understood (*hībōnēn*) only when the day has come. But that day is in the not too distant future; it is not an eschatological concept.” J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 563. While I disagree with Thompson about the passage not being eschatological, I do agree that it includes the post-exilic times. Those times were the prelude to Messiah’s kingdom, and therefore were eschatological in expectation. Clements says, “Quite evidently the loss of Israel’s national identity as a consequence of the tragedies of 598 and 587 b.c., leading to the scattering of several small communities of Jews among the nations, now called for a broad, inclusive definition that would be decisive.” R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: J. Knox Press, 1988), 184. Other commentaries clearly root this “last days” reference to the restoration of Israel in the sixth century BC. It was the last segment of the Old Covenant times.

⁸ Jeremiah 49:34-39 prophesies the exile and restoration of Elam and verse 39 promises that this would happen in the last days - ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν. This took place in 539 BC Huey says, “Elam, with its capital at Susa, became the center of the Persian Empire after 539 B.C., perhaps fulfilling this message (cf. Neh 1:1; Dan 8:2).” F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations, vol. 16, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 407. Matthew Henry applies it not only to 539 BC (the literal interpretation), but also to Acts 2, when many Elamites became converts: “When Cyrus had destroyed Babylon, brought the empire into the hands of the Persians, the Elamites no doubt returned in triumph out of all the countries whither they were scattered, and settled again in their own country. But this promise was to have its full and principal accomplishment in the days of the Messiah, when we find Elamites particularly among those who, when the Holy Ghost was given, heard spoken in their own tongues the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:9, 11), and that is the most desirable return of the captivity. *If the Son make you free, then you shall be free indeed.*” Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1317. However, in light of similar language in Jer 29:14; 46:25-26; 48:47; and 49:6, it is almost certain that this prophecy refers to the return of Elamites from exile in 539 BC and afterwards. As Willis words it, “The Elamites once thought of themselves as a nation that extended its power over many lands; now they will be extended—as exiles—over many lands. As with Moab and Ammon (48:47; 49:6), there is a final note of hope, as the Lord promises the eventual resurgence of this once powerful land (v. 39).” Timothy M. Willis, *Jeremiah/Lamentations, College Press NIV Commentary* (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 2002), 370.

⁹ Jeremiah 30:24 says that in the last days (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν), God’s purposes for Israel’s exile will be understood. This too is a reference to 539 BC and beyond since the post-exilic prophets gave clear testimony to why the exile happened, as did Ezra’s composition of 1&2 Chronicles. Thompson comments, “The last line, *In the days to come you will understand this* (cf. 23:20), is an affirmation that the purposes of Yahweh are already determined but will be understood (*hībōnēn*) only when the day has come. But that day is in the not too distant future; it is not an eschatological concept.” J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 563. Again, though I disagree with Thompson about this not being eschatological, I agree with his timing. These were times showing the inadequacy of human kings and waiting for the promised divine King, Jesus. The last days were the countdown to Messiah.

¹⁰ Jeremiah 48:45-47 not only promises judgment upon Moab, but a restoration of Moab under Cyrus (539 BC), and describes that restoration as taking place “in the last days.” Both the inter-testamental materials (Judith) and Josephus point out that Moab was returned to their land around the time of Israel’s return (cf. Ezra 9:1; Neh. 13:1,23) “It had a literal accomplishment under Cyrus, as is thought, when they were restored to their land; and certain it is they were a people in the times of Alexander, or King Jannæus, who subdued them, as Josephus relates...” John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament, vol. 5, The Baptist Commentary Series* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 663.

¹¹ Ezekiel 38:14 does not use “last days” in the Hebrew, but the LXX speaks of the Gog and Magog battle that occurred in the time of Esther as being in the last days - ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν. This difficult passage has many interpretations, with some identifying it with the war of Haman against Jews in the book of Esther, others placing it in AD 70, and still others placing it future to us. Here are a few timing indicators that place this during the time of Nehemiah: 1) The battle of Ezekiel occurs when Jerusalem and the other towns still have no walls (Ezek. 38:11). This rules out an interpretation in the days of the Maccabees or later since Jerusalem has had walls ever since Nehemiah built them. However, at this point in Esther’s story, no walls have been built. Nehemiah has not yet started that work. 2) Occurs in a time when Israel is divided up into tribes (37:19) This rules out any interpretation after the Middle Ages since Israel is so intermixed that there are no tribal divisions discernable. 3) The enemy lives in a time when they use horses (38:15), swords (38:4) arrows, bows, war clubs (39:9), and wood instruments (39:10). Again, this would tend to rule out any fulfillment future to us. For other information on this war, see

<https://kaysercommentary.com/Sermons/Old%20Testament/Esther/Esther%20part%207.md> Again, these inter-testamental times were the countdown to Messiah, and thus the last days of the Old Covenant.

¹² Ezekiel 38:16 speaks of the Gog and Magog battle that occurred in the time of Esther, and yet it is ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν. On the timing of Gog and Magog, see the previous footnote.

¹³ Daniel 11:20 gives a prophecy of Seleucus IV Philopater (187-175 BC), and this is said to occur in the last days - ἐν ἡμέραις ἐσχάταις. Collins says, “*In his place will arise one: Seleucus IV Philopater (187–175 B.C.E.). His reign was dominated by financial exigency, because of the tribute to Rome. who will make a tribute collector of royal splendor pass through: This is most probably a reference to Heliodorus, whose attempt to despoil the Jerusalem Temple is recounted in 2 Maccabees 3. in some days he will be broken: Seleucus reigned for twelve years, but his reign is dismissed as short and inconsequential. He fell victim to a plot by Heliodorus, hence the emphasis here on the secrecy of his death.*” John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 381–382.

¹⁴ says that this stone will be a witness against them in the last days - ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν. It appears to be the last days of Israel as a nation, so I have placed this in AD 70, but with no degree of certainty.

¹⁵ Hosea 3:5 speaks of Israel seeking David their king (a messianic title) ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν. Though some apply this verse to 539 BC, the Davidic reference seems to point to the Messiah. If Geneva Study Bible is correct, this was fulfilled in Acts 2:38-41. But Premils could potentially use this to prove their "last days" viewpoint.

¹⁶ Micah 4:1 speaks of Messiah's kingdom being "established" ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν. It was established in AD 30.

¹⁷ Isaiah 2:2 speaks of the Messianic kingdom being "established" ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις. It was established in AD 30.

¹⁸ Though many apply this to the whole Messianic age, Peter said that the manifestation of prophecies and tongues on the day of Pentecost was the fulfillment, so it has to include at least AD 30 ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις.

¹⁹ Hebrews 1:1 says that Jesus spoke on earth during the last days - ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν. Jesus ministry went from AD 27-30

²⁰ Though 1 Peter 1:20 does not use the expression, "last days," it speaks of Jesus being manifested "in these last times." Because "last times" is parallel in usage with "last days," this and Jude 18 clearly tie the two to the last days of the Old Covenant. (see Heb. 8:13)

²¹ James, while rebuking the rich Jews who were persecuting the Jewish Christians, predicts the destruction of their gold in AD 67-70 AD. In the middle of his denunciation he says, "Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped [notice the past tense, they have already done it] up treasure in the last days (ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις)." (5:3) So the heaping up happened in the decades before that. The commentator, Fruchtenbaum, concurs. He says, "They are to weep and howl because the A.D. 70 judgment is coming soon, and it will destroy their wealth. They are to weep and howl *for your miseries.*" **Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews, James, First Peter, Second Peter, Jude*, 1st ed.** (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2005), 298. Likewise Newcome defines "last days" as "In the last period of the Jewish economy. 1 John 2:18." **William Newcome, *An Attempt toward Revising Our English Translation of the Greek Scriptures, or the New Covenant of Jesus Christ: And toward Illustrating the Sense by Philological and Explanatory Notes*, vol. 2** (Dublin; London: John Exshaw; J. Johnson, 1796), 421.

²² 1 Timothy 4:1 refers to earlier prophecies (by Christ and other apostles) that a great deception and apostasy was to happen in the last days - ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις. But as he goes on to describe their doctrines it is clear that he is describing things already in the works. These were not doctrinal deviations that would happen 2000 years from them, but something that related to their conduct. Timothy was to instruct the brethren in these things (v. 6), to reject the false doctrine (vv. 7ff.) and to command and teach these things (v. 10). If they were to command the things related to the latter times, then obviously there was an immediate bearing in their lives. JFB comments, "...in the times *following upon the times in which he is now writing*. Not some remote future, but times *immediately subsequent*, the beginnings of the apostasy being already discernible (Ac 20:29): these are the forerunners of "the *last days*" (2 Ti 3:1)" **Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2** (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 412. Spencer says, "Have the later times (4:1) already begun, or are they future times? Normally, later (*hysteros*) by itself refers to some event that follows previous events (e.g., Luke 20:32). In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul probably refers to "later times" after Jesus' "own times" (2:6) in contrast to the future time when Jesus would return (6:14-15). A synonymous term is used in 2 Timothy ("last days," *eschatē, hēmera*, 3:1), which, as in 1 Timothy 4:1-3, refers to activities which appear quite contemporary, such as "lovers of themselves, lovers of money ...)" **Aida Besançon Spencer, *1 Timothy: A New Covenant Commentary*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener, *New Covenant Commentary Series* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 103. Cowles says much the same: "Obviously these "latter times" were not supposed to be very remote even then, for Paul considers the development of heretical opinions then apparent as at least an incipient fulfillment of those predictions." **Henry Cowles, *The Shorter Epistles: Viz: Of Paul to the Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; Thessalonians; Timothy; Titus and Philemon; Also, of James, Peter, and Jude*** (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1879), 249.**

²³ 2 Timothy 3:1 says, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come, men will be lovers of themselves [etc.]" In verse 5 Paul tells Timothy to turn away from them. If this is describing people at the second coming, how could Timothy turn away from them? In verses 7-8 he describes them in the present tense. "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith." And then in verse 9 he encourages Timothy by showing that this apostasy will not be something that will last for all time (he is talking only about the last days of the Old Covenant up to 70 AD, though of course the principles can be applied to any age): "but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all."

²⁴ 2 Peter 3:3 says, "Knowing this first, that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts . . . [in verse 5 he describes them further saying] For this they are deliberately forgetting [present tense. I.e., Peter is talking about people already in existence. Thus he was in the last days, though of course they would get worse in the years to come. Thomas Schreiner says, "...there is no suggestion that the prophecy recorded here was still unfulfilled. Peter believed it was fulfilled in the false teachers that had arrived in the churches he addressed. We see the same phenomenon in 1 Tim 4:1-5; 2 Tim 3:1-9; and Jude 18. Paul himself prophesied that false shepherds would arise among the flock (Acts 20:29-30). Jesus also predicted that false prophets would emerge (Matt 24:3-4, 11)" **Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 372. John Gill mentions three possible interpretations for "last days." His second is, "...in the last days of the Jewish state, both civil and religious, called *the ends of the world*; 1 Cor. 10:11 a little before the destruction of Jerusalem, when iniquity greatly abounded; Matt. 24:11, 12." **John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, vol. 3, *The Baptist Commentary Series* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 606. Cowles says, "It was of the first importance that they recall the predictions of the coming of scoffers in the last days—the days then passing." **Henry Cowles, *The Shorter*******

Epistles; Viz: Of Paul to the Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; Thessalonians; Timothy; Titus and Philemon; Also, of James, Peter, and Jude (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1879), 438

²⁵ Though not using “last days,” Jude 18 speaks of the heresies they were facing as things that had predicted by Jesus and the apostles to happen “in the last time.” He describes in the present tense false teachers who had crept into the church. In verse 12 he says, “These are [present tense] spots in your love feasts.” He tells them in verse 17, “But you beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.” (vv. 17-19) Christ had prophesied in Luke 21 and Matthew 24 that such false teachers would arise, and the other apostles had prophesied the same things would occur in the last times before the end of Jerusalem and the end of the age. Because of these and other parallels, “last times” seems to be parallel in meaning to “last days.” This passage clearly includes Jude as being in the last times.