

EDITORIAL: Sooner or later, one day will be final

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Are we living in the final days?

The question has been asked quite a bit lately. With all the fighting between Hezbollah and the Israeli army, even secular media have wondered if the time has come for the final showdown between good and evil. The End Times question inevitably arises when the nation of Israel goes to battle. Several reasons prompt such speculation.

First, some people say God has a special relationship with Israel. They point to the covenant between God and Abraham, recorded in Genesis 12. They equate the secular political state of Israel with the descendants of Abraham. And they believe God's covenant with Israel—whether Israel is an ancient tribe, a religious people group or a modern nation—extends to today. So, they expect God to protect the nation of Israel.



Second, some people read the highly symbolic message of Revelation literally, interpreting it to mean a battle in the Holy Land could signal The End. This interpretation particularly applies if the fighting reaches the plain of Megiddo. Also known as Armageddon, it was the site of many ancient conflicts and the location of a prophesied battle in Revelation 16:16, “And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” Some interpreters of Revelation assume any battle at Megiddo, particularly a war with religious overtones such as the current conflict, could signal the final good/evil showdown.

Third, still others look to the third chapter of 2 Timothy, which says, “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.” It cites a litany of moral failures and cultural woes: “People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” They point to these signs of “terrible times,” wave a newspaper and proclaim: “See? The end is near.”

So, are we living in the final days? Three answers:

- Yes.

Biblically and theologically speaking, we indeed live in the last days. But so did the apostles, all the popes, Martin Luther, our Baptist forebears and every other Christian.

We can divide history thus far into four epochs—(1) Creation to Abraham; (2) the Old Covenant, from God’s promise to bless the offspring of Abraham to the Messiah; (3) the life of Christ; and (4) the New Covenant or last days, from Ascension to Second Coming. Clearly, the Apostle Paul and first century Christians expected Jesus to return during their lifetimes, and so have believers in every generation. But we all have lived between Christ’s

Resurrection/Ascension and his return, what Paul called the “last days.”

- It’s probably not what you think.

Many people expect the end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it every time the Israeli army fires a gun. They believe God has a special deal to protect Israel, and the final battle will be fought on Israeli soil. This thinking is doubly flawed. First, the Old Covenant, the linchpin of God’s special relationship with Israel, ended with Christ. From a New Testament perspective, the church—not the Jewish people—is the new Israel, the recipient of God’s special relationship. Second, even if the Old Covenant were in effect and God still has a deal with the Jews, the nation of Israel is not the same as the people God promised to bless through Abraham’s “seed.” Although most of its citizens are Jewish, Israel is a secular nation. Many of its citizens are not even observant Jews. And why should the nation of Israel get picked? More Jews live in New York City than in Tel Aviv, Israel’s capital. If God were looking to protect the Jewish people, maybe God would keep a closer eye on Brooklyn than Haifa.

- Maybe; God only knows.

Jesus said even he did not know the day or the hour of his return; only the Father knows. The Bible says that, in God’s timing, a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. So, we have no way of reading God’s calendar. Christians in every generation expected to see Christ’s return and live through the final days, and up to now, each of them has been wrong. Someday, some will be right. Not because they correctly interpret God’s calculus, but because they happen to be alive at the right time.

In the meantime, the days are numbered for each of us. We may not witness the Final Day, but our final day will come. And for us, that moment will be as ultimate as a future apocalypse. In the meantime, may we live

expectantly and faithfully, inviting others to join us on the journey.

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