

Terrible Times In the Last Days

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. (2Timothy 3:1)

This verse reads like a summary of the daily news program. Many believers are confident that the terrible times we are experiencing are the fulfillment of this verse. I'm reminded of the testimony of one of my pastors during my youth. He said something like this, "the Great Depression was beginning; there was much trouble and strife in the United States. Fear had settled upon the nations of the world. Already the looming threat of World War II was gathering on the horizon. Many were feeling that those were the last days, when we should expect the return of Christ. However, even though those days were terrible, they were not 'signs announcing His return.' The Lord Jesus did not come back, but believers found their relationship with Christ sufficient to bring them through those terrible times."

When I was young, I was unaware that many similar times had come into human history during the course of the two thousand years since our Lord's first appearance. Many people take the phrase "the last days" to refer to the time just before Christ's return, but the Biblical usage of that phrase indicates that it refers to the whole period of time between the first coming of our Lord and His second coming now consisting of over 2000 years. In other words, for two millennia, we have been living in the last days. There have been many periods we would call "terrible times." I would suppose that there will be many more such periods, which will demand an intimate walk with Christ in order to pass through them.

In the account in Acts 2 we read that on the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel, in which the prophet said that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2:17). That, Peter said, was beginning to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, almost two millennia ago. So, it is clear that the last days is a period that has now extended to two thousand years' duration. The apostle Paul is saying that within this extended period there will come repetitive cycles of distress (perilous times) when all the conditions that he describes with these chilling words will occur.

As we look back through human history during these last two thousand years of last days, we can see how true that is. Again and again in our Western world, we have had periods of relative peace and prosperity, only to have them interrupted by terrible times of stress and agony that repeatedly come into human affairs. Paul's words to Timothy are not necessarily a prediction of the last days for the church; rather, they are a recognition of the cycle of days like this that will keep coming. One of them is going to be the last one. These times of stress exactly fit the description the apostle uses here. However, whether this is the actual last cycle to come into history before our Lord returns is difficult to say. As in the past, the clouds of peril may disperse, and the sun may break out again.

**NOTES OF ENCOURAGEMENT
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But what the apostle wanted Timothy—and us—to know: Understand this, he says, that these will be dangerous times, times of great stress, times when our faith will be pushed to the limit of its endurance, when our confidence in God's goodness to us will be under attack.