

## The 'Last Days' of James 5: 3

*Scripture references are to the NIV-UK unless stated otherwise.*

**Q** *'Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.'*

What is meant by 'in the last days' in this passage?

**A** The term has prompted some commentators to locate its fulfilment at the 'end time' – the classic 'end of days' or 'time of the end'. If true, then its application contemporary with the church to which James was writing may be untenable.

In his commentary, Adam Clarke opines that the destruction forecast for the 'rich men' was fulfilled in 70 A.D. – less than a decade after this epistle was circulated – when the Romans laid siege against Jerusalem. The warfare against the holy city conducted by the Romans was mirrored inside by the persecution of Jew against Jew. Of this period, Josephus writes:

'As for the richer sort, it proved all one to them whether they stayed in the city or attempted to get out of it; for they were equally destroyed in both cases; for every such person was put to death under this pretence, that they were going to desert – but in reality that the robbers might get what they had.' (*Wars*; Book V, Chap. 10, 2.)

The expression 'last days' might also be rendered 'against the evil day' or 'fully expecting to use it [one's assets] later'. If the apostle's remarks are directed to the wealthy amongst the church – including converted Jews[\*] – who may have been tempted to hoard their riches rather than alleviate the poor, perhaps we can interpret his warning that they would individually receive retribution for their miserly ways. *Comp. 2: 1-7, 14-17*. See [here](#) for a more complete analysis of James 5.

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\* In the remoter regions, to which James addresses his letter, the Christians apparently were not ostracised as in Jerusalem, or they could not have met openly. And the fact that some of them continued to attend at the synagogues suggests that the faith was not yet under persecution in those parts. This fact also seems to suggest that the Christian meetings had retained sufficient Jewishness as to make their doctrine not unattractive to nominal Jews.