

Chapter 3

The Early Escape

Daniel foretold a 490-year timeline for Israel.
Events for 483 of these 490 years have already occurred.
The remaining seven years occur at the end of our Age. (Appendix 3)

God rescues people from earth during the seven-year end-times.
This rescue, or rapture, transports believers to heaven in a split second.
It comes without warning, and leaves many left-behind on earth feeling robbed.

First the bad news. The end-times will bring the worst suffering the world has ever seen. Jesus said of the end-times, *For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.* (Matthew 24:21) There will be global conflict and persecution of Christians. The world will be a miserable place. Jesus told believers: *Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.* (Matthew 24:7-8)

There is good news also. There is a way for God's people to avoid the end-times. A rapture rescues believers from end-time suffering; rapture occurs when God suddenly removes people from earth—taking them up into heaven. The word “rapture” comes from the Latin word “rapio” which means to take away by force. The benefits of an early rapture are obvious. Those leaving earth early will avoid persecution and suffering.

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Jesus and Paul used the words “taken” and “caught up” to refer to rapture. Jesus said, *I tell you on that night, two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.* (Luke 17:34-35) *Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.* (Matthew 24:40-41) To be “left” is to be “left behind” on earth.

Paul wrote that *the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Jesus cited Noah as an example of God protecting believers prior to a worldwide (flood) judgment. To emphasize the point, Jesus cited a second example, the destruction of Sodom. Angels removed Lot and his family from Sodom immediately before God destroyed that city.

“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

“It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. (Luke 17:26-30)

The Controversy

Teaching from universities, pastors, and authors repeat the belief that every Christian will be raptured (removed) from earth at the very start of the seven-year end-time period. This “pre-tribulation” rapture is central to a “dispensational” interpretation of prophecy. Dispensational institutions include Dallas Theological Seminary, Liberty University, and Moody Bible Institute. Three dispensational authors (Tim LaHaye, Jerry Jenkins of the Left Behind series; Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth) sold 100,000,000 books—that is roughly one copy for every seventy persons on earth.

But what if this dispensational approach for end-time prophecy interpretation is invalid? After all, God is not required to conduct business in accordance with dispensational theory. If wrong then the assumption that all believers must be removed for the entire seven-year period—is likely wrong also. The result is catastrophic, that God’s people are unprepared for the approaching end-times. (Appendix 1)

Denominations

Believers identify with a denomination, such as Baptist or Lutheran, or the non-denominational status. God also sorts believers into groups, as being members of the seven churches of Revelation. These churches are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

The Philadelphia Church has a bright future. Jesus promised it protection: *I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.* (Revelation 3:10) The only *hour of trial* that affects the *whole world* is the end-times. In great contrast, Jesus warns the Laodicea Church: *those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.*

TABLE 3-1: TWO FORCASTS

Church	Promise or Warning	Implication
Church #7: Laodicea	<i>Those whom I love I <u>rebuke and discipline.</u></i> (Revelation 3:19)	The predominate end-times church faces discipline—not immediate rapture to heaven.
Church #6: Philadelphia	<i>I will also <u>keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world</u></i> (Revelation 3:10)	The second most predominate end-time church—participates in the early rapture.