

JESUS  
AND THE  
END TIMES

RON RHODES



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## Jesus and the End Times

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# Introduction:

## Jesus and the End Times

When Jesus came to earth as the divine Messiah, He fulfilled the three primary offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. As Prophet, Jesus gave major discourses such as the Upper Room Discourse (John 14–16), the Olivet Discourse, which contains many prophetic teachings (Matthew 24–25), and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). He also spoke as a prophet on many occasions when addressing the kingdom of God (also called the kingdom of heaven).

Unlike human prophets, who were simply God’s spokesmen, Jesus as Prophet is intrinsically omniscient, or all-knowing. He knows the future just as comprehensively as He knows the past. In fact, all who came into close contact with Jesus seemed to sense that He was omniscient or all-knowing. The apostle John said of Jesus, “No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person’s heart” (John 2:25). Jesus’s disciples said, “Now we understand that you know everything, and there’s no need to question you” (16:30). After His resurrection from the dead, when Jesus asked Peter for the third time if Peter loved Him, Peter responded, “Lord, you know everything” (21:17).

Bible scholar Thomas Schultz provides us with an excellent summary of biblical evidences for Christ’s omniscience:

First, He knows the inward thoughts and memories of man, an ability peculiar to God (1 Kings 8:39; Jeremiah 17:9-16). He saw the evil in the hearts of the scribes (Matthew 9:4); He knew beforehand those who would reject Him (John 6:64) and those who would follow Him (John 10:14). He could read the hearts of every man and woman (Mark 2:8; John 1:48; 2:24-25; 4:16-19; Acts 1:24; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Revelation 2:18-23). A mere human can no more than make an intelligent guess as to what is in the hearts and minds of others.

Second, Christ has a knowledge of other facts beyond the possible comprehension of any man. He knew just where the fish were in the water (Luke 5:4,6; John 21:6-11), and He knew just which fish contained the coin in its mouth (Matthew 17:27). He knew future events (John 11:11; 18:4), details that would be encountered (Matthew 21:2-4), and He knew that Lazarus had died (John 11:14).

Third, He possessed an inner knowledge of the Godhead showing the closest possible communion with God as well as perfect knowledge. He knows the Father as the Father knows Him (Matthew 11:27; John 7:29; 8:55; 10:15; 17:25).

The fourth and consummating teaching of Scripture along this line is that Christ knows all things (John 16:30; 21:17), and that in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3).<sup>1</sup>

An additional evidence for Christ's omniscience is that He hears and answers the prayers of His people all over the world (Acts 7:59; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; 2 Corinthians 12:8-9; Revelation 22:20). "When Jesus claimed for himself the prerogative to hear and to answer the prayers of his disciples," New Testament scholar Robert Reymond suggests, "he was making an implicit claim to the possession of omniscience. One who can hear the innumerable prayers of his disciples, offered to him night and day, day in and day out

throughout the centuries, keep each request infallibly related to its petitioner, and answer them in accordance with the divine mind and will would need himself to be omniscient.”<sup>2</sup> That’s a pretty amazing insight.

Of course, the point I am building up to is that Jesus—as omniscient deity—comprehensively knows the future. This means that His prophetic teachings about the future are trustworthy. He knows what He’s talking about. Count on it.

### **Christ Spoke Through the Old Testament Prophets**

In 1 Peter 1:10-11, the apostle Peter spoke of the prophets and their words about salvation in Christ: “This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ’s suffering and his great glory afterward.”

Scholars have debated what may be meant by the phrase “Spirit of Christ.” Grammatically, the phrase may refer either to Christ Himself (as the Spirit *of* Christ) or to the Holy Spirit (as the Spirit *from* Christ). The form of the word in the original Greek text is the same in either case (*Christou*).<sup>3</sup>

A number of scholars have concluded that it was indeed Christ’s spirit who was at work in the prophets.<sup>4</sup> Based on this verse, Clement of Alexandria suggested that Jesus was “the Prophet of prophets, and Lord of all the prophetic spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

Along these same lines, theologian Millard Erickson summarizes:

Christ’s revealing work covers a wide span of time and forms. He first functioned in a revelatory fashion even before his incarnation. As the Logos, he is the light which has enlightened everyone coming into the world; thus, in a sense all truth has come from and through him (John

1:9). There are indications that Christ himself was at work in the revelations which came through the prophets who bore a message about him... (1 Peter 1:11). Although not personally incarnate, Christ was already making the truth known.”<sup>6</sup>

Bible scholar R.C.H. Lenski in like manner commented that in 1 Peter 1:11, “the deity and the pre-existence of Christ are involved: Christ’s Spirit testified in advance about Christ’s sufferings and glories, that is, when as the incarnate Logos he would suffer in his humiliation and after that be crowned with glories in his exaltation.”<sup>7</sup>

I am convinced this is the correct view. But for those who are not sure, one further consideration bears mentioning. Even if the phrase “Spirit of Christ” refers not to Christ’s spirit but to the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of Christ” was doing Christ’s bidding in the prophets—*providing prophetic truth on Christ’s behalf*. In John 16:14-15, Jesus affirmed of the Holy Spirit, “He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me... The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.”

### **Christ’s Prophetic Teachings in the Gospels**

Christ spoke quite a bit about biblical prophecy in the New Testament Gospels. Much of it is found in His Olivet Discourse, so named because He was sitting on the Mount of Olives when He delivered the discourse (Matthew 24–25). The disciples had come to Him to inquire, “What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?” (24:3). The entire Olivet Discourse should be viewed as His response to this question.

Highlights of Jesus’s teaching in this discourse include His prediction of the signs of the end of the age—including the appearance of false Christs, wars, earthquakes, famines, the profaning of the Jewish temple, various cosmic disturbances, and the sign of His



coming (Matthew 24:4-31). He also spoke of how the end times will be much like the days of Noah:

In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes (Matthew 24:38-39).

Jesus consistently stressed the importance of being ready for when He returns (Matthew 24:32-35,45-51; 25:1-13,14-30). He also prophesied about the judgment of the nations that will transpire immediately following His second coming (25:31-46). This judgment will determine who will be permitted to enter into Christ's millennial kingdom (more on all this later in the book).

Of course, Jesus set forth other prophetic teachings aside from those found in the Olivet Discourse. He affirmed, for example, that He would one day come for His followers at the rapture and bring them back with Him to heaven (John 14:1-3). In this book we will see that prophecy was a major component of the teachings of Christ throughout His three-year ministry. We would therefore be wise to pay close attention to His prophetic teachings.

### **The Course of the Present Age**

Jesus also spoke prophetically about the course of the present age. The theological backdrop to this is that the Davidic kingdom (2 Samuel 7:8-14) had been offered to the Jewish people by the divine Messiah, Jesus Christ (Matthew 11-12). However, the Jewish leaders not only rejected Jesus, but claimed His miracles were performed not in the power of the Holy Spirit but in the power of Satan, the *un*holy spirit. This constituted a definitive

and flagrant turning away from Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. The apostle Paul informed us that this is why a judicial blindness and hardening was inflicted upon Israel as a judgment from God—a blindness and hardening that will not be removed until the end times (Romans 11:25).

God's kingdom program was thereby altered, with a delay in the coming of the offered kingdom. In fact, it will be delayed until the future 1,000-year millennial kingdom, which will follow the second coming of Christ.

That being the case, Jesus, in Matthew 13, provided insights to His followers as to what the course of the present age would be like up till the time of His second coming. Jesus provided these insights in the form of parables.

The word *parable* means “a placing alongside of” for the purpose of comparison. A parable is a teaching tool. Jesus often told a story from real life—involving, for example, a woman who lost a coin, or a shepherd watching over sheep, or a worker in a vineyard—and used that story to illustrate some particular spiritual truth. By taking such a story and “placing it alongside” a spiritual truth, Jesus helped His followers to understand His spiritual teachings more clearly. As an example, His story of the good shepherd helps us to understand that Jesus watches over us and guides us, just as a shepherd watches over and guides sheep.

Some of Jesus's parables provide us insights on the course of the present age. I will address these prophetic parables in detail in chapter 6. To whet your appetite, however, the parable of the sower teaches that this age will be characterized by the sowing of the gospel seed onto different kinds of soil (Matthew 13:1-23). This reveals that there will be various kinds of responses to the gospel, including opposition to the gospel from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The parable of the tares indicates that the true sowing of the

gospel seed will be imitated by a false counter-sowing (Matthew 13:24-30). Only a judgment following the future tribulation period will separate the “wheat” (true believers) from the “weeds” (unbelievers, or false believers).

The parable of the mustard seed indicates that God’s spiritual kingdom would have an almost imperceptible beginning—hardly even noticeable. But just as a small mustard seed can produce a large plant (it can grow up past 15 feet high), so God’s spiritual kingdom would start small but grow to be very large in the world by the time of the second coming (Matthew 13:31-32).

The parable of the hidden treasure has been interpreted in various ways by biblical scholars (Matthew 13:44). Many believe Jesus was pointing to the incredible value of the true kingdom of heaven, as opposed to counterfeit belief systems (such as the cults and false religions that are so prominent in our day). Those who truly see the kingdom’s importance will do anything within their power to possess it. They will allow nothing to stand in their way.

In the parable of the net (Matthew 13:47-50), Jesus indicated that up until the second coming, when judgment will take place, there will be both genuine Christians and phony (professing) Christians that coexist within the kingdom. At the end of the age, there will be a separation of the righteous from the unrighteous, just as good fish are separated from bad fish caught in a net. The righteous (that is, true believers) will be invited into Christ’s kingdom, while the unrighteous (professing believers who are actually unbelievers) will be excluded from His kingdom and sent to a place of suffering (see Matthew 25:31-46).

We conclude from these (and other) parables that Jesus’s prophetic teachings address not only the more distant end times, but also describe the religious landscape in the many centuries that precede the end times. Jesus, as God, was omnisciently able to see the entire panoramic sweep of human history, right up till the end.

## **The Book of Revelation—a Revelation from Jesus Christ**

In Revelation 1:1-2 we read, “This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John, who faithfully reported everything he saw.” The phrase “revelation *from* Jesus Christ” can also be translated “revelation *of* Jesus Christ.” It is likely that both senses are intended in this verse. The book of Revelation contains prophetic truth that comes *from* Jesus Christ and is also *about* Jesus Christ.

Notice that “God gave” this revelation to Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1). This simply means that God the Father gave this revelation to God the Son. The Father is the source. Jesus is the revealer. This reminds us of John 12:49, where Jesus affirmed, “I don’t speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it.”

Jesus, in the book of Revelation, reveals “events that must soon take place” (Revelation 1:1). This should not be taken to mean that the events described in Revelation would all take place within a few years of the time John saw them. John recorded Revelation in the Greek language, and the Greek word translated “soon” can mean “quickly,” “swiftly,” “speedily,” and “at a rapid rate” (see Luke 18:8). In Revelation 1:1, the term indicates that when the predicted events first start to occur in the end times, they will then progress rapidly.

I have written separately about the book of Revelation (see *40 Days Through Revelation*, published by Harvest House Publishers). Here in this book, we will see that Christ’s prophetic teachings in Revelation coincide quite nicely with His prophetic teachings in the four Gospels, especially the Olivet Discourse.

## **Be Accurate Observers of the End Times**

In view of the importance Christ gave to prophetic truths, we should all seek to be accurate observers of the times. We are

motivated to do this when we consider Jesus's words in Matthew 16:1-3:

One day the Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus, demanding that he show them a miraculous sign from heaven to prove his authority.

He replied, "You know the saying, 'Red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow; red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.' You know how to interpret the weather signs in the sky, but you don't know how to interpret the signs of the times!"

What a rebuke! These guys—the religious elite of the time—were supposed to know the teachings of the prophets, and yet they were completely unable to properly discern the times. The Pharisees and Sadducees had been surrounded by spiritual signs of Jesus's identity and they had missed them all. They were blinded to the reality that the Messiah was with them. Jesus's miracles pointed to His divine identity just as surely as dark clouds signal rain. The Old Testament prophesied about the Messiah's miracles—the blind will see, the deaf will hear, and the lame will walk (Isaiah 35:5-6). The Pharisees and Sadducees—experts in the Old Testament—should have realized that Jesus fulfilled these messianic verses. After all, blind people were given sight, deaf people were enabled to hear, and lame people could now walk. But in their blindness and hardened hearts, these religious leaders could not "interpret the signs of the times."

*Let's not follow their example.* Let's seek to understand the prophetic signs of the times relating to end-time events leading up to Christ's second coming and beyond.

Jesus also urged, "Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things, you can know

his return is very near, right at the door” (Matthew 24:32-33). In this passage, Jesus indicated that God has revealed certain things in prophecy that ought to cause people who know the Bible to understand that a fulfillment of prophecy is taking place—or perhaps the stage is being set for a prophecy to eventually be fulfilled. Jesus was thus informing His followers to be accurate observers of the times so that they could take note when biblical prophecies were being fulfilled (see also Luke 21:25-28). I encourage you to reflect on this often as we proceed through the book. (I’ll provide more details on the parable of the fig tree in chapter 4.)

*Lord, by the power of Your Spirit, please enable us to understand the prophetic teachings of our blessed Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus Christ. As we proceed, please excite us with Your Word and instill a sense of awe for the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You in Jesus’s name. Amen.*

## The Rapture

**T**he rapture is a glorious event in which Christ will descend from heaven, the dead in Christ will be resurrected, and living Christians will be instantly translated into their glorified bodies. Both groups will be caught up to meet Christ in the air and taken back to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54). This means one generation of Christians will never pass through death's door.

The rapture will be an instantaneous event—"in a moment, in the blink of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52). One moment Christians will be on earth in their mortal bodies, and the next moment they will meet Christ in the clouds, instantly transformed into their glorified bodies.

The apostle Paul calls this event a "wonderful secret":

Let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed

into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

The Greek word translated “secret” in this passage means “mystery.” A mystery, in the biblical sense, is a truth that cannot be discerned merely by human investigation but requires special revelation from God. Generally, this word refers to a truth that was unknown to people living in Old Testament times but is now revealed to us by God (Matthew 13:17; Colossians 1:26). The doctrine of the resurrection was known in Old Testament times (Job 19:25-27; Psalm 49:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2), but the doctrine of the rapture was not revealed until New Testament times (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-52; Revelation 3:10). Jesus Himself spoke about the rapture several times in His prophetic teachings.

### **Jesus Promises to Rapture Us**

John 14–16 contains Jesus’s Upper Room Discourse. In John 14:1-3, Jesus gives us an amazing prophecy of the rapture:

Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

My former prophecy mentor at Dallas Theological Seminary, John F. Walvoord, had a great insight on this passage of Scripture:

These verses are the Bible’s first revelation of the rapture, in



which Christ will come back to take His own to heaven. He exhorted the disciples not to be troubled. Since they trusted the Father, they also should trust Christ, whose power was demonstrated in His many miracles. Having referred to Himself as the Source of peace, Jesus spoke of His coming to take them to heaven. They need not be anxious about His leaving because later He would return for them.<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of what happens in this world, we do not need to be troubled. Why not? Because we know the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. He is the source of our peace, and the peace He gives does not depend on circumstances: “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid” (John 14:27). We need not worry. We need not fear. This is especially so because we know that Christ is coming for us at the rapture. We may not know precisely *when* Christ is coming for us, but the *fact* that He is coming for us can be a huge boost to our emotions.

### **The Bride/Bridegroom Metaphor**

Scripture portrays Christ as the Bridegroom (John 3:29) and the church as His bride (Revelation 19:7). The backdrop to this imagery is rooted in Hebrew weddings, which had three phases. First, the marriage betrothal—a binding commitment often arranged a year or more prior to marriage—was legally consummated by the parents of the bride and groom, after which the groom went to prepare a place to live in his father’s house. Next, the bridegroom came to claim his bride. Finally, there was a wedding and marriage supper, which could last several days. All three of these phases are seen in Christ’s relationship to the church, the bride of Christ, and are particularly relevant to our understanding of Christ’s teaching on the rapture in John 14:1-3.

1. As individuals living during the church age come to salvation, under the Father's loving and sovereign hand, they become a part of the bride of Christ (the church) (see John 6:44,65). Meanwhile, Christ, the Bridegroom, is in heaven, preparing a place for the bride of Christ to live in His Father's house (John 14:2).

2. The Bridegroom (Jesus Christ) will one day come to claim His bride (at the rapture) and take her to heaven, where He has prepared a place for her (John 14:1-3). The actual marriage will take place in heaven prior to the second coming (Revelation 19:6-16).

3. The marriage supper of the Lamb will follow the second coming, prior to Christ's setting up of the millennial kingdom (see Daniel 12:11; compare with Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13).

We can see other parallels as well. Just as Jewish grooms paid a purchase price to establish the marriage covenant, so Jesus paid a purchase price for the church (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Also, just as a Jewish bride was declared sanctified or set apart in waiting for her groom, so the church is declared sanctified and set apart for Christ the Bridegroom (Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; Hebrews 10:10; 13:12). And just as a Jewish bride was unaware of the exact time her groom would come for her, so the church is unaware of the exact time Jesus the Bridegroom will come at the rapture, though it is an imminent event. It could happen at any time.

This idea of imminence supports a pretribulational rapture. After all, if the rapture takes place after the tribulation, the rapture would be preceded by seven years of prophetic signs. We would therefore be able to predict when the Bridegroom would come for His bride. The bride/Bridegroom metaphor seems much more in keeping with a pretribulational rapture, with the bride (the church) not knowing precisely when the Bridegroom will come for her.

### **Parallels Between Jesus and Paul**

It is interesting to see how similar Jesus's teachings on the rapture

are to those of the apostle Paul. One need only compare Jesus's prophetic words in John 14:1-3 with Paul's prophetic words in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 to see noticeable parallels:

- John 14:3 depicts Jesus as coming to the earth (“I will come”), which obviously involves a descent from the heavenly realm. Likewise, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul said Christ “will come down from heaven.”
- In John 14:3 Jesus said to believers: “I...will take you to myself” (ESV). In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Paul revealed that believers will be “caught up” to meet Christ in the air.
- In John 14:3 Jesus revealed that believers will be with Him (“you will always be with me where I am”). In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Paul affirmed that believers “will be with the Lord forever.”
- In John 14:1 Jesus revealed that the purpose of this revelation about the rapture is so that the hearts of Christ's followers would not be troubled. Likewise, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13,18, Paul revealed that the purpose of this revelation about the rapture was to minimize grief and bring encouragement.

Of course, it is not surprising that there are such similarities between Jesus's and Paul's teachings. After all, Jesus Himself affirmed that Paul was “my chosen instrument” who will speak “my message” (Acts 9:15). This means that Paul's words about the rapture were part of Christ's message.

### **Christ Is the Architect and Builder of Our Eternal Home**

Prophetic Scripture reveals that Jesus Himself is the Architect and Builder of our eternal home, to which He will take us immediately following the rapture. He told His followers, “I am going to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). I love pondering this verse. Sometimes when I go outside at night, I look up and see thousands

of stars illuminating the sky. It boggles the mind to ponder that the same Christ who created the entire stellar universe (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16) is the One who is building a place for us in the Father's house (John 14:1-3).

Let's camp here for a moment. Consider the sheer magnitude of the stellar universe. Astronomers tell us that only about 4,000 stars are visible to the unaided human eye. Yet astronomers—using powerful telescopes—have discovered that there are more than 10 million billion billion stars in the known universe. And truth be told—who knows how many stars exist beyond the reach of our finite telescopes? The likelihood is that our universe is far more immense than our finite instruments could even begin to detect.<sup>2</sup>

The grandeur of the universe is evident not only in the number of stars, but also in their incredible distances from each other. Allow me to use an illustration. A ray of light travels at 186,000 miles per second. It would take that ray of light 2 minutes and 18 seconds to reach Venus because it's 26 million miles away. It would take four-and-one-half minutes for that ray to reach planet Mercury because it's 50 million miles away. The ray would take 35 minutes to reach Jupiter because it's 367 million miles away. Saturn would take an hour and 11 seconds because it's 790 million miles away. Pluto would take much longer because it's 2.7 billion miles away. Even then, we still haven't left our solar system.

The North Star is an incredible 400 hundred billion miles away. That sounds immense, but when compared to the size of the known universe, it's a relatively short distance. There's a star named Betelgeuse that is a phenomenal 880 quadrillion miles from us and has a diameter of 250 million miles. The diameter of this gargantuan star is greater than the earth's orbit around the sun. *Mind-blowing!*

As staggering as all this sounds, the entire universe, in all of its glory, was created through the agency of Jesus Christ: "Through him

[Christ] God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:16). John 1:3 says of Christ, “God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.”

Whether one is contemplating the incredible glory of the stars above, or fixing one's eyes upon beautiful sights on earth, none can deny that Jesus has amazing creative abilities. Anne Graham Lotz offers this inspiring insight about God the Son's creative abilities:

Who created all the earthly beauty we have grown to love... the majestic snowcapped peaks of the Alps, the rushing mountain streams, the brilliantly colored fall leaves, the carpets of wildflowers, the glistening fin of a fish as it leaps out of a sparkling sea, the graceful gliding of a swan across the lake, the lilting notes of a canary's song, the whirl of a hummingbird's wings, the shimmer of the dew on the grass in early morning... This is the same Creator who has prepared our heavenly home for us! If God could make the heavens and earth as beautiful as we think they are today—which includes thousands of years of wear and tear, corruption and pollution, sin and selfishness—can you imagine what the new heaven and the new earth will look like? It will be much more glorious than any eyes have seen, any ears have heard, or any minds have ever conceived.<sup>3</sup>

Revelation 21–22 reveals that the place Christ is now creating for us is a heavenly city called “the New Jerusalem.” In this city, God will live directly with redeemed humankind—face to face (Revelation 21:3; compare with Leviticus 26:11-12; Deuteronomy 12:5). Here at last we find unfettered companionship between the Creator and His creation. And God “will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.

All these things are gone forever” (Revelation 21:4). There will be no more disease, no more weakness, no more decay, no more coffins, no more funerals, and no more graves. There will be no reason for tears. Life in the eternal city will be painless, tearless, and deathless.

*This* is the place Jesus was referring to when He told His followers, “I am going to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). Immediately following the rapture—when the dead in Christ are raised, living believers are instantly transformed into their glorified bodies, and we all meet the Lord in the air—we’ll all go straight to this glorious heavenly city that Christ has prepared for us. How awesome it will be!

### **Jesus on the Timing of the Rapture**

Jesus revealed in the book of Revelation that the rapture of the church will take place prior to the beginning of the tribulation—a seven-year period of God’s judgment upon the world that precedes the second coming. In Revelation 3:10, Jesus makes this promise to the church at Philadelphia: “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” (ESV). While the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 were historical churches in Asia Minor, many scholars believe these churches may also point in a secondary way to churches in the succeeding centuries of church history. If this is correct, then Revelation 3:10 may have application to the future rapture. We know for a fact that Jesus’s statement to the church at Philadelphia was not intended to be limited to that church alone. After all, in the same passage, Jesus said, “Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying *to the churches*” (verse 13).

That being the case, let’s unpack this verse a bit. Notice that there is a definite article (“the”) before the phrase “hour of trial” in Revelation 3:10 (“*the* hour of trial”) (ESV). In the English language, definite

articles do not hold too much significance. But in the Greek language they are very important. Among other things, definite articles can indicate specificity. In Revelation 3:10, the definite article points to a specific and distinctive time period, not just any “hour of trial.” There is good reason to believe it is a reference to the future tribulation period, which will be a seven-year “hour of trial” (ESV). This period of trial—the tribulation—is described in detail in Revelation 4–18. It is from this period of trial that the church is to be exempted.

I don’t want to make too fine a point of it, but it’s critical that you not miss Jesus’s declaration that the church is to be kept *from the time period itself*. If the Lord meant to communicate that He would preserve church believers *through* this time of testing, He would not have said, “I will keep you *from* the hour of trial.”

The Greek preposition (*ek*), translated “from” in this verse (“I will keep you *from* the hour of trial”), carries the idea of *separation* from something. This means that believers will be kept from the hour of testing in the sense that they will be completely separated from it by being raptured before the period begins (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9).

Renald Showers, in his helpful book *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!*, suggests that “the language in Jesus’s reference to this future period of worldwide testing implied that it was well-known to the church saints. It was well-known because both Old and New Testament Scriptures, written years before Revelation, foretold this unique, future period of testing or Tribulation, which would take place prior to the coming of the Messiah to rule the world in the Messianic Age or Millennium (Isa. 2:10-21; Dan. 12:1; Zeph. 1:14-18; Mt. 24:4-31).”<sup>4</sup>

Of course, this verse promises that *only church-age saints* will be kept out of this hour of trial that will come upon the entire earth. Those who become believers during the hour of trial itself—whom we might call tribulation saints—will go through the remainder of the tribulation. This is an important observation, as noted by

prophecy expert Arnold Fruchtenbaum in his book *The Footsteps of the Messiah*:

Throughout the Tribulation, saints are being killed on a massive scale (Rev. 6:9–11; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7, 15; 14:13; 17:6; 18:24). If these saints are Church saints, they are not being kept safe and Revelation 3:10 is meaningless. Only if Church saints and Tribulation saints are kept distinct does the promise of Revelation 3:10 make any sense.<sup>5</sup>

One may wonder how people will become believers during the tribulation period. Perhaps they become convinced of the truth of Christianity after witnessing millions of Christians supernaturally vanish off the planet at the rapture. Or perhaps they will become believers as a result of the ministry of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists introduced in Revelation 7 (who themselves come to faith in Christ sometime after the rapture). Or maybe they will become believers as a result of the miraculous ministry of the two witnesses of Revelation 11, prophets who apparently will have the same kinds of powers as Moses and Elijah. As well, Christian literature will be left behind after the rapture, and many may come to faith after reading such books.

### **What About Jesus's Prophecy in Matthew 24:40-41?**

Some Christians appeal to Jesus's prophecy in Matthew 24:40-41 and claim that Jesus taught the rapture will occur following the tribulation period, not before it. In this passage, Jesus stated, "Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left." It is reasoned that because this passage occurs in a second-coming context, it must refer to a posttribulational rapture.

The problem with this view is that a comparison of this passage to a key cross-reference shows that those who are taken are removed



not in the rapture, but are *taken away in judgment*, to be punished. In Luke 17:35-37, Jesus states, “There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left. And they said to him, ‘Where, Lord?’ He said to them, ‘Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather” (ESV). Those who are “taken” become corpses that feed the vultures. This type of language was often used among the Jews as a metaphor for judgment (see Ezekiel 28:26; 32:4-6; 39:17-20; 1 Samuel 17:44; Psalm 79:2). Hence, the passage does not refer to being taken in the rapture, but rather, being taken away in judgment. Those who are “left” are the righteous who will enter into Christ’s millennial kingdom on earth (see Matthew 25:31-46).

I will address Jesus’s teachings on judgment and the millennial kingdom later in the book. In this next chapter, we will zero in on Jesus’s teachings about the tribulation period, which follows the rapture.