

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 2)

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, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.* (Matthew 24:21)

There will be global conflict and persecution against 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)

But there is good news also. There is a way for God's people to avoid the end-times. The 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 tremendous suffering and persecution.

Scripture has already recorded the sudden removal of people from earth up to heaven. Elijah was taken to heaven in a whirlwind. (2 Kings 2:11) At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus was taken into heaven from the Mount of Olives. (Acts 1:9) Perhaps Enoch was one of many believers raptured—years before Noah’s flood ended the previous Age. (Genesis 5:24)

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)

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.* (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

God’s Rescue

Perhaps the most controversial and critical aspect of end-time prophecy interpretation focuses on the sudden rapture of believers from earth to heaven. This event is a much-needed rescue during the traumatic final seven years. Teaching from universities, pastors, and authors alike echo the belief that every Christian must be raptured (removed) from earth at the very start of the seven-year end-time period, prior to the seven-year tribulation.

This pre-tribulation rapture is central to the “dispensational” interpretation of prophecy. Institutions with a dispensational focus include Liberty University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Moody Bible Institute. Three prominent dispensational authors (Tim LaHaye, Jerry Jenkins (Left Behind series), and Hal Lindsey (The Late Great Planet Earth)) combined for 100,000,000 books sold—about one copy for every seventy persons on earth.

But what if this dispensational approach for end-time prophecy interpretation is an invalid approach? 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 increasingly unprepared for the approaching end-times. (Appendix 1)

God’s Denominations

All believers belong to one body—the body of Christ. Paul correctly stated that *we are members of his body*. (see Ephesians 5:30) Within this body, believers often identify with a specific denomination, such as Baptist or Lutheran, or claim a non-denominational status.

God also sorts believers into groups—as members of the seven churches of Revelation. The end-time churches are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Recall that the Philadelphia church has a bright end-time outlook. Jesus promised this church: *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 contrast, Laodicea members are warned of difficult times. Jesus said, *those whom I love I rebuke and discipline*. Most believers will receive end-time discipline; yet some believers will be rescued. That only some believers are raptured early is not a matter of pride; every believer is vulnerable for being left-behind. Scripture instructs every believer to pray that we will escape the end-times. (Luke 21:36).

Jesus taught us how to avoid the end-times. He told us to *pray that you may be able to escape!* Jesus said, *be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.* (Luke 21:36) Much is at stake that should compel us to pray. Instead of being left-behind to suffer on earth—we could be safely raptured up heaven *to stand before the Son of Man*—to stand before Jesus!

TABLE 3-1: TWO FORCASTS

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

Some believers will watch and pray; others will not. There are serious consequences for inaction, communicated in phrases like “partial rapture” and “left behind.” These phrases capture our interest—they ring true—because these events are so very true.

There are other examples of Jesus teaching about an early rapture. Jesus cited *Noah* as an example of God protecting believers prior to a worldwide (flood) judgment. As if to emphasize this point, Jesus immediately 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)

Like in the days of Noah, people today are *eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage*. As in the days of Lot, people are also *eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building*. Many believers are greatly enjoying life, and devoting precious little to God—we are simply too busy.

Consequently, Jesus warned us to *remember Lot's wife!* (Luke 17:32) Lot's wife looked back fondly at the world that God called her to leave, and was destroyed. (Genesis 19:26) Similar to Lot's wife, many end-time believers will face destruction; many will be left-behind to suffer at the hands of Antichrist.

Finally, in perfect sequence, Jesus described this early rapture.

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)