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Dr. John F. Walvoord's final book on prophecy and world events.

The 21st century has opened with a bang. Three years have been filled with a rush of history that has left the world's population dizzy and grappling for stability. Yet events only promise to accelerate. But accelerate toward . . . *what?*

Although we don't know exactly when the prophecies of the last days will be fulfilled, today's headlines do nothing to make us think Christ couldn't be coming soon! In *Prophecy in the New Millennium*, Dr. John F. Walvoord gives a concise, insightful analysis of current trends that could be setting the table for the Second Coming. And he presents a fresh look at prophetic topics that include Israel, the Antichrist, the rapture, the Second Coming, and the new heaven and new earth.

Please accept a copy of ***Prophecy in the New Millennium*** by Dr. John Walvoord as our thank you for your support of God's work at Dallas Theological Seminary.

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Equipping Christians to live by truth—veritas—from God.



Dr. John F. Walvoord, who went to be with his Lord on December 20, 2002, was the second and

longest-serving president of Dallas Theological Seminary, serving from 1952 to 1986, subsequently assuming the positions of chancellor and chancellor emeritus. During his tenure, Dallas Seminary grew to become an international fountainhead of scholars, pastors, missionaries, and ministry leaders who pushed forward the influence of conservative theology and spirituality in all areas of society. And even in the last of his 92 years on earth, Dr. Walvoord kept up a busy schedule of teaching, writing, and mentoring. Though his written works span the range of theology, he was described as one who "defined contemporary eschatology for an entire generation." Of his XX books, many were on the subject of prophecy and the second coming of Christ.

Dr. Walvoord gave this address on "the blessed hope" at a Seminary retreat.

Fastening Your Grip on the Blessed Hope

Dr. John F. Walvoord

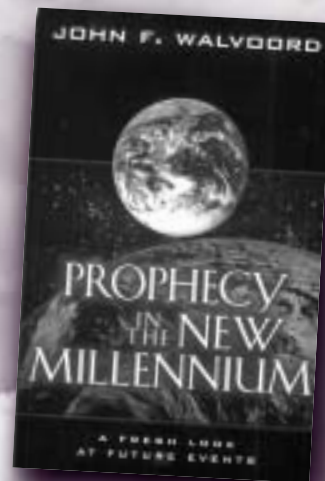
In the study of prophecy it seems to me that the central point is the fact that Christ is coming for us in what we call the rapture of the church. First Thessalonians 4:13–18 gives us a description of exactly what is going to happen when the Lord comes in the rapture of the church, or what the apostle Paul calls in Titus 2:13 "the blessed hope" of the coming of Christ for His own.

While Paul was in Thessalonica, he taught the believers the truth of the rapture, that Christ was going to come and that they would be changed and caught up to be in the presence of the Lord.

He also taught them that there was going to come a time of great trial and tribulation for the world and that this seemingly would follow the rapture of the church. They were told to look for the coming of the Lord. And their

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questions were, “What about our loved ones who have died? Will they be resurrected when we are raptured, or will we have to wait until after the time of trouble when Christ comes to set up His kingdom?”

So in this passage Paul gives us in detail exactly what is going to happen when the rapture takes place.

Obviously there are a lot of different points of view in the matter of interpreting the prophecies of the Bible. Of course, when you get into it you discover there isn't any Christian truth that isn't controversial. No matter what you teach, there is someone else who teaches the opposite. And prophecy is no exception to that.

No matter what you teach, there is someone else who teaches the opposite. And prophecy is no exception to that.

I believe the Bible does tell us some things very plainly about prophetic truth and future events. There are other things that are more obscure. And some things, God doesn't tell us at all. We should respect the silence of God and not try to create something He didn't say. On the other hand, I think we should pay very close attention to what He *does* say.

Revelation 1:3 tells of a special blessing for those who read and take heed to the words of prophecy. I once had a pastor, when I was a teenager, who told us never to read the book of Revelation. He said, “All you'll do is get confused, and it

won't teach you anything.”

Apparently he hadn't read it himself! If he had, he would have discovered he was missing a blessing. Because that's what the book says!

I'm afraid the rapture is going to be quite a surprise for some Christians who have never studied prophecy. But God has wonderful plans for us—plans that should be a joy and anticipation to us. And that is why one-fourth of the Bible was prophetic when it was written.

How Does Hope Dispel Our Sorrow?

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, the word “asleep” refers to death. The point is that when Christians die, it is just temporary. The day is going to come when they will rise from the dead. Paul doesn't want believers to be ignorant concerning their loved ones who have died, “that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope.”

The Bible does not minimize human sorrow. I don't think God expects us as Christians to always be joyful every moment no matter what happens. We have sorrows. Christ wept at the tomb of Lazarus even though He knew He was going to raise him from the dead.

Sorrows are very real, but the difference is that the Christian has hope. He has comfort.

And in verse 14, Paul deals with the subject of resurrection and the *certainty* of this hope that is ours. He says, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them

also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” This is what is called in Greek grammar a first-class condition. It could be translated “for since” or “because we believe.”

You see, the Thessalonians believed in the death and resurrection of Christ.

The death of Christ is a constant theme of the Old Testament, and there are many passages that imply His resurrection. Psalm 16:10 says, “Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” Yes, Christ would die, but His body would not see corruption; He would be raised from the dead. The Old Testament prophesied this.

In the New Testament, this is no longer a prophecy; it is history. One of the things you learn in the study of prophecy is that God can be just as precise, just as detailed, as He is in history. God has before Him the whole panorama of the past and the future; He sees it all. It is no problem for Him to describe a future event in detail. And so He does here.

When a Christian Dies

When a Christian dies, a physician can determine medically that he is dead, but from a theological standpoint a person dies when the soul leaves the body.

In 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul speaks of being absent from the body and present with the Lord. When a believer in Christ dies, his soul doesn't stay in the body. We bury the body but we don't bury the soul! The soul goes *immediately* into the

presence of the Lord. And you and I are comforted when we lose loved ones in Christ by the fact that when they are released from the pain and struggle of this life, they are immediately in the joyous presence of the Lord, awaiting their future resurrection.

When the Lord comes and the day of resurrection occurs, Christ is going to bring the souls of Christians who have died from heaven back to the sphere of earth. And as the verses that follow describe, He is going to give a command and order their resurrection. And their soul is going to enter that resurrection body forever. They will never die again.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and following, notice that Paul doesn't quote the Old Testament. The Old Testament is clear that the saints will be resurrected, but the rapture of living saints is not specifically prophesied in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, Enoch and Elijah went up to heaven without dying. They are illustrations of the rapture but, except for them, everybody else in history has lived and died. There were no exceptions except for the current generation.

So Paul brings our attention to the fact that what he is telling them is something the Lord gave them,

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revealed to Paul especially:

“This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we [that is, Christians] who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [or precede] them who are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up [or ‘snatched up’ or ‘raptured’] together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words.”

(1 Thessalonians 4:15-18)

Their question was, will we have to wait for our loved ones when the day of the rapture comes for those of us who are living?

The answer: You won't have to wait. Why?

Because they are going to be resurrected just a moment before you are translated. And then we will join them and meet the Lord in the air.

What else is going to happen? Verse 16 says, “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout.” The Lord is at the right hand of the Father now interceding for us. Temporarily, He is going to leave that throne and come to the air above the earth. *In the rapture there is no indication that His feet touch the earth at all, in contrast to His*

later Second Coming. And He is going to issue a shout.

The word for “shout” is also a command. He is going to *order* it. In John 5:28 our Lord says, “Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,” some to everlasting life and some to everlasting contempt. We learn in Revelation 20 that there are a thousand years between those two events. The point is, in both cases Christ is the only one who has the authority to raise the dead.

How Does a Body Exit Its Grave?

The trumpet that attends the rapture is the trumpet associated with the coming of Christ for His own, and it's going to be accompanied by the voice of the archangel Michael. When this happens, 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 says, “. . . the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up [or ‘shall be raptured’] together with them.”

Once an artist tried to picture this scene with a beautiful cemetery with green grass and tombstones. And it showed Christ in the air with the saints rising from earth to meet Him. The artist showed over each grave a little, fresh tuft of dirt to capture the idea that a body had left the ground and had risen to meet the Lord in the air. The artist may be right, but I'm not sure that it's necessary to disturb the ground to extract the body of a resurrected person.

On the night of His resurrection, Christ met with the disciples in the Upper Room, and the door was locked and He just went right through the walls. Suddenly He stood in their midst. Apparently our resurrection bodies will not be confined like our present bodies by material things.

This is interesting because in the case of the resurrection of Christ, in His tomb was the silent and yet eloquent testimony to the fact that He had risen. The Bible tells us that they wrapped His body in linen cloths and that they used 75 pounds of spices. They wound linen strips around each leg and each arm, and then they wound the strips around the whole body, almost like a mummy case. Then over the face they would put a napkin, and that is the way they buried people.

Obviously, in the hours that Christ was in the tomb, those spices dried and hardened until they became a solid encasement. And if they had tried to steal the body of Christ they'd have had to take the linen cloths with them. Instead of that, the cloths remained. I can't prove it, but I think they were still in the shape of the human body. Christ had just slipped out and was gone in His resurrection body. And so when they looked into that tomb they saw the silent evidence that Christ was indeed raised from the dead.

Now you don't believe something as unusual as resurrection without proof. You can be sure that those Jews had beaten a path to that tomb and had looked in for themselves,

and they saw the evidence. That's why when Peter preached they believed him. You see, our faith in the resurrection isn't just an emotional response because we want to believe it; it's built on solid historical facts and historical witnesses.

This is one of the central doctrines of our faith. And when the Lord comes, it is all going to happen. The dead in Christ are going to be raised. The living Christians are going to be translated, and we all are going to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Verse 17 goes on to say, “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Here Comes the Bridegroom

The rapture is like a bridegroom claiming his bride. He comes to take his own, and from then on they are together. We are going to be in heaven with Him while the Tribulation unfolds on earth. When He comes back to reign, we are going to come back with Him and reign with Him in the millennial kingdom. And when the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem are created, we are going to be with Him in the New Jerusalem.

Wherever Christ is, we're going to be, and we're going to be with all

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of our loved ones and friends who know the Lord. What a great day of reunion that will be!

As we grow older, more and more of our loved ones slip away from us. We rejoice in the fact that they are in the presence of the Lord, but we miss their presence here. Even so, we have this wonderful hope—a hope that could be fulfilled today—that Christ is coming. And today a family circle broken on earth can be reassembled in heaven. And then we are going to be with the Lord forever. We are told to “comfort one another with these words.” The word that is translated “comfort” means more than simply comfort in sorrow; it is a word that means “to encourage” or “to urge on.”

I believe the truth of the rapture of the church and the fact that it could occur any day is a tremendous spur to Christian witness, service, and stewardship. We must face the fact that tomorrow could be too late. So we have to make the most of today in whatever dimension God is calling us to serve.

Like all prophecy, it underscores the fact that we are going to have to face Christ as our judge. And the first question is, of course, are you saved? Have you put your trust in Christ?

Precious promises like this passage assure us that if we belong to Christ, we are going to be with Him forever. We can believe it. We can be sure of it, just as sure as we are of the death and resurrection of Christ. I trust that this is your hope

today and that you are trying to make your life really count for Christ until He comes.

Our Father, how we thank Thee for Thy Word and how we thank Thee that the coming of Christ is the beginning of a glorious future in His presence. We pray that this might not be simply a theological fact that supports us in time of sorrow and trouble. May it not simply be a part of our church creed or our personal creed, but may it be part of our life, part of our thinking. What a wonderful truth—it could be today. And so, speak to our hearts according to our need, and for those who need comfort in sorrow we pray that Thou would give Thy wonderful comfort. For those who need encouragement as they face the battle of life, wilt Thou give them the encouragement that comes as we realize that we do have victory in Christ, victory now and victory throughout eternity. For we ask this all in Christ's name. Amen.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Authorized Version.

Why I Love Stability

Throughout the Scriptures the rock has been a metaphor of stability. Standing on the rock rather than in mud was preferable for the psalmist. Jesus also spoke to this principle in His final words in the Sermon on the Mount: Building on the rock—hard foundation of God's Word applied to one's life brings stability in times of testing or judgment.

What is it about rock that makes it so stabilizing? It is solid, weight-worthy, and firm—you can count on it.

Just like you can count on “the blessed hope” of our faith.

In this lecture, I love the way Dr. Walvoord spells out, in careful detail, the rock-hard *solidity* of the hope we have in Christ. As he points out, we Christians don't resort to “blind faith” or mystical subjectivism for our hope. We rely on historical evidence.

Christ arose, and we can rationally evaluate and affirm this. Therefore, based on His testimony and that of His personally designated apostles, we know that we too will physically rise. And we've even been treated to some important details of how this will take place: the sequence of events, the nature of our risen bodies, and more.

That's why we can be certain of our reunion with our beloved Dr. Walvoord. And it is why he could face his homegoing last December with such assurance and hope.

So if you come away with nothing else from this *Veritas* issue, come away with that conviction. You should never have to apologize for your faith to those who see it as a personal inner experience that doesn't apply to everyone or as wishfulness that has no root in the absolute.

That's the blight of today's “postmodern” temptation: *Don't offend. I have “my” faith, but someone else has “theirs” and that's okay, because all sincere faith is good and God will sort it out in the end.* That's not concrete, biblical faith. That's no better than silly putty.

At Dallas Seminary, we seek to produce leaders in the mold of Dr. Walvoord.

Our graduates can communicate hope, courage, power, and transformed lives.

That's because they give their listeners *rock-solid truth*. Knowledge alone is not spirituality, but without a solid grasp of biblical factuality, there can be no true spirituality.

And it is your support that God uses to produce these leaders. Your gifts and prayers are the answer to the prayers of people all over the world looking for more than silly-putty faith. They are praying for solid answers that will hold firm.

Thank you for helping provide the leaders who will deliver those needed answers.



DR. MARK L. BAILEY
President
Dallas Theological
Seminary

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Bailey".