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A N S W E R S



THE END TIMES

Catholic Answers

20 Answers: The End Times

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Introduction

The end times. The last days. The end of the world. People have wondered about these for thousands of years.

Some religions have the idea that history is an endless series of cycles, just as day follows night, one year follows another, and generations are born, grow up, and pass from the scene. But the Bible teaches something else. Although there are cycles in the world, they don't endlessly repeat.

Instead, history follows a definite course. It tells a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning of the story is creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). After man fell into sin, God began working to redeem him. He made a covenant with the patriarch Abraham, from whom came God's chosen people, Israel. Then, "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4), and Jesus Christ performed the supreme act of redemption by his death on the cross. After rising from the dead, he ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to empower his followers to spread his message throughout the world.

These events are not part of a cycle that keeps repeating. They are unique parts of God's plan of the ages. And that plan has an end point. God promised that Jesus would return and that the dead would be raised. Following the final judgment, there will be "a

new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1), where God will dwell with his people and “wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

History is thus heading toward its end point, and Christians have always wondered how close they might be to that end. There is even a special branch of theology devoted to the subject: *eschatology* (Greek, *eschatos* “last,” *logos* “teaching”), or the study of the *last things*.

Eschatology has two parts. It is called *individual* or *personal* eschatology when it deals with the last things that individual people experience: “the four last things” (i.e., death, judgment, hell, and heaven—with purgatory thrown in as a bonus topic).

The other part—which is our subject—is called *universal*, *cosmic*, or *corporate* eschatology, and it deals with the last things the world as a whole will experience. It involves the end times, Christ’s Second Coming, and what happens afterward.

1. Are we living in the end times?

This is a natural question to ask in a society that has changed more in the last century than in the many thousands that preceded it.

We’ve invented technologies that would seem like magic to our ancestors. Using just the phones we carry

with us, we can talk to and see people anywhere in the world. We've cured incurable diseases, split the atom, and rocketed to the moon. More people are alive now than ever before, they live longer, and they enjoy a level of material prosperity unequaled in human history.

Yet there are dangers. People have been uprooted from their cultures and countries. Traditional values are under attack. Millions live under totalitarian regimes. The first half of the twentieth century saw two world wars that were cataclysmic global conflicts, and then we endured a decades-long Cold War with the prospect of imminent nuclear annihilation.

Today, we live with the threat that new and even more deadly wars could break out, with even more advanced military hardware. We face terrorism, pandemics, and social upheaval, and the uneasy prospect of technology running amok. Some are even contemplating the possibility that, because of artificial intelligence, we may face a "technological singularity" that could fundamentally transform or end the human race.

No wonder people ask if we're living in the end times!

The answer is that *we are*. In his first letter, St. John makes a striking statement: "Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore, we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).

Not only does this passage contain an ominous reference to the Antichrist—even multiple antichrists—it twice repeats the bold declaration that “it is the last hour.” So, yes, there is a sense in which we are living in the end times.

But John wrote this in the first century. The “last hour” he speaks of has been going on for almost 2,000 years. So, although it’s true that we are living in the end times, this doesn’t mean what many suppose. From a biblical perspective, the end times—and even the last hour—cover a much broader sweep of history than we’d initially guess.

To understand this, it’s helpful to look at a pair of passages from St. Peter. On the one hand, he tells his readers, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore, keep sane and sober for your prayers” (1 Pet. 4:7). On the other hand, he tells them, “But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8).

In other words: yes, we are near the end, but God doesn’t reckon time the way we do. We can’t calculate the time left in human terms.

This provides the key to understanding the sense in which we’re living in the end times. The Christian age is the final stage of world history, the last period in God’s plan. All the ages that preceded the coming of his Son are past, and there will be no future ages before the Second Coming and the consummation of

the world. We are thus in the final period—the end times—from God’s perspective.

But because God doesn’t reckon time the way we do, we can’t tell how long that age will last. We therefore need to be cautious about making predictions concerning how many years are left from a human perspective.

2. Did the first Christians expect Jesus to return in their lifetimes?

God did not reveal his plan of the ages all at once. As the centuries rolled on, he sent prophets to his people Israel, and they learned more about the shape of his plan. This is a concept that scholars refer to as *progressive revelation*, because the revelation happened in stages.

Jesus also taught his disciples progressively during the years he spent with them. Very quickly, they realized he was the Messiah (John 1:41), but they did not initially understand that his kingdom was “not of this world” (John 18:36). Instead, they expected him to be what most people understood the Messiah to be—a political deliverer who would wage war against Israel’s oppressors, kick out the hated Romans, and restore political autonomy to the Jewish people.

They did not expect him to suffer, die on a cross, or rise from the dead. When he told them he would, St. Peter rebuked him and the disciples debated what

he meant (Matt. 16:22, Mark 9:10). Even after his resurrection, they still asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

His reply was, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority” (Acts 1:7), and he told them to wait to receive power from the Holy Spirit, after which they would be his witnesses throughout the world. They thus learned that there would be an extended period before the next step in God’s plan.

But they didn’t know how long this period would last, and—understanding that they were now living in the final age of history—they tended to assume it would not be very long. Many in the early Church expected that Jesus would return in their lifetimes.

We see this in St. Paul’s writings when he describes how living and deceased Christians will experience the Second Coming:

We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:15–17).

Notice that Paul refers to “we who are alive.” He envisions himself—and at least some of his readers—as among those who are still alive at the time of the Second Coming, which was a common expectation.

But God’s revelation is progressive, and he eventually made it clear that Paul would not live to see the Second Coming. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians around A.D. 50, early in his literary career, but around A.D. 66 he penned his last letter, and we find him saying:

I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day (2 Tim. 4:6–8).

Similarly, in Peter’s last letter we find him cautioning readers against trying to calculate time from God’s perspective (2 Pet. 3:8). He also knew his own death was approaching, for he wrote, “I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. And I will see to it that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things” (2 Pet. 1:14–15). He thus received a revelation that he would not live to see Jesus’ return.

The disciple who may have received the most insight into how long the Christian age would last was John.

When he initially wrote that it was the “last hour,” he knew this was hyperbole (exaggeration to make a point), because he didn’t literally expect the world to end an hour after he wrote those words. (Given the way ancient mail worked, it would have taken days or weeks for his letter to reach its destination!) Instead, he meant it was the last hour in terms of God’s plan of the ages, although he may also have supposed that it would not be long in human terms before the world ended.

Yet God made it clear to him that the Christian age would go on for an extended period of time. In Revelation 20:1–6, John saw that it would continue for a lengthy era—symbolized as a period of a thousand years—before the final end came.

We thus find passages in the New Testament that reflect the early Christians’ initial guess that Jesus would return in their own lifetimes, but we also find passages where—by progressive revelation—God makes it clear to them that this would not be the case.

3. How does biblical prophecy work?

To understand what the Bible has to say about the end times, we must first understand how biblical prophecy works. Otherwise, there will be serious misunderstandings about what lies in our future.

The starting point is understanding the role of prophets in biblical times. God did not send prophets to Israel

simply to satisfy people's curiosity about the future. They had a practical purpose. Their principal role was to encourage people to remain faithful to God and his laws.

At times, this meant giving predictions. A prophet might foretell a coming disaster—like a war, a famine, or a plague—if people did not repent of their sins. He might foretell a blessing if they repented. Or he might assure them that victory would be theirs if they only stayed true to God. However, predictions were not the principal thing that prophets were sent to communicate. Their primary message was the need to remain faithful to the Lord.

Consequently, when prophets did make predictions, they were normally directed to their own day and age—so that the people then living could act on them and heed the message to be faithful. There are examples of prophets speaking to people in a distant age (e.g. Dan. 12:4), but this is not the norm. Usually, their predictions concerned either their own generation or one closely following it.

An instructive example is found in Isaiah 7. In this chapter, the kings of Syria and Ephraim have combined forces to conquer Jerusalem and install a new king as their puppet. The current king in Jerusalem—Ahaz—is rightly concerned about this, and God sends the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz to assure him that the forces arrayed against him will not succeed. The king only needs to remain faithful and trust in God.

To provide proof, Isaiah tells Ahaz to name a sign for God to give him: “Let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven” (Isa. 7:11). But, overcome by false piety, Ahaz refuses to name a sign, and so the prophet tells him:

The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted (Isa. 7:14–16).

For this to serve as a sign to Ahaz, who reigned in the 700s B.C., the child would need to be born very soon—before the conflict with the other two kings was over. Otherwise, it could not serve as a sign to Ahaz that the Lord would keep him on the throne. Scholars have consequently speculated on who this child of prophecy was. One of the leading suggestions is that it was Ahaz’s own son, Hezekiah, who would be king after him. However that may be, the prophecy had a fulfillment in the time of King Ahaz.

Yet it was not limited to that time, because it would go on to have a greater fulfillment centuries later. The Hebrew name *Immanuel* means “God with us,” and eventually God would come to be with his people not only in a spiritual sense but also by taking on human

form. Thus, the birth of Jesus—God incarnate—also fulfills the Immanuel prophecy (Matt. 1:23).

This shows that, although prophecies are normally directed to the near future of when they were originally given, they also can have additional fulfillments in later ages.

4. What are the biggest mistakes people make when interpreting prophecy?

Since people know that prophecy contains predictions, they often assume that prophetic passages in the Bible must refer to things in *our* future. This is not the case, for the reason we have just seen. Because of prophecy's practical orientation, we should *first* look for a fulfillment near the prophet's own time and only *then* ask whether it may have more distant fulfillments.

Assuming that prophecies automatically refer to events in *our* future is one of the most common mistakes people make, but it is far from the only one. Another is adopting what may be called an “egocentric” interpretation: when people think Bible prophecy is *about them*.

At the extreme, this involves the interpreter thinking that he, personally, is a figure mentioned in biblical prophecy. Throughout the centuries various people—including recent ones like Charles Manson or David Koresh—have claimed that they were figures whose coming was prophesied in the Bible.

The vast majority of people do not claim such things, but a less extreme form of this tendency is very common. Even if they do not think that Scripture speaks of them *specifically*, some people assume that biblical prophecy concerns them in a more general way—that it speaks of things in their location or time period.

Advocates of the second-century heresy known as Montanism claimed that the new Jerusalem would descent from heaven on the small town of Pepuza in modern Turkey, where they happened to have their headquarters. And throughout the centuries, many have thought that they were living immediately before the end and that the Second Coming would happen within just a few years. Some even set dates for when it would occur, only to see these dates pass.¹

Another common mistake is failing to recognize the amount of symbolism biblical authors use. For example, sometimes the Bible uses “cosmic cataclysm” language—speaking of the sun darkening, the moon not giving its light, the stars falling, etc. (Isa. 13:10; 24:18–23; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; Amos 8:9; Hag. 2:22; Mark 13:24–25). Some understand this imagery literally, as referring to solar eclipses (the sun darkening), lunar eclipses (the moon not giving light), or meteor showers (stars falling).

However, this language usually is a symbol of God’s judgment on a people. Isaiah 13 contains an oracle against Babylon that says, “The stars of the heavens

and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light. . . . [God] will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place” (vv. 10, 13). God makes it clear how this judgment on the Babylonians will be accomplished: “I am stirring up the Medes against them” (v. 17).

This shows that God is using the cataclysm imagery to describe the conquest of the Babylonian empire by the ancient Medes. It is a poetic expression of what living through the judgment will be like. For the Babylonians, it will be *as if* the sun and moon darkened and the stars fell from the sky. Further, some interpreters have seen the celestial bodies as symbols of the rulers of the people, who would quake and lose their positions in the turmoil.²

To avoid making these mistakes, it’s helpful to keep several principles: (1) Don’t assume that biblical prophecy automatically refers to the future, (2) don’t assume it’s about your time or place, and (3) don’t assume it is literal rather than symbolic. A given prophecy might turn out to be each of these things, but that can’t simply be assumed. It needs to be proven.

5. What does the Old Testament say about the end times?

The earlier books of the Old Testament don’t have much to say about the end times. However, as God’s

revelation progressed, he began to disclose more about them.

Passages like Isaiah 7:14 contain predictions of the Messiah, whose coming would inaugurate the final period of world history. The Old Testament also contains veiled prophecies of Christ's death and resurrection.

The expectation of the Messiah was founded on a covenant God made with King David, telling him, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). There might be temporary interruptions in the line of Davidic kings, but the permanent nature of this covenant meant that a son of David would eventually appear and reign as God's anointed king or "Messiah" (Hebrew *mashiyakh*, "anointed one").

Many expected the Messiah to be an ordinary political ruler, but God had something different in mind. Prophecy revealed that—before his glorious reign would begin—the Messiah would experience suffering and death. But people would not understand this:

Who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth (Isa. 53:8–9).

Yet he would come back from the dead in triumph, having redeemed people from their sins:

He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the Righteous One, my Servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:11–12).

The Old Testament also has prophecies about the messianic or Christian age:

- Ezekiel 36:25–26 predicts that God will “sprinkle clean water upon” his people and give them “a new heart and a new spirit,” which corresponds to the sacrament of baptism.
- Jeremiah 31:31 predicts that God will make a New Covenant, which Christ inaugurated.
- Malachi 1:11 prophecies “a pure offering” being made to God everywhere among the Gentiles, pre-figuring the Eucharist.

- Isaiah 66:21 says that God will even take some Gentiles to be his priests, pointing to a Christian priesthood that isn't dependent on being a descendant of the tribe of Levi.

When it comes to events at the very end of the Christian age, we learn there will be a time of trouble that will be followed by the resurrection and judgment of the dead. The prophet Daniel is told,

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered, every one whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt (Dan. 12:1-2).

This time of trouble will be followed by the resurrection of the dead ("many" is another way of saying "all" in Hebrew, so "many who sleep in the dust" means all of the dead).

The resurrection of the dead also appears in other passages, such as when Isaiah says, "Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy!" (Isa. 26:19).

When the dead rise, there will be great rejoicing, which Isaiah describes as a feast:

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines—of fat things full of marrow, of choice wines well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces (Isa. 25:6–8).

But not all will participate in this joy, because the dead will first be judged. As Daniel was told, some will wake “to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” The righteous thus will be rewarded, and the wicked will bear the consequences of their sins, having excluded themselves from God’s joy.

The destruction of death means a fundamental change in the way the world operates, so Isaiah also prophesies that God will produce “a new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17). This renovated earth will include a new Jerusalem: “Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing” (Isa. 65:18).

These themes figure prominently in what the New Testament has to say about the end times.

6. What does Jesus tell us about the end times?

Because the end times stretch from Christ's first coming to his second, everything Jesus says about the Christian age deals with them.

He gave some of his prophecies in the form of parables, such as how his kingdom would grow from a tiny beginning (Matt. 13:31–32) or how it would contain both the good and the bad (Matt. 13:36–43).

However, Jesus also gave prophecies in a more traditional manner, as in the *Olivet Discourse*. This is a speech that he gave on the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem's temple. It is his longest prophecy, and it's found in Matthew 24–25, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

Shortly before the Crucifixion, Jesus came out of the temple and his disciples remarked on how beautiful and impressive in size it was. He responded by saying, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down" (Mark 13:1).

The disciples were startled and asked him, "When will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?" (Mark 13:4; cf. Luke 21:7).

In response, Jesus gives the Olivet Discourse, which is often misunderstood. Because he used apocalyptic language, including cosmic catastrophe language,

many assume he was talking about events in our future. But we've seen that this kind of language often is not meant literally but represents what it will be like to live through a traumatic event or period (see answer 4). Further, we know when the temple was destroyed: in A.D. 70, when the Romans first burned it and then dismantled it stone by stone.

To understand the Olivet Discourse, we must read it in light of the two questions Jesus is answering: how long will it be until the temple is destroyed and what sign will God give to show this is about to happen?

Answering the first question, Jesus says, "This generation will not pass away before all these things take place" (Mark 13:30)—and it didn't. The temple was destroyed less than forty years after Jesus uttered these words, and many people who witnessed the Crucifixion were still alive.

Answering the second question, Jesus says a number of things will happen before the destruction of the temple, and he specifically warns that some are *not* signs that the time is imminent:

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines; this is but the beginning of the sufferings (Mark 13:7–8).

He then names a sign that *does* call for action: “But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Mark 13:14).

The desolating sacrilege—also called the *abomination of desolation*—was an event predicted and partially fulfilled in the Old Testament. It dealt with pagan forces entering and desecrating the temple (Dan. 11:31, 12:11; 1 Macc. 1:51–61; cf. Dan. 9:27, Matt. 24:15).

Gentile readers would not be familiar with this, so Luke clarifies in his version of the discourse:

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it (Luke 21:20–21).

The approach of pagan armies thus represents the abomination that will cause the desolation of Jerusalem and its temple.

On the literal level, the Olivet Discourse as found in Mark and Luke is about the events leading up to A.D. 70. However, as we noted in answer 3, prophecy can have more than one fulfillment, so it may also point to events that are still in our future.

It’s significant that Matthew adds certain parables to the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:45–25:46). These clearly

deal with the Second Coming, and to set them up, Matthew has included an additional question at the beginning of the discourse: “What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (Matt. 24:3).

The natural way to understand the Olivet Discourse is that the common material found in all three of these Gospels has its primary, literal fulfillment in the years leading up to A.D. 70, but may also foreshadow events in our future; *and* that the added material in Matthew deals directly with the Second Coming.

7. Did Jesus predict the end of the world in his own day?

Because of certain statements Jesus made, some have thought he (wrongly, since the world didn't end) predicted the end of the world in his own day.

One statement was that “this generation will not pass away” before the events of the Olivet Discourse take place (Mark 13:30). However, Jesus wasn't predicting the end of the world. When read in context, this statement referred to the events leading up to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70 (see answer 6).

Another statement also occurs in the Olivet Discourse, when Jesus describes the coming events and says, “And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will

send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds” (Mark 13:26–27).

Since Jesus will return from heaven at the end of the world (Acts 1:11), many have understood this as a reference to the Second Coming. And, because prophecy can have more than one fulfillment, it may point to the Second Coming. However, this wasn’t what it referred to in the events leading up to the destruction of the temple.

Part of the confusion is caused by the fact that many only study their Bibles and don’t read the historical sources that reveal what happened when Jesus’ words were fulfilled.

The Jewish historian Josephus, who was an eyewitness of the events, reported that God gave great signs in the heavens to show that the temple would soon be destroyed. These included a star that resembled a sword hanging over the city, unexplained light shining around the temple and its altar, chariots and soldiers fighting in the clouds, and heavenly voices saying, “We are departing” from the temple.³ The same signs are mentioned by the Roman historian Tacitus.⁴

It is quite possible that the sign of Jesus appeared in the clouds to signify judgment. However, it’s also possible that this should be understood as a continuation of the common Old Testament image of God riding the clouds like a chariot, coming in judgment on those who have done wrong (Ps. 104:3, Isa. 19:1–2, Jer. 4:13–14,

Ezek 1:4, 26–28). It was even prophesied that the Son of Man would ride on such a cloud and be given dominion by the Lord (Dan. 7:13–14).

In such passages, God did not appear physically in the clouds but came spiritually as a judge. Jesus' prophecy thus may be fulfilled symbolically in the events of A.D. 70: after the Jerusalem authorities destroyed the temple of Jesus' body (John 2:19–22), Jesus came spiritually to judge the Jerusalem temple, which he had found wanting (Mark 11:15–17, John 2:13–17) and so announced its doom (Mark 13:2).

And, now that he has been given dominion by the Father, he gathers his elect or chosen people from the four winds through the spread of the gospel. The cessation of worship at the Jewish temple thus corresponds to the dawning of the Christian age.

This also is the explanation for a statement that Jesus makes to the high priest Caiaphas. When asked if he is the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus replies: "I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62).

Jesus is not prophesying that the Second Coming will occur during Caiaphas's lifetime. His statement reflects Daniel 7:13–14, where the Son of Man is brought before God *in heaven* to receive his kingdom. The prophecy thus refers to Jesus ascending into heaven (Acts 1:9), where he received his kingdom (Acts 7:55–56) and where he now reigns (1 Cor. 15:24–26).

Theologians also have explored the idea of an *adventus medius* (“middle advent”) of Christ prior to the Second Coming. It is a spiritual “coming” of Christ in which he is preached to the world and becomes present with his people.⁵

This is the explanation for passages such as when Jesus says, “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23) or “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). These refer to spiritual comings of Jesus, not his Second Coming. We thus need to be aware that not all passages that speak of Christ as coming refer to the end of the world.

A final statement that should be considered is, “There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power” (Mark 9:1; cf. Matt. 16:28, Luke 9:27).

This is not about the end of the world, for “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:21), and some of Jesus’ disciples were about to see it manifested in a powerful way. In each Synoptic Gospel (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the Transfiguration *immediately* follows Jesus’ announcement (Matt. 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–10; Luke 9:28–36). Jesus takes three of the disciples—Peter, James, and John—up a mountain. His clothing becomes dazzlingly bright, Moses and Elijah

appear beside him, everyone is enveloped in a cloud, and God the Father speaks from heaven, identifying Jesus as his Son/his Chosen, and declaring, “Hear him!”

This manifestation is the coming of the kingdom “with power” that Jesus referred to, and the text of each Gospel suggests this is the way the evangelists understood it. Not only does the Transfiguration happen right after the announcement, but each Gospel says it was about a week later (Matt. 17:1, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:28; the slight difference in the number of days may reflect reckoning parts of days as wholes and counting days as beginning at sunset, midnight, or dawn). Peter, James, and John thus were the three who did not taste death before they saw the kingdom coming with power.⁶

8. What does St. Paul say about the end times?

Paul’s letters don’t deal primarily with prophecy. However, they do contain prophetic passages. He regularly stresses common Christian themes such as the Second Coming of Christ, the final judgment, and the salvation and rewarding of the righteous.

In one of his earliest letters—1 Thessalonians—he had to correct his readers’ understanding on certain prophetic points. Some Thessalonians apparently thought that those who died before the Second Coming would miss out on the kingdom of God, but Paul assured them this was not the case: “For the Lord himself will descend

from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16).

He warned them not to be concerned about when the Second Coming would happen, and said it was not humanly predictable: "But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:1-2).

Some Thessalonians continued to misunderstand these points, even thinking that the day of the Lord may have already come. Paul thus told them that this is not the case and gave a number of signs that will precede the event: "That day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:3-4).

Paul states that the coming of the lawless one will be accompanied by false signs and wonders that will deceive many (2 Thess. 2:9-12). This apparently plays a role in the "rebellion" (Greek, *apostasia*, "apostasy") that will accompany the man of lawlessness (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-9).

He also indicates that something is currently holding back these events (2 Thess. 2:6-7), but eventually,

“the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming” (2 Thess. 2:8).

Paul also had to correct another group of Christians—this time at Corinth—who were denying that we will be resurrected on the last day. His reply was pointed: “If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:16–17). He thus explained to them that the resurrection of Christ was simply the first fruits of the great harvest of resurrection to occur at the Second Coming (vv. 23–26).

The Corinthians would be curious about what our resurrected bodies will be like, so Paul compares the difference between our present bodies and our future ones to the difference between a seed and the plant that grows from it. He explains that the resurrection will involve a transformation that will change our current earthly, mortal bodies into glorious, immortal ones (1 Cor. 15:35–44), which will be like Jesus’ resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:49)—a theme he also stresses elsewhere (Phil. 3:20–21). For those who are alive at the time of the Second Coming, this transformation will occur “in the twinkling of an eye,” without their dying first (1 Cor. 15:51–52).

The resurrection of the dead also will be accompanied by divine judgment, and Paul indicates that the

saints (i.e., faithful Christians) will judge the world, including even angels (1 Cor. 6:2–3).

9. Does the book of Revelation contain coded secrets about when the world will end?

The final book of the Bible, Revelation, was written by St. John while he was in exile on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9). It contains information about our future, but perhaps not as much as many people suppose.

The book was addressed to a group of seven churches in the province of Asia Minor (in modern Turkey) for a specific purpose: “to show to [Christ’s] servants what must soon take place” (Rev. 1:1). It thus encourages Christians to hold fast to their faith in the face of persecution and the traumatic events that were to happen in their immediate future.

Today many assume that the events prophesied in Revelation are all still in our future, but it is often an error to suppose that just because a passage is a prophecy it hasn’t yet been fulfilled. So, how should we interpret Revelation?

Scholars of every stripe agree that the beginning of the book of Revelation (at least chapters 1–3) deals principally with events in the first century A.D. They also agree that the end of the book (Rev. 20:7–22:21) deals principally with events at the end of the world that are thus in our future. The question is how the

middle part of the book (4:1–20:6) is to be related to history. On this subject, there are four major schools of thought:

- i) *Preterism* holds that this part deals with events from toward the beginning of Christian history—either the first century or the first few centuries.
- ii) *Historicism* holds that it forms an outline of Church history, so that as you proceed through the book you move through the different centuries, until at last you arrive at the end of time.
- iii) *Idealism* holds that it describes the conflict between good and evil that plays out in Church history, but not in the form of a simple timeline (as in historicism). Instead, it presents elements that occur over and over again during Church history in a cyclical pattern.
- iv) *Futurism* holds that the bulk of the book deals with material that lies in our future.

Which of these views is to be preferred?

The natural starting point is preterism. As previously discussed (see answer 3), the biblical prophets focus primarily on events to occur in their own generation or within a few generations—not thousands of years later.

Also, as we will see (in answers 11, 12, and 16), some of the major symbols of Revelation fit a first-century context very well.

Finally, both the beginning and the end of the book say that the events it describes are “what must soon take place” (Rev. 1:1, 22:6). This creates a strong initial case for the view that most of Revelation deals with the beginning of Christian history. Can a case be made for any of the other views that would overturn this?

The prospects for historicism are not good. This view is held by very few scholars today, as it is impossible to match up the events of Revelation to Church history in any objective way. Where in Revelation should one see the rise of Islam? Or the Protestant Reformation? Or the Napoleonic Wars? Or World Wars I and II? How is one to know which events are represented and under which symbols? There is no objective way to establish these things.

The prospects for idealism might seem better, because prophecies can have more than one fulfillment, and the struggle between good and evil stretches throughout the Christian age. Therefore, it is possible to see things from Revelation being fulfilled at different points in Church history. However, prophecies tend to have a single primary fulfillment—described in the literal sense of the text—with other fulfillments belonging to the spiritual sense (cf. the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 115–119). We would expect the same to be true of the prophecies in Revelation. Only if we

could establish that Revelation is *not* principally about the beginning of the Christian age—or *any* single part of the Christian age—would idealism be established.

Futurism is popular today in some circles, especially among Evangelical Protestants. However, it faces a significant problem: if the beginning of the book applies to the first century, when does it suddenly start talking about events 2,000 or more years later? For most of the book to apply to our future, there would need to be a point early in the text that indicates a long period of time has elapsed—an early, clear jump from the first century to our future—but there isn't one.

Also, futurism would require us to take the book's emphasis that it describes what will happen "soon" in a counterintuitive sense. This is not *impossible* (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8), but the starting point of our interpretation should be taking words in their natural sense, and that would point us toward preterism.

A futurist could pose a counter-argument and note that, if most of Revelation deals with the beginning of Church history but the end deals with events in our future, there should be a point late in the text that indicates a long period of time elapsing, to bridge the material between the early Church and the end of time. So, where is the jump from past to future that we would expect?

The answer is in Revelation 20:1–6, where a long period of time—described as "a thousand years"—is discussed (see answer 12). If the number is taken as a

stock figure representing just a long period, then we see exactly what we would expect on a preterist interpretation: most of the book deals with events early in Church history (Rev. 1:1–19:21), then there is a long period of time in which we are now living (Rev. 20:1–6), and finally we come to events still in our future (Rev. 20:7–22:21).

On this view, Revelation would principally be about the convulsions that happened at the beginning of Church history—the persecutions and martyrdoms that happened at that time (cf. Rev. 1:9, 6:9, 7:14, 17:6) and God’s judgment on the persecutors (pagan Rome and/or Jerusalem). Eventually, however, Christianity would prevail, leading to a new spiritual age in which the gospel would be preached for many centuries before the Second Coming and the end of the world.

Although preterism is the natural starting point for interpreting Revelation, this doesn’t altogether exclude other views. Since prophecies can have multiple fulfillments, and Revelation may primarily apply to the early Christian age but have secondary fulfillments throughout Church history—including at the end of the world.

10. Who (or what) is the Antichrist?

One of the most notorious and misunderstood figures from biblical prophecy is the *Antichrist*. There are only

four verses in the Bible that speak about the Antichrist—at least under that name—and they are all in the letters of St. John.

As the name suggests, the Antichrist is someone opposed to (*anti-*) Christ. The coming of the Antichrist is linked to the end times, but John reveals that these began in the first century. He also reveals that there is more than one antichrist, telling his readers: “As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore, we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

John identifies these individual antichrists as former members of the Christian community: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us” (v. 19).

There thus was something wrong with their profession of faith, even when they were claiming to be Christians, and John tells us what it was: they were heretics. “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son” (v. 22). “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 7).

The individual antichrists—both then and now—thus deny the truth of Christ incarnate, either by denying that he was born in human flesh (as some early heretics did) or by denying the Christian faith

altogether. This movement of antichrists is animated by evil spirits: “Every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already” (1 John 4:3).

The portrait of the Antichrist that John gives us is thus of a dark, anti-Christian spiritual movement that has been in the world since the first century. But will this movement culminate with a single person serving as the final villain of world history?

Many have thought that it will, and they have proposed that this villain is discussed under other names elsewhere in Scripture. For example, some have identified him as the “man of lawlessness” or “man of sin” that St. Paul says will lead a rebellion against God and proclaim himself to be a god (2 Thess. 2:3–4).

Others have identified him as a figure in the book of Revelation that is pictured as a great beast arising from the sea (Rev. 13:1–18; see answer 11).

Throughout history, most commentators have held that there will be a single individual who opposes Christ at the end of the world. However, the *Catechism* is cautious on this question and does not settle it one way or the other.

It links the Antichrist to a movement or ideology of “pseudo-messianism,” without precluding that this movement would have a single person serving as its leader:

Before Christ's Second Coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh (CCC 675).

11. Who is the beast of Revelation and what is his mark?

The book of Revelation contains more than one beast, but the most famous is one John sees rising from the sea in chapter 13. It incorporates animal symbols that had previously been used in the book of Daniel to represent a line of pagan kingdoms that oppressed God's people (Dan. 7).

This beast has seven heads, and we are told, "The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while" (Rev. 17:9–10).

The seven mountains have been identified since ancient times as the seven hills of Rome. Interpreters thus have commonly understood this beast as the

pagan Roman empire that persecuted Christians in John's day and in the early centuries.

As seven kings, the beast's heads are seen as connected to the line of first-century Roman emperors. Like these emperors, the beast blasphemes God, persecutes the saints, rules the world, and receives worship from all but Christians (Rev. 13:6–8). It also has the number 666 (Rev. 13:18), which is what “Nero Caesar” (NRWN QSR) adds up to in Hebrew and Aramaic ($N+R+W+N+Q+S+R = 50+200+6+50+100+60+200 = 666$).

If—in keeping with Revelation's theme that its events will happen “soon” from John's perspective—the seven heads are the line of first-century emperors, and the five who “have fallen” would be Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. The one who “is” would be Nero's successor, Galba, and the other who “has not yet come” would be Otho, who did reign “only a little while” (three months). This would place the composition of Revelation during the reign of Galba (June 9, A.D. 68–January 15, A.D. 69).

It also would suggest that the literal fulfillment of the beast is to be found in the first-century line of Roman emperors. However, this would not prevent there from being another fulfillment of this prophecy before the end of the world. It would be similar to the way Daniel's “abomination of desolation”/“desolating sacrilege” (Dan. 9:27, 11:31, 12:11) could be fulfilled both in the

time of the Maccabees (1 Macc. 1:54) and again in the generation that followed Jesus (Matt. 24:15).

Thus the world's final villain—described by Paul as “the man of lawlessness” and commonly called “the antichrist”—is likely to echo the beast of Revelation and Roman emperors like Nero.

Many have wondered about the “mark of the beast” that its followers receive on their right hands or foreheads, allowing them to buy and sell (Rev. 13:16–18). Some have suggested this might involve modern technologies like implanted RFID chips, but this is not what the passage would have meant in its original context.

In the first century, disobedient slaves were sometimes tattooed or branded to show who owned them, but the beast's servants seem willing rather than disobedient. On the other hand, the devotees of some pagan gods also were marked for the one they worshipped, so that may be in view.

Yet there is reason to think that Revelation does not intend this to be a literal, visible mark. In the Old Testament, God spoke of his laws being a mark on the Israelite's hands and foreheads (Exod. 13:9, 16). In Ezekiel, the righteous are invisibly marked on their foreheads by an angel (Ezek. 9:4), as are a group of 144,000 Israelites in Revelation (7:3–8, 14:1). Indeed, Christians in general are said to be sealed by God (2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13, 4:30).

Understood in light of these parallels, the mark of the beast would not be a physical brand or tattoo—

much less an undreamt-of future technology—but a symbol of the pagan’s willingness to employ his head and his hand in the service of the Roman cult of emperor worship and thus reap the economic rewards of participating in imperial public life—from which Christians were often excluded.

If this mark has a parallel in the future, its form can only be a matter of speculation.

12. What is the millennium?

The term *millennium* comes from Latin roots that mean “thousand” (*mille*) and “year” (*annus*). The millennium is thus a thousand-year period mentioned in Revelation 20:1–6.

Although some interpreters take the number 1,000 literally, others see it as a symbolic figure that simply indicates a long period of time (cf. Ps. 50:10, where God says that “the cattle on a thousand hills” are his—meaning the animals on *all* the hills are his).

During the millennium, the devil is bound so “that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended,” and John sees a group of thrones with those “to whom judgment was committed” seated on them.

He also sees a group of Christian martyrs who had refused to worship the beast (see answer 11). In some translations it says that this group of people “came to

life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” However, other translations merely say that they “lived and reigned” with Christ during the millennium. The Greek allows either translation.

A key question is how this event is to be understood, and historically there have been three major options. In Protestant circles, these have been dubbed *premillennialism*, *postmillennialism*, and *amillennialism*.

According to *premillennialists*, Christ’s Second Coming will occur *before* (pre-) this thousand-year period, and Jesus will physically reign on earth (likely from Jerusalem) during it. This view was common among some early Christian writers, and in recent centuries it has been popular among Evangelical Protestants. In Catholic circles, this view has often been called *millenarianism*.

According to *postmillennialism*, the Second Coming will occur *after* (post-) the millennium, and during that period Christ reigns from heaven, along with his saints, in a way that produces a golden age on earth. This view was popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries among English-speaking Protestants. It became less popular after the horrors of the twentieth century’s two world wars, and its growing secularization led many to conclude that we were not moving toward such a golden age in which the Church progressively triumphs.

According to *amillennialism*, we are now living in the millennium, which spans the Christian age and will

be followed by the Second Coming. Christ is currently reigning in heaven, and the saints live and reign with him there. On earth, the devil is bound so that he cannot deceive the nations by stopping the spread of the gospel, though this does not result in a paradisiacal golden age where all earthly problems vanish. This view has been the position of most scholars throughout history, including the original Protestant reformers.

Although Catholics tend not to use the word *amillennial*, this term best corresponds to the Church's understanding of the millennium. The Magisterium has specifically rejected premillennialism (i.e., millenarianism). According to the *Catechism*, "The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism" (676).

The Magisterium also has warned against expecting a golden age of the kind predicted by postmillennialism before the Second Coming: "The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to come down from heaven" (CCC 677).

The millennial reign of Christ spoken of in Revelation 20 is thus taking place right now, for as he said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18), and as St. Paul declared, “He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25–26).

13. Do Israel and the Jewish people have a special role in the end times?

Christian scholars of all persuasions have recognized that God’s plan of the ages unfolds in stages. Prior to the coming of Christ, God dealt with the people of Israel in a unique way, taking them as his chosen people among all the peoples of the earth.

With the beginning of the Christian age, God’s family expanded to include people from every nation who, like the Jewish people, become children of Abraham by faith (Gal. 3:7; cf. Rom. 2:25–29). The Church thus became a new chosen people, mirroring what the children of Israel had been (cf. Exod. 19:6, 1 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 5:9–10).

This raised the question of what role the Jewish people now have in God’s plan. After the Reformation, some Protestants proposed that the Israelites no longer had a special role. The Church had completely taken over the promises God had made to Israel, and so Jews no longer had a unique status. They were simply one people among many, with no special destiny.

This view is sometimes called “replacement theology,” because it holds that the Church has replaced Israel in God’s plan.

However, beginning in the nineteenth century, a school of thought arose in Protestant circles known as *dispensationalism*. One of the distinctive teachings of this movement is that Israel very much remains God’s chosen people, and it has a unique role that has yet to be fulfilled. According to some dispensationalist authors, the Christian age is simply a “parenthesis” in God’s plan, in which he deals with Gentiles, and at the close of this age he will turn back to dealing with Jews.

Dispensationalists commonly hold that the Jewish people still have a God-given right to the promised land, and it was taken as a prophetic sign when the modern nation-state of Israel was founded in 1948. Many dispensationalists expected the Second Coming to occur within a forty-year generation of Israel’s founding, though the twentieth century ended without this happening.

They still commonly hold that Jesus will return soon, after which he will reign as a king in Jerusalem for a thousand years. Dispensationalism is thus a form of premillennialism (see answer 12). According to dispensationalists, the Jewish people will have a prominent role in the world during the millennium, there will be a temple in Jerusalem, and—according

to many—animal sacrifices will again be offered to God there.

The Catholic Church's position does not go to either the extreme proposed by replacement theology or the one advocated by dispensationalists. Regarding the former, the Church acknowledges that the Jewish people still have a special role in God's plan. As St. Paul says, "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! . . . As regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:1, 28–29; cf. CCC 839).

On the other hand, the view proposed by dispensationalists is problematic. Although the Church does not have a teaching on whether the Jewish people still have a divine right to the Holy Land—or whether the current state of Israel has any prophetic significance—it rejects the dispensational belief in the millennium as a future, earthly reign of Christ (CCC 676).

Especially problematic is the idea that God's plan includes literal animal sacrifices being offered in a future Jerusalem temple. Christ did away with these by offering himself "once for all" on the cross (Heb. 7:27, 8:13, 9:12, 26; 10:10)!

However, one sign of the end is that there will be a major conversion of the Jewish people to Christ (Rom. 11:11–12, 25), which apparently occurs shortly before the end of the world (Rom. 11:15).

Thus the *Catechism* states:

The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by "all Israel," for "a hardening has come upon part of Israel" in their "unbelief" toward Jesus. St. Peter says to the Jews of Jerusalem after Pentecost: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" [Acts 3:19–21]. St. Paul echoes him: "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" [Rom. 11:15] (674).

14. What is the Great Tribulation?

In life, people experience trouble—or "tribulation" to use an old-fashioned word—and this applies to Christians as much as anyone else. St. Paul said that it is "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Sometimes God prophetically warns his people about times of trouble, and various passages of Scripture speak of tribulation. Because prophecy usually applies to the near future of when it is given, most of these belong to history. However, some passages speak of future times of trouble.

Daniel 12:1–2 speaks of a tribulation that will occur just before the resurrection of the dead: “There shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. . . . And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.”

Because this time of trouble is unprecedented, it is often called “*the* great tribulation,” and people have naturally sought to learn more about it.

One way they’ve done this is by looking for other passages that speak of tribulation, and especially severe tribulations, on the assumption that they refer to the same event. And if a Bible passage speaks of “great tribulation,” it’s guaranteed someone will propose this.

But we need to be careful, because the Bible can speak of tribulations—even great ones—without intending to speak about the final trial that precedes the resurrection of the dead. Before assuming that a passage that mentions a tribulation is talking about the last one, we first need to read it and determine its meaning in its own context.

For example, in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus says, “Then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be” (Matt. 24:21). However, this part of the discourse is speaking about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70, and it refers to a local tribulation, not a global one, as Jesus warns, “Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matt. 24:16; cf. 24:17–20).

There was reason to flee! The Jewish historian Josephus reports that, of the approximately three million people who had gathered in Jerusalem for Passover, more than a third were killed, so that “the victims thus outnumbered those of any previous visitation [of wrath], human or divine.”⁷ Except for a few, select structures, the city itself was almost totally destroyed, and the Romans razed it to the point that it “was so completely leveled to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing that it had ever been inhabited.”⁸

Still, these events may foreshadow the tribulation that will precede the final judgment. Revelation records that, after the millennium, “Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth” (Rev. 20:7–8), resulting in a persecution.

According to the *Catechism*, “The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection” (677). This suggests that the Church will be persecuted almost to the point of extinction (cf. Luke 18:8), but Jesus will return to save it at the last moment.

15. Should we expect a “Rapture” at any moment?

Faced with such a dire time of tribulation, Christians have wondered whether they will have to live through

it. The historic answer, for both Catholics and Protestants, is that we will. Jesus warned us we would have to face persecution (John 15:20).

However, in the nineteenth century, dispensationalists began teaching that Christians will not have to face this trial. Instead, before the great tribulation begins, they will be caught up to heaven and spared the reign of the Antichrist and the horrors it contains.

They referred to this event as the *Rapture*, based on the Latin word *rapio* (“to snatch, to carry away”). Catholics do not generally use this term, but Paul does describe an event when “we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

According to the scenario dispensationalists propose, the Rapture is the next prophetic event in God’s plan, so it will happen without warning, at any moment. Jesus will descend into the atmosphere and all true Christians will be caught up to be with him in the sky. This will include dead Christians, who will be raised back to life. Jesus will then take his followers back to heaven while the Antichrist reigns and all hell breaks loose on earth. Then, at the end of the great tribulation, Jesus will return to earth, slay the Antichrist, and begin his thousand-year earthly reign.

There are multiple problems with this view. First, as we have seen, the Church rejects the idea of a future

earthly millennium (see answer 12), so the overall scenario is based on a false premise.

Furthermore, the dispensationalist view does not fit what St. Paul says. It splits the Second Coming in half, with Jesus first descending to claim his Church and then, years later, returning to deal with the Antichrist. Yet in the relevant passages, Paul speaks only of a single coming. He indicates that the event when believers will be caught up to be with Jesus occurs at “the coming [singular] of the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16).

And he doesn't say that Jesus will then go back to heaven. Instead, he indicates that the final judgment will follow, for he goes on to tell the Thessalonians that they have no need to worry about the times or seasons of when this will happen, because “you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape” (5:2–3).

The scenario Paul depicts is Jesus returning to earth, gathering his followers in the sky, and then proceeding to judge the wicked as part of “the day of the Lord.”

This is confirmed when he takes up the same subject in his second letter to the Thessalonians, referring to the event as “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him” (2 Thess. 2:1). Both

elements are thus present: the return of Christ and the gathering of his followers to him.

Paul says this event “will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (vv. 3–4).

Then, when the Lord returns and we are assembled to be with him, “the Lord Jesus will slay [the man of lawlessness] with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming” (v. 8).

Paul also emphasizes that “*when* the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven” (2 Thess. 1:7, emphasis added) the wicked “shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord . . . when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints” (2 Thess. 1:9–10). After discussing this event, Paul then identifies it as “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him” (2 Thess. 2:1).

The sequence Paul lays out thus does not involve Christians being caught up to heaven during the Antichrist’s reign, or that reign coming over a thousand years before the final judgment. Instead, it involves the Antichrist reigning first, then Jesus returning and the faithful being caught up to be with him, following which the Antichrist will be killed and the final judgment will take place.

Thus we shouldn't expect a Rapture to take place at any moment now. We *will* be caught up to be with Jesus—after the reign of the man of lawlessness, not before.

16. What is the Battle of Armageddon?

In popular speech, *Armageddon* has become a term for the final military battle of world history. It also has an extended meaning and can refer to any devastating conflict, whether or not it would be the final one. Thus, during the Cold War, people feared that World War III would bring about a “nuclear Armageddon,” even if the human race survived.

The basis for this idea is found in a passage in Revelation that describes a trio of evil beings—the dragon (i.e., the devil), the beast, and the false prophet—who disgorge “three foul spirits like frogs” that “go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.” These kings then assemble “at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon” (Rev. 16:13–16).

We are told that “they will make war on the Lamb [i.e., Jesus], and the Lamb will conquer them” (17:14). This conflict is described in Revelation 19:11–21, and the outcome is that the beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown alive into hell, while the devil is bound for a thousand years, so that he

cannot deceived the nations during the millennium (Rev. 20:1–6).

However, the devil is afterward released, and he deceives the nations and again gathers them for battle. His army is then destroyed by fire, and he is thrown into hell, alongside the beast and the false prophet.

Thus, contrary to popular usage, Revelation does not depict Armageddon as the final battle of history but as one preceding the reign of Christ.

Scholars debate the precise meaning of the name *Armageddon*. The Greek word John uses is *harmagedôn*, but he tells us it is of Hebrew or Aramaic origin. The term *har* means “mountain,” and Megiddo was an ancient city in Israel, so most scholars have understood Armageddon to mean “the mount of Megiddo.”

Megiddo sits in the middle of a valley, but it is an ancient settlement that long predates the founding of Israel. It has been built and rebuilt numerous times, resulting in it sitting atop an artificial hill made up of all the earlier versions of the settlement. This artificial hill may be the “mount” that John is referring to. Alternately, some scholars suggest, it may be a true mountain that is *near* Megiddo, such as Mount Carmel.

Whatever the case, Megiddo has a long history as the site of battles. It was a strategically important location, and numerous battles have been fought there,

both before and after the founding of Israel. Revelation thus invokes its history as a site of warfare.

The question is how literally the conflict involving it should be understood. Many premillennialists—and especially dispensationalists—see this as a literal military conflict that will occur in Israel, with forces led by the Antichrist, just before the beginning of the earthly reign of Christ in the millennium.

However, as we have seen, there will not be an earthly reign of Christ before the end of the world (see answer 12). Instead, the millennium is best understood as the reign of Christ that is occurring now in heaven and, through his Church, on earth (CCC 680).

The battle of Armageddon thus might be understood as related to the Jewish War of the A.D. 60s, when the forces of pagan Rome (“the beast”) attacked Jerusalem and destroyed its temple.

Alternately, it may be understood not as a literal military conflict but as a spiritual conflict between the forces of paganism and the gospel, which led to the devil being bound so that he could not stop the proclamation of Christ to the nations. Revelation would be depicting this spiritual conflict in military terms and drawing on the history of Megiddo as a site of warfare as part of that imagery.

However Armageddon is to be understood, Revelation also predicts a future conflict at the end of the Christian age, and it may involve military as well as

spiritual elements, including the involvement of the Antichrist.

17. How will Christ return, and what will happen when he does?

Before the Second Coming, there will be both a conversion of the Jewish people and a great persecution that gravely endangers the Church, which Jesus will return to rescue (see answers 13 and 14).

Jesus concluded his earthly ministry by ascending into heaven as his disciples watched. As they did so, two angels in human form appeared beside them and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

The Lord thus will return from heaven the same way that he left. He ascended *bodily* into heaven, and he will descend from heaven in the same body. Contrary to some New Age speculation, he will not be born into a new body or descend as a spirit on some new person. Instead, “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16).

When that happens, as St. Paul explains, the dead in Christ will be raised back to life, and all of the saved will be caught up to be with him (1 Thess. 4:17). At

the same time, they will instantaneously receive a glorious form like Christ's and be given immortality. Those who otherwise would experience purgatory will be transformed "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:51–53, Phil. 3:21, 1 John 3:2).

Upon returning, Christ will defeat the forces that oppose God and oppress his Church, and all of the dead will be raised. "And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done" (Rev. 20:13).

The fundamental reason for the resurrection is that God created human beings to have both bodies and souls, and we are not complete unless we have both. Death separates the two, for "the body apart from the spirit is dead" (James 2:26). But God will reunite them so that we may physically live again.

At death, we experience what is called the "particular judgment," because it is particular or specific to each one of us. "Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death" (CCC 1022; cf. Luke 16:19–31).

At the resurrection, another judgment will occur. "The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear [Jesus'] voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28–29).

"God's triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment after the final cosmic

upheaval of this passing world” (CCC 677). This judgment differs from the particular judgment in that it includes all people, including those who were still alive at the time of the Second Coming. It also is a public event that demonstrates God’s love and mercy before all the world. And we will experience the results of this judgment in both body and soul, now that the two have been reunited.

“Through his Son Jesus Christ,” says the *Catechism*, “he will pronounce the final word on all history. We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation and understand the marvelous ways by which his Providence led everything toward its final end. The Last Judgment will reveal that God’s justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God’s love is stronger than death” (1040).

Those who have repented and accepted God’s offer of love and grace in this life will be incorporated fully into the life of God and his people. “Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ” (CCC 1026).

But those who reject God’s grace will be lost. “To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell’” (CCC 1033).

18. What will eternal life be like?

Sometimes people wonder if eternal life will be boring, with humans as disembodied spirits sitting on clouds and playing harps. However, these images are drawn from cartoons and greeting cards rather than the Bible.

As the resurrection from the dead indicates, eternal life is something we will experience in bodily form, and this means living in a physical place. Beginning in the Old Testament, God revealed that he would one day renew the world, creating “a new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17).

This theme is developed further in Revelation: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:1–2).

A question some have asked is whether the new heaven and earth will be totally new creations from nothing, like the present ones are, or whether the text has something else in mind. The *Catechism* understands the two in terms of a renewal rather than an annihilation and replacement of the present creation: “The universe itself will be renewed. . . . Sacred Scripture calls this mysterious renewal, which will transform humanity and the world, ‘new heavens and a new earth’” (CCC 1042–1043).

For the blessed, the key aspect of life on the new earth will be union with God, which excludes all suffering: “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3–4).

Scripture also doesn’t present eternal life as living passively on a cloud playing a harp. Rather, it depicts it as living in an active community with God and man: the new city of Jerusalem.

The idea of God creating a new Jerusalem was present as far back as the Old Testament (Isa. 65:18), and the theme is picked up in the New Testament, as when St. Paul tells us that the present, earthly Jerusalem “is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother” (Gal. 4:25–26). Similarly, the author of Hebrews says that Christians have come “to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22).

John sees this city descending from heaven onto the new earth, and it has remarkable size and glory (Rev. 21:9–27). Its radiance is “like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.” It has “a great, high wall, with twelve gates” that are guarded by angels—meaning that the city is entirely secure. The twelve gates have

the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on them, and the city also has twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles. It thus incorporates both Jewish and Christian elements.

The city is said to be square and to extend 12,000 *stadia* (about 1,500 miles) along each side, and “its length and breadth and height are equal.” Its wall is 144 cubits high (that is, twelve times twelve cubits, or about 200 feet tall). The city is, indeed, depicted as having “pearly gates,” for “the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.”

John sees no temple in the city, because “its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb,” and there is no night there, “for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”

How are we to understand these images? Some have taken them literally, but most see them as a symbolic way to convey the grandeur and glory of what eternal life will be like. In support of this, they point to things like the repeated multiples of the symbolic number twelve in the city’s description, the fact that it is vastly taller than the height of its wall, and that the city itself is described as “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9)—a description that indicates it is identical with Christ’s mystical body, the Church (Eph. 5:25–32).

According to the *Catechism*, “This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ

is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: 'no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' [1 Cor. 2:9]" (CCC 1027).

And, throughout eternity, we will have tasks to perform. "In the glory of heaven the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God's will in relation to other men and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with him 'they shall reign for ever and ever' [Rev. 22:5]" (CCC 1029).

19. What light can private revelations shed on the end times?

The Church distinguishes between two types of revelation, which are referred to as *public* and *private*.

Public revelation, which is found in Scripture and Tradition, is binding on all the faithful. God ceased to give this type of revelation with the death of the last apostle, and so it does not occur anymore.

However, down through the centuries, God has continued to speak to various people—either directly or through one of the angels or saints—and these are referred to as private revelations. They may contain messages for a general audience, but they are not binding as matters of faith the way public revelation

is. According to the *Catechism*, their role is not to “improve or complete Christ’s definitive revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* [Latin, the “sense of the faithful”] knows how to discern and welcome in these revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church” (CCC 67).

Even in cases where the Church has approved a private revelation, it is not binding as a matter of faith. As the future Pope Benedict XVI stated: “Such a message can be a genuine help in understanding the gospel and living it better at a particular moment in time; therefore, it should not be disregarded. It is a help which is offered, but which one is not obliged to use.”⁹

Sometimes private revelations contain predictions about the future. When they do, their purpose is not to satisfy human curiosity but to help people live out their faith—as was the case with the biblical prophets.

Many have sought to develop a picture of the future using information from both public and private revelation. As we saw in answers 3 and 4, people need to handle biblical prophecies with care, and the same applies to private revelation.

What should our basic attitude toward it be? Many people received private revelations in the first century, and so the New Testament addresses the question. St. Paul expresses a balanced view that is open but

critical, telling his readers: “Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:19–21).

What mistakes do we need to be on guard against when assessing material from private revelations?

One mistake is simply assuming that a quotation is genuine. Many books and websites copy and paste quotations attributed to apparitions without checking to see if they are accurate. This results in numerous poorly sourced quotations, and sometimes they turn out not to be genuine. For example, Padre Pio is often claimed to have predicted a proposed event known as the “Three Days of Darkness,” in which the entire earth will be shrouded in darkness. However, he did not make such predictions, and the quotations attributed to him are inaccurate.

Another mistake is assuming that a quotation is from a private revelation when it isn’t. For example, St. Edmund Campion is often claimed to have predicted a proposed event prior to the Second Coming known as the “Illumination of Consciences,” in which each person on earth will be given a mystical insight into the state of his soul. However, when the passage is read in its original context, it’s clear that Campion was not relating the contents of a private revelation. He was recounting how he once preached a sermon about Judgment Day.

We also should not assume that just because an apparition speaks of the future it is speaking about the

end of the world. Like the public revelations received by the biblical prophets, private revelations are meant to help people live “in a certain period of history,” and their predictions are most likely about that period.

For instance, although many assumed that the 1917 apparitions of Mary at Fátima, Portugal were about the end of the world, they actually applied to the twentieth century, and by the year 2000, the future Benedict XVI could say of their predictions: “Insofar as individual events are described, they belong to the past. Those who expected exciting apocalyptic revelations about the end of the world or the future course of history are bound to be disappointed.”¹⁰

We should not assume that messages from private revelations are inspired the way Scripture is. As the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has noted, people receiving them sometimes “have added, even unconsciously, purely human elements or some error of the natural order to an authentic supernatural revelation.”¹¹ They thus should not be treated as word-for-word from God.

Another mistake is relying too much on unapproved apparitions. Although apparitions that the Church has not examined and approved may be genuine, there is still a need for discernment. St. John says this frankly: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

We thus need to be on guard against false prophecies while remaining open to the genuine helps to living our faith that may be found in private revelations. We cannot embrace an apparition just because we like what it says, lest we fall into the trap Paul warns about when he describes those who “having itching ears . . . will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings” (2 Tim. 4:3).

Finally, although private revelations can give genuine insights into the future, we must recognize that many of the scenarios proposed by apparition-based books and websites are highly speculative and often do not prove to be true with the passage of time. The falsification rate for scenarios based on sensationalistic interpretations of private revelations is as high as that of scenarios based on sensationalistic interpretations of biblical prophecies. Many authors are simply too willing to embrace shaky speculation and present it as truth.

20. How should we live in light of the end times?

The fact we are in the end times—the final age of human history—has implications for how we live our lives.

Since, from one perspective, the “end times” are synonymous with the whole of the Christian age, it means we get the chance to live as Christians! We have the fullness of revelation that God has given, for the Faith

has been “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). We have the full means of grace, which are available to us in the sacraments. And we get to be members of Christ’s mystical body, the Church. How blessed we are to live in this age, for as Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Matt. 13:16).

From another perspective, the “end times” are yet to come, and people naturally wonder how close we are to the grand finale of human history.

We could be close! According to the *Catechism*, “Since the Ascension Christ’s coming in glory has been imminent, even though ‘it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority’ [Acts 1:7]. This eschatological coming could be accomplished at any moment, even if both it and the final trial that will precede it are ‘delayed’” (673).

The *Catechism* then goes on to note the signs that will precede the Second Coming, including a widespread conversion of the Jewish people (674) and the final persecution of the Church (675–677). Many have tried to calculate just how close we are to the end, and they have repeatedly set dates for Christ’s return or other apocalyptic events.

So far, every one of them has been wrong.

The practice of date-setting has a poor track record, and the Church warns the faithful against it: “The Last

Judgment will come when Christ returns in glory. Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only he determines the moment of its coming” (CCC 1040).

We can say with confidence that we are closer to the end than we used to be, “for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11), but this has been true all through the Christian age. The mere fact that we are closer doesn’t mean we are close. The final end could come soon from our perspective—or it might not occur for centuries.

Part of the problem with date-setting is that people often misunderstand how God fulfills prophecy. Think about how many people missed the first coming of Christ because of how they misunderstood and misapplied the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. They assumed that these would be fulfilled in certain ways, but God surprised them and did the unexpected, for “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9).

Knowing this, we should be very careful about how we suppose remaining prophecies will be fulfilled. Our ability to read “the signs of the times” is limited, and fulfillments may happen unexpectedly. Thus, the *Catechism* says, “We know neither the moment of the consummation of the earth and of man, nor the way in which the universe will be transformed” (1048).

Part of the folly of date-setting is the fact that God does not view time as we do. As St. Peter says, “Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:8–9).

This provides the key to how we should live in the interim: we should repent. That is why God delays the fulfillment of prophecy, so that more souls can repent and come to him for salvation. “Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4).

Scripture emphasizes that the day of the Lord will come “like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2; cf. Matt. 24:43, Luke 12:39; 1 Peter 3:10, Rev. 3:3, 16:15), and it emphasizes the need to repent. Thus, St. Paul says, “You are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:4–8).

Whether we live close to the Second Coming or not, we will all stand before the Lord, and we do not know when this will happen. We must repent and make ourselves ready not only because the Lord could return soon but also because we could die and stand before him in individual judgment at any moment. “You do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (James 4:14). And “it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

The proper response to living in the end times—whether we are close to the final end or not—is not to be preoccupied with precisely when the Second Coming will occur or precisely how prophecy will be fulfilled. We must leave these matters in God’s hands. As Jesus told us, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day” (Matt. 6:33–34).

What we can, should, and must do is live as he has called us to, practicing the virtues of faith, hope, and charity—seeking to serve God and do good for our fellow men.

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who

sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:7–10).

Our present life is one of limitations. We do not know God or his prophecies perfectly, but one day the mystery will be revealed to us, and our task in the meantime is to live lives of love and virtue. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:12–13).

About the Author

Jimmy Akin is an internationally known author and speaker. As the senior apologist at Catholic Answers, he has more than twenty years of experience defending and explaining the Faith. Jimmy is a convert to the Faith and has an extensive background in the Bible, theology, the Church Fathers, philosophy, canon law, and liturgy. Jimmy is a weekly guest on the national radio program Catholic Answers Live, a regular contributor to *Catholic Answers Magazine*, and a popular blogger and podcaster. His books include *The Fathers Know Best* and *A Daily Defense*. His personal website is JimmyAkin.com.

Endnotes

- 1 Just a few of the many who have made dated predictions for the end of the world are Medieval heretic Joachim of Fiore (predicted the millennium would begin between 1200 and 1260), Anabaptist Thomas Muntzer (predicted the millennium would begin in 1525), Puritan Cotton Mather (predicted the end of the world in 1697), Baptist William Miller (predicted the Second Coming in 1844), Jehovah's Witness Charles Taze Russell (saw the battle of Armageddon beginning in 1914), Evangelical Hal Linsey (saw the 1980s as "the countdown to Armageddon"), and Protestant Harold Camping (predicted the Rapture in 1994).
- 2 E.g., Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:29.
- 3 *Jewish War* 6:3:5(288–310).
- 4 *Histories* 5:13.
- 5 See Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 2, epilogue.
- 6 *Ibid.* vol. 1, ch. 9.
- 7 Josephus, *War* 6:9:4[428]; cf. 6:9:3[421, 425] in *The Jewish War: Books 1–7*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson et al., trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, vol. 3, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA; London; New York: Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd; G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927–1928).
- 8 Josephus, *War* 7:1:1[3].
- 9 Joseph Ratzinger, "Theological Commentary" in Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Message of Fatima*.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Norms Regarding the Manner of Proceeding in the Discernment of Presumed Apparitions and Revelations*.

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