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I travel a lot. When I visit a new city where I will be speaking at a conference, sometimes navigating around town is a little difficult because everything is new to me. But once I have been there for a short time and have gotten the lay of the land, I can more easily find my way around.

The same can be true when going on a tour through prophetic Scripture. If you do not know the prophetic lay of the land, it might seem a little difficult to navigate through some of the concepts. The rapture, the tribulation, the antichrist, the false prophet, the abomination of desolation, the millennial kingdom, the two witnesses, the 144,000 Jews, Armageddon, the second coming, the great white throne judgment, the eternal state…unless you are familiar with such language, navigating through prophecy can be a little confusing.

To make things easier for you, this chapter provides a basic road map of notable events and personalities of end-times prophecy. Once you become acquainted with the road map, the rest of the book will be much easier to navigate.

THE TRIBULATION PERIOD

The Greek word for tribulation (thlipsis) literally means “to press” (as grapes), “to press together,” “to press hard upon,” and it refers to
times of oppression, affliction, and distress. It is translated variously as *tribulation, affliction, anguish, persecution, trouble, and burden*. The word has been used in relation to…

- those hard-pressed by the calamities of war (Matthew 24:21)
- a woman giving birth to a child (John 16:21)
- the afflictions of Christ (Colossians 1:24)
- those pressed by poverty and lack (Philippians 4:14)
- great anxiety and burden of heart (2 Corinthians 2:4)
- a period of unparalleled tribulation in the end times (Revelation 7:14)

All Christians can expect a certain amount of general tribulation in their lives. Jesus Himself said to His disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). Paul and Barnabas warned, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). But such general tribulation is to be distinguished from the tribulation period of the end times.

- Scripture refers to a definite period of tribulation at the end of the age (Matthew 24:29-35).
- It will be of such severity that no period in history—past or future—will equal it (Matthew 24:21).
- It will be shortened for the sake of the elect (Matthew 24:22). Otherwise, no one could survive it.
- It is called the time of Jacob’s trouble or distress, for it is a judgment on Messiah-rejecting Israel (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1-4).
- The nations will also be judged for their sin and rejection of Christ during this period of tribulation (Isaiah 26:21; Revelation 6:15-17).
- This tribulation period will last precisely seven years (Daniel 9:24,27).
- This period will be so bad that people will want to hide and even die (Revelation 6:16).
The tribulation period will be characterized by wrath (Zephaniah 1:15,18), judgment (Revelation 14:7), fury (Isaiah 26:20-21), trial (Revelation 3:10), distress (Jeremiah 30:7), destruction (Joel 1:15), darkness (Amos 5:18), desolation (Daniel 9:27), overturning (Isaiah 24:1-4), and punishment (Isaiah 24:20-21). Simply put, no Bible passage alleviates at all the severity of this time to come on the earth.

Scripture reveals that this tribulation will envelop the entire world, not just part of it. Revelation 3:10 describes this period as “the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.” Isaiah likewise describes this tribulation: “Behold, the Lord will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants…Terror and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth!” (Isaiah 24:1,17).

As to the source of the tribulation, Scripture mentions both divine wrath and satanic wrath—but especially divine wrath. We are told that the tribulation is a “day of the wrath of the Lord” (Zephaniah 1:18). The earth will experience “the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:16-17). “The Lord will empty the earth” (Isaiah 24:1), and “the Lord is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity” (Isaiah 26:21). Satan’s wrath is evident in Revelation 12:4,13,17.

THE RAPTURE

The rapture is that glorious event in which the dead in Christ will be resurrected, living Christians will be instantly translated into their resurrection bodies, and both groups will be caught up to meet Christ in the air and be taken back to heaven (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). This means that one generation of Christians will never pass through death’s door. They will be alive on earth one moment, and the next moment they will be instantly translated into their resurrection bodies and caught up to meet Christ in the air. What a moment that will be!

Christians seem to love to debate end-time issues. Perhaps the hottest debate relates to when the rapture occurs. These are the four primary views:

Partial rapturism is the view that only spiritual Christians will be
raptured prior to the beginning of the tribulation period. Carnal Christians will be left behind. Throughout the tribulation period, as more Christians become spiritual, they too will be raptured. Such raptures may continue to occur throughout the tribulation. (This view is not widely held today.)

Pretribulationism is the view that Christ will rapture the entire church before any part of the tribulation begins. This means the church will not go through the judgments prophesied in Revelation 4–18.

Posttribulationism is the view that Christ will rapture the church after the tribulation at the second coming of Christ. This means the church will go through the time of judgment prophesied in the book of Revelation, but believers will be kept or preserved through such judgments.

Midtribulationism is the view that Christ will rapture the church in the middle of the tribulation period. In this view, the two witnesses of Revelation 11, who are caught up to heaven, are representative of the church.

Most Christians today are either “pretribs” or “posttribs.” I believe the pretrib position—the majority view among evangelicals—is most consistent with the biblical testimony. For one thing, Revelation 3:10 indicates that believers will be kept from the actual hour of trial that is coming on the whole world. Further, no Bible passage on the tribulation mentions the church, either in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4:29-30; Jeremiah 30:4-11; Daniel 8:24-27; 12:1-2) or in the New (Matthew 13:30,39-42,48-50; 24:15-31; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:4-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11; Revelation 4–18).

Granted, Scripture does say there will be believers who live during the tribulation period (for example, Revelation 6:9-11). But in pretribulationism, these people become believers sometime after the rapture. Perhaps they become convinced of the truth of Christianity after witnessing millions of Christians supernaturally vanish off the planet at the rapture. Or perhaps they become Christians as a result of the ministry of the 144,000 Jewish followers of Christ introduced in Revelation 7 (who themselves apparently come to faith in Christ after the rapture). Many people could become believers as a result of the miraculous
ministry of the two witnesses of Revelation 11, prophets who apparently have the same powers as Moses and Elijah.

In any event, Scripture assures us that the church is not destined for wrath (Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:9). This means the church cannot go through the great day of wrath in the tribulation period (Revelation 6:17).

Throughout Scripture, God protects His people before judgment falls (see 2 Peter 2:5-9). Enoch was transferred to heaven before the judgment of the flood. Noah and his family were in the ark before the judgment of the flood. Lot was taken out of Sodom before judgment was poured out there. The firstborn among the Hebrews in Egypt were sheltered by the blood of the Paschal lamb before judgment fell. The spies were safely out of Jericho and Rahab was secured before judgment fell on Jericho. So too will the church be secured safely (by means of the rapture) before judgment falls in the tribulation period.

Note that Scripture portrays the rapture and the second coming as distinct events. For example, at the rapture the translated saints return with Christ to heaven (John 14:1-3), whereas at the second coming Christ returns to earth (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:11). The nations are not judged at the rapture, but they are judged at the second coming (Matthew 25:31-46). The rapture could happen any moment (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3), whereas many prophetic signs will precede the second coming (Luke 21:11,25). The rapture takes place before the “day of wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9), but the second coming occurs after the day of wrath. At the rapture Christ comes for His own (1 Thessalonians 4:17; John 14:3), whereas at the second coming Christ comes with His own (Revelation 19:6-14). The tribulation period follows the rapture, whereas the millennial kingdom follows the second coming.


Key verses on the second coming. Daniel 2:44-45; 7:9-14; 12:1-3;

THE ANTICHRIST

I will obviously address the antichrist in great detail throughout this book. As a way of introduction, however, the apostle Paul called him a “man of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:3,8-9). He will perform counterfeit signs and wonders and deceive many people during the future tribulation period (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). The apostle John describes this anti-God individual in the book of Revelation as a hideous beast who will rise to political prominence in the tribulation period, seek to dominate the world, attempt to destroy the Jews, persecute all true believers in Jesus Christ, set himself up as God in a rebuilt Jewish temple, and set up his own kingdom (Revelation 13). He will glorify himself with arrogant and boastful words (2 Thessalonians 2:4). He will eventually rule the whole world (Revelation 13:7) from his headquarters in Rome (Revelation 17:8-9). He will be defeated and destroyed by Jesus at His second coming (Revelation 19:11-16) and is destined for the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20).

THE FALSE PROPHET

The false prophet is like the first lieutenant of the antichrist. He will be motivated by Satan (Revelation 13:11), promote the worship of the antichrist (verse 12), execute those who refuse to worship the antichrist (verse 15), control economic commerce on the earth in order to enforce worship of the antichrist (verse 17), perform apparent signs and miracles (verse 13), and bring deception and false doctrine upon the whole world (verse 14).

SEAL, TRUMPET, AND BOWL JUDGMENTS

Human suffering will steadily escalate during the tribulation period. First are the seal judgments, involving bloodshed, famine, death, economic upheaval, a great earthquake, and cosmic disturbances
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(Revelation 6). Then come the trumpet judgments, involving hail and fire mixed with blood, the sea turning to blood, water turning bitter, further cosmic disturbances, affliction by demonic scorpions, and the death of a third of humankind (Revelation 8:6–9:21). Then come the bowl judgments, involving horribly painful sores on human beings, more bodies of water turning to blood, the death of all sea creatures, people being scorched by the sun, total darkness engulfing the land, a devastating earthquake, and much more (Revelation 16). The tribulation period will be a horrible time to live.

ARMAGEDDON

Worse comes to worst when these already traumatized human beings find themselves in the midst of a catastrophic series of battles called Armageddon. The name Armageddon literally means “Mount of Megiddo” and refers to a location about 60 miles north of Jerusalem. This is the location of Barak’s battle with the Canaanites (Judges 4) and Gideon’s battle with the Midianites (Judges 7). This will be the site for the final horrific battles of humankind just prior to the second coming (Revelation 16:16).

Napoleon is reported to have once commented that this site is perhaps the greatest battlefield he had ever witnessed. Of course, the battles Napoleon fought will dim in comparison to Armageddon. So horrible will Armageddon be that no one would survive if it were not for Christ coming again (Matthew 24:22).

THE SECOND COMING

The second coming is that event when Jesus Christ—the King of kings and Lord of lords—will return to earth in glory at the end of the tribulation period and set up His kingdom. The very same Jesus who ascended into heaven will come again at the second coming (Acts 1:9-11).

The second coming will involve a visible, physical, bodily return of the glorified Jesus. One key New Testament Greek word used to describe the second coming of Christ is *apokalupsis*. This word carries the basic meaning of “revelation,” “visible disclosure,” “unveiling,” and “removing the cover” from something that is hidden. The word is
used of Christ’s second coming in 1 Peter 4:13: “Rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”

Another New Testament Greek word used of Christ’s second coming is *epiphaneia*, which carries the basic meaning of “to appear,” or “to shine forth.” In Titus 2:13 Paul speaks of “our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” In 1 Timothy 6:14 Paul urges Timothy to “keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The second coming will be a universal experience in the sense that every eye will see it. Revelation 1:7 says, “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.” Moreover, at the time of the second coming, there will be magnificent signs in the heavens (Matthew 24:29-30). Christ will come as the King of kings and Lord of Lords with many crowns on His head—crowns that represent absolute sovereignty. His eyes will be like blazing fire (Revelation 19:11-16).

**THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM**

Following Christ’s second coming, He will personally set up His millennial kingdom on earth. This is another one of those doctrines that Christians seemingly love to debate, and there are three theological views.

Premillennialism teaches that following the second coming, Christ will institute a kingdom of perfect peace and righteousness on earth that will last for 1000 years. After this reign of true peace, the eternal state begins (Revelation 20:1-7; see also Isaiah 65:17-25; Ezekiel 37:21-28; Zechariah 8:1-17). The reason I subscribe to this view is that it recognizes that just as the Old Testament messianic prophecies were literally fulfilled in the first coming of Christ, so the prophecies of Christ’s second coming and millennial kingdom will be literally fulfilled.

Amillennialism, a spiritualized view, teaches that when Christ comes, eternity will begin with no prior 1000-year (millennial) reign on earth. Amillennialists generally interpret the 1000 years metaphorically and say it refers to Christ’s present (spiritual) rule from heaven.
The postmillennial view, another spiritualized view, teaches that through the church's progressive influence, the world will be “Christian-ized” before Christ returns. Immediately following this return, eternity will begin (with no 1000-year kingdom). Of course, a practical problem for postmillennialism is that the world seems to be getting worse and worse instead of better.

A literal and plain reading of Scripture leads effortlessly to premillennialism. As we saw in the introduction, when the plain sense of Scripture makes good sense, we need not seek another sense. I see no reason to spiritualize Bible prophecies relating to the millennium. The Bible plainly teaches a literal 1000-year kingdom over which Christ will rule on the earth. The antichrist will be in the lake of fire by the time the millennial kingdom begins.

**SIGNOS OF THE TIMES**

Scripture reveals that no one can know the day or the hour of specific end-time events. Matthew 24:36 tells us, “Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” Likewise, Acts 1:7 instructs us, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” However, the Lord Jesus did indicate in the parable of the fig tree that we can know the general time of His coming (see Matthew 24:33).

The term *signs of the times* (Matthew 16:3) describes specific characteristics and conditions that warn people that we are living in the end times. Jesus provides this explanation in the Olivet Discourse:

> See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars… Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places…Many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:4-12).
The apostle Paul offers a similar alert.

In the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

He likewise warns in 1 Timothy 4:1, “The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” We see this in the kingdom of the cults.

All of these, then, are signs of the times. They clue us in to the reality that we are living in the end times and that the emergence of the antichrist cannot be far off. I will address these signs further at the end of the book.