

OVERVIEW OF THE END TIMES

1. Introduction

- a. Matthew 24 gives us a microcosm of the signs we will see as we approach the end of the age. Jesus gave us those signs to prepare us so that we will not be deceived or caught unawares.
 - i Many scriptures help to build a picture of what we can expect to happen in the last days.
 - ii We are going to explore the main events and characters involved in the end times drama that will help to paint the bigger picture that we need to get hold of. This will be the framework which we will build on in later sessions.
- b. Looking at an overview of end times is like a jigsaw puzzle. The best way to start is to find the corner pieces and all the edge pieces and put them together first. This gives you a framework – all the other pieces have to fit inside this framework somewhere.
 - i This framework gives a context for everything else that has to fit within the framework – you know all the other pieces have to fit somewhere inside that framework.
 - ii Secondly, it gives us a reference point that helps us to fit all the other pieces in the right place in relation to each other.
 - iii Looking at an overview helps us to put a framework in place so that we can begin to see how the different pieces fit together to make the bigger picture. Once we know the overall framework and context of the end times, the details begin to make sense.
- c. There are a couple of points that are relevant here:
 - i The phrase “End Times” is not actually a Biblical one – you won’t find it mentioned anywhere in the Bible. The term that the Bible does use is “the last days.” However, we have been in the last days ever since Jesus ascended to heaven – John says in his first letter that we are in the last days (1 John 2:18).
 - ii So we use the phrase “*the end times*” to refer to that period of time in which earth’s history transitions from this present age into the next.
 - iii Secondly, you may have heard people talking about the end of the world. That is not a biblical concept – the world is not coming to an end. According to the bible this world doesn’t have an end, it continues for ever. The correct biblical terminology is that used by the disciples in Matthew 24 when they asked him what will happen “at the end of the age.”

2. Outline of main end times characters and symbols

- a. **The Beast (aka the Antichrist)** – he will be a world leader who wages war against God and His people. He will be powerful in many ways: politically, militarily, in religion, financially. He will be a very shrewd and persuasive leader.
 - i Outside of Jesus himself there is more prophetic insight into this man than any other. He will appear on the scene in an unprecedented period of international confusion and disruption.

- ii He will talk about global peace, and will gain the allegiance and trust of millions – his charismatic character will win them over.
- iii Behind the scenes he will be building a secret network of alliances.
- b. **The False Prophet (aka another Beast)** – He is the Antichrist's right-hand-man and is the leader of an end-time, worldwide religious network. He causes those on earth to worship the Antichrist, giving Satan the worship that he craves. He will use demonic miracles to deceive, political and military power to kill all who resist, and economic oppression to control the nations.
 - i The false prophet will be the key spiritual leader in the end times. He will lead what the bible calls the Harlot Babylon, a worldwide socio/political religious organisation that will suck many into its system.
- c. This combination of the Antichrist and the False Prophet together with Satan who is their source of power, form an unholy trinity, which seeks to mimic the Godhead.
- d. **The Dragon** – This is how the book of Revelation refers to Satan
- e. **The 7 heads** – the seven empires that have historically been great enemies of Israel. [Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Revived Roman Empire]
- f. **The 10 horns** – these are symbolic of a confederation of 10 nations or power-blocs that will be under the Antichrist's control, totally submitted to his authority.
- g. **The woman with the male child** – found only in Revelation 12, the woman is the faithful remnant of Israel throughout history. The male child is Jesus, and the rest of her offspring are gentile believers during the Great Tribulation.
- h. **The Two Witnesses** – Two characters operating powerfully in the supernatural during the Great Tribulation Period. They give powerful testimony of God in Jerusalem, opposing the Antichrist, and he is unable to kill them until God gives permission. They then lie dead in the streets of Jerusalem for three days, after which God brings them back to life and they are then taken to heaven.
- i. **The Saints** – throughout the books of Daniel and Revelation there are many references to the Saints. These refer to the body of Christ on the earth, those who are in Christ, comprising both Jewish and Gentile believers.

3. Outline of main end times events

- a. In Matthew 24 Jesus outlines some 22 signs which he describes as the beginning of birth pangs. In the years leading up to the Tribulation we will see an increase in these signs, both in their frequency and their intensity.
 - i This includes the intensification of global calamities – earthquakes, storms, floods, volcanoes and tsunamis. Also increasing wars between nations and ethnic groups and clashes of different ideologies.

- ii There will be an escalation of ungodly agendas, and an increased blurring of the lines between right and wrong. Pornography and perversion will find many new ways to manifest itself. In many places even marriage will be outlawed.
 - iii Governmental, economic, social, religious, ecological, technological and military structures will be stretched to their limit in order to keep pace with the collapsing infrastructure.
 - iv This will lead to a state of lawlessness, where the rule of law gives way to dictatorial demands and governments find themselves unable to function. This sets the stage for the revelation of the antichrist who is able to bring order out of the chaos.
- b. As we approach what Jesus described as “increased birth pangs” several things develop seemingly unconnected to each other, but they all feed into a time of apparent world peace. These are the first years of the Tribulation, marked by a significant event. By now the Antichrist will be on the rise and will be a well-known figure on the world stage.
- i He will suffer a wound to the head which appears to be fatal. This will be headline news, covered in every detail on social media. The whole earth will mourn because they believed in the potential of this brilliant new leader.
 - ii The False Prophet, empowered by Satan, will create an enormous public stir by bringing him back to life. This “resurrection” will elevate his political career to new heights that were previously unthinkable. Many will believe this man has immortal qualities.
- c. During these first 3½ years of the Tribulation there are several things that will happen according to the scriptures:
- i Right at the beginning of this time frame the Antichrist will broker a peace treaty in the Middle East between Israel and the Muslim nations (Daniel 9:27). For a season this will enable a sense of stability not just in the Middle East, but also on the world stage. This also enables Israel to build a new temple in Jerusalem on the temple mount.
 - ii This covenant is described by Isaiah as a covenant of death (Isaiah 28)
 - iii Because of this new-found worldwide peace and safety a world religion will emerge. The Antichrist will be a key proponent of this religious system and he will use it to extend his influence for a season, as it will shift the culture of the world to accommodate his plans. But once this religion has served his purpose he will turn on it and destroy it.
 - iv This religion, which the Bible calls “Mystery Babylon” will embrace and promote tolerance above all, engendering a sense of world unity. Genuine expressions of faith will be viewed as dangerous and threatening to the peace. It will be a hostile time for all true believers. Many will be sucked in by the lure of what appears to be social justice, but which in reality is false justice, and many will fall away from the real faith through fear and compromise.
 - v This is part of the great falling away that Paul warns us about in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3
 - vi Towards the end of this first 3½ years of the tribulation, the Antichrist will have risen to greater political power as the leader of this 10-nation power bloc. He then makes two moves. First, he has worked for years building up his political and military power base, now he has no need of this false religious system, and will totally destroy it.

- vii Then he will set out to convince the world that he is God. He will set up a huge image of himself in the temple in Jerusalem. This image will appear to be living and will speak great blasphemies against God. At the same time he will abolish all the sacrifices and offerings in the temple, breaking the covenant he has made with Israel and the nations. This talking image will be set up in the holy of holies, and demand that the nations worship it. This is what Jesus, quoting Daniel, describes as the Abomination of Desolation.
 - viii This demand to worship the Antichrist as God will be augmented by the False Prophet performing counterfeit miracles. It will be accompanied by threats of death to anyone who refuses to worship the beast. All who willingly join in worshiping the Antichrist will be given a mark that will enable them to buy and sell. It will be a seal of approval not easily obtained, you won't acquire this mark accidentally.
 - ix Resistance to the Antichrist will be punishable by death, and many people will be martyred as the Antichrist increases his persecution of both Israel and Christians.
- d. Let us now turn our attention to what God is doing. Through this second 3½ years of the Great Tribulation the Two Witnesses will be making their presence felt in Jerusalem. Their witness will cause many to turn away from following the Antichrist as part of the great harvest at the end of the age.
- i The Abomination of Desolation also marks the beginning of God's judgments, the seals and the trumpets. These judgments, the pouring out of God's wrath are not indiscriminate. They are judgments poured out on the Antichrist and his system and they are designed to disrupt and confuse his infrastructure.
 - ii As God's people we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, and God will protect us from direct harm by these judgments. In exactly the same way that the Israelites in Goshen were protected from the plagues of Egypt.
 - iii There are three series' of judgments:
 - (1) **The seal judgments** – less severity, intended to catch the attention of the people, to alert them to the danger they are in if they give allegiance to the Antichrist. They begin as soon as the Antichrist sets himself up as God with his talking image, there are 7 in all, and the details are recorded in Revelation 6.
 - (2) **The trumpet judgments** – These follow on from the seals and are more severe than the seal judgments, intended to give a warning of something even worse to come. They will bring judgment on the enemies of the saints; warning to the lost that Jesus' arrival is imminent; and victory to God's people. There is great significance in the 7th trumpet.
- e. At the sounding of the 7th trumpet two things happen. The return of Jesus and the rapture of the saints. It is at this point that the Bible tells us that the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ (Revelation 11:15). At the sight of Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven, the rapture of the saints begins. As each saint is caught up in the sky he receives his resurrection body, which happens in the twinkling of an eye.

- i This appearing in the sky with the sound of a trumpet and the shout of the archangel is the first phase of Jesus' return to the earth that leads to his triumph over the Antichrist and his armies. Every eye will see Jesus when he returns – this is also not an instantaneous event that happens supernaturally. Every eye will physically see Jesus.
- ii Then when all the saints have been caught up to be with Jesus, the moment that he has longed and waited for has arrived – he returns to the earth to begin his final campaign against the armies of the Antichrist.
- f. Most people assume that Jesus will return to Jerusalem, but when Jesus returns, he comes first of all to Mount Sinai (Saudi Arabia). From there he travels to Egypt (Deuteronomy 18), and from here he begins to release the Bowl judgments, the final 7 most severe judgments that will ultimately destroy the Antichrist and his armies.
 - i This is the 30 days that Daniel speaks of in chapter 12:11, which is how long it takes for Jesus to travel from Egypt to Jerusalem. Jesus releases Jewish people from prison camps where they have been held (Isaiah 27). He comes up through what today is Jordan approaching Jerusalem from the East.
 - ii The primary focus of the Antichrist's rebellion now switches from attacking the Jews in Jerusalem to marshalling his armies ready to attack Jesus and the armies of heaven as they advance northwards. Huge numbers are gathered on the plains of Megiddo, just to the north of Jerusalem.
 - iii Jerusalem itself is surrounded by the armies of the Antichrist, and the people in the city are trapped. As Jesus stands on the Mount of Olives, the ground will literally split from east to west, allowing those trapped in the city to escape (Zechariah 12, 14:4).
 - iv The inhabitants of Jerusalem having escaped Jesus releases the final bowl judgment; he rides into battle on his white horse with all the armies of heaven following him. Defeat of the Antichrist and his armies follows swiftly, and there is so much blood flowing that it flows for 184 miles, and at some points is as high as a horse's bridle (Revelation 14:20).
 - v At the end of the battle Jesus rides triumphantly into Jerusalem, destroys the abomination of desolation, and takes up his earthly throne. The Antichrist and the False Prophet are taken and cast into the lake of fire. An angel is sent to arrest Satan, bind him in chains and place him in the bottomless pit from which he cannot escape.
- g. Jesus has one more task to accomplish. In a glorious fulfilment of Hosea 2:14-23, Jesus takes the remnant of Israel, who escaped from the city when the ground split, and he gathers them together in the wilderness.
 - i There he speaks tenderly to them, and they look upon him, recognising him as the one whom they had pierced. They receive the long-promised salvation that Paul speaks of in Romans 11. And in this way, all Israel will be saved, and will know Jesus both as their Messiah and as their glorious Bridegroom.
- h. Then Jesus gathers the nations before him in Jerusalem to evaluate them according to Joel 3 and Matthew 25 – this is the sheep and goats judgment that we looked at in the last session.

- i. Daniel 12:11-12 A period of 45 days in which Jesus puts in place the infrastructure of the Messianic Kingdom.

4. The Messianic Kingdom and beyond

- a. Jesus establishes his Messianic Kingdom – aka the Millennium.
- b. Many people think that when Jesus returns he's just going to wave his hands and everything is going to be put right. No – Jesus is coming for a Bride – and that means partnership.
- c. There will have been wholesale destruction across the earth during the Tribulation, there will be a great need to repair and restore the basic necessities of life. Jesus will rule from Jerusalem, rebuilding both society and the physical infrastructure from the ground up.
- d. The ultimate goal of this restoration will be to bring the earth back to how it was in Eden, where sin is totally eradicated from the planet.

Ephesians 1:9-10 *...making known to us the mystery of his [God's] will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him [Jesus], things in heaven and things on earth.*

- e. Jesus is joining together the natural and the spiritual realms in preparation for the coming of the New Jerusalem when heaven descends to earth and the two become one.
- f. During the years of the Messianic Kingdom our dwelling place will be the New Jerusalem – but our assignment will be here on earth. In our resurrection bodies we will be able to transition between the New Jerusalem and the place of our assignment on the earth.
- g. But then, right at the end of this 1,000 years God lets Satan out of his prison and allows him access to the earth. The result is that millions decide to follow him, to their ultimate destruction.
 - i Even given near-perfect conditions, with righteous government, every need being met, no sickness or disease, longevity of life, and the very presence of Jesus on the earth, men still prefer darkness to light.
 - ii God's response is swift and uncompromising – judgment comes in the form of fire from heaven and consumes all the rebellious. Satan himself is taken and cast into the lake of fire forever.
- h. Then the earth is purged and cleansed by the fire of God until sin is totally removed from the face of the earth
- i. After this comes the Great White Throne judgment where Jesus judges the wicked dead who were not raised in the first resurrection at the rapture of the saints.
- j. And after this, the final enemy, death and Hades are also thrown into the lake of fire, so there will be no more death. Now the New Jerusalem finally descends fully to the earth and heaven and earth are joined together again as it was in the beginning.
- k. We can't be sure of what that new age, which we call eternity, will look like for us, but we do know that the Father has been waiting and planning for that time from before the creation of the world.

- I. Psalm 2:1-12; 110:1-7; Isaiah 2:1-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 51:1-8; 60:1-62:12; 65:17-25; Jeremiah 3:17; Ezekiel 36:35; 47:1-12; Habakkuk 2:14; Matthew 6:10; 17:11; 19:28; 28:19; Acts 3:21; Revelation 20:1-6; 21:4

5. Context – the story behind the storyline

- a. God is deeply involved with this planet. At the creation God created two different realms: the first was the heavens which he populated with spiritual beings that we call angels.
 - i This was the place of his own dwelling, where he is most manifestly seen and known, where he reigns supreme, forever the object of incessant worship. The place where his desires are perfectly expressed and fulfilled.
 - ii Among the created heavenly beings there were three commander angels under the authority of God. We know one was called Michael, and another was Gabriel. The third is often referred to as Lucifer – but his name in Hebrew is “Hillel ben Shacar” which means “Son of the Dawn” (Isaiah 14:12).
 - iii There came a time when there was a rebellion, where this Son of the Dawn sought to take from God what was exclusively his, the worship of heaven. And like lightning he was expelled from the presence of God, taking ⅓ of the angels with him.
 - iv God demonstrates his zeal to confront and deal with sin wherever and whenever it occurs.
- b. The second realm was the earth. It is a place of physicality, a world of finite real estate, filled with beauty and pleasure.
 - i Into this physical world God placed the ultimate expression of his creative will, a physical being created in his own image, bearing the very nature of the creator God. And into this physical being God breathed his own spirit and man became a living being.
 - ii God planned all this before the foundation of the earth.

Ephesians 1:4-5 “...He [God] chose us in Him [Jesus] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him. In love, ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will...”

- iii You were in the heart and mind of God even before the first atom of creation was spoken into being, and it’s for the outworking of God’s choosing to dwell with his creation that he put this plan in place.

- c. According to the scriptures we can identify four different ages that are referred to.

Hebrews 1:2 ...but in these last days he [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

- d. In the Greek the word translated “world” should really be “ages”. Jesus created the ages.
- e. What are the four ages that we can identify?
 - i **Pre-creation** (before the foundation of the world)
 - ii **This present age** (we could divide this into two parts: pre-cross and post-cross)
 - iii **The Millennial Age** (1,000-year rule and reign of Jesus on earth)

iv **The Eternal Age** (Revelation 21-22 and beyond)

- f. Genesis tells us that God took 7 days to create the world and everything in it. But there was a sub-division, because God did all of the creating in 6 days, and then rested on the 7th day.
- i 2 Peter 3:8 tells us that with the Lord 1 day is as 1,000 years and 1,000 years is as 1 day. The Jews have traced the generations back to Adam, and have calculated that we are currently in the year 5780. While the calculation is only approximate, it clearly indicates that we are rapidly approaching 6000 years since creation.
- ii The next 1,000 years or so are a Sabbath rest for the earth, and this is what we understand the messianic kingdom to be.

6. God wants to dwell on the earth

- a. Here is a key framework piece of our end-times jigsaw puzzle, it's this: **God wants to dwell with his people on the earth forever**. It's on this statement that the whole of the history of the earth and the end-times scenario is predicated. That is what the whole history of the earth has been pointing towards and will ultimately find its consummation in that reality.
- b. To begin our overview of the end times we have to start at creation, the beginning of earth's history. Moving forward just a short distance we come to Eden and the creation of Adam.
- c. We believe that Eden was a mountain-city; it was literally heaven on earth. That was how it was at the beginning, and according to Revelation 21-22 that is how it will be at the end. Eden wasn't just a garden, but like the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21, it was a mountain-city.
- i The garden was just a small patch of land on the eastern side of Eden that God gave to Adam to cultivate and find fulfilment in, and to enjoy. Adam's mandate from God was to partner with him in taking the joys and pleasures of the garden and establishing them in other places throughout the earth, to rule with God over all other elements of creation.
- ii We know what happened next. Satan, through a series of half-truths and lies deceived Eve and then Adam into disobeying God, drawing them in to embrace his own rebellion and ensnaring them under his own power and control.
- d. God had determined that this was not to be the end of the story – it was just the beginning, and so he began to unravel his plan for the redemption of mankind. He promised a seed who would crush Satan's head, though his heel would be bruised in the process.
- e. Early markers on the timeline:
- i The Flood.
- ii God made a covenant with Noah.
- iii God's covenant with Abraham. This is the foundational redemptive covenant on which all the others are built.
- iv The Exodus of Israel from Egypt, followed by God's covenant and the giving of the Law at Sinai. This was God's marriage betrothal to the nation of Israel.

- v God's covenant with David in which he promised that the seed would come through his line and would establish a kingdom that would last forever.
- f. There is much significance in all of these and many other events and prophecies in the Old Testament that contribute to our understanding of the end times.

7. The cross

- a. Because we live in the post-cross time frame we understand that the fulfilment of that prophetic promise in Genesis 3 was through Jesus, the promised seed, who came as the second Adam.
 - i To understand what Jesus is coming to do at the end of the age, we have to understand the cross correctly. Jesus' death on the cross is an event with no equal – it is the ultimate expression and revelation to humanity of who God is.
 - ii The cross is not the end of the story. It is not the climax of redemptive history – it sets the stage for the climax of redemptive history. The cross does not fulfil all the promises of God, it secures them.
- b. The cross is the guarantee that every promise of God will be fulfilled:

2 Corinthians 1:19-20 *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.*

- i Every promise that God has made finds its yes in Jesus. It will be fulfilled, but the time for many of those promises has not yet come – but it will.
- c. Jesus' return brings the fulfilment of the promises secured at the cross – promises that include the defeat and ultimate destruction of Satan, the resurrection from the dead to eternal life, the judgment of the wicked and the restoration of all things.
 - i Focusing on what Jesus has done is good, but we should equally focus on what Jesus will do, that is when he delivers the complete fulfilment of all God's redemptive promises.
 - ii John Pipe: "Biblical hope is not finger-crossing. It is the confident expectation of good things to come... we set our hope on the second coming of our Lord... the second coming of Christ is the completion of his saving work. If you take it away, the whole fabric of his saving work unravels."
- d. Jesus is the key to understanding the end times. Important as it is to be obedient to Jesus' leadership in our lives now, it will be even more essential to follow his leadership through the unusual circumstances and pressures of the end times.

Zechariah 14:2 *For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses plundered, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.*

8. Jesus is coming to take over the kingdoms of the earth

- a. When Jesus returns, He will enforce the authority that He won on the cross and make all of His enemies a footstool under His feet. He will rule all the nations with a rod of iron and take over all the kingdoms of the earth (Psalm 2:9; 110:2; Revelation 2:26; 11:15)

Psalm 2:8-9 *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*

⁹*You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

Hebrews 10:12-13 *But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.*

- b. God's ultimate purpose for the earth is to restore everything that was lost in Eden. He will reunite heaven and earth as Jesus establishes His kingdom over all the earth.

Daniel 2:44 *And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever*

Ephesians 1:9 *"...making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."*

Revelation 11:15 *Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."*

- c. Jesus will prepare the earth for the rule of His Father at the end of the millennial kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Revelation 21:3)

Revelation 21:3 *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."*

- d. When Jesus returns he will come for a church that has been made mature in love, without and blemish. The journey of where we are now to where we need to be is one of preparation. In order to lay hold of this perfected love, we must be willing to do all that it takes to prepare for that encounter.
- e. We may not know in detail what our life will be like in eternity, but we do know that what we do now will have an impact on what we will be doing in the age to come. Our choices today shape our eternal destiny. Jesus wants us to have an eternal perspective that will steer us through the difficulties as we transition into the next age.