CORONA CRISIS

PLAGUES, PANDEMICS, AND THE COMING APOCALYPSE

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About the Author
To my grandson Reed Wilson Hitchcock

I thank God daily for adding your smile and sunlight to our family. Just thinking about you makes me smile. I can’t remember what we did without you. I look forward to watching you grow up and, by God’s grace, come to know and love Jesus.
Are we approaching those days of which the Bible speaks? Are the events of our time meant to warn us of even greater disasters—disasters predicted by the Bible that will be harbingers of Christ’s coming judgment and rule?

—Billy Graham, Storm Warning
CHAPTER 1

CORONA FEVER

We’re waking up to our new reality. . . . This will be the thing this generation remembers.
—Amy Acton, Ohio Department of Health Director

“People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.”
—Jesus, Luke 21:26

None of us, in our wildest dreams, ever thought we would spend so many days and weeks of our lives
thinking about a microscopic virus. It’s not something we like to think about or want to think about. Now or ever! Yet our lives have been consumed by novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).¹ We’re bombarded and barraged with it every waking moment. It’s 24/7. We’ve heard from doctors, epidemiologists, politicians, financial experts, and political pundits nonstop. We’ve seen charts and graphics predicting how bad it’s going to get. No one living through these times will ever forget 2020 and COVID-19.

The coronavirus has turned the entire world upside down. It’s a classic “black swan” event.² We’re witnessing worldwide upheaval. The headlines tell the story:

“Apocalypse Now: Here’s How Americans Think It Will All End”
yougov.com, March 18, 2020

“Coronavirus Will Change the World Permanently. Here’s How.”
Politico, March 19, 2020

“Why Do Some Christians Believe Coronavirus Is an Apocalyptic Prophecy?”
The Jerusalem Post, March 26, 2020
“Empty Streets and Sights as Major Cities Lock Down”
BBC News, March 29, 2020

“Trump Acknowledges That Deaths in the US Could Reach 100,000 or More”
Associated Press, March 29, 2020

“Over 3,000 People Have Died in US from Coronavirus, Surpassing 9/11 Death Toll”
New York Post, March 31, 2020

“US Jobless Claims Hit Record 6.6 Million as COVID-19 Ravages Economy”
The Guardian, April 2, 2020

Never in my lifetime have I sensed so much anxiety and unrest. It’s palpable. Never, other than briefly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, has nearly every conversation been dominated by one topic. Conversations are centered around coronavirus and its consequences and impact on daily life.

We’re navigating uncharted waters. These are turbulent, unparalleled, unprecedented times. There’s a daily Niagara Falls of unnerving news. It’s easy to get overwhelmed. Isolation is exacting its grinding toll.
On New Year’s Eve 2019, health officials from China alerted the World Health Organization of a new form of pneumonia in the city of Wuhan, a megacity in the Central China region.

A few days later, health officials announced they had identified a new strain of virus from the coronavirus family. It was labeled “2019-nCoV,” more commonly known as COVID-19 or the coronavirus.

The number of cases exploded in China, and then Italy and Spain were hit hard. The first COVID-19 death in the United States was on February 29, 2020. The US eventually surpassed China as the country with the most confirmed cases. New York City became the global epicenter.

Coronavirus hit the elderly population hardest along with those with underlying medical issues. Experts maintain we will never know the full extent of the pandemic since some people have no discernible symptoms. But one thing we do know is that coronavirus changed the world. That’s not an overstatement or exaggeration, since COVID-19 spread to almost every nation on the planet and reached into every corner and crevice of our lives. Our schedules, schools, social contacts, hygiene, work, psyches, and—for many people—interest in spiritual
things. Shaking hands or hugging became taboo. We had to keep our distance from everyone.

Like thousands of other pastors, I preached for weeks to an empty sanctuary as our services were live-streamed to our people in their homes. It was not ideal, but it was a great reminder to us all that the church is not the building or the gathering but the people who are part of Christ’s body. Still, preaching to an empty room on Good Friday and Easter Sunday was an experience I will never forget.

Even our vocabulary changed in a short period of time. New words and phrases we’ve all heard and learned have become part of our everyday conversation: self-isolation, self-quarantine, shelter in place, social distance, community spread, coronavirus, n95 mask, COVID-19, super-spreader, flatten the curve, and pandemic. There’s no doubt the word of the year for 2020 will be coronavirus. It may be the word of the new decade.

It seems like we’ve all been suddenly written into the script of a movie about the spread of a mysterious apocalyptic virus—think Outbreak (1995) or Contagion (2011), the latter of which became one of the most-watched movies during the corona crisis. Or it seems like we’re part of the nightmarish plot of one of the spate of movies that portrays a dystopian future after a pandemic, war, or ecological disaster: World War Z,
28 Days Later, The Walking Dead, or The Last of Us. Strange times indeed.

India went on lockdown, quarantining one-sixth of the world’s population. Italy shut down as tight as a condemned building. While I’m writing, 90 percent of the US population is under some level of lockdown or stay-at-home/shelter-in-place order. Storefronts are plastered with signs stating “Closed Until Further Notice.” Streets are eerily empty. High-rise office buildings are vacant. Playgrounds are silent. Tent hospitals have sprung up in New York City’s Central Park. Floating naval hospitals are anchored off the coasts of New York City and Los Angeles. Writing for The Atlantic, Ed Yong said,

Three months ago, no one knew that SARS-CoV-2 existed. Now the virus has spread to almost every country. . . . It has crashed economies and broken health-care systems, filled hospitals and emptied public spaces. It has separated people from their workplaces and their friends. It has disrupted modern society on a scale that most living people have never witnessed. Soon, most everyone in the United States will know someone who has been infected. Like World War II or the 9/11 attacks, this pandemic has already imprinted itself upon the nation’s psyche.³
On top of all the other personal anxiety, financial markets plummeted. The US stock market logged its worst first quarter in 124 years. Experts called it a major financial reset. The largest economic relief and stimulus package in history was passed by Congress and signed by President Donald Trump. More rounds are expected.

Global travel lurched to a standstill. Unemployment could quickly surge to near 1930s levels. There’s no doubt that the world is being battered psychologically, socially, physically, and financially. But COVID-19 has had another powerful effect, reaching into our collective psyche prophetically and apocalyptically. Everywhere you look, more and more people are wondering if, in addition to all the other impact, coronavirus signals the beginning of the end. With the sudden surge of COVID-19, it’s not uncommon to hear the words apocalyptic, doomsday, or last days used to describe what’s happening. We often use those words loosely, but in this case many people seem to be using them in a more literal sense. With the entire world on edge, many are asking searching questions:

- Is this the beginning of the great tribulation?
- Will coronavirus lead to the end of the world as we know it?
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- Is it a sign of Christ’s soon return?
- Are these the “beginning of birth pains,” as Jesus predicted in Matthew 24:8?

Opinions on this topic are flying all over the internet and social media in every conceivable direction as people struggle to make sense of what’s happening.

**THE HARBINGER**

Without doubt, the global spread of coronavirus has a strange, apocalyptic feel. In March 2020, as my wife and I were at Armageddon, the ancient ruins of Megiddo in Israel, leading a tour group from our church, the corona crisis was ramping up. The site at Armageddon is fascinating, and it felt surreal being there as a global pandemic was tightening its grip on the globe. We were there on a beautiful, clear day, which was great since the ancient site of Megiddo overlooks the expansive Jezreel Valley, or Valley of Armageddon. As always, I presented a teaching on the final great military conflict from Revelation 16 and 19.

After we returned to the States, I read that even Armageddon was on lockdown in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. I couldn’t help but think that things have
gotten pretty bad when Armageddon is off limits and locked down. The site at Armageddon may be closed, but the events that will lead to that final great conflagration are ramping up. Our world is well down the road that leads to Armageddon.

Even the *New York Times* has taken note of the apocalyptic character of the times as natural disasters seem to be escalating:

For people of many faiths, and even none at all, it can feel lately like the end of the world is near. Not only is there a plague, but hundreds of billions of locusts are swarming East Africa. Wildfires have ravaged Australia, killing an untold number of animals. A recent earthquake in Utah even shook the Salt Lake Temple to the top of its iconic spire, causing the golden trumpet to fall from the angel Moroni’s right hand.⁶

Many are pointing to these events as flashing signs of the end. The shaking of the foundations.

Pastor and prophecy expert David Jeremiah, who is not given to sensationalism or hyperbole, called the COVID-19 pandemic “the most apocalyptic thing that has ever happened to us.”⁷ The American people seem to share that sentiment.

In a poll of likely voters in the United States,
conducted by the nationally recognized McLaughlin & Associates, “A stunning 44.3% of poll respondents said they believe the coronavirus and resulting economic meltdown is a ‘wake-up call for us to turn back to faith in God,’ signs of ‘coming judgment,’ or both.”\(^8\) That’s astounding. Additionally, 29 percent of those polled believe the corona crisis suggests that “we are living in what the Bible calls the ‘last days.’”\(^9\) This poll is not a fringe finding or outlier. It’s an accurate reading of the nation’s prophetic pulse.

I heard a story years ago about a man who visited the Upper Peninsula of Michigan with a friend. Stunned by the solitary beauty, he commented, “This looks like the end of the world.” His friend replied, “It’s not the end of the world, but I think you can see it from here.”

That’s how many people are feeling today. Even people with little or no religious belief or conviction have an uneasy, foreboding sense that doomsday is approaching. That we can see the end from here.

They may be right. Scripture predicts events that will shake and shatter the foundations of society in the end times. The Bible urges us to pay attention to the crises in our world that will lead to the final events that must take place before Jesus returns. Among those future crises or catastrophes is pestilence, plagues, and pandemics—like coronavirus.
It’s well known that President Ronald Reagan was extremely nearsighted. Reagan’s eyesight was so bad that it affected his military service in World War II, keeping him from combat duty. For many years he wore glasses and later contact lenses. As he aged, he still needed correction for his nearsightedness but also needed help to see up close. He wore a lens to correct nearsightedness on his right eye and a lens for farsightedness on his left eye. So he would read his speeches with his right eye and look out at the audience with his left eye. President Reagan was a man focused on the near and the far.10

In these unprecedented times, we want the same to be true of us. We need double vision. We need to be ever watchful, simultaneously looking with one eye toward the end times and the other on the meantime. We need to be focused on what’s up close: Our health. Our families. Our communities. Ministering to those around us who are in need. But if all we do is focus on what’s nearby, we can become anxious and alarmed. We need to keep an eye on the sky. As pastor Philip De Courcy observed,

It’s easy to become alarmed if we remain nearsighted.

After all . . . famine and natural disasters abound, wars and rumors of wars fill our conversation,
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economic globalism is on the rise. . . . We must not be nearsighted alone, we must also be farsighted. To survive and thrive in a world gone mad, we as Christians must begin with the end, we must constantly and confidently keep an eye on the horizon as we look for the second coming of Christ in the clouds with power and glory.11

We need both eyes. It’s easy to get out of balance. I like this thought from author Max Lucado, calling us to strike a proper balance: “Some Christians are so obsessed with the last days that they are oblivious to these days. Others are just the opposite. They’ll tell you Jesus is coming. But they live like he never will. One is too panicky, the other too patient. Isn’t there a balance?”12 There is, and we would do well to find it, especially in these challenging times. We need to keep our vision balanced and focused.

We will try to do that throughout this book. We want to look at what’s ahead because that’s the focus of this book, but we also want to think about how to live today in light of what’s coming. Interestingly, as we look at current events and headlines, the near and far seem to be moving closer together every day—even appearing to be on the verge of merging.

With that in mind, it’s not my desire to stir up needless anxiety or arouse groundless fears; rather,
I hope to deal with questions people everywhere are asking and to connect some prophetic dots by turning to Scripture for answers. I invite you to come with me as we discover the answers God has given us in His inspired Word, the Bible.
The Bible gives . . . clear indications that will alert us to Christ’s soon return. And here’s what I find so fascinating: There are more of those signs in closer proximity to one another than I have ever seen before.

—Greg Laurie, Signs of the Times

Every Tuesday during the school year, I drive from our house in the Oklahoma City area down I-35 to Dallas Theological Seminary, where I have the privilege of teaching. I’ve driven that stretch of road hundreds of
times. I know the road extremely well. Maybe too well. Many of the signs along the highway are very familiar. I use the signs as markers to know where I am and to determine how much longer it will be until I arrive.

Some of the highway signs are informational, like “Exit 51” or “Dallas 180 Miles.” Other familiar signs are invitational, such as “Welcome to Texas” or “Best Barbecue in Oklahoma 5 Miles.” However, the signs that grab my attention, no matter how many times I make the drive, are the new warning signs: “Left Lane Closed Ahead,” “Merge Now,” or “Road Work Next 5 Miles.” Some of these warning signs have flashing lights. You can’t miss them.

One other thing about the signs on I-35 is that the closer I get to the seminary campus, the greater the number of signs I see. As I approach Dallas and then get into the city, signs are everywhere. You can’t miss them. They increase in number and are closer together.

All the signs we encounter along any road, whether informational, invitational, or instructional, are designed with one simple goal in mind: to help us get safely from where we are to our final destination.

In a similar way, God has posted signs that highlight where we are today and where we’re going. These signs point to future events. We find these signs of the times in God’s Word, the Bible. These signs tell us what we
can expect on the road ahead. Some of these signs are more familiar. They’ve been in place for a while. Many are new. Some of them have flashing lights. Also, just as the signposts increase the closer I get to Dallas, signs of the times are increasing the closer we get to the end of the age.

People everywhere sense it. It’s palpable. The signs are multiplying. They’re lining up. Global events are tilting and trending toward the end of days. Turmoil in the Middle East, the rise of Russia and Iran, the threat of nuclear proliferation, globalism, natural disasters, and now the surging coronavirus pandemic and panic.

**THE SAVIOR AND SIGNS**

Of course, none of this takes the Lord by surprise. God is never caught off guard. In fact, Jesus Himself spoke frequently about signs of the times. This might amaze some people. In one encounter with the religious leaders of His day, Jesus rebuked them for blindly refusing to see the signs swirling around them.

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.
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He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.” (Matthew 16:1–3)

Jesus was saying these religious leaders were master meteorologists, but they were incompetent interpreters of the signs of the times. They totally missed the clear signs of His first coming. They were blind to all the obvious signs that identified Him as the Messiah. In the same way, many today are blind to the signs of His second coming, which He’s meticulously laid out for us. In Matthew 24:4–28, Jesus gave a long list of signs that will telegraph His return. In Luke 21:25, He spoke of dramatic cosmic signs.

Jesus called His followers to discern the signs of the times.

DISCERNING THE SIGNS

As we observe and evaluate current events and world headlines in relation to signs of the times, we need to set up a few important guardrails to make sure we stay on
the road and don’t drive into the ditch. Let me suggest four principal parameters.

1. **Seriousness, Not Sensationalism**

   First, we must shun a sensationalistic approach to current events and world headlines. Any time there’s a crisis or natural disaster such as COVID-19, a chorus of voices immediately begin to announce the advent of the Antichrist and imminent arrival of the Apocalypse. Wild speculation often spreads faster than the virus. Some prophecy teachers cry wolf about every event, no matter how insignificant, so often that thinking people turn off the noise and don’t listen to them anymore. For sensationalists, every earthquake, war, terrorist attack, disease, crime spree, famine, hurricane, or tsunami is a flashing neon sign pointing to the end. The problem with this kind of news headline exegesis is that if everything is a sign, then nothing is a sign. We can’t manufacture every current event into a sign of the times. Doing so dilutes the serious impact and force of true, discernible signs outlined in Scripture.

2. **Scripture First, Not Headlines**

   Second, current events, headlines, and world news must be assessed in light of the Bible, not the other way around. We must remember the Bible is the final source
about signs of the times. We get all our information about end-time events from God’s Word. It’s the only reliable authority about the future. The Bible is a book of prophecy. Within its sixty-six books we find a staggering one thousand prophecies, penned over a period of fifteen hundred years by forty different human authors. About half of those prophecies have already been fulfilled, so we know the rest will one day be fulfilled as well. The Bible's track record is pristine. It’s flawless. We can put it to the test. You can trust the prophecies found in Scripture.

Danger arises when people fall prey to the temptation to find some sensational event in the headlines and then go searching for some obscure scripture, often wrenched out of context, to support what the news is reporting. That’s reckless and irresponsible. We must consult the biblical blueprint for the end times first, and then responsibly look at world events and their correspondence, if any, to Scripture. The Bible is our infallible prophetic template.

Of course, the most egregious, reckless form of prophetic pandering is setting dates for specific end-time events to occur. Every so often someone comes along and sets a date for the return of Christ. They do this despite Jesus saying during His time on earth that even He didn’t know the time of His second coming.
“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36). That means those who allege to know the date of Christ’s return are claiming to know something even Jesus didn’t know. That’s pretty bold . . . and extremely foolish. When someone sets a specific date for the second coming, I know I can always rule out that date, since Jesus said, “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (v. 44).

Date setters are upsetters and must be ignored and rejected.

3. Second Coming, Not the Rapture

A third important principle for signs of the times is to remember that they relate directly to Jesus’ second coming back to earth, not the rapture. Understanding this point requires us to fill in a little bit of end-time background and chronology and define a few important prophetic terms.

Let’s begin with the rapture since it’s the next event on God’s prophetic calendar. The rapture is an imminent event, meaning it could happen at any moment. We know it will happen, but we can’t know when it will happen. It’s an event without a sign. In other words, nothing needs to transpire before the rapture takes
place. It will happen in a split second, in the time it takes to blink your eye. At the rapture, believers—both living and dead—will be taken up to meet Jesus in the air and accompany Him back to heaven. The bodies of the dead will be resurrected to rejoin their perfected spirits. The living will be raptured—that is, they will be caught up to heaven and transformed without ever tasting death.

Three main New Testament texts describe this event that will shock the world:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:1–3)

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51–53)
For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18)

The rapture will be God’s rescue operation. The rapture will deliver living believers from the horror of the next event on the prophetic calendar, the tribulation period (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; Revelation 3:10–11). That means believers today are looking for Christ, not the Antichrist. The tribulation period will last seven years and will commence with a seven-year peace treaty forged by the Antichrist with Israel (Daniel 9:27). The ongoing, seemingly endless Middle East peace process is a fore-shadow of this future accord.

The seven years of tribulation will be hell on earth. The Lord will pour out His judgment upon the earth in three successive waves vividly unveiled in Revelation 6–18. Yet, in His mercy and grace, God will use those dark, terrible days to save an innumerable host of people (7:9–17).
The last half of the tribulation, or final three and a half years, is often called the “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21 NASB). During this brief span, the Antichrist will seize control, ruling the world politically, economically, and religiously. The entire world will be forced to give total allegiance to him—or suffer persecution and death (Revelation 13:1–18). He will employ a distinguishing mark to signify loyalty and allegiance to him: the number 666. It’s called the mark of the Beast.

The great tribulation will end with the battle of Armageddon. All the armies of the earth will gather in the land of Israel for a final showdown. Revelation graphically describes earth’s final death struggle:

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. . . .

Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. (16:12–14, 16)
The battle of Armageddon will suddenly be interrupted by the climactic event of human history—the literal, physical, visible, glorious return of Jesus Christ to planet Earth. Jesus will return accompanied by those He raptured to heaven seven years earlier. He will destroy the gathered armies and cast the Antichrist and his evil associate, the false prophet, into the lake of fire. The glorious revelation of Jesus is described in Revelation 19:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (vv. 11–16)
After His return, Jesus will establish His kingdom of peace and prosperity and rule the world for one thousand years, followed by the creation of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 20–22).

You have to admit, that’s quite an outlook.

The central point I want to emphasize, however, is that the rapture and the return are two distinct phases or stages of the second coming of Christ, separated by the tribulation. Jesus will come for His saints at the rapture, before the tribulation, and then come with His saints at the end of the tribulation. This chart highlights some of the more salient differences between these two phases of Jesus’ coming:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Rapture</th>
<th>The Return</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christ comes in the air (1 Thess. 4:16–17)</td>
<td>Christ comes to earth (Zech. 14:4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ comes for His saints (1 Thess. 4:16–17)</td>
<td>Christ comes with His saints (1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement from earth to heaven</td>
<td>Movement from heaven to earth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**THE TIMES OF THE SIGNS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No signs—it is imminent</th>
<th>Portended by many signs (Matt. 24:4–29)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time of blessing and comfort (1 Thess. 4:18)</td>
<td>Time of destruction and judgment (2 Thess. 2:8–12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves believers only (John 14:1–3; 1 Cor. 15:51–55; 1 Thess. 4:13–18)</td>
<td>Involves Israel and Gentile nations (Matt. 24–25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will occur in the blink of an eye, to only Christ’s own (1 Cor. 15:51–52)</td>
<td>Will be visible to the entire world (Matt. 24:27; Rev. 1:7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reason I’m underscoring this distinction is that the signs of Christ’s coming set forth in the New Testament deal with the return of Jesus to earth, not the rapture. None of the passages that describe the rapture include any mention of signs. There are no signs for the rapture. It’s a signless event. So, what is the relationship, if any, of signs to the rapture? Do signs relate to the rapture in any way? I believe they do.
Let me explain by using a simple illustration involving Christmas and Thanksgiving. When it comes to signs, the return of Christ is like Christmas. There are all kinds of signs that Christmas is drawing near. Christmas music in the mall. Decorations everywhere. Nativity scenes. Christmas lights on shopping centers and homes. Santa everywhere. Hallmark Christmas movies 24/7. Signs of Christmas abound.

The rapture, on the other hand, is like Thanksgiving. There are no specific signs for Thanksgiving, unless you’re a turkey. Nevertheless, if it’s late summer or early fall, and you begin to see signs for Christmas all around but Thanksgiving has not arrived, you know it must be near. In the same way, as we see the proliferation of signs for the return and the rapture has not yet happened, we can expect that the rapture is near. In that way, escalating signs we see today, such as globalism, world focus on the Middle East, spiritual deception, and even the coronavirus pandemic serve as a kind of prophetic overlap that points toward the rapture.

4. Stage Setting, Not Fulfillment

One final parameter for signs of the times is that most of what we see today is not the direct fulfillment of end-time prophecy but rather a foreshadow of what will come after God’s people have been raptured to heaven.
The main prophecy that I believe is being fulfilled today is the regathering of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland. This regathering is predicted by the Old Testament prophets many times (see Ezekiel 37, for example). The modern state of Israel was founded, against all odds, in 1948. That event was a prophetic watershed. Israel is God’s timepiece—His prophetic, end-time alarm clock. Israel is often called the “super-sign” of the end times because so many other prophecies are dependent upon it. Israel is the epicenter of God’s prophetic program. If you want to know where we are on God’s prophetic calendar, look at Israel. And when we look at Israel, all signs point to a converging crisis.

Other than Israel, the rest of the prophetically significant events we see today, such as COVID-19, are not fulfillments of specific prophecies but are setting the stage for events that will begin to unfold after the rapture. Today, God is preparing the world for what’s coming. God is in control. He is the director who is setting the world’s stage for the coming drama of the tribulation. Authors Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy said, “Just as many people set their clothes out the night before they wear them the following day, so in the same sense is God preparing the world for the certain fulfillment of prophecy in a future time.”
CORONAVIRUS AND CONVERGENCE

I believe coronavirus is part of the stage setting for the end times. In that sense, it’s a sign that points beyond itself to future events. For example, coronavirus is revealing the interconnectedness of the modern world as well as accelerating it. Author Bryan Walsh spotlighted this connection:

As Covid-19 is painfully demonstrating, our interconnected global economy both helps spread new infectious diseases—and, with its long supply chains, is uniquely vulnerable to the disruption that they can cause. The ability to get to nearly any spot in the world in 20 hours or fewer, and pack a virus along with our carry-on luggage, allows new diseases to emerge and to grow when they might have died out in the past.³

Rapid means of world travel provide the perfect environment for plagues to spread quickly around the world. This points toward the pandemics that will surge in the end times.

COVID-19 is also speeding the rise of globalism. The pandemic intersects with the drive toward a one-world economy and government that will fall under the rule
of a global strongman, the final Antichrist (Revelation 13:1–18). The global framework that must be in place for the Antichrist to rise to power is gaining momentum in the face of the pandemic.

Gordon Brown, a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, “has urged world leaders to create a temporary form of global government to tackle the twin medical and economic crises caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.” He said he believes countries cannot deal with this effectively on their own but that there should be some sort of coordinated effort to fight it. Brown added, “We need some sort of working executive.” This approach to combatting COVID-19 is underscoring and expediting the movement toward globalism—supporting what the Bible says will happen in the end times.

**POSITIVE SIGNS**

The road to the Apocalypse is lined with signs. If we’re honest, some of them are frightening and foreboding, such as a pandemic plague. Still, it’s important for us to keep our eyes on the signs, even when we’d rather look away. We ignore them at our peril.

Yet, at the same time, we can’t allow ourselves to get enamored with the signs. Any driver who focuses all his
or her attention on the signs is headed for trouble. Signs are important, but they aren’t all-important. Their only value is to point to something beyond themselves. Signs show us the way and lead us from where we are to where we want to be. And the ultimate place we want to be is with Jesus in His kingdom. The signs lead us home.

My friend and fellow pastor Philip De Courcy said it well:

All this bad news must in a way be viewed as good news because the signs of our times are pointing to the signs of the end time and the recapture of Earth by Heaven at the return of Christ. The Bible tells us things will get worse before they get better. . . . We must not be nearsighted alone, we must also be far-sighted. To survive and thrive in a world gone mad, we as Christians must begin with the end, we must constantly and confidently keep an eye on the horizon as we look forward to the second coming of Christ in the clouds with power and glory.⁵

The signs are all pointing in the same direction: the coming of Jesus and a world recaptured by heaven. Take comfort—the best is yet to come.