

The Sequence of Pretribulational Events

The Great Tribulation is not imminent. A number of events are clearly stated to precede the Tribulation period. This study is concerned with the sequence of those events – nine in all – that on one hand come before the Tribulation and, on the other hand, consecutively lead up to the Tribulation.

A question raised so very often is:

Are we living in the last days? Invariably, the answer is: Yes! But when asked, *How do we know?*, the answers tend to be rather general and based on present-day crises, particularly on those current events affecting the United States. In this area, many "newspaper exegetes" have had a field day proclaiming almost every major, world event to be a partial fulfillment of prophecy and another proof that these are, indeed, the last days. However, this is a very dangerous practice. Prophecy must first be determined from the Scriptures and then applied to current events rather than taking current events and forcing them to fit some kind of scriptural passage. Only after one's eschatology has been developed exegetically from the Scriptures should current events be taken into account to determine if any are fulfilling prophecy. And only if the current events fit the demands of Scripture *perfectly* are these events to be identified as a fulfillment of prophecy.

Nevertheless, we know that we are living in the last days, because certain pretribulational events have been fulfilled:

A. World Wars I and II

The prophecies regarding World Wars I and II are found in Matthew 24:1-8. Jesus is asked three questions by the disciples, including one of great concern to this study: What shall be the sign of the end of the age? These are typical Jewish expressions of that time. The rabbis spoke of two ages: "this age" and "the age to come." "This age" is the age in which we now live. "The age to come" was the Messianic Age. Their question is: What is the sign that marks that the end of this age has indeed begun?

Christ reveals in verses 7-8 the one event that will indicate that the end of the age has begun. This sign is said to be when *nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom*. This is to be accompanied by famines and earthquakes. It is clearly stated that these things are *the beginning of travail*. Throughout the prophetic portions of Scripture, the end days are pictured by the word *travail*, which means "birth pang," i.e., the pain a woman endures before giving birth to her child. Just as the pregnant woman goes through a series of birth pangs, so the closing days of this age will bring a series of birth pangs before giving birth to the new age of the kingdom.

It is crucial to understand the cultural and historical meaning of the idiom, *nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom*. Taken in the Jewish context of Jesus' day, this expression points to a total conflict in the area in view. This idiom is found in two Old Testament passages: In Isaiah 19:1-4, the idiom points to a conflict all over the land of Egypt as the nation is engrossed in civil war; in II Chronicles 15:1-7, the Middle East is in view, and the idiom describes a conflict throughout the area. Back to Matthew 24 now, it is clear from verses 14, 21, 30 and 31 that the entire world is in view. Hence, the idiom refers to a worldwide conflict – the first birth pang signifying that the last days have begun.

World War I, waged from 1914-1918, marked the first such worldwide conflict. And most historians concur that World War II was, in effect, a continuation of World War I. These global wars were the first of the events leading up to the Tribulation period.

B. The Re-Establishment of Israel

Amazingly, some Christians have concluded that the present State of Israel has nothing to do with the fulfillment of prophecy. The issue that bothers so many who hold this view is that not only have the Jews returned in unbelief with regard to the person of Jesus, but the majority of those who have returned are not even Orthodox Jews. Certainly, then, Israel could not possibly fulfill the biblical passages dealing with the return of a *regenerated* nation, according to these proponents.

The problem with this belief is the failure to see that the prophets spoke of two international returns. First, there was to be a regathering in unbelief in preparation for judgment, namely the Tribulation (Ezekiel 20:33-38; 22:17-22; Zephaniah 2:1-2). This was to be followed by a second worldwide regathering in faith in preparation for blessing, namely the Messianic Age (Isaiah 11:11-12).

Thus, 1948 marked another birth pang of the last days. The restoration of the Jewish state is a fulfillment of those prophecies that spoke of a regathering in unbelief in preparation for judgment. It is another event leading up to the Tribulation and so sets the stage for several other pretribulational events. In fact, in terms of the nine events leading up to the Tribulation, each event sets the stage for its succeeding event. The re-establishment of Israel arose out of World Wars I and II. World War I gave the impetus to the growth of the Zionist movement, and World War II affected world sentiment to allow the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel.

C. Jerusalem Under Jewish Control

The third pretribulational event involves the Jewish control of Jerusalem. The fact that the Jewish state had to exist before the Tribulation does not necessarily require the total Jewish control of Jerusalem. Following the Israeli War of Independence (1948-1949), Israeli forces were in control of West Jerusalem, the newer Jewish section. The Old City of Jerusalem (the biblical city) fell into the hands of the Jordanian Legion and was later annexed into the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Jerusalem thus became a divided city and remained that way for the next 19 years.

Nevertheless, prophetically-speaking, the Old City of Jerusalem had to fall under Jewish control. This can be deduced from the prophecies dealing with the third Jewish Temple, sometimes known as the Tribulation Temple. There are four passages of Scripture that describe a specific mid-Tribulation event regarding the Tribulation Temple. Each passage (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15; II Thessalonians 2:3-4; and Revelation 11:1-2) speaks of the third Jewish Temple, namely the Tribulation Temple. And all four make the point that in the middle of the seven-year Tribulation, the Antichrist will take control of the Temple and commit the abomination of desolation. These verses view the Jewish Temple as having been rebuilt, and they also presuppose Jewish control of the Temple compound, as well as the Old City of Jerusalem.

Though none of these factors specify a time as to when this was to occur, it was clearly fulfilled in the Six Day War and, thus, became the third birth pang.

D. The Russian Invasion of Israel

Unlike the previous three pretribulational events, the remaining six such events are all to occur in the future. One of these is foretold in Ezekiel 38:1-39:16, which details an invasion of Israel from the north and the subsequent destruction of the invading forces upon reaching the mountains of Israel.

In Ezekiel 38:1-6, the prophet names the peoples involved in this invasion. In verses 1-4, attention is centered on *Gog*, the leader in the *land of Magog*. He is the prince of *Rosh*, *Meshech*, and *Tubal*. The identity of Gog will only be determined at the time of the invasion, as Gog is not a proper name but a title of the ruler of Magog (like the terms pharaoh, kaiser and czar). The identification of Magog, Rosh, Meshech and Tubal can be determined from the fact that these tribes of the ancient world occupied the areas of modern-day Russia. Magog stood between the Black and Caspian Seas which today comprises southern Russia. The tribes of Meshech and Tubal later gave names to cities that today bear the names of Moscow (Russia's capital) and Tobolsk, a major city in the Urals in Siberia. Rosh – the basis for the modern name Russia – was located in what is now northern Russia. The modern nation of Russia, then, encompasses all of these areas spoken of by Ezekiel.

As if to avoid any further possible doubt, Ezekiel adds that these come from *the uttermost parts of the north* (Ezekiel 38:6, 15; 39:2). From Israel, the uttermost parts of the north is Russia, with Moscow situated at a point almost a straight line due north from Jerusalem. Hence, Russia – led by Gog – is the leader of the northern confederacy.

But Russia is not alone as she invades Israel; she is the leader of a confederacy. Other nations involved are (verses 5-6): Persia, or present-day Iran; Cush or Ethiopia; Put or Somaliland or Somalia; Gomer, located in modern Germany; and Togarmah, which today is Armenia. Verse 6 adds the phrase, *even many peoples with thee*. This phrase may simply define

the numbers of the nations already mentioned, or it may include other nations not mentioned. One interesting point is that not a single Arab nation participates in this invasion.

These nations are geographically located both north and south of Israel, but it is Russia that is the controlling nation and allied with Moslem, non-Arab states. A common error made in previous interpretations of this passage was to assume that this was a communist invasion. The fall of communism in East Europe has caused many to abandon the "Russian" interpretation of this passage. But there is no need to do so. It should be noted that the text never describes the invading nation's type of government. It does not indicate whether it is a monarchy, socialistic, communistic, democratic, or dictatorial government. The focus is on the geography, not the type of government. While the names of these geographical areas have changed over the centuries, and may change again, the geography itself remains intact. Regardless of what names they may carry at the time of this invasion, the nations involved are those very nations which comprise the particular geographical areas described. So, the leading nation may have once been called the Soviet Union, and more recently the Commonwealth of Independent States, and traditionally Russia... regardless, it is this territory, by whatever name it may be known, that will lead the invasion.

Ezekiel (38:1 - 39:16) also affirms that the Russian confederacy's invasion of Israel comes when the latter nation is dwelling securely before the Tribulation (38:14). The prophet reveals too, that the confederacy is destroyed in Israel before the Tribulation (38:17-23).

E. The One-World Government

The fifth birth pang leading up to the Tribulation is the development of a one-world government as found in Daniel 7:23. The fourth Gentile empire is to continue until it eventually devours the whole world. The Roman Empire is hardly a fulfillment of this prophecy.

In light of Ezekiel 38:1 - 39:16, the eastern balance of power – currently centered in Russia and the Moslem block of nations – will collapse with the fall of the Russian forces in Israel and the destruction of Russia itself. With the eastern power destroyed, this will open the way for a one-world government. As to the exact nature of this government, nothing is stated. It will certainly be a form of imperialism, but whether this will be in the form of the United Nations or that of a select leadership is unknown. But that this one world government will develop and *devour the whole world* is clear.

F. The Ten Kingdoms

This one-world government will eventually split up into ten kingdoms, according to Daniel 7:24a. Of course, there has been much speculation in recent years concerning the European Common Market. This, again, is an errant attempt at "newspaper exegesis" which does not correlate with the scriptural text. Textually, after the world falls under the one-world government, then and only then does the one-world government split into ten kingdoms. But these ten kingdoms cover the entire world rather than just Europe alone. The sixth birth pang will be this division of the one-world empire into ten kingdoms with ten kings who will rule the world. At best, the Common Market might become one of the ten, but could hardly become all ten. Beginning before the Tribulation, this ten-kingdom stage will continue into the middle of the Tribulation.

G. The Rise of the Antichrist

Following the division of the world into ten kingdoms, the Antichrist will begin his rise to power in Daniel 7:24b. That there was to be a revelation of the identity of the Antichrist before the Tribulation is clear from II Thessalonians 2:1-3. In this passage, two events are said to occur before *the day of the Lord*, which always refers to the Tribulation. The first is the apostasy; the second is the revelation of *the man of sin* and *the son of perdition*. This seventh birth pang – the revelation of the identity of the Antichrist – will precede the Tribulation.

H. The Period of Peace and False Security

Another pretribulational event is portrayed in I Thessalonians 5:1-3, where the term, *the day of the Lord*, is applied once

again. The destruction of the Tribulation hits with such sudden and devastating force at a time when men are saying, "*Peace and safety*." This period, then, must come just before the act that initiates the Tribulation itself. So, while all the world is under the ten kingdoms and the Antichrist is rising to power, there will be a period of peace and false security - the eighth birth pang.

I. The Seven Year Covenant

The event leading up to the Tribulation is the signing of the seven-year covenant between Israel and the Antichrist, something foretold in Daniel 9:27 and Isaiah 28:14-22. It must be emphasized that it is **not** the Rapture that ushers in the Tribulation but, instead, the signing of the seven-year covenant.

The Rapture will precede the Tribulation by some unknown period of time but does not actually start it; only the seven-year covenant can do so.

Copyright © 2005, Ariel Ministries. All Rights Reserved.



The complete Messianic Bible Study of "The Basis of the Second Coming of Christ" is available as Catalog item #mbs-038.