

## THE RAPTURE, PART 7

The most common question that people have related to the rapture is very simple – “*When is this going to happen?*” The second most common question is “*Are there any signs that help us to know when this will happen?*” What the Scriptures clearly tell us is that we cannot know the actual day or hour of His coming, but it does reveal that we can know the general “season” of His return. [Matthew 24:36-44](#) says,

**Mt 24:36 (NKJV) "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. <sup>37</sup> But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>38</sup> For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. <sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>42</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**

Jesus' encouragement to us in this passage is in v42 where He exhorts us to “**Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.**” [Matthew 25:13](#) says the same thing in the parable of the foolish virgins,

**Mt 25:13 (NKJV) Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.**

Whatever signs that reveal that we are drawing near to the events of the last days obviously are directly related with the period that we call the Tribulation / Great Tribulation. Because [Matthew 24 and 25](#) deal specifically with Israel, what we have to do is to track what we could call the “general trends” that are setting the stage for the Tribulation / Great Tribulation. Stated another way, what we want to do is to understand the events that actually follow the rapture. All of history and all of God's redemptive work on the earth is leading up to the Second Coming of Christ. So the more events that we can identify that appear to be in preparation for the Second Coming as identified in [Revelation 6-19](#), then the closer we are to understanding the proximity and nearness of the actual rapture of the church since it precedes the Second Coming.

Now, in our last study we identified four precursor events that will precede the Second Coming, and there will most likely precede the rapture event. They were (1) the rise of false Christs, (2) the hearing of wars and rumors of wars, (3) nation rising against nation, and (4) famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. All of these have been a part of all of history, but as we near the time of the rapture, they will begin to increase in their frequency and in their intensity.

Now, there are nine other specific signs related to the Second Coming that are different than the ones just mentioned in [Matthew 24:4-7](#). There are other signs that we will not address, but these nine are specific signs that we can see are developing in our lifetime, and are specifically identified as occurring in the “**last days**”. Please appreciate that each one of these, and especially Item 1 and 2 are complete

studies in and of themselves. I will only give you enough detail to arouse your curiosity, and then hopefully we will come back later in the study and several of them in much greater detail.

1. [Ezekiel 37](#) - Israel becoming a nation in 1948.

Of the nine signs that we will begin to look at, this is probably the most important of all signs that we are given. Many scholars actually call this the “super sign”. It is desperately important to appreciate that the re-gathering of the Jews in Israel after nearly 2000 years of having no actual land to be a nation in is as significant of a sign and prophetic event as we can have. Obviously this happened in 1948 and was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. In reality, no area of Eschatology has been more important in the history of the church than the prophecies related to Israel. Because Israel is such a major part of biblical prophecy in both the Old and New Testaments, the idea that prophecies about the nation will not be literally fulfilled is a major stumbling block to coherent prophetic interpretation. Hermeneutically, you cannot pick and choose to interpret some prophecies literally and some non-literally, yet that is what many have done.

There are many who see the church as spiritual Israel and in doing so they quickly minimize the importance of Israel in the end time events. It is the idea that the promises that were made to Israel have been transferred to the church. However, there is much more detail in the Scriptures of God’s future plans for Israel than there are for the church, even in the Millennium. The pre-tribulational / pre-millennial position that we take causes us to take the prophecies related to Israel literally, and because of that we can clearly see the agenda that God has purposed for Israel as a nation. [Romans 9-11](#) are clearly about the sovereignty of God in his dealings with Israel. [Revelation 6-19](#) are clearly about God’s dealings with Israel and the nations that hate her so much. So, it is clear to see that how God deals with Israel is a major way of understanding the timeline of events preceding the Second Coming. However, if we spiritualize these passages rather than taking them literally, then the uniqueness of the church is quietly and unrealistically merged into the nation of Israel and a subject like the rapture becomes meaningless.

It is a miracle in itself that the people of Israel maintained their Jewish identity for nearly 2000 years and then settled again into their original home. Ever since Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., the Jewish people have consistently faced worldwide persecution and hatred. They have been slaughtered in Holocaust after Holocaust. That the Jewish people even exist today is one of the most remarkable testimonies of God’s faithfulness given in the Bible. Because they are now back in their land, there is nothing prophetically to prevent the fulfillment of the rapture and the Second Coming.

Even during the Tribulation period, they will also experience great persecution. Listen to [Luke 21:20-24](#),

**Lk 21:20 (NKJV) "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. <sup>21</sup> Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. <sup>22</sup> For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. <sup>23</sup> But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. <sup>24</sup> And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led**

**away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.**

You have to keep in mind that the last great battle to actually destroy and exterminate Israel is what we call Armageddon and it is what actually triggers the Second Coming when Christ returns and delivers Israel and destroys all of her enemies. At that point in time, Jews from all over the world will believe in Christ and be regathered to Israel in preparation for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and their reign with Christ during the Millennium.

In what could be the very near future, Israel will sign a covenant initiated by the anti-Christ, and that is what will actually begin the seven years of Tribulation. If we took the actual hatred that exists for Israel currently, it is not hard to imagine that a major peace treaty for them would be greatly welcomed to give everyone a kind of reprieve. So, if we want to know something about the upcoming events of the last days, then all we have to do is to keep our eyes on Israel. They are the major factor for the countdown to Armageddon to begin and the Second Coming to follow.

To keep all of this in perspective, what the “**last days**” will provide for us is what we want to call two distinct and separate “end-time gatherings”. The first one occurs in the rapture before the Tribulation for the Christians and the second one occurs after the Tribulation at the Second Coming for the Jews. The prelude regathering of Israel has been taking place since before 1948, but since then it has been 72 years. Stated a different way, everything is prophetically in place in Israel for Christ to return in the rapture. I think that we can correctly see that one event as the major preparation for the end of the age which includes Jesus coming first for His church and secondly for His nation.

2. **Ezekiel 38-39** – The rise of Russia as a world superpower.

The rise of Russia to become a world superpower from a military perspective began to really happen beginning in 1950 to the present day. This is a major part of the prophecies concerning the “**last days**”. Even though the old Soviet Union no longer exists, what we can call “mother Russia” is as strong as ever. They have spent massive fortunes on a national military build-up of weapons. Russia is also an ally with the many middle east nations that utterly abhor and hate both Israel and the United States. Ironically, the ultimate undoing and downfall of Russia is prophetically related to her hatred of Israel and her desire to acquire all of her resources to help fuel her military machine.

Today, Russia is one of the most prolific suppliers of weapons to the militant Islamic forces in the Middle East. Please appreciate that all of what is happening will be in fulfillment of the prophecies of **Ezekiel 38-39**. What God will do with Russia when they invade Israel shortly after the rapture and at the beginning of the Tribulation in the fulfillment of **Ezekiel 38-39** is something that has not been witnessed on such a massive scale in centuries. In essence, Israel will be supernaturally delivered by God from the invasion by Russia and her allies which are Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, Germany, and Turkey. This is often referred to as the Battle of Gog and Magog and will take place as a military campaign against Israel in the first half of the seven years of Tribulation. The exact timing is not perfectly clear, but is often thought to happen at the beginning of the first 3 ½ years. **Ezekiel 38:1-6** says,

**Eze 38:1 (NKJV) Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy**

against him,<sup>3</sup> and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I *am* against you, O Gog, the prince of **Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal**.<sup>4</sup> I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company *with* bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords.<sup>5</sup> Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them *with* shield and helmet;<sup>6</sup> Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah *from* the far north and all its troops--many people *are* with you.

Magog, Meshech, and Tubal were all sons of Japheth, who was one of the three sons of Noah. Japheth and his family migrated to the area known today as modern-day Russia. Gog (v2) is a person who rules over the land of Magog (Russia). Magog (v2) means the "Prince of Rosh" where "Rosh" is the old root word for the land of Russia. God informs Gog and Magog of the following in [Ezekiel 38:14-16](#),

Eze 38:14 (NKJV) "Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "On that day when My people Israel dwell safely, will you not know *it*?<sup>15</sup> Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army.<sup>16</sup> You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes."

What is "far north" of Jerusalem? It is Moscow. "Meshech" is the old name for the capital of Western Russia, which is known today as Moscow. "Tubal" is identified as a city in Siberia. [Ezekiel 38:5-6](#) identified all of the nations that will be dragged into this conflict. Persia is a reference to modern-day Iran. Ethiopia describes present-day Ethiopia and the black nations of Central Africa. Libya is located in northern Africa. Gomer represents all of the people who settled in Germany. Togarmah is Asia Minor and Turkey. All of these nations will be militarily aligned with Russia in this attack on Israel and God will supernaturally defeat them.