

The Timing of the Tribulation

I have noticed that a number of people have started teaching that the Tribulation is just a few months away. Some even believe that it will begin sometime in 2011! While I do think we are in the last days I find it very difficult to believe that we are that close to the Tribulation. According to the Bible there are still many prophecies that must be fulfilled before the Tribulation can begin, and some of these require years to accomplish.

What I would like to do is take some time to explore the events that must take place before the Tribulation can begin. It is my hope that this will give people a better understanding of where we are in the prophetic timeline.

The Psalm 83 Battle

During the past century a great many important end-times prophecies have been fulfilled. For example, Israel has re-emerged as a nation after many centuries of dispersion and the Jews have regained control over the city of Jerusalem. Both of these events had to take place before the Tribulation could begin – after all, how could the Antichrist sign a seven-year agreement with Israel if Israel did not exist? However, there are several other events that must take place before that infamous covenant can be signed, and one of them is the conflict described in Psalm 83.

In that chapter we find Asaph telling God that nations are lining up against Israel, putting His people in grave danger:

Psalm 83:1: “Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God.
2 For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head.
3 They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones.”

These enemies want nothing less than the complete destruction of Israel. They are hoping to invade the land and destroy it so that she will no longer be a country. We can see this in the following verse:

Psalm 83:4: “They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.”

The nations that want to wipe Israel off the map are listed in the following verses:

Psalm 83:5: “For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee:
6 The tabernacles of **Edom**, and the **Ishmaelites**; of **Moab**, and the **Hagarenes**;
7 **Gebal**, and **Ammon**, and **Amalek**; the **Philistines** with the inhabitants of **Tyre**;
8 **Assur** also is joined in with them: they have helped the children of Lot. Selah.”

The reason this is interesting is because verse 5 clearly says that *all* of these nations have banded together to destroy Israel, but this didn't happen in ancient times. Israel wasn't threatened by an alliance of those nations until the modern era.

It's true that there are no longer nations with those names, but these names and groups can be traced through history. Ishmael, for instance, is the patriarch of Saudi Arabia. The Hagarenes would be the descendents of Hagar; today we call them Egyptians. Moab was the patriarch of what is now central Jordan and Ammon was the patriarch of what is now northern Jordan. (Moab and Ammon, of course, are the "children of Lot" that are mentioned in verse 8.) Gebal is now northern Lebanon and Tyre is southern Lebanon. What used to be Philistia is now the Gaza Strip. Assur is Assyria, which we now call Syria. The tabernacles of Edom refers to the Edomites, who used to live in what is now Southern Jordan. Their descendents became the Palestinians.

To line them up, the nations in verses 6-8 are Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinians. Are these nations currently opposed to Israel? Yes – and this is actually a new development! Until very recently Egypt was at peace with Israel, bound by a peace treaty and led by a man that honored that treaty for decades. Recently, however, there has been a revolution in Egypt that has changed the political landscape. A 2009 poll revealed that 95% of Egyptians have an unfavorable opinion of the Jews – as do 97% of Jordanians and Palestinians, and 98% of Lebanese. Egypt is rapidly becoming an enemy of Israel – just as the Bible prophesied.

Do these nations wish to wipe Israel off the map, as foretold in Psalm 83? Yes. Have these nations banded together and launched an all-out war against Israel? Not yet – but at some point before the Tribulation begins they will. Given the turbulence in the Middle East, along with the deep hatred for Israel that exists in that region, it is not at all hard to imagine a war breaking out sometime in the near future.

If you read the passage itself you will notice that God's response to this invasion is not recorded here. However, it can be found elsewhere. The Lord told Jeremiah that He would destroy those who tried to remove Israel from her land:

Jeremiah 12:14: "Thus saith the Lord against all mine evil neighbors, that touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them."

In Isaiah we find that Syria – one of the nations listed in Psalm 83 – was singled out for destruction:

Isaiah 17:1: "The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.

2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

3 The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the Lord of hosts."

Here we see the Lord promising to destroy Damascus so thoroughly that it will no longer be a city. The nation of Syria will be crushed, her cities forsaken, and her land used as pasture. So far these Scriptures have not yet been fulfilled; Damascus is still the capitol of Syria and has been inhabited for thousands of years. You can still go there today, if you wish, but one day it will be destroyed and turned into a ruined heap. This is almost certainly the Lord's response to Asaph's prayer in Psalm 83: when Syria attacks Israel she will be destroyed and her capitol will be turned into ruins.

It should be noted that Israel does not go through the war unscathed. In fact, she is seriously harmed in the attack:

Isaiah 17:4: “And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean.

5 And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

6 Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel.”

Israel will be seriously wounded; verse 6 likens her to an olive tree that has been shaken until only a few olives remain in the uppermost branches. But she will survive and her enemies will be devastated. All of this will be done so that men will have respect for the Lord:

Isaiah 17:7: “At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel.

8 And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect that which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images.”

It is verse 7 that makes me think the Psalm 83 war might be the point at which God turns His attention back to Israel. After all, verse 7 calls God the Holy One *of Israel*. Other passages refer to God as the Most High God, or the Lord over all the Earth, but here God is specifically linked to Israel (not to the Church!). Isn't it possible that this means by the time this war happens God will have turned His focus back to Israel *because the Church has been completed and brought home*? If (and I say if) that is the case then the Rapture is much nearer than we think.

Of course, Syria was not the only nation involved in the attack. The Ammonites (modern Jordan) have a surprise in store for them as well:

Jeremiah 49:1: “Concerning the Ammonites, thus saith the Lord; Hath Israel no sons? Hath he no heir? Why then doth their king inherit Gad, and his people dwell in his cities?

2 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard in Rabbah of the Ammonites; and it shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel be heir unto them that were his heirs, saith the Lord.”

When the dust settles Jordan will be destroyed and Israel will move in and take over. Edom (the Palestinians) will not fare any better:

Jeremiah 49:17: “Also Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof.

18 As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbor cities thereof, saith the Lord, no man shall abide there, neither shall a son of man dwell in it.

19 Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong: but I will suddenly make him run away from her: and who is a chosen man, that I may appoint over her? For who is like me? And who will appoint me the time? And who is that shepherd that will stand before me?

20 Therefore hear the counsel of the Lord, that he hath taken against Edom; and his purposes, that he hath purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: Surely the latest of the flock shall draw them out: surely he shall make their habitations desolate with them.”

Nor will Saudi Arabia (here referred to as 'Dedan') be spared:

Jeremiah 49:8: “Flee ye, turn back, dwell deep, O inhabitants of Dedan: for I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time that I will visit him.

9 If grapegatherers come to thee, would they not leave some gleaning grapes? If thieves by night, they will destroy till they have enough.

10 But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: his seed is spoiled, and his brethren, and his neighbors, and he is not.”

Obadiah goes on to say that the entire house of Esau will be completely destroyed, leaving no survivors:

Obadiah 1:17: “But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

18 And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it.”

Egypt will be devastated and abandoned for *40 years*:

Ezekiel 29:10: “Behold, therefore I am against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia.

11 No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years.

12 And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be desolate forty years: and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries.

Some people think that the desolation of Egypt will continue on through the Tribulation and into the Millennial Kingdom, and that may be the case. However, if all of this is fulfilled before the Tribulation begins then that means the Tribulation is more than 40 years away (since we need time for Egypt to be made desolate, then re-inhabited, and then partially settled by Israel). As is often the case in dealing with prophecy, the timing and sequence is hard to understand but the events themselves are not.

Isaiah reports that Egypt will be terrified of Israel and the Israelites will possess five Egyptian cities:

Isaiah 19:17: “And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts, which he hath determined against it.

18 In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction.”

Let's turn our attention back to Psalm 83. There we saw Asaph praying for deliverance on behalf of Israel, and in these passages we see the Lord's response. While Israel will be greatly harmed in the

attack, she will survive while her attackers will be ruined. The descendents of Esau (which would include Edom and some of the Palestinians) will suffer the most, for none of them will survive. The Lord's name will be magnified.

This will open up a new era of peace for Israel as she will no longer be surrounded by enemies that long for her destruction. Over time she will recover from the devastation of that war and will rebuild until she has expanded her borders and become a wealthy and powerful nation. At this point the invasion described in Ezekiel 38 takes place, which is what we'll investigate next.

All of this brings up a number of important points:

- Israel is going to be invaded by a coalition of her neighbors. This war is currently brewing but it hasn't happened yet. It must occur before the Tribulation begins.
- When this war finally happens the Lord will deliver Israel and give her the land of her enemies. However, she will be devastated in the war. It will take her time – perhaps years – to recover. Her recover must be complete before the Ezekiel 38 invasion, which means Israel must be rebuilt before the Tribulation can begin. This is going to take a lot of time.
- In the war Damascus will be wiped off the face of the Earth. It will not be inhabited again. This also must happen before the Tribulation starts.
- Over time (perhaps years, perhaps decades) she will become a wealthy and peaceful nation. At this point the next big event will happen: the Ezekiel 38 invasion.

The Ezekiel 38 Invasion

In Ezekiel 38 we are told of a coalition of nations that is going to invade Israel. The reason they invade her is because she is a wealthy nation and they want to plunder that wealth. They also see that she is at peace and they believe she will be an easy target.

As you can see, none of this is true of Israel today. No one is threatening Israel because of her wealth; they are threatening her for largely religious reasons. Israel is not a fabulously wealthy nation, nor is she a nation at rest – she is surrounded by nations that want to wipe her off the face of the Earth. Israel is far from being at rest and, today, is on the verge of destruction (which fits well with Psalm 83).

Before Ezekiel 38 can take place Israel has to undergo *dramatic* changes. Somehow she has to take over her neighbors, remove all threats against her, become a peaceful nation, and acquire tremendous wealth. That is going to take time. It's quite possible that it could take years or even decades. It seems highly unlikely that Israel could make this transition in a matter of months.

On top of this, the nations that invade Israel in Ezekiel 38 are just beginning to form their relationship. The nations are:

Ezekiel 38:1: “And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,

2 Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him,

3 And say, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal:

4 And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armor, even a great company with bucklers, and shields, all of them handling swords:

5 Persia, Ethiopia, and Lybia with them; all of them with shield and helmet:

6 Gomer, and all his bands, the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands:

and many people with thee.”

So who are these people? As we've discussed before, it's possible to trace these groups through history and tie them to modern nations. The nation of Persia is now called Iran. Ethiopia and Lybia have not changed their names. Gomer and Togarmah are modern-day Turkey. Meshech is modern-day Georgia (the country, not the state!), and Tubal is modern-day Turkmenistan. Gog and Magog represent Russia.

Today we can see that Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Lybia are beginning to form an alliance. However, conditions are not yet right for this battle. As we've said before, Israel has to be a nation at rest before all of this happens:

Ezekiel 38:10: “Thus saith the Lord God; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought:

11 And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates,

12 To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land.

13 Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? Hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? To carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?

14 Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord God; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it?”

Once again, notice that Israel is described as a land “at rest”, with people that “dwell safely” and “without walls”. Currently Israel is not at rest and her people do not dwell safely; instead they're bombarded with rockets and their lives are in constant danger from terrorist attacks. They have even gone so far as to erect *walls* to protect them from the Palestinians! One day all of that will change and Israel will become a land “without walls” but it hasn't changed yet.

The Lord goes on to describe the details of this invasion:

Ezekiel 38:15: “And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army:

16 And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.

17 Thus saith the Lord God; Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days many years that I would bring thee against them?

18 And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord God, that my fury shall come up in my face.

19 For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel;

20 So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all the creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of

the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.

21 And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God: every man's sword shall be against his brother.

22 And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, and overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

23 Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord."

Here the Lord promises to fight against the armies of Gog with "great hailstones, fire, and brimstone". The Lord is going to personally destroy the armies of Gog and, in so doing, magnify His name among "many nations". He will not only rescue the nation of Israel, but in doing so He will demonstrate that He is God in a manner that is plain to everyone.

But God is not finished yet:

Ezekiel 39:1: "Therefore, thou son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal:

2 And I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee, and will cause thee to come up from the north parts, and will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel:

3 And I will smite thy bow out of thy left hand, and will cause thine arrows to fall out of thy right hand.

4 Thou shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel, thou, and all thy bands, and the people that is with thee: I will give thee unto the ravenous birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field to be devoured.

5 Thou shalt fall upon the open field: for I have spoken it, saith the Lord God.

6 And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles: and they shall know that I am the Lord."

The Lord promises to devastate Gog's army to such an extent that only 1/6th of it will remain. He will crush them when they are in the mountains of Israel, demonstrating His power. But He is still not done:

Ezekiel 39:7: "So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel."

Here the Lord says something very important: God is going to use this battle to reveal Himself to the Israelites. As I've explained elsewhere, the nation of Israel is currently blinded to her need for Jesus. Paul said that this blindness would last until the Church was completed, at which time God would turn His attention back to the Israelites. Here we see God doing exactly that – He is removing the blinders from Israel, showing both them and the world that He is God. That tells me that by the time this battle happens the Church has already been completed and removed from Earth in the Rapture.

But there is still more. This is the key point I want to bring out:

Ezekiel 39:8: "Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord God; this is the day whereof I have spoken.

9 And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the handstaves, and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire seven years:
10 So that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall burn the weapons with fire: and they shall spoil those that spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord God.”

Verse 9 is tremendously important – it says that the people of Israel will burn the invaders' weapons as fuel for *seven years*. The reason this is important is because halfway through the seven-year Tribulation the Jews are attacked by the Antichrist and start running for their lives. The armies of the world surround Jerusalem and sack the city. The Jews are not going to be burning weapons while they try to fight off the entire planet; instead they're going to be *using* them!

This tells me that the Ezekiel war must take place at least 7 years before the midpoint of the Tribulation – or, to put it another way, the burning must begin at least 3.5 years before the Tribulation starts. If this is true then when the Ezekiel invasion takes place the Tribulation is still at *least* three-and-a-half years away.

All of this is beginning to add up to a significant amount of time. The Psalm 83 battle may be short but it will take quite some time – perhaps years – for Israel to recover from it. Then the Ezekiel 38 battle must take place, after which there must be at least 3.5 years between the end of that battle and the start of the Tribulation. These two passages alone could easily require ten, twenty, or even thirty years to fulfill – and that doesn't even take into account Egypt's 40-year desolation! It seems highly unlikely that all of this could happen between December 2010 and May 2011.

One-World Government

I believe that the next prophetic step after the Ezekiel invasion is the establishment of a one-world government. I think this will happen *after* the Gog-Magog battle because when that battle takes place the Earth still seems to be divided into a multitude of nations. After all, it isn't the one-world government that invades Israel; instead it's a coalition of independent nations such as Russia, Iran, etc. (As a side-note, this would place the establishment of the one-world government *after* the Rapture, assuming that the Rapture does take place before the Gog-Magog invasion.)

The book of Daniel is what tells us that one day a kingdom will conquer the entire world:

Daniel 7:23: “Thus he said, the fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.

24 And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.

25 And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.”

The passage says that one day the “whole earth” will be conquered by a kingdom, which shall then be divided among ten kings. After these ten kings “another shall arise” that will subdue three kings. This “another” is the Antichrist. We can see this from verse 25, where he makes war against the saints for three and a half years (“a time and times and the dividing of a time”). That perfectly matches

the description in Revelation of what the Antichrist will do starting midway through the seven-year Tribulation.

What I want to draw your attention to is the time it's going to take for all of this to happen. Right now there are roughly 195 countries in the world. One day someone will violently conquer the entire planet (note the use of “devour”, “tread it down”, and “break it in pieces”). This kingdom will then be divided among ten kings, so ten people reign over the entire planet (not just over Europe, so I don't believe the European Union is a valid match for this prophecy). *After* this another person arises that puts down three kings and becomes the Antichrist.

This is going to take some time. How long does it take to conquer the planet? How long will it take for the conquered planet to be divided among ten kings? Plus, keep in mind that the Antichrist doesn't appear until *after* all of that happens – and since the Antichrist is the one that signs the seven-year treaty that begins the Tribulation, the Tribulation can't start until after he is on the scene.

It could easily take years, if not decades for all of this to play out. It seems highly unlikely that it could all happen in the space of the next few months.

Babylon

The next issue to consider is the matter of Babylon. In Revelation 14:8 we are told that the great city of Babylon has fallen:

Revelation 14:8: “And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

This is brought up again a few chapters later:

Revelation 16:19: “And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.”

Revelation 17:5 depicts Babylon as a woman that is drunk with the blood of the saints, but later on that same chapter makes it clear that it is discussing an actual city:

Revelation 18:2: “And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”

And later:

Revelation 18:9: “And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,

10 Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon,

that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come.”

The reason I bring this up is because there are many people who believe that Babylon is symbolic of some other city, such as Rome. However, I believe that the Bible is referring to the actual city of Babylon. The reason I think this is because of what Jeremiah prophesied concerning the destruction of Babylon:

Jeremiah 50:24: “I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware: thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the Lord. ...

39 Therefore the wild beasts of the desert with the wild beasts of the islands shall dwell there, and the owls shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited forever, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.

40 As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbor cities thereof, saith the Lord; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein.”

As we can see, God said that He would judge Babylon to the point that no one would ever inhabit the city again. It would be abandoned *forever*. The problem is that this hasn't happened yet. Today the ancient city of Babylon has been rebuilt, courtesy of Saddam Hussein. Its ruins have been reconstructed and the site has been reopened. In fact, the United States is spending \$600 million to build a 100+ acre embassy in Babylon. People are living there again and the city is coming back to life – and yet God said “it shall be no more inhabited *forever*”.

I believe that the total destruction and subsequent abandonment of Babylon is still in the future. The city is being rebuilt and will one day become the capitol of the world. Then, during the Tribulation, God will judge it and the city will be completely destroyed, never to be inhabited again. (You can read about this in Revelation 18:21-24.)

How does this impact the timing of the Tribulation? Well, let's go back to Revelation. Look at how these verses describe the city of Babylon:

Revelation 18:15: “The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,

16 And saying, Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!

17 For in one hour so great riches is come to naught. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,

18 And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!”

In this passage Babylon is said to be the greatest city on Earth (“what city is like unto this city!”). It has fantastic wealth and unbelievable grandeur; it is the envy of the world and gave many people great wealth. Modern Babylon, on the other hand, is not “decked with gold and precious stones”; in fact, it's little more than a tourist attraction. It will take time – perhaps decades – for Babylon to be transformed into the mightiest and grandest city the world has to offer. To say that all this is going to happen before May 2011 seems highly unlikely. It's far more probable that it will take place over the course of many years – perhaps decades.

Elijah

In Malachi we are told that Elijah will return before the Tribulation begins:

Malachi 4:5: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet **before the coming** of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

Here we can see that Elijah will return to Earth *before* the “day of the Lord”, which is the term the Old Testament used to describe the Tribulation. Some would argue that Elijah is going to appear in the first half of the Tribulation, as that is a time of relative peace and the true horrors do not begin until the 7-year period is halfway over. However, I do not believe that is the case. While the Antichrist might not start his war against the saints until halfway through the Tribulation, the horrors begin long before that time. Look at Revelation 6:

Revelation 6:15: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

As you can see, we are told that “the great day of his wrath is come” – and this is quite early in the Tribulation! This is long before the Antichrist enters the Temple and declares himself to be God. It is even before the 144,000 witnesses are appointed – and yet “the great day of his wrath” is already come.

If Elijah is going to appear before the “great and dreadful day of the Lord” then it seems highly likely that he will appear before the Tribulation begins. There is no way to know how far in advance he will appear; it may be days, weeks, months, or even years. But he must appear soon enough to allow him enough time to complete his ministry.

Personally I think he will appear after the Ezekiel 38 invasion. That invasion is what God uses to start turning the hearts of the children of Israel back to Him. If Elijah is a part of God's ministry to the Israelites then that would be the perfect time for him to appear. By the same token, Romans tells us that God will not turn His attention back to saving Israel until after the Church is complete and taken home. Therefore the Rapture must happen *before* the Ezekiel invasion, which means that by the time Elijah arrives the Church will probably be gone.

The Rapture

I have talked about the case for a pre-Tribulation Rapture quite extensively elsewhere so I won't repeat all of that here. The bottom line is that the seven-year Tribulation begins when Israel signs a covenant with the Antichrist, but the Antichrist can't be revealed until the Church is gone. This means that the Rapture must take place before the Tribulation and the rise of the Antichrist. For reasons I've explained previously I believe that the Rapture will happen before the Ezekiel invasion. This means that as long as the Church is still here the Tribulation is years away. There is going to be a gap between

the Rapture and the Tribulation and it could measure in years or even decades.

Conclusion

As we've seen, there are many things that must take place before the Tribulation can occur. Israel must be invaded, devastated, and rebuilt; she has to transform from a nation under siege to a wealthy nation at peace. The ancient city of Babylon has to be rebuilt and become the premier city of the planet. The Israelites have to spend seven years burning the weapons left behind by the Ezekiel 38 invasion. A one-world government must rise, the Rapture must take place, and the Antichrist must rise to power. I just do not believe all of these things could happen between December 2010 and May 2011.

How long is it going to take? No one really knows. It wouldn't surprise me if these events took a century or more to come to pass – or it may all happen over the span of twenty years. Time will tell.

The wildcard in all of this is the Rapture. God turns His attention back to Israel during the Ezekiel 38 invasion, so it seems likely that the Rapture will happen before that takes place. What we don't know is how much time will pass between that invasion and the start of the Tribulation. What if the rebuilding of Babylon, the one-world government, and the ministry of Elijah all happen *after* the Church is gone? There could be *decades* between the disappearance of the Church and the start of the Tribulation – perhaps even an entire generation. The Church may be here for many more years or we might just have a matter of hours. What we do know is that He is coming for us and He wants us to be ready and waiting when He returns.

Appendix: The Olivet Discourse

In Matthew 24 the disciples ask Jesus that signs would accompany His Second Coming. The Lord then spends the rest of the chapter explaining the events that would surround this epic event. Near the end of the chapter He says this:

Matthew 24:32: “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”

I have actually argued in the past that “this generation” refers to the generation that was alive when Israel became a nation in 1948, and that what Jesus is saying is that the Tribulation would occur and Jesus would return before 70 years had passed (by 2018). While this is an exciting thought, I have since come to learn that I was entirely mistaken.

What I did not realize was that the entire chapter is focused on the Second Coming, which happens *after* the Tribulation. Jesus had not yet told His disciples that the Church was going to come into existence; in fact, even the Old Testament did not mention this. The birth of the Church was a mystery that was not revealed until after the Last Supper, when Jesus had one final talk with His disciples before being arrested. When this particular conversation took place the disciples had no idea that there was going to be a Church or a Rapture. That was still a secret.

In fact, the entirety of Matthew 24 discusses events that take place *during* the Tribulation. Many people teach that verses 5-14 are signs that the Tribulation is near (and I have done this myself), but what Jesus is really describing in these verses are *the first three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation*

itself. In other words, Jesus is not describing signs that point to the Tribulation; instead He is describing the *actual* Tribulation! Take a look to see what I mean:

Matthew 24:5: “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

Compare that to the verses in Revelation that describe the Tribulation itself:

Revelation 6:1: “And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

4 And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.”

Do you see the correlation? Matthew 24:5-7 says the *beginning* of sorrows will be composed of “wars and rumors of wars”, and that is exactly what happens in Revelation 6 when the *first* two seals are opened during the beginning of the Tribulation.

Matthew 24:8 says there will be a famine, and that happens when the third seal is opened:

Revelation 6:5: “And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”

The “penny” mentioned in verse 6 was actually a day's wage. When these events take place food prices are so high that it takes an entire day's salary to purchase a single measure of wheat! That is a famine of catastrophic proportions.

Verse 12 mentions a “great earthquake”:

Revelation 6:12: “And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.”

Matthew mentions martyrs:

Matthew 24:9: “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye

shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.”

Revelation 6 does as well:

Revelation 6:9: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

Matthew says that the gospel will be preached to the whole world, “and then shall the end come”:

Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

Revelation reports that this happens *during the Tribulation*, just before the end:

Revelation 14:6: “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”

Do you see the striking correlation between Matthew 24 and Revelation 6? The events Jesus describes in those first few verses perfectly match the events that take place in the Tribulation – and as I've explained before, the verses in the second half of the passage *definitely* correspond to the Tribulation. It is at the midpoint of the Tribulation when the “abomination of desolation” takes place, which Jesus mentions in Matthew 24:15, and the rest of the chapter discusses the terrible events of the “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21). I cannot escape the conclusion that what Jesus is describing in Matthew 24 *is the seven-year Tribulation itself*. He isn't telling them events that are going to take place *before* the Tribulation; instead He's telling them things that will happen *during* the Tribulation!

The reason He's doing this is because the disciples wanted to know what signs would happen just prior to His return – and when does Jesus come back? *After* the Tribulation. So it makes perfect sense that the Lord would explain the events of the Tribulation to them – events that Jesus was actually the first one to reveal. At the time Jesus had this discussion with His disciples the book of Revelation had not yet been written; in fact, Revelation would not be penned until decades later, after every last one of the disciples had died except for John.

When Jesus says that “this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled”, what He is saying is that the generation that is alive when the Tribulation begins will still be alive when Jesus returns after the Tribulation has ended. At the time Jesus told this to His disciples this was indeed news. Daniel had already revealed that the Tribulation would last for seven years, but no one knew how long it would be before Jesus returned. Revelation makes this much more clear, but Jesus was the first one to make it known that the generation that was alive when the Tribulation started would still be around when Jesus came back. (For the record, Jesus comes back at the end of the Tribulation, defeats the Antichrist, and a few weeks later begins His Millennial Kingdom. But that detail was not revealed until later.)

I want to emphasize this again: when Jesus says in Matthew 24:33 “so likewise ye, when ye

shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors”, He is *not talking about the Rapture*. He is talking about the events of the Tribulation, which are a sign that His Second Coming is near. When He says in verse 36 “But of that day and hour knoweth no man”, He is not talking about the Rapture, but His Second Coming. The Rapture is not even *mentioned* in Matthew 24. People apply these verses to the Rapture all the time but that is *not* what Jesus was talking about.

Just to make it clear, *before* the Tribulation begins the Lord will come and get His Church and take them home to Heaven. This is what we call the Rapture. Later, at the *end* of the Tribulation, the Lord will come back to Earth *with* His Church, defeat the Antichrist, and set up His kingdom. This is the Second Coming, and *that* is what Matthew 24 is talking about.