

UNDERSTANDING KEY EVENTS OF END TIMES PROPHECY

As mentioned before, one aspect of studying end-times prophecy is to try to understand the key events of the end times. These events include, but are not limited to the rapture, the tribulation period, the second coming of Christ, the millennial reign of Christ, and the new heaven and new earth etc... We will actually seek to look at more detailed events (i.e. the seven seal judgments, the seven trumpet judgments, the seven bowl judgments) rather than just a general overview of the tribulation period.

We will attempt to first understand the key events spoken of in end times prophecies, by looking at them in chronological order and utilizing all the key end times prophetic passages that speak to each event.

FOCUS #1—CONDITIONS AT THE END OF THE AGE

For over 2000 years, Christians have believed that Jesus Christ would return to this earth physically, in his second coming, in their generation. Even though our Lord knew the church would not see that return for over 2,000 years, He wanted each generation to live as though He could come back at any time. The fact of the matter is that He can come back at any time.

The apostles and first century church expected the imminent return of Christ. In fact they seem to think that His return would be during their lifetime, which is why they were so motivated to live holy lives and so dedicated to evangelism and reaching their known world for Christ. It is only natural as believers who have studied the Bible that we would be excited for the Lord's return as well. It would be only natural for us to search the Scriptures for signs of His return.

Even the disciples, when they realized that Jesus would soon leave, asked, "What shall be the sign of your coming?" They equated His coming with the end of the age (Cf. Matthew 24:3). Since the Lord did not rebuke the disciples, then we can conclude that this is a legitimate question for us today.

One word of caution, however, we should avoid foolish speculations that go beyond the intent of Scripture (i.e. setting dates for the return of Christ, identifying the anti-christ by name, etc...). According to the Lord's statement in Matthew 24:36, we cannot know the day or hour. The conclusion is that we will have an idea of the general time period, but will not know exactly when that day will come.

So the question that we must ask this morning is, "Are there specific signs that point to Christ's return?" or "What are the conditions of the world at the end of the age?" The following is a list of the various conditions that the Scripture suggests will exist at the end of the age:

Condition#1—Revival of the Nation of Israel

Israel is referred to as ground zero for the end times. Much of end times prophecy centers around events in Israel or involving Israel. The only problem is that Israel hasn't always been in Israel. In fact from 70 A.D. to May 4, 1948, Israel did not exist as a nation. So it is safe to say that for most of church history conditions have not been right for the unfolding of end-times events.

It is interesting that in history there have been three predicted scatterings of the people of Israel and their return:

DEPARTURES	RETURNS
<i>First Departure:</i> Jacob's family into Egypt (1876 BC)	<i>First Return:</i> Exodus from Egypt under Moses/Entrance into the land under Joshua (about 1446-1406 BC)
<i>Second Departure:</i> The northern 10 tribes into Assyria 722 BC; The southern 2 tribes into Babylon 605-586 BC	<i>Second Return:</i> Under Zerubbabel (538 BC); Ezra (458 BC); and Nehemiah (444 BC)
<i>Third Departure:</i> At the hands of the Romans in AD 70.	<i>Third Return:</i> Began in 1871 and continues even today. (Official nationhood May 4, 1948)

First Departure/Return: Genesis 15:13 predicted Abraham's seed to be exiled for 400 years and the return of that seed is seen in the exodus from Egypt and the Conquest of Canaan (Cf. Exodus 13 through Joshua).

- **Genesis 15:13**, *“God said to Abram, Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.”*

Second Departure/Return: Jeremiah 29:10 predicted that Israel would be taken captive for 70 years (cf. Isaiah 11:11) to Babylon, and their return is seen under Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. (Destruction of the land is seen in 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Lamentations, while the return is highlighted in Ezra and Nehemiah.)

- **Jeremiah 29:10**, *“For thus says the Lord, When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.”*

Third Departure/Return: Deuteronomy 28:63-64 predicts a world-wide dispersion, where the nation of Israel will be scattered among all the peoples and would be torn from the land. The return is predicted in Jeremiah 23:7-8; Ezekiel 39:28 and Amos 9:14-15, where they will not be rooted out from their land again.

This departure is likely the one that took place during New Testament times at the hands of the Romans in AD 70. It seems probable that the return to the land is the return that has taken place over the last century.

- **Deuteronomy 28:63-64**, *“It shall come about that as the LORD delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the LORD will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you will be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it. Moreover, the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known...”*
- **Jeremiah 23:7-8**, *“Therefore behold, the days are coming declares the LORD, when they will no longer say, As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt. But as the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the north land and from all the countries where I had driven them. Then they will live on their own soil.”*

The scatterings and first two returns were fulfilled literally to this point. We do not know if the return of Israel to the land in 1948 is the predicted return but possibly it is. It is unclear whether there will be additional departures and returns, but since all of these prophecies have been fulfilled literally up to this point, then it stands to reason that the remaining unfulfilled prophecies will be as well.

What is clear is that in the end times Israel does exist as a nation in the Promised Land. Therefore Israel's presence in the land must be seen as a condition for the unfolding of end-times events. The fact that they have been returned to the land at this point could be seen as a sign of the end of the age.

In fact Israel's presence in the land is often referred to as the primary or super sign of the rapidly approaching end of the age. In fact it is quite fascinating that after nearly 1900 years scattered out of the land that they are returning and once again identified as a nation. At no other time in history has a people been out of their homeland for 500 years and been able to return and re-establish themselves as a nation.

Condition #2—A Rise of Key End Times Nations

End-times prophetic passages mention several nations that play key roles in end times events. Obviously at the end of the age, attention will be focused on the Middle East. The Middle East is the setting of events that culminate the end of this age and as increased activity occurs in the region it may prepare the way for the future. So what nations surrounding the Middle East play key roles?

- **Ezekiel 38:1-7**, “And the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of **Magog**, the prince of **Rosh**, **Meshech**, and **Tubal**, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. “And I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords; **Persia**, **Ethiopia**, and **Put** with them, all of them with shield and helmet; **Gomer** with all its troops; **Beth-togarmah** from the remote parts of the north with all its troops — many peoples with you. “Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them.”

From this end-times prophetic passage we find the mention of several nations involved in an invasion of Israel.

1) **Magog**—The Jewish historian Josephus reported that the ancient Scythians inhabited the land of Magog. These northern nomadic tribes inhabited the land from central Asia across southern Russia. Magog today probably represents the former underbelly of the former Soviet Union: Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Afghanistan could also be part of this territory. [John F. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil, and Terror*, p. 89] Of course it is not surprising that these nations would want to invade Israel since each of them are dominated by Islam. And certainly their combined population in excess of 90 million would prove to be a formidable force.

2) **Rosh**—This has often been identified with Russia. It is true in Ezekiel’s day that there was a group of people known as Rash, Reshu or Ros and they inhabited what today is considered to be southern Russia. This would fit with the phrase from the passage, “the remote parts of the north...” Obviously Russia is regaining strength and becoming a major player in modern events. It would not be surprising for them to align themselves with other nations from the former Soviet Union. They also have been aligning themselves with Islamic nations and seem to trend toward an anti-Israeli stance.

3) **Meshech and Tubal**—These refer to the ancient Moschoi and Tibarenoi recognized in ancient Assyrian writings and referring to locations in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Turkey also is an Islamic nation playing a major role in the Middle East today.

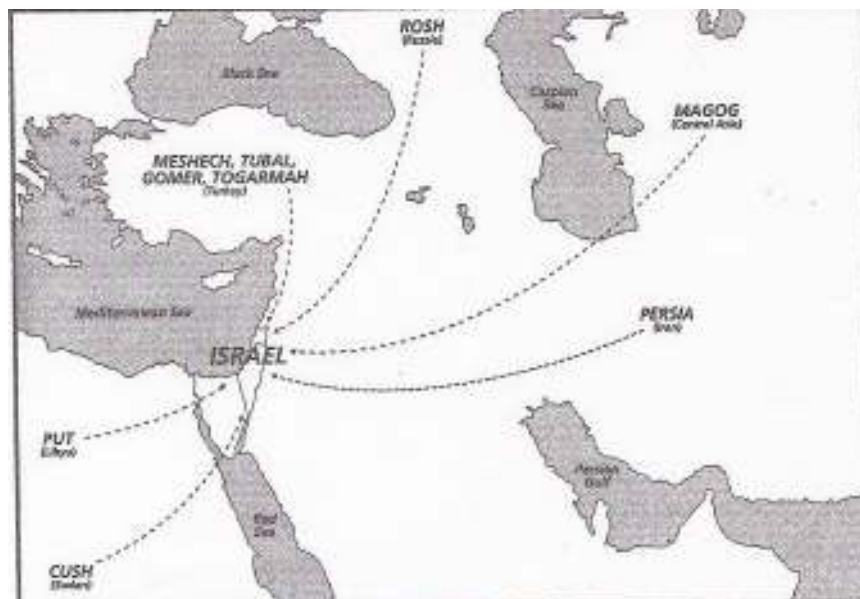
4) **Persia**— Frequently mentioned as a nation during Old Testament times, the ancient land of Persia became the modern nation of Iran in March 1935 and the name was changed to the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. The population of Iran is up to 68 million and is a nation who is hostile toward Israel, a major sponsor of terrorism, and seeking to develop nuclear weapons. Certainly an alignment of this nation with other Islamic nations against Israel would not be surprising.

5) **Ethiopia (Cush)**—Although translated Ethiopia in many English versions, it is literally rendered Cush from the Hebrew. Ancient Cush was called Kusu by the Assyrians and Babylonians, Kos or Kas by the Egyptians and Nubia by the Greeks. Secular history locates Cush directly south of Egypt extending down past the modern city of Khartoum, which is the capital of modern Sudan. Sudan just happens to be a hard-line Islamic nation that supported Iraq in the Gulf War and harbored Osama bin Laden from 1991-1996. It is not surprising that this part of Africa would be hostile toward Israel.

6) **Put**—Some ancient sources indicate that Put or Phut as a North African nation. The Babylonian Chronicles locates this distant nation as being west of Egypt, which could be associated with modern day Libya. The Greek Septuagint renders the word Put as Libues. Modern day Libya is an Islamic nation that has an allegiance to Islamic extremism and a hatred of Israel.

7) **Gomer**—This region is not associated with Germany as some have attempted to do. It really is a reference to the ancient Cimmerians or Kimmerioi. Ancient history identifies biblical Gomer with the Akkadian Gimirraa and the Armenian Gamir. These peoples occupied the territory of Anatolia, which is modern day Turkey. Josephus noted that the Gomerites were identified with the Galatians who inhabited what is today central Turkey. It is interesting that modern day Turkey has a formidable military force on the northern border of Iraq and has ever deepening ties with Russia as well as an allegiance to her Muslim neighbors.

8) **Beth-togarmah**—This is literally rendered as the house of Togarmah and is described as a nation that traded horses with ancient Tyre. This ancient nation also occupied a region of modern day Turkey.



All of these nations will come together and participate in a battle/invasion to destroy Israel during the end times.

- **Revelation 16:12**, “*And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings from the east.*”

9) **Kings from the East**—This is a reference to a massive army from the east just prior to the battle of Armageddon. There must be a large eastern nation that has a strong military toward the end times. While it is conceivable that the strength of this nation could develop during the tribulation period, it is more likely that this nation will be gaining strength long before. Obviously this is a reference to Asia and could likely be associated with the massive nation of China today. China is capable of producing a large scale invasion from the east. It has a massive military and fits the description of kings from the east very well. East and Southeast Asia are more powerful than ever before, economically and militarily, and have an enormous population base.

10) **Israel**—As mentioned before Israel is ground zero for end-times events as much of the activity actually takes place in or involves Israel in some way.

11) **The New Roman Empire**—According to Daniel 9:27, a peace treaty will be made for seven years with a coming world ruler who will rise to power and is related to the Roman Empire and the people who destroyed Jerusalem. It is unclear what the name of this empire will be, but it is clear from the book of Daniel that a 10-nation confederacy will rise to power and the coming world ruler will rise up from this confederacy (Cf. Daniel 2; 7). The ancient Roman Empire ruled the Mediterranean world, but was centered in Rome, which is most closely associated with modern day Europe. It is believed that some sort of Western Confederation involving nations from Europe will develop and strengthen toward the end of the age.

Condition #3—A Decline in Spiritual Character

A major characteristic of the end of the age is widespread **apostasy**.

1. A Definition of Apostasy

Based upon the Biblical usage, apostasy is a departure from the faith. This involves truth concerning a cardinal doctrine and therefore apostates are unbelievers who at one time gave mental assent to Christianity.

This is in contrast with heresy. Heresy refers to a division or faction that may possibly involve deviation from doctrine. Heresy therefore does not necessarily make reference to the salvation of the heretic but rather only to their party spirit. The heretic may be an apostate, but not necessarily.

2. The History of Apostasy

Apostasy has always been present, for example:

- Satan in Genesis 3
- Cain's refusal to offer a blood sacrifice (Genesis 4)
- Unbelief in the day of Noah (Genesis 6-8)
- Unbelief at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11)
- Apostasy of Israel, resulting in captivity
- Unbelief in the rejection of Christ by the Jews
- Modern liberalism

However, it appears there will be a climax of apostasy in the tribulation (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Apostasy will culminate with God's judgment (Revelation 17 - the judgment of the world church).

3. The Problem of Apostasy

The New Testament gives much data regarding the conditions, which the early church faced regarding apostasy:

- "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings;" (Hebrews 13:9)
- "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15)
- "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." (Acts 20:29-30)
- "But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3)
- "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel." (Galatians 1:6)
- "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." (2 Peter 2:1)
- "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1)

In addition, there will be an increase in apostasy that will prevail in the last days:

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." (1 Timothy 4:1).

4. The Nature of Apostasy

- A denial of Christ (2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:18)
- A denial of Christ's return (2 Peter 3:3-4)
- A denial of the faith (1 Timothy 4:1-2; Jude 3)
- A denial of sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:3-4)
- A denial of Christian liberty (1 Timothy 4:3-4)
- A denial of morality (2 Timothy 3:1-8; Jude 18)

Other Characteristics that reveal a decline in spiritual character:

- *Atheism in Government*

Daniel 11:36-45 speaks of the anti-Christ, as a king who will use his power to oppose God. Governments, which deny the Creator, allow a potential for such a world leader to rise to power. Certainly we see a denial of the Creator, a denial of the existence of God not only in our society, but in governments around the world.

- *The Rise of Satanism and the Occult*

1 Timothy 4:1 also appears to indicate that there will be an increase in demonic teaching as the end of this age approaches.

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." (1 Timothy 4:1).

Condition #4—A Development toward Globalism

Globalism is the idea that we are all connected. Rather than an emphasis on many individual nations, there is an emphasis on the unification of the world as a whole. Globalism would open the door for one man to declare himself as world ruler, as is the case in end-times events with the rise of an individual referred to as the antichrist. And certainly we see a trend toward globalism today.

- *Trend toward a World Government*

Since the League of Nations after World War I, there has been an interest in consolidating the governmental powers. Today there is an unprecedented willingness for nations to cooperate together. Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 indicate there will be a world government just prior to the second coming of Christ.

- *The Rise of the World Church*

There seems to be movement toward a major world religious system as Revelation 17 indicates will exist in the end times. Revelation 17 suggests there will be a large world "church" structure existing during the tribulation period.

Certainly, The World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement seek to bring all churches together. It may have nothing to do with the above-mentioned movements, but they are seen as a trend toward the idea of a world church/religious structure. Also the idea of religious pluralism (the idea that there are many paths to God, many ways to heaven) seems to open the door for such a world religious system.

- *The Development of a World Economy*

There is also a desire to move toward a worldwide economic structure in which a single currency could be used to facilitate trade, business and other economic actions. It is interesting, as we have witnessed over the last few months how one nation's economic downturn produces a negative effect worldwide (i.e. Recession in U.S. resulting in a world-wide recession; Stock Market decline in U.S. results in a market decline world-wide). Over the past century there has been a unification of the world's economic structure that has not existed previously and certainly this trends toward the idea of globalism.

Until recently it would have been impossible for one world ruler to instantaneously communicate with the entire world and control the entire world's economy. But all that has changed. Especially over the last two decades. Incredible developments have occurred that have rapidly advanced globalization.

- The end of the cold war
- The creation of the World Trade Organization
- The advance of the internet
- The creation of global news networks (i.e. CNN) and the idea of instant global news
- The need for global cooperation on environmental issues
- The threat of worldwide terror
- The global need for oil

The world that seemed so large and expansive and hopelessly fragmented just a few decades ago is coming together and someday will open the door for the antichrist to take advantage of the situation and control the world.

Conclusion:

Certainly there are many other signs/conditions that would describe the end of the age. Generally there will be wars, rumors of wars, famine and pestilences as well as an increase in earthquakes and other natural phenomena as described by Matthew 24/25 and Revelation 6-18. Although these passages specifically describe the seven-year tribulation period, many have believed that the Matthew 24 statements could also be taken in a general sense to refer to the end-times. If that is the case, then there could be an increase in wars, earthquakes, famine etc... Whatever the case there will be a great desire for peace and safety toward the end of the age. World events will lead to a desire for unification and a desire for a great leader to take command of the world.