

The Sequence of Pretribulational Events

The Great Tribulation is not imminent. The world stage has to be set in a certain way before the Tribulation can actually begin. A number of events are clearly stated to precede the Tribulation period. Some of these pretribulational events have already happened and most are yet to take place. From where we sit in history today, there are several events that will lead up to the Great Tribulation. It will not begin until all these events are completely worked out.

Jesus had told his disciples that Herod's Temple would be destroyed (**Matthew 24:2**). Later on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of you coming and of the end of the age?" He answered them saying: **Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains** (**Matthew 24:7-8**).

The **birth pains** of two world wars and the establishment of the State of Isra'el have already taken place. Most historians agree the World War II was really a continuation of World War I. Both had a decisive impact on Jewish history. The events of World War I provided the impetus for the growth of the Zionist Movement, while the Second World War set the stage for the establishment of the state of Isra'el.

Today, in large part, Isra'el is a secular society and the Bible clearly points to their regathering in the Land in unbelief in preparation for judgment (see my commentary on **Jeremiah Ex - Rebellious Isra'el Renewed**). In addition, **Zephaniah 2:1-2** pinpoints this regathering as occurring before the Great Tribulation period. Thus, two world wars, the increase in famines and earthquakes, and the establishment of the state of Isra'el in unbelief have already taken place.

So *when* does the Rapture begin? The Scriptures clearly teach that it will occur *before* the Great Tribulation (**Luke 21:36; First Thessalonians 5:4-10 and Revelation 3:10**). First, outside of the book of **Revelation**, there is no passage that discusses the Great Tribulation where the Church is mentioned. But some people like to point to the fact that because believers are found during the Great Tribulation, that the Church will go through it. However, the reality that the believers are found during the Great Tribulation (**Revelation 6:9**) does not prove that the Church will go through it, any more than the existence of the righteous of the TaNaKh proves that the Church was there. These passages state that the Church will be removed from the earth *before* the Great Tribulation begins.

But *when before* the Great Tribulation does the Rapture take place? The Scriptures teach that the coming of **the Messiah** is imminent, that is, **He** can come at any time (**Romans 13:11-12; James 5:7-9** and **Revelation 22:20**). While the earlier passages teach that the Rapture will precede the Great Tribulation, these last three teach that **the Lord** could come at any moment.

So then, concerning *when* the Rapture occurs, two things should be noted. First, the Rapture comes before the Great Tribulation. Since it begins with the signing of the seven-year covenant, the very latest point at which the Rapture can occur would be at the time of the signing of the seven-year covenant. The Rapture will not occur beyond that point.

Second, the Rapture is imminent. It can come at any moment, and it need not wait until the signing of the seven-year covenant. It is important to understand that imminency does not mean *soon*. It only means that nothing else must precede it and that it could come at any point in time.

Combining this information, the conclusion is that the Rapture will come some time between this very moment and the signing of the seven-year covenant. Therefore, the Church may see several more pretribulation events take place just as it has already seen two world wars and the establishment of the state of Isra'el. But it may not see any more, depending on exactly at what point the Rapture comes.

The relationship between the Rapture and the Great Tribulation must be clearly understood. The Rapture *comes before* the Great Tribulation, but it *does not begin* the Great Tribulation. The seven-year covenant, not the Rapture, begins the Great Tribulation. The Rapture will come at some point before this signing and may very well precede the Great Tribulation by a good number of years. Therefore, the other pretribulation events, the invasion of Isra'el, the ten kingdoms, the rise of the antichrist, the period of peace and safety, the first blackout, the return of Elijah and possibly the building of the third temple, all may occur sometime between now and the signing of the seven-year covenant.¹²⁹