

Tough Bible Questions: Part 3

By [Nathan Jones](#)

Have you ever found yourself faced with trying to come up with a good answer to a tough Bible question?

Dr. Ron Rhodes is the founder and director of [Reasoning From the Scriptures Ministries](#). He is an expert on the Bible, and one of the things that he specializes in is answering tough questions about the Bible. The following are tough Bible questions Dr. Rhodes answered for our audience.

Q) Dr. Rhodes, do you believe we are in the season of the Lord's return, and if so, why?

A) I think we are. I think to begin with let's recognize the really key foundational prophecy of Israel becoming a nation and Jews streaming back to the Holy Land ever since then. It's kind of interesting because back in the 1800's a couple of prophecy experts were writing about this eventual rebirth of the nation Israel. And everybody was saying "no, it will never happen, that's just an impossibility." But, then in 1948 it did happen. And it's an amazing unfolding of events. But, I think that kind of sets the stage for everything else. If that one thing had not happened, I have a problem in all other prophecies because that's really the foundation to build from.

But, beyond that, you have all kinds of stuff. For example, you've got movement towards the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple today. You've got money being raised, blueprints drawn, people gathering the paraphernalia. You've got people working on interacting with the Jewish people over there, giving them the dream and the vision and so forth.

Beyond that you've also got the alignment of nations that will one day form a coalition against Israel. That would include Russia and Iran and Sudan and Libya and Turkey. All those nations are even now forming alliances with each other. You've got the European Union which I believe sort of sets the stage for the Roman Empire.

And the way I like to look at it is this: If you can imagine a bunch of lines intersecting each other at some point in the near future, one of these lines is the Jewish Temple, another of these lines is the rebirth of Israel, all these different prophecies are coming true, apparently intersecting at some point in the near future. And so, it's the accumulative weight of all of that, that leads me to believe that indeed we are living in the very end times.

Q) When is the Rapture going to occur? What will be the timing? Is it going to be the middle of the tribulation, near the end, at the end, before, at the beginning?

A) I'm a firm believer that it's going to happen before the tribulation and there's a number of reasons why I say that.

I'd say the most important reason is that the Church has no purpose in being in the Tribulation. The Scriptures clearly define the purpose of the Tribulation and I believe it's two-fold: there's going to be a judgment on unbelieving nations and there's also going to be a purging of Israel. The church has no business even being there, now that's aside from the fact that there's not a single verse dealing with the Tribulation in the Old Testament that mentions the Church. There's not a single verse in the New Testament dealing with the Tribulation that mentions the Church. We are told in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 as well as 1 Thessalonians 5:9 that the Church is not appointed to wrath. That leads me to believe that God is going to take the Church out of the world prior to the time of wrath which is coming upon the world. I also think this is related to Revelation 3:10 where the Church is promised deliverance from the actual time period of testing that is going to come upon the earth.

One of my favorite verses is John 14:1-3, which I don't think fits a Post-Tribulational scenario at all. Jesus says I am going to prepare a place for you and if I go to prepare a place for you I will come back for you and take you so that you can be where I am. In other words, Jesus is going to take Christians and take them back to Heaven. That doesn't fit the Post-Tribulational scenario which says that they all stay on the earth.

Imminence is absolute. That's an assumption that is always there. There's nothing that needs to take place before the Rapture of the Church. It could happen any moment. There are many events that must take place before the Second Coming, and if you had a nice little calendar you could pretty much tell when Christ was going to come again. You could watch, for example, when the Antichrist signs the peace pact with Israel in Daniel 9:27 and do a countdown, seven years. It's the 70th week. And the thing is that when you're talking about the Rapture you don't see signs that are prophesied prior to that event. You see, so it's an imminent event. It's something that could happen any moment.

Q) What would you say to a person who says that the whole idea of a Rapture, separate and apart from the Second Coming, is too new an idea to be true?

A) That's a common complaint. There are people out there who even say that the idea of a Rapture is so recent in church history that some even argue it even came from Margaret MacDonald, a teenager. And you know what's interesting? If you actually look at her writings, she comes out to be a cross between Post-Trib and Partial-Trib in viewpoints. A lot of Post-Tribs are going around talking about this as if it's a gospel truth.

Well, one of the things that you also have to keep in mind is that especially during the early centuries of Christianity, Roman Catholicism was predominate. And if you didn't agree with what they taught your life was in danger basically.

And so, I certainly believe if you want to talk about early stuff, I certainly believe that the apostle Paul and John and some of these others were Pre-Tribs, if you look at their writings. And, if you're going to let Scripture speak for itself and words mean anything, then the Pre-Trib position is correct. You've got to do a lot of spiritualizing in my opinion to get to the other positions.

Q) A very faddish thing that has suddenly developed in the last six to eight months in Bible prophecy is the idea that the empire that will be revived in the end time will not be the Roman Empire but the Ottoman Empire. And that the Antichrist will come out of that Ottoman Empire and he will be the one who will rule over it. In fact, not only do they say its going to be the Ottoman Empire and its going to be a Muslim, but they argued that its hyperbole when the Bible says that he's going to rule over all the nations of the earth that he's really just going to rule over the Middle East. What about the Ottoman Empire?

A) Well I think that Scriptures are very clear that it's a Roman Empire. When you look at Daniel in his writings he talks very specifically about how the Antichrist would come from the people who overran Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish Temple. That wasn't the Muslims, it wasn't the Muslims that overcame Jerusalem. They didn't even exist at that time. You know Islam was founded by Muhammad and we're talking centuries later. 600 years later. And so to say that could possibly apply even metaphorically to Muhammad or to Islam would be just reading something into the text that's not there.

And, I also think about Daniel chapter seven where it talks about how you've got the little horn that emerges out of the ten horns right there with them. And that indicates to me, that whole context is about the Roman Empire that will reemerge, and so he comes out of the Roman Empire and he is said to be of the same people who overcame Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish Temple. Now, that was Titus and his Roman warriors who destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. If words mean anything, it is a Roman Empire.

Furthermore, I think that the idea that this guy is a Muslim, that really kind of runs amiss in terms of what Islam teaches when you think about it. For example, Islam believes in the Islamic creed, "there's one god named Allah and Muhammad is his prophet." They will not tolerate any other claims to deity. In 2 Thessalonians 2 it's talking about the Antichrist. And it says that he is going to go into the Temple, exalt himself above every god or object of worship, take his seat in the temple and display himself as being god. Well, for a Muslim to do that, especially in view of the Islam creed which says that "there's one god named Allah" and in view of

the Islamic teaching that Allah can have no partners, you know that's a very clear teaching in Islam, it becomes an impossibility.

Further, just consider how it stretches credulity to say that this individual according to Daniel 9:27 will sign a pact guaranteeing protection for Israel. Why would a Muslim sign a pact guaranteeing protection to Israel? I mean, if there's any group of people that want to see the destruction of Israel it is Muslims. So how would that work?

Not only that, but I believe that this invasion of Muslim countries into Israel will probably take place before the Rapture or after the Rapture and before the Tribulation or at the very beginning of the Tribulation, somewhere in there. If the Muslim nations are largely destroyed by judgment, as seems to be indicated in Ezekiel 38 and 39, how will an Antichrist emerge from the ashes of what used to be a very strong group of people but now is almost gone?

Anyway you look at it there's just all kinds of variables that do not fit this idea that the Antichrist could be a Muslim.

Daniel even says that he will have no regard for the gods of his father, but he will claim that he is above all gods. How can a Muslim say that? No, a Muslim couldn't possibly say that. In fact, one of the things that Muslims get mad about in terms of Christians today is claiming that Jesus is the son of God. They say that's absolute blasphemy because that means that God has partners.

Concerning the argument that this is going to be a local empire, not a world-wide empire, that that's hyperbole when Revelation says that, if a prophecy as you read it in the past came true literally and if you look at all the prophecies that deal for example with the first coming of Christ and see how absolutely literal they were fulfilled, then the indication is that all the other prophecies that deal with the Second Coming and events associated with it will be fulfilled just as literally. So, there's no room for spiritualizing in my opinion. Very often in the Old Testament you've got things referring to both the old and Second Coming within the same basic passage. And, as the first part was literally fulfilled, so the second part will be literally fulfilled.

The proper policy is to read the Bible first. Let the Bible speak for itself and then as Jesus said in Matthew 16, to be accurate observers of the times.

Q) What would the one-world religion be then if it's not Islam?

A) I've done a lot of thinking about the one-world religion. And when you think about it there are two very powerful people groups that would stand against it. Christians would stand against it and Muslims would absolutely stand against it.

Now just think about it. The Rapture takes place before the Tribulation, that's what I believe. So the Christians are removed. If in fact this invasion into Israel by Russia and the Muslim nations takes place before the Tribulation or maybe at the very beginning of the Tribulation. Muslims are largely taken out of the picture, too. To me that opens up the door for the easy emergence of both the Antichrist and the great power as well as a one-world religion. And so to me it just fits chronologically very, very well.

Q) What do you mean by your book's title *Northern Storm Rising*?

A) If you look off into the distance and you see a bunch of dark clouds coming on the scene, and you see some lightening and you can kind of tell when the rains are coming down and the winds blowing, and it's coming toward you. By being an accurate observer of the times, you can tell that a storm's coming at you. Well, according to the Scripture, there is a northern storm emerging on the scene. Jesus told us to be accurate observers of the times, so as you look off to what's happening in Russia and Iran and Turkey and Sudan and all of these nations over there.

What the Bible says is that there's going to be a massive invasion into Israel. We don't like to talk about those kinds of things, I mean we're sick of war. But the Bible is very clear that there's gonna be a massive invasion into Israel. And there's going to be a coalition of nations involved from the north. In fact, one of the nations involved is called Rausch, and that's to the uttermost north of Israel. And if you take a ruler and draw a line straight north from Jerusalem, you're gonna hit Russia. And joining Russia will be a variety of Islamic nations including Iran and Sudan and Libya and Turkey. And here's the thing, when Ezekiel wrote back in the 6th century BC, Islam did not exist. He probably had no idea what would make all these nations unify together. And in fact for many years there have been some more liberal-type Christians who have said these nations are not contiguous or next to each other, therefore it doesn't make sense to say that they are going to join together in a battle, but see recent history reveals Islam. Islam came into being in the 6th and 7th century and that's what unifies them with the exception of Russia.

Did you know that Russia is 20% Islamic and they've got thousands of Muslim temples over there. And Russia has a long history of aggression against Israel. We see that in 1967, 1973 and 1982, and in each case American Presidents stare down the Russian bear. When you look at some of the alliances that Putin's building, for example with Iran, how could you deny it? He signed not only an agreement in which Iran is provided nuclear weaponry but has also signed a 25-year agreement in which Iran gives 500 million dollars a year to Russia in order to build up Iran's military.

And Iran under President Ahmadinejad has said that he would like to see Israel wiped off the map. He has said we're going to see very soon what it's like to live in a US-free and Israel-free world.

I think that the stage is being set. I'm not one of those people that likes to set dates. That's not a healthy thing. In fact, Christ told us not to, so I don't want to imply any date or anything like that. But, I will tell you that Jesus told us to be accurate observers of the times. And, as I observe what's taking place with Russia and Iran and Turkey and Sudan and Libya, not only are these nations aligning with each other, but every one of them has a motive to hate Israel. These nations stand against Israel. They believe that Israel belongs to them. They believe that Allah promised that Holy Land to them. And that in our Bible the Old Testament has been changed by Jews and Christians and originally that land was promised to the Muslims, so Israel was basically stealing something that wasn't theirs back in 1948.

Now, of course, there's been recent overtures in trying to build the Palestinian state and divide Jerusalem and all like that. The Muslims don't want a part of Jerusalem — they want all of it. They want all of it, and they're going to go to war one day and I see what is taking place right now is setting the stage for this eventual storm that will just come in like gangbusters. And, the fact is that God is going to stand for Israel. You know He who stands for Israel does not sleep or slumber. That's what Psalm 121 tells us.

You know what's interesting though? Israel is going to be so overwhelmed when this invasion takes place that there's not going to be a chance of Israel's survival. When God actually turns back the invading force, it's like everybody's going to recognize God's hand. And I want you to notice that when God speaks, He says that they may know that *"I am the Lord thy God."* Now this is the same language you see in the Exodus account when God delivered Israel from the Egyptians, *"That they may know that I am the Lord thy God."* In fact, Ezekiel says point blank it'll be done in such a way that even the Jews will realize it came from God, so I think there's gonna be massive conversions as a result of this.

I've heard some people say that when this army gets destroyed that the Antichrist might stand up and try to take credit for it. Well, I suppose that's possible. I heard some people like Dr. Dwight Pentecost say that. But, the text indicates that God is going to get the glory for this. God says that *"they may know that I am the Lord thy God."* A lot of people are going to become acquainted with Yahweh for the first time.

144,000 Jews that come out to become witnesses during the Tribulation might convert because of that. I think those 144,000 witnesses will be kind of like 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams going all over the world witnessing. I also think there's going to be conversions based upon the two witnesses of Revelation chapter 11.

I also think that when Christians vanish off the planet, all our books are going to be left behind. And I think that many people are going to turn to the Lord as the result of that. That was really my goal in writing the book. I believe that one of the ministries God has called me to is to communicate effectively with people. And the truth is that the Bible is one of the most exciting books in existence and if I can help communicate that excitement in what I write then I've succeeded. And if people get anything from this book it's that God is in control of human history and that the Bible can be absolutely trusted in its prophecies.

If I didn't believe in a sovereign God today, I'd have a lot to worry about. Our world seems to be spinning out of control in so many different ways. But God is directing human history toward its culmination and one day when you and I have been with Christ for billions of years we're going to look back on all of this and just marvel at the way that God directed the circumstances on earth toward its end.

Thank you, Dr. Rhodes, for the answers to these tough Bible questions!