

The Rapture and the Timing of the Two Witnesses

More proof that the Rapture is Pre-Trib is hidden in the timing of the Two Witnesses. The evidence for this becomes clear as we investigate the question of when the Two Witnesses' ministry begins—during the first half of the Tribulation, or during the second.

Students of Bible prophecy from the dispensational viewpoint understand there is a Tribulation period of 7 years prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. During this time, God and Satan vie for the souls of men. Satan introduces his infamous 666 mark that all men must accept to worship him, or die by beheading. God, on the other hand, extends a last-minute opportunity for men to receive forgiveness for their sins through faith in Jesus Christ. One of the things taught in Revelation is that God uses Two Witnesses to preach Jesus Christ. The question before us is: When will the time of the Two Witnesses' ministry occur within the Trib period's 7 years? The answer to this question also helps demonstrate why the Rapture is Pre-Trib.

The 7-year Trib period comes from the prophecy of the 70 weeks in Daniel chapter 9, where each "week" is a time period of 7 years. The Tribulation period is the last, or 70th, "Week" of that prophecy. This prophetic week is divided into two halves, each 3½ years long. (Daniel 9:27) It needs further to be said that those years are not our familiar calendar years of 365¼ days each, but are actual Jewish lunar years of 360 days each, where each month is exactly 30 days each. That being said, each half of the Trib period is 1,260 days long, the same number of days as the ministry of the Two Witnesses:

"And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." (Revelation 11:3)

We are further taught just who these Two Witnesses are:

"These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord." (Revelation 11:4)

This corresponds to an Old Testament prophecy given to Israel through an angel of the Lord in Zechariah chapter 4. First the prophet sees a vision in verses 3-4, and some verses later asks the angel to explain what he was seeing:

“And I answered the second time and said to him, ‘What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from themselves?’ So he answered me, saying, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ And I said, ‘No, my lord.’ Then he said, ‘These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.’” (Zechariah 4:12-14)

The verse in Revelation 11:4 ties the two Scripture passages together, so that when the Tribulation period is underway, the descendants of Israel who see the Two Witnesses will understand from the book of Revelation that the Two Witnesses are the anointed ones Zechariah foretold would be coming.

Now concerning the number of 1,260 days, I do not believe the sameness of half the Trib period and the ministry time span of the Two Witnesses is a coincidence. Some students of Bible prophecy think the Two Witnesses’ 1,260 days of ministry is aligned with the first half of the Trib period, while others believe it aligns with the second half. This latter view is primarily due to Revelation 11:3-13 (which is the entire story of the Two Witnesses) being found between Revelation 9:13-21, which describes the “second woe” (i.e., the sixth angel trumpet judgment), and Revelation 11:14-19, which describes the “third woe” (i.e., the seventh angel trumpet judgment).

However, some careful thought will show that the 1,260 days of the Two Witnesses’ ministry cannot be located, time-wise, in the second half of the Trib period.

First, consider the nature of exactitude with God’s numbers. When He says 1,260 days, He doesn’t mean 1,261 days or 1,259 days. When dealing with these Tribulation time figures, we will find them expressed differently in Scripture, but all are exactly equivalent. There’s “a time, times and half a time” (Daniel 7:25), which is repeated in Revelation 12:14 and also defined for us in Revelation 12:6:

“Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.” (Revelation 12:6)

“But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.” (Revelation 12:14)

From this we know “a time, times and half a time” = 1,260 days. Likewise, the time of the reign of the Antichrist is given in Daniel 7:25 as “a time, times and half a time,” and is repeated in Revelation 13:5 as “42 months.”

“He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times and half a time.” (Daniel 7:25)

“There was given him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.” (Revelation 13:5)

By this we know that the Antichrist’s reign in Revelation 13:5 (i.e., 42 months) is exactly 1,260 days, not a day more nor a day less. In Daniel 9:27, from which (as we have already seen) we derive the 7-year length of the Trib period, we find the Antichrist committing the Abomination of Desolation. The Abomination of Desolation is an act of sacrilege in which he enters the temple of God and puts a stop to Jewish worship sacrifices, and demands to be worshipped as God himself:

“Who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.” (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

We know from Daniel that this event occurs in the exact center of the Trib period’s 7 years:

"...but in the middle of the week [i.e., 1 prophetic week = 7 Jewish lunar years] he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering, and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate..." (Daniel 9:27b)

The Abomination of Desolation makes the temple of God "desolate." Please carefully note that Antichrist will continue his reign until he is destroyed:

"...even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Daniel 9:27c)

This can only mean that Antichrist, whom we have seen reigns for 42 months, is destroyed according to God's decree, at the 1,260th day of his reign, not one day more or less. This destruction of the Antichrist is revealed in Revelation chapter 19 at the Second Coming. There, the Antichrist and his associate in evil, the False Prophet, are dealt with in finality:

"...these two were thrown alive in the lake of fire..." (Revelation 19:20b)

Now, you might say, "Okay, so the Antichrist is destroyed after reigning exactly 1,260 days. So what's that got to do with the time of the ministry of the Two Witnesses?" I'm glad you asked. In Revelation 11, after revealing the effects and nature of the Two Witnesses' ministry, it records for us:

"When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them." (Revelation 11:7)

We are further told the Two Witnesses' bodies will lie in the streets of Jerusalem for "three and a half days." (Revelation 11:9b) Revelation goes on to say:

"But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them." (Revelation 11:11)

For argument's sake, let's assume the ministry of the Two Witnesses really is aligned with the second half of the Tribulation. Follow with me the following time sequence based on that assumption:

At the Tribulation period's midpoint, the Antichrist commits the Abomination of Desolation. (Daniel 9:27) That same day, the ministry of the Two Witnesses begins, and they minister for the ordained 1,260 days, which is also the length of the Antichrist's reign. Then, on the final day of the Antichrist's reign, he kills the Two Witnesses. But! Jesus comes back right then also and has the Antichrist and False Prophet thrown into the Lake of Fire. Despite this world-shaking event of the Second Coming, the world nonetheless watches the bodies of the Two Witnesses for 3½ more days, even while Jesus is judging the nations (Matthew 25:31-46) and setting up His kingdom. Still following that time sequence, after those 3½ extra days, the bodies rise to life again and there's a great earthquake. (Revelation 11:13) Then the third woe occurs (Revelation 11:14), meaning the next angel, the one with the seventh trumpet, blows his horn. (Revelation 11:15-19) And that's not even counting the seven Bowls of Wrath that additionally follow after the Seventh Trumpet.

All this happening 3½ days AFTER the Second Coming?

Does anybody besides me see a problem with this?

It is simply a fact that the seven Seals, seven Trumpets and seven Bowls all are completed BEFORE the Second Coming. The time of the Two Witnesses' ministry CANNOT be in the second half of the Trib period. Even if we allow that the Revelation passage of the Two Witnesses is isolated, time-wise, from the progression of the sixth and seventh Trumpets (which, in fact, it is), we still can't have the time of their ministry in the second half. The world rejoices and gloats over the death of these two men of God and gives gifts to one another in a satanic celebration during those 3½ days (Revelation 11:9-10), something that would have to be happening while Jesus has already returned to Earth. Does anyone seriously expect that Jesus, then returned to Earth in His power and glory as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, would ALLOW that? I don't think so!

May I suggest a simpler explanation that does not cause impossible conflicts like those shown above?

In Revelation 9, John is describing a time point in the progression of the 21 Judgments where those judgments are well past the middle point of the Trib's 7 years. In the next chapter John is told, "You must prophesy again concerning peoples and nations and tongues and kings." (Revelation 10:11b) This means that the "clock" of the Trib period is being reset back to the Trib period's beginning to describe what follows next.

John then describes in Revelation 11:1-2 the temple of God. This HAS to be in existence in the first half of the Trib period in order for the Antichrist to enter the temple to commit his Abomination of Desolation at the midpoint of the Trib. This is proof that the time sequence of Revelation 11:1-13 is in the first half, meaning both the temple and the Two Witnesses are present when the Trib starts. To me this also implies that the temple has to be already fully built when the Trib period starts, for the instruction in Revelation 11:1 says, "Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, 'Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.'" You can't hand a measuring rod to someone to measure something that isn't built yet. The instruction implies he is being ordered to measure a completed item, not something under construction.

As Revelation 11 moves along, John signals that the Revelation 10:11 "reset" (back to the beginning of the Trib period) has ended, and the countdown of the 21 Judgments has resumed. He does this by saying:

"The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly." (Revelation 11:14)

When the first day of the 7-year Trib period (i.e., Daniel's 70th week, Daniel 9:27) begins, it is then that the Two Witnesses appear; their ministry begins on Day 1 of the Trib period, and ends on Day 1,260, when the Antichrist commits the Abomination of Desolation and goes out to murder them.

Now, when you see the impossibility of the time of the Two Witnesses' ministry being in the second half, thus requiring that it be in the first half, you can see the

evidence for the Rapture showing clearly as Pre-Trib. Think about it for a moment. The Church of Jesus Christ is commanded to be Jesus' witnesses. (Acts 1:8) Why would God put into operation these two spectacular witnesses to bear witness of Jesus Christ, if the Church were still on Earth to do that job as it has for the past 2,000 years?

However, with the Pre-Trib Rapture happening, billions of people will suddenly have no one to tell them about Jesus. The Bride Church will all be gone. However, with the time of the Two Witnesses' ministry beginning on Day 1 of the Trib, people will be hearing about Jesus despite the disappearance of Christians in the Rapture. I believe it is the ministry of the Two Witnesses that brings to faith the 144,000 male Jews of Revelation 7:1-8. These Jewish men finally believe in Jesus, and realize that the time is short, and while the Two Witnesses minister to Israel, the 144,000 spread out over all the Gentile nations to share Jesus Christ. Someone has compared it to 144,000 Billy Grahams let loose on the world at once!

This, too, is an evidence that the Rapture is Pre-Trib. As said earlier, Jesus gave to His Church the job of being witnesses to Him. (Acts 1:8) Why would God now use two Jewish witnesses doing the miracles of Moses and Elijah, and 144,000 Jewish men to share the gospel, unless it were necessary because the Church is no longer on Earth to do the job?

The result of the ministry of the 144,000 is a great number of saved souls "...which no one can count out, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues..." (Revelation 7:9b) They cry out, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:10b)

In conclusion, the understanding that makes the best sense is that the ministry of the Two Witnesses begins on Day 1 of the Tribulation period. They win the 144,000 to Christ, who then go out in the world to win uncountable numbers of souls. The Two Witnesses continue their own ministry in Israel, performing the miracles of Moses and Elijah (i.e., turning water to blood, etc.). (Revelation 11:5-6)

It is important to note that in doing the miracles of Moses and Elijah, the Two Witnesses represent the testimony of the two authorities acknowledged by the sons of Israel, the Law and the Prophets. When giving "The Golden Rule," Jesus referenced that same authority the people knew when He said, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12) When Jesus had taken Peter, James and John to the Mount of Transfiguration, they met Moses and Elijah, who epitomize the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). (Luke 9:20) When Jesus rebuked the scoffing Pharisees, again He spoke of the Law and the Prophets. (Luke 16:14-16) Also, after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and taught them about Himself out of the Law and the Prophets. (Luke 24:25-27)

During the Tribulation, the sons of Israel will be seeing, with their own eyes, the Two Witnesses performing the miracles of Moses and Elijah, and will be hearing, with their own ears, the testimony of those two authorities, representing the Law and the Prophets, preaching Jesus Christ.

At the end of their ministry, on Day 1,260, the Antichrist goes into the temple of God and commits the Abomination of Desolation. Then the words of Jesus become terribly clear:

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains." (Matthew 24:15-16)

The Antichrist slays the Two Witnesses, and the Trib period now begins its second half. The Antichrist then goes after God's people in a massive persecution that will permit no worship except to him. It says in Scripture of this time (i.e., the second half of the Trib):

"I kept looking, and that horn [i.e., Antichrist] was waging war with the saints and overpowering them." (Daniel 7:21)

"...and they will be given into his hand for a time, times and half a time." (Daniel 7:25b)

“There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.” (Revelation 13:5)

“It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.” (Revelation 13:7)

His reign is supreme during the second half. With the committing of the Abomination of Desolation, he proceeds forth to force people to submit to him, via the infamous 666 mark, or be beheaded. (Revelation 13:15; Revelation 20:4)

As a last thought, it is also this supreme reign of his during the second half that shows why all of the evangelism must take place in the Trib period’s first half, both that of the Two Witnesses and that of the 144,000 Israelites. Therefore, the time of the Two Witnesses can be none other than during the first half of the Tribulation period, with the Rapture preceding it.

by Paul K.