

Reasons for a Gap between the Rapture and the Great Tribulation

Scripture teaches that the Rapture is imminent – it could happen at any time.¹ Many Bible teachers, however, assume that the Rapture will immediately precede the Great Tribulation (the final seven years of this age). But there are several reasons why a gap of time between the Rapture and the final seven year period is likely. Here are some:

- 1) After the Rapture there will be global chaos. If only 1000 people disappeared from a city there would be accidents and great turmoil. It would be the story of the century. But at the Rapture, *millions* of believers will be instantly translated to meet the Lord in the air. If only 1% of the population is removed, that would equate to 3 million in the US alone and 70 million globally. All will vanish in an instant! The resulting global turmoil will require time for things to settle down.
- 2) After the Rapture, the Antichrist will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:5-9; Rev. 6:2). However, no Scripture states that he will confirm the seven year covenant immediately (Dan. 9:27). In fact, he will not dominate until the 3 ½ year midpoint of the Tribulation (Rev. 13:5). His rise to power will take time – perhaps several years (Dan. 8:23-25).
- 3) Daniel chapter 7 lays out the sequence of the world's final kingdom before Christ returns. This fourth kingdom will initially emerge as a global government that “shall devour the whole earth” (v. 23). Then we are told that there will be “ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom” (v. 24). They will be followed by the Antichrist: “and another shall rise *after them*; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings.” (compare this passage with Revelation 13 and 17). Today the world is rapidly heading toward a global government and economic system. However, believers are hindering the emergence of a global government. But once the salt is removed, and chaos ensues, a global Marshall plan will be implemented. Of course the rise of a ten region global government, followed by the rise of the Antichrist will require time. Clearly the Antichrist will not dominate or enforce a peace covenant until after the ten-region world-wide system is firmly established. All this will take time.
- 4) The Woman of Revelation 17 rides the Beast into power. She is one holding the reins at the start of this period. Therefore it is improbable that the Antichrist will dominate and confirm a covenant with Israel and the world immediately after the Rapture.
- 5) The Harlot's Babylonian-like religious system will come in Christ's name, not the Antichrist's name. She will present herself as Queen of the true church, but in reality she will be a seductive counterfeit. Clearly, the organizing of her global religious system will require time to set up.
- 6) The two witnesses of Revelation 11 will preach for the first 3 ½ years of the final seven year period. These men “have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the

¹ Read *Rapture!* at: www.eternal-productions.org/PDFS/articles/Rapture.pdf

earth with all plagues, as often as they desire” (v. 6). This appears to coincide with the 3rd and 4th Seal Judgments of Revelation 6 and the warnings of Jesus in Matthew 24:4-7. If correct, then the 1st and 2nd Seal Judgments would occur before the two witnesses arise – which means they would have to happen before the final seven year period. Again a few year gap would be needed for these early prophecies to be fulfilled.

- 7) The Magog Invasion (Ezek. 38) may provide the impetus for the Antichrist to confirm the covenant which will start Daniel’s 70th Week. But before this invasion, Ezekiel 38:8-13 indicates Israel will become strong and very prosperous. The Psalm 83 and Isaiah 17 Middle East war and Israel’s prophesied great victory followed by a period of peace and prosperity could well set the stage for the Magog invasion.
- 8) Three times during the Magog Invasion scenario God is calling the Jews “My people Israel” (Ezek. 38:14, 16; 39:7). This beckons the question “Where is the church?” In Ezekiel 39:7 God states that during this time “(I will) make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let them profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.” Therefore, by this time the church must be gone because believers are God’s witnesses to the world, but during this period God is once again using His people Israel as His primary witness to the nations. Because it appears that the Magog Invasion precedes the final seven years, this provides even more evidence for a gap of time between the Rapture and final seven years.
- 9) The 5th Seal saints of Revelation 6:9-11 ask “how long?”, suggesting they were martyred during Pre-Tribulation events. They are also listed before the Tribulation saints of Revelation 7 & 15. After the Rapture, as persecution ramps up, it appears the Revelation 6 martyrs may come to faith and be tested during this period preceding the seven year Tribulation. The fact that they are crying out “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (v. 10), offers evidence that they are not in the Great Tribulation – otherwise they would probably know they are in the final seven year period and would know how much time was left before the Lord judges the earth.
- 10) A gap would also give Israel time to build her temple and prepare to reinstitute temple sacrifices – which are in place before the first half of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 11:1-3). It also provides time for the Woman’s religious site to be erected in Babylon, Iraq (Zech. 5:11), and the ten-region global government to organize (Dan. 7; Rev. 13); etc.

In summary, there is no Scripture that states the Rapture will immediately precede the Tribulation. Further, a short stage setting gap of perhaps a few years followed by the final seven year period seems to agree with the whole prophetic picture. This gap will likely be more than a few months because so much takes place during this time period. However, this gap will likely be relatively short because Jesus likened these signs to birth pangs – which always increase in frequency and intensity and tighten as delivery nears (Matt. 24:8). Because the stage setting

events are already positioning in rapid succession, it appears this gap will not be long (Rev. 22:20).

While the final seven year period – known as the Great Tribulation – is well documented in the Bible (Daniel 7:25; 9:27 ; 12:7-11; Matthew 24:15; Revelation 11:3; 12:6, 13:5; etc.), there is no specific Scripture that tells us the length of this possible gap between the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation. This makes sense because God’s Word teaches that the Rapture is imminent – it could happen at any moment and we should always be watching and waiting (Mark 13:37; Rev. 3:3).

However, as we have reviewed, the Lord has provided many clues. The remainder of this article will examine some additional clues that may help us determine the approximate length of this time gap.

Smyrna and the Length of the Global Testing

Smyrna was one of seven churches Jesus addressed in the Book of Revelation. *Smyrna* means *myrrh* or *bitterness*. When crushed, myrrh produces a sweet fragrance. It was used in the holy ointment (Exod. 30:23), perfumes (Esther 2:12; Psalm 45:8; Song 4:6; 5:5, 13) and in embalming (John 19:39). Of the seven churches that Jesus addressed in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Smyrna received the shortest letter from the Lord – only four verses (Rev. 2:8-11). They were the suffering church of the first century – and perhaps may characterize the persecuted church throughout the Church Age. Jesus foretold that these believers would experience tribulation and poverty (v. 9). Some would be thrown into prison, tested, and have tribulation ten days – ultimately to be martyred (v. 10).

Many commentators believe the ten days may refer to ten years. These include: William MacDonald, Geneva Bible Notes, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, British Family Bible, Halls, Thomas Scott, and others. This is based on the fact that in Scripture a day often represents one year. Adam Clarke writes: “As the days in this book are what is commonly called prophetic days, each answering to a year, the ten years of tribulation may denote ten years of persecution; and this was precisely the duration of the persecution under Diocletian, during which all the Asiatic Churches were grievously afflicted.”

Here are some Scriptures in which a day represents one year:

“Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years” (Gen. 29:27).

“According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection” (Num. 14:34).

“And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year” (Ezek. 4:6).

“Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city...” (Dan. 9:24). In this famous prophecy, 70 weeks are equal to $70 \times 7 = 490$ prophetic days or 490 years.

Might Smyrna also provide a foreshadow of the final period of testing? We know from Daniel 9:24-27 that there is a final seven year period during which the Lord will deal particularly with the Nation of Israel. This period is called “the time of Jacob's trouble” (Jer. 30:7).

However, the Tribulation period is also called “the time of the Gentiles” (Ezek. 30:3) when God “will punish the world for its evil” (Is. 13:11). Most interestingly, Jesus refers to this period as “the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Rev. 3:10). Just as Smyrna was “tested” for ten days, might the world be tested for ten years?

The Numbers Seven and Ten

The number seven is the most repeated and significant number in the Bible. Starting with the Creation week in Genesis, and found throughout the Bible culminating in the final Book (Revelation), seven represents completion, perfection, fullness.

The second most significant number in the Bible is ten. Examples include the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), the ten plagues (Exodus 7-11), and the final ten kings (Dan. 7:24; Rev. 13:1; 17:12). Here are some other examples:

“Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice” (Numbers 14:22).

“Then it came about, after about ten days, that the LORD struck Nabal, and he died” (1 Samuel 25:38).

“These ten times you have reproached me; You are not ashamed that you have wronged me” (Job 19:3).

“So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, ‘From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us’” (Nehemiah 4:12).

“Please test your servants for ten days” (Daniel 1:12-15).

More examples include: Ten generations from Adam to Noah (Genesis 5); Laban changing Jacob's wages and testing him ten times (Genesis 31:7); a ten year famine and testing period for Naomi (Ruth 1:4-6); the disciples were commanded to wait ten days in Jerusalem until they were empowered by the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1 & 2). See also: 1 Samuel 1:8; 1 Samuel 25:5.

From these examples we see the number ten can signify law, judgment, completeness, testing. How appropriate then if this age concluded with a ten year period of worldwide testing and judgment in parallel with a seven year testing of Israel.

Concerning this possible ten year period, it is also interesting to note that the Feast of Trumpets begins on the 1st day of the 7th month, and is followed by the Day of Atonement concluding on the 10th day of the 7th month. This period of time is known as the “Ten Days of Awe” or “Ten days of repentance”. Because the first four feasts coincided with Christ’s First Coming, many believe that the Fall feasts will coincide with key Second Coming events. The Feast of Trumpets is a time of remembrance, repentance, re-awakening, and revival and therefore may coincide with the beginning of this final period.² The Day of Atonement is a time of affliction, brokenness, and cleansing. If this prophetic model is correct, then the Feast of Trumpets may coincide with the commencement of the re-awakening/testing and then Tribulation; then ten days later (ten years?) the Great Tribulation ends when Christ returns at the evening of the Day of Atonement.

A potential problem to this 3 year gap theory is the first horseman of Revelation 6. Many (including the author) believe the first horseman of Revelation 6 is the Antichrist. Because the Seal Judgments of Revelation 6 are the beginning of judgments, they conclude Antichrist will immediately sign the covenant and ride into power as a man of peace. However, in the Bible there are many prophecies with double bearing. For example, Isaiah was given a prophetic sign for his generation, but the prophecy also extended to and was fully fulfilled by Christ’s first advent (Is. 7:14-16). The King of Tyre was warned of his demise in Ezekiel 28:12-19 but the prophecy also applied to Lucifer’s fall, and will be entirely fulfilled when Satan is cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). Therefore it is possible that the Antichrist will arise onto the world stage as a man of peace, then war will ensue, then he will confirm a global peace accord with Israel and the world, then more war and great tribulation will follow. A two stage promised peace period agrees with the prophetic double bearing found elsewhere in Scripture.

In summary, as Smyrna suffered tribulation for ten days (ten years), the world may suffer tribulation for ten years. After an approximately three year period, God will focus primarily on Israel, and test them in parallel for the final seven years of this age. Therefore a total of ten years between the beginning of “the hour of trial” and the Second Coming is possible and seems to agree with the Bible’s last day’s prophetic picture. The Rapture will likely precede this global testing period. However with all the last days signs already in place, it’s looking like it won’t precede it by much. May we urgently share the gospel in the short time remaining.

² For a study on the biblical feasts, read: Robert R. Congdon, *An Appointment with God: The Feasts of the Lord – Leviticus 23*, Bloomington, IN, CrossBooks, 2009.