



The Messiah Will Return

The issues surrounding what many call “the rapture” and its timing have caused much unnecessary debate, slander, and criticism over the years in evangelical Christianity. People from all the various views surrounding the gathering of the Lord’s own unto Himself have at times slandered one another, and in many cases, have given eschatology, or the study of end things, an overall bad name. To those of us who believe in reasoned discussion rather than fierce debate, this is of some concern. While in mainstream and popular Christianity, the pre-tribulation rapture position is often overwhelmingly represented in comparison to post-tribulationism, the numbers are much more even in the Messianic movement. We should strive for an ample position so that we might examine this subject fairly, rationally, and above all Scripturally.

We are commanded by the Bible to “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). We are also told to be “diligent to preserve

the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) tells us quite plainly, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). When we critique others for what they believe concerning an issue like this, it must be tempered in a generous spirit of fairness. It must be done constructively so we can all gain something from the discussion, and if necessary change, or at least fine-tune, our theological beliefs.

The issue surrounding the return of Yeshua is very important as far as our overall theology should be concerned. After His ascension into Heaven, the angels present attested, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Yeshua, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Without any doubt, the Messiah will return. As the Apostles’ Creed states concerning Yeshua: “[He] ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the Father whence he cometh to judge the living and the dead.”¹ **Regardless of our view, we must be united around the common hope that our Lord will come back as has been foretold.**

The primary concern surrounding the return of the Messiah for pre-millennialists—those who believe that Yeshua returns before His thousand-year Millennial reign—has never really been the event itself and what the resurrection involves,² but rather its timing. It is the most debated topic between those who study prophecy today, and will continue to be until He returns.

¹ Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26.

² Consult the FAQ, “Resurrection, Late Belief.”

It must be said that one's position on the return of the Messiah does not necessarily have to have a bearing on where he or she spends eternity. This does not have to be a "salvation issue," as some individuals at times make it out to be.³ But, there are concerns that should exist when a person gets too comfortable or too dogmatic with an opinion surrounding events that are *yet to occur*. We must be open to alternatives if the end-times do not play out exactly as we expect. We have to all recognize that whatever position we hold to, pre-tribulation or post-tribulation, that we are dealing with future events. Our end-time charts may not necessarily "pan out" as we think they will.

I am very explicit about my views, and do not wish any of you to be confused about what I *might believe*. I take the Scriptures at face value for what they say and believe in a literal return of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) to Planet Earth. I believe that there will be a physical removal of the saints from Planet Earth prior to His touchdown upon the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). I affirm that a seven-year period known as the Seventieth Week of Israel will occur, with its latter half being known as the Great Tribulation (Daniel 9:27; cf. Matthew 24:21; Mark 13:19). During this time of intense horrors, the Scriptures tell us that many millions of people on this planet will die, many of

³ Pre-tribulationists Todd Strandberg and Terry James, *Are You Rapture Ready?* (New York: Dutton, 2003), 49, rightly acknowledge that the debate over "rapture timing" is not a salvation issue:

"No other doctrinal issue brings about more uproar in Christian ranks than do differences in belief about the Rapture. Many arguments over that event divide Christians who otherwise agree almost right down the line on crucial doctrines, such as those involving salvation."

whom will unfortunately be eternally condemned. I affirm orthodox Biblical truths that have sustained our faith since the time of the Apostles and were restored during the Protestant Reformation. And most importantly for you to note, I am a Messianic Believer who strongly emphasizes the Hebraic Roots of our faith and the Torah obedient lifestyle adhered to by Yeshua (Jesus) and His Jewish Disciples.⁴

Now that you know something of my theological basis, it is important that we address the issues surrounding the Messiah's return. As the world gets more and more unstable, and with the Twenty-First Century fully upon us, many Believers are expecting Yeshua to come at any moment. *People are definitely talking about prophecy.* Within pre-millennial eschatology, the specific debate that exists is whether or not Yeshua will return **before or after** Daniel's Seventieth Week, also called the Tribulation period.

By far, the most popular of these two positions is that the Messiah will take the saints into Heaven prior to the Tribulation period (the full seven years) and then physically return to Earth at the close of the Great Tribulation. This is commonly referred to as the **pre-tribulation rapture** view, and is the one that many are familiar with today. The converse position is the **post-tribulation rapture** belief, in which the Messiah will gather Believers near, or at the end of, the Tribulation

⁴ If you are unfamiliar with any of the ideas or concepts concerning the Messianic movement and the Hebraic Roots of the faith, consult the workbook *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study* co-written by the author and William Mark Huey, and the author's book *Introduction to Things Messianic*.

Also consult the author's book *The New Testament Validates Torah* and the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics (forthcoming).

period, and then return to judge the world. This is the view which Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics holds to.⁵

We *do not* consider the issue of the rapture and Second Coming of Yeshua to be one of salvation, even though some pre-tribulationists I have encountered might consider it to be a salvation issue. *As a future event, it is open to interpretation.* However, it is our job as Believers to rightly search the Scriptures and be on guard when it pertains to His return. Yeshua Himself asks, “when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). We are to be on alert when it pertains to His return, standing true in our faith in Him, and not give in to any populist interpretations. What we believe needs to be legitimately supported from God’s Word and be consistent with the ideology we see beginning in the Torah, and upheld by the Prophets.

In this study, we will examine some of the common arguments given in reference for a pre-tribulation rapture escape. This is not intended to be the “final word” on the pre- versus post-trib rapture debate, as there are many other issues which surround it,⁶ some of which will only be addressed in passing. But, I certainly hope that this

⁵ Another belief similar to the post-tribulation perspective is the **pre-wrath** rapture, which many regard to be a “modified” form of post-trib. This publication is really not intended to debate the nuanced differences between the post-tribulation and pre-wrath views, although we do emphasize that just like the pre-wrath rapture advocates, we believe that the saints are *indeed* spared from the wrath (Grk. *orge*) of God.

⁶ Many useful thoughts are available in Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Paul D. Feinberg, Douglas J. Moo, Richard R. Reiter, *Three Views on the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), where these different scholars critique the others’ point of view.

analysis will demonstrate many of the shortcomings of the pre-tribulationist belief system and reveal how unscriptural it really is. Most importantly, this report is written from a distinct Messianic viewpoint, so you may want to take serious note of how we feel about the rapture controversy, as opposed to us just being your average evangelical Christians. We are very concerned with the testimony of today's Messiah followers to both Israel and the worldwide Jewish community. We have a unique vantage point because we consider ourselves participants in the end-time restoration of Israel, and not part of a separate "Church" entity.

The intent of this analysis is to address some of the common reasons that most pre-tribulationists give for believing that Yeshua will gather His elect prior to the Tribulation. I hope you will find these reasons responded to fairly, as well as thoroughly. Even more important than this, we will be addressing the issues that surround those who hold *very strongly or militantly* to pre-tribulationism, perhaps making it an issue of salvation or fellowship. Is it a salvation issue, or is it an issue of interpretation? If the pre-tribulation rapture does not occur as so many Christians believe, what will they—or *perhaps even you*—do? **Are you really prepared for whatever may take place?**
