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# The Top Reasons People Believe in the Pre-Trib Rapture

The following is a list of twelve common reasons why many people believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. These reasons are those which have been most commonly given to us by website readers over the years who are pre-tribulationists. Their order primarily indicates the frequency of us hearing these arguments. As you should notice, some of the reasons listed seem somewhat absurd, some pose legitimate theological questions, and others pose some serious concern regarding the character of our Heavenly Father as He is perceived by some people.

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**“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture out of respect for my pastor/Bible teacher.”**

The Holy Scriptures are replete with admonitions to respect others, and specifically those in positions of spiritual authority. Whether appointed by God or other humans, these persons do not deserve harsh, merciless, or unfair criticism. However, it is very important that we all recognize that a pastor, congregational leader, or even a highly respected theologian or teacher at a seminary, is a human being and will make mistakes. As James the Just admonishes, pertaining to Biblical teachers, “we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1)—and I certainly take this warning very, very seriously. Teachers need to understand that what they say will affect others’ opinions about God, His Word, and serious life decisions will often be made from what they say. They need to be very careful to not say any flippant thoughts or imperative statements in the context of instructing others from the Scriptures, but instead communicate things fairly and with an inquisitive tenor seeking truth.

A website reader once told me a story about one of his pastors who was fond of saying, “Do as I say but not as I do.” It was later unfortunately discovered that he was having an extra-marital affair, and consequently many he was responsible for were seriously disturbed in their personal faith. He was forced to resign his position and he later ended up marrying the woman with whom he had been adulterating. Each one of us needs to take this kind of example to serious heart and understand that human teachers or pastors will always fail us (even if just on minor things), and

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look to *the Teacher*, Messiah Yeshua, for our ultimate answers.

Yeshua accused the leaders of the Pharisees of doing similar things (Matthew 23:1-11). On the outside these individuals showed a form of godliness, yet they were hypocritical as the Lord called them “whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23:27). The Messiah did not issue a rebuke against all Pharisees, but certainly against those who had abused their power and position. Are there not religious leaders today who fit this same category? Do we not see those who profess some form of godliness, but do exactly the opposite? One of Yeshua’s major rebukes to the Pharisaical leaders of His time was “They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as a finger*” (Matthew 23:4). While they were willing to take all the credit for being “pious,” they were unwilling to do some of the major work of serving others, making the required sacrifice.

Today, many pastors and leaders are embracing the ecumenical wave sweeping through our faith, in which key doctrines such as salvation coming only through Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) or the final authority of Scripture, are being denied for the sake of “unity.” As we should all recall from the Bible, true unity comes from individuals bound together in the Holy Spirit (cf. Ephesians 4:2-6) **and not** an edict from an ecumenical assembly or church council. Unfortunately, some pastors whose rapture position is pre-tribulational believe that it is acceptable for “unity” to occur with an apostate Roman Catholicism, many of whose members have given the Virgin Mary co-redeemer status with the Lord Jesus. While it is one thing to reach

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out to those of other religious groups, in an effort to show them a better way—it is another thing to join with them and look beyond some of their severe shortcomings.

Believing in any teaching or doctrine simply because someone you respect believes it can be dangerous. Pastors or Bible teachers are *human beings with flaws*, which we all must recognize. Placing one's complete trust and confidence in a human person will only bring harm. As the Apostle Peter warned how "there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves" (2 Peter 2:1). By all means Bible teachers who commit their lives to a study of God's Word should be consulted and considered, but their conclusions must always be tested against God's Word.

The warning to watch out for false teachers in the Last Days is very real. Is believing in the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine—or any other Biblical doctrine for that matter—solely on the basis that someone whom you respect believes it, Biblically valid? **No.** You can respect a person for his or her position, but at the same time disagree based on Scripture in a civil manner. If you believe in any teaching solely on the basis of respecting someone, you need to pray and ask the Lord for Him to show you a better way of making theological conclusions. You need to ask Him to impart you with the ability to read the Bible better yourself, and give you the reasoning ability and discernment to deal with complicated issues.

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**“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because it is the traditional view.”**

The issue surrounding the history of the pre-tribulation rapture is very intriguing. Very few are aware that the modern basis for the pre-tribulation rapture probably stems from the so-called visions of Scottish girl Margaret MacDonald in the 1830s, who claimed that God would give His people a “secret rapture” before the end-times. British theologian John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren movement later popularized beliefs based on her visions, and by the end of the Nineteenth Century dispensationalism began to be developed by theologians such as Cyrus Scofield. Sometimes, though, pre-tribulationists will quote figures from the early Church such as Pseudo-Ephraim from as early as 300 C.E., claiming that God would “rescue” His people before the Tribulation.

Certainly, while tradition should be a component in determining theology, believing in something because it is “traditional” can be problematic. During the Counter Reformation, many Catholic theologians argued against the Protestant Reformers solely on the basis that they went outside the authority of the pope and the traditions established by the papacy. The primary basis of any doctrine needs to be in the Bible itself, and frequently one *may* find a teaching confirmed by the historical record, as well as secondary and tertiary literature. Interestingly enough, however, John F. Walvoord, often considered to be the “dean” of pre-tribulationists, wrote that “posttribulationism, as far as the church as a whole

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is concerned, is the majority view.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, it should also be noted that Walvoord *included* in this statement those of non pre-millennial views such as post-millennialism and amillennialism. However, notable great preachers, such as Charles Spurgeon, admired today by many pre-tribulationists, were post-tribulationists.<sup>2</sup>

Author Dave MacPherson has written a number of books detailing the history of the pre-tribulation rapture, including: *The Incredible Cover Up*, *The Rapture Plot*, and *The Three R's: Rapture, Revisionism, Robbery*. I agree with many of his conclusions, although I would leave the historical argument for post-tribulationism to MacPherson and others. Rather, our analyses in this publication are more concerned with the contours of theology and Biblical examination.

What is most important in this regard is really establishing if the “traditional” view is Biblically accurate. For almost 1,200 years, the Roman Catholic Church was virtually the only representation of Christianity in Western Europe—so if we are basing all of our theology solely on tradition, *Catholicism wins*. Early Reformers such as John Wycliffe, and later individuals such as William Tyndale, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin began the Reformation which changed the face of our faith. As they questioned unscriptural Catholic teaching,

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), 127.

<sup>2</sup> The article, “Charles H. Spurgeon and Eschatology: Did He Have a Discernible Millennial Position?”, available for access via <<http://spurgeon.org>>, is a good summary of Spurgeon’s post-tribulationist position.

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so might we question the popular pre-tribulation rapture doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

Many unfortunately believe in the pre-tribulation rapture on the basis that it has been the standard view for centuries in the past. In Mark 7:8-9, Messiah Yeshua told the Pharisees present that the primary reason that they rejected Him as the prophesied Deliverer was because they preferred their tradition over the teachings of Moses: “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.’ He was also saying to them, ‘You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.” As the Messiah also attested, “if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me” (John 5:46). Unfortunately, for many of the Pharisees, they considered their traditions to be so important that it would at times negate Scripture. When Yeshua arrived many of them could not see Him as the living Word of God. Certain Pharisees meticulously looked for *their tradition* to be kept by Him and could not find it. This is not to say that Yeshua did not keep many of the mainline traditions of His day, but He did not keep tradition at the expense of the Law of Moses itself, especially its weightier matters of ethics and morality.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics will question some mainline Christian views in relation to the validity of the Torah, the seventh-day Sabbath, the Biblical appointments of Leviticus 23, and the kosher dietary laws of Scripture, *not* believing that such things were “done away with” by Messiah Yeshua. While not salvation issues, they do possess great benefits when practiced as a matter of a Believer’s growth in holiness.

<sup>4</sup> The issue of how much or how little of the First Century Jewish customs and traditions Yeshua actually kept is a great matter of scholarly debate. It requires us to look at each

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In a similar manner, the same instance has happened within much of Christianity concerning the pre-tribulation rapture. Because many people are taught this doctrine in church and fail to question its validity and examine it from the Scriptures first, they accept it as being legitimate. If the issue for you is tradition versus the Bible, which do you choose? *We would hope you choose the Holy Scriptures.* There are too many varied traditions regarding the end-times for tradition to be the sole determining factor in what to believe about the Messiah's return. We have to instead root our main conclusions within the Biblical text.

**"I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because we cannot know the time of the Messiah's return."**

Those who claim that Yeshua can return at any moment primarily base this on His words, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36; cf. Mark 13:32). Yet is this truly a legitimate basis for what some call the doctrine of imminence? No. All that the Messiah says is that no one knows the day or the hour, meaning *the exact time* of His return. Is He saying that He can return at any moment? Consider the fact that much of Yeshua's Olivet Discourse on the

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instance in the Gospels of His encounters with the Pharisees, or His interactions with fellow Jews, and consider the historical background as detailed in the Rabbinical literature and other available data from the time. While Yeshua may appear to be criticizing the Pharisees in many instances, it may be only a particular group of Pharisees such as the School of Hillel or the School of Shammai.

Consult the author's article "You Want to Be a Pharisee," for a summary of these issues (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*).

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Last Days is spent explaining the general signs that His followers are to look for that lead to His return, including: wars, famines, terrible Earth changes, and ultimately the Abomination of Desolation. If certain events are to precede the coming of the Lord, then He cannot return at any moment.

The Apostle Paul writes, “Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4).

The specific saying that is frequently given to support the so-called imminent return of the Messiah is where Paul claims, “For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2). However, in this same passage, Paul also clarifies that at this time “While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3, NIV). He further writes, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4). There is no allusion in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 to any removal of Believers. Rather, this passage speaks of the sudden judgment of God upon the world and our collective need as His people to be on guard.

Another important passage to note is 2 Peter 3:10-12:

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“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!”

The Apostle Peter says that on the Day of the LORD, *which comes as a thief*, that “the heavens will pass away with a great noise” (KJV) and that “the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up” (RSV). Again, there is no allusion to any rapture, but rather of God’s judgment upon Planet Earth.

Consider this: what does a thief come and do? A thief comes to steal from a person and utterly ruin him. A thief comes unexpectedly. 1 Thessalonians 5:4 admonishes Believers not to be ignorant so that the Day of the LORD would overtake them, imploring them to be on guard. Yeshua Himself warns, “if the householder had known at what time of night the burglar was coming, he would have kept awake and not have let his house be broken into. Hold yourselves ready, therefore, because the Son of Man will come at the time you least expect him” (Matthew 24:43-44, NEB). How can we compare the Second Coming of the Messiah to an unexpected break-in—and conclude that this break-in is a *good thing*? Do any of us want Yeshua to arrive as though He were a burglar—or do we want to be ready at all times so we are not caught unaware?

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The warnings of Scripture should remain true to us every day, and whether or not Yeshua returns in our lifetime, we need to be on guard and ready as though He will return. **We do not need to find ourselves derelict in the work that He has given us to perform.** Yeshua says in the Book of Revelation, “Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame” (Revelation 16:15). None of us should ever want the Messiah to show up so unexpectedly that we find ourselves “shamefully exposed” (NIV).

Furthermore, if we believe that Yeshua’s actual gathering of the saints is to be post-tribulational, and Believers will have to endure the hardships of the Tribulation period, then we must consider the fact that it is prophesied that the world will be engulfed in a time of great darkness prior to Yeshua’s advent. Prior to the Lord’s appearing, Revelation 9:1-6 tells us that something is going to hit the Earth and that great smoke is going to blanket the planet. Locust creatures (whatever these may be or represent) will come forth to torment people, but this will only take place for a period of five months:

“Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not

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have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.”

These locust creatures will have free reign to torment humans during these five months of darkness. Further descriptions of this time of almost total darkness appear in Revelation and the Book of Joel. In Revelation 6:12, John the Apostle states, “I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood.” This parallels the prophecies of Joel, who says that “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Joel 2:31). Describing the severity of this darkness, he proclaims that “The sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness” (Joel 3:15).

These prophecies describe the reality that a meteor or comet will hit the Earth, causing black clouds to engulf the atmosphere. A major side effect of this could be that Earth is thrown off of its axis, thus being responsible for any number of other great judgments of God in which He will inflict further devastation. While the text tells us that this darkness will be in place for five months, we must consider the chance that individual days may be reduced in length from twenty-four hours to a possible shorter length. This is because Yeshua tells us, “Unless the Lord had shortened *those* days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days”

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(Mark 12:30). While “five months” will occur—it may be an accelerated five months.

The Messiah’s assertion that He will return at a time that only the Father knows is true for us, because the time for humans living on Earth will have substantially changed in some way. Even those with watches during this time of darkness will be unable to actually know what “day” it is, because Planet Earth may very well be thrown off its axis in such a way that the “days” are shortened in length. *They will be unable to count off the days remaining.* How short they will be we can only speculate. Those living during this time will have to turn to God for their total provision, just as He preserved the Ancient Israelites during the darkness He inflicted upon the Egyptians in the time of the Exodus.

It is very true that no human being can know the *exact* time of our Lord’s return, but this is not a legitimate basis to say that Yeshua can “return at any moment” for Believers (although each one of us should be prepared to meet Him *personally* at all times, as we can die at any moment). Unfortunately for pre-tribulationists, none of the verses used to support the doctrine of imminence say that Yeshua can come for the corporate body of saints at any time. Rather, the admonitions which we see direct Messiah followers to be on guard and not be overtaken like a thief *or burglar* who is coming to steal and utterly ruin.

**“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because the Messiah will come like Noah and the Flood.”**

In Matthew 24:37-39, Yeshua informed His Disciples, that the days prior to His return would be like the days of Noah:

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“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

Similar to the faulty logic pertaining to pre-tribulationists claiming that the Messiah will come for them as a “thief in the night,” a poor reading of this is also often applied by many pre-tribulationists regarding Yeshua’s comparison of the days of Noah to the days prior to His return. Matthew 24:38-39 describes that people were “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage...until the flood came and took them all away.” Many would like us to believe that those taken away are representative of those who will be “taken” into the clouds, and into glory, when the Messiah returns.

When comparing this to the Noahdic Flood in Genesis ch. 6, those *taken away* were not at all “raptured.” Noah was safe in the ark that the Lord instructed Him to build. When the floodwaters came, those who were not in the ark were killed by the floodwaters—they were *taken away*. The specific Greek verb translated “took” in Matthew 24:39, *airō*, means “to take from among the living, either by a natural death...or by violence” (Thayer).<sup>5</sup> Once Noah was safe inside the ark, the Flood came and swept everyone else away. In a similar sense, once Believers go to meet Yeshua in the clouds after the Tribulation, many who remain will be physically consumed by the wrath of God poured

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 17.

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out upon Planet Earth (Isaiah 13:6-13; Malachi 4:1-3).

A similar support for the pre-tribulation rapture is given from Matthew 24:40-41, which says, “Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.” Again, many would like to imply that those taken are “raptured” up to Heaven. However, the Greek of this likewise does not support this premise. The verb translated “taken” in these two verses is *paralambanō*, which can relate to “the removal of persons from the earth in judgment, when ‘the Son of Man is revealed’” (*Vine*).<sup>6</sup> As a verb, *paralambanō* does have varied usages which can only be determined by context, some of which are rather neutral, but a being “taken” to judgment is the theme here. *AMG* further observes,

“[I]n these verses, those who are taken are not to be misconstrued as those whom the Lord favors, as if they were the same saints spoken of in 1 Thes. 4:17 who will be raptured...to meet the Lord in the clouds. The verb *paralambánō* in most cases indicates a demonstration in favor of the one taken, but not always...It is used to refer to those in the days of Noah who were taken away, not being favored but being punished, while Noah and his family were left intact. Therefore, in this passage...*paralambánō* must not be equated to the believers who are to be raptured at the coming of the Lord for His saints. It refers rather to those who, as in the days of Noah, are taken to destruction.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 616.

<sup>7</sup> Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 1108.

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This is quite different than the verb *analambanō*, which means “to take up” (*Vine*),<sup>8</sup> in reference to Yeshua’s ascension on “the day when He was taken up [*analambanō*] to heaven” (Acts 1:2).

The Greek verb translated “left” in Matthew 24:40-41 is *aphiēmi*, generally meaning “to let go, let alone, let be,” or “to disregard.” It can also mean “to remit, forgive” (*Thayer*).<sup>9</sup> Some argue that those taken in Matthew 24:40-42 are *taken to judgment* and those “left” are simply *left alone*. Those left alone are mortals who enter into Yeshua’s Millennial Kingdom. However, we should also note that *aphiēmi* can mean “To let go from one’s further notice...to leave or let alone” (*AMG*),<sup>10</sup> so it may be “left” in a neutral context.

We know that the understanding of *paralambanō* as being taken to judgment is the correct interpretation per Luke’s parallel account of Yeshua’s words:

“There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. *Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.* And answering they said to Him, ‘Where, Lord?’ And He said to them, ‘Where the body *is*, there also the vultures will be gathered” (Luke 17:35-37).<sup>11</sup>

Yeshua said, in comparing the days of Noah to the time before His return, **for His followers to be on guard and on alert to His coming.** During the

<sup>8</sup> *Vine*, 615.

<sup>9</sup> *Thayer*, 89.

<sup>10</sup> Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 299.

<sup>11</sup> The same Greek verbs used in Matthew 24:35-37 for *taken* and *left*, *paralambanō* and *aphiēmi*, are used in this passage. For a further examination of this issue, consult Appendix A in *When Will the Messiah Return?: “Is Being ‘Taken’ Always a Good Thing?”*



time of Noah, all of humanity with the exception of Noah's family was utterly evil. Noah and his family were saved from above the judgment (a type of the "rapture") and when they were in the ark, the Flood came and took—or *killed*—the rest (cf. 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5). The Flood did not "rapture people" to Heaven as many pre-tribulationists would like us to think the Lord is alluding to. Furthermore, the Flood only lasted forty days. If pre-tribulationists would like us to think that Noah was saved from the entire judgment, be rest assured that Noah was fully aware of the ecological disaster around him while in the ark. When Believers meet the Lord in the clouds, they will be aware that He pulled them out at the last minute, as the full brunt of His judgment will then be issued upon the Earth.

**"I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because we are not appointed to God's wrath."**

No one can deny the clear Biblical reference of 1 Thessalonians 5:9: "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah." Neither this, nor other passages such as Romans 5:9, should ever be in dispute by post-tribulationists. However, it is important that we determine *what* the wrath of God actually is, something very few pre-tribulationists often make the effort to do. Pre-tribulationists errantly consider the entire Tribulation period to be God's wrath.

There are two primary Greek words used in the Apostolic Scriptures translated as "wrath" in our English Bibles: *orgē* and *thumos*, each indicative of a particular type of wrath or anger of God.

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*BDAG* defines *orgē* as “strong indignation directed at wrongdoing, w. focus on retribution, *wrath*.”<sup>12</sup> This is necessary to understand because it indicates that *orgē* “wrath” is most often reserved for the Divine punishment of God on sinners. *Thayer* adds to this, telling us that *orgē* is indicative of “anger exhibited in punishing, hence used for the punishment itself.”<sup>13</sup>

*Thumos*, on the other hand, is described as “a state of intense displeasure, anger, wrath, rage, indignation” (*BDAG*).<sup>14</sup> *Thayer* remarks that it means “passion, angry heat...anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again.”<sup>15</sup> This does not indicate a “wrath” that is constant and steady, but one that is only momentary.

The comparison of these two terms is that *orgē* “denotes indignation which has arisen gradually and becomes more settled” (*Thayer*).<sup>16</sup> *Orgē* is the Divine wrath used to describe the eternal punishment of unbelievers, whereas *thumos* is used to describe the anger of God poured out during the Tribulation period.

Interestingly enough, the only times the word *orgē* (Divine wrath) is used in the Book of Revelation are in a post-tribulational context (6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15). It is used after the sixth seal (Revelation 6:16-17), the seventh (or the last) trumpet (Revelation 11:18), the seventh vial/bowl (Revelation 16:19), and is most importantly used to describe the eternal punishment of the condemned in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 14:10). Believers are indeed spared from the *orgē* wrath of

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<sup>12</sup> *BDAG*, 720.

<sup>13</sup> *Thayer*, 452.

<sup>14</sup> *BDAG*, 461.

<sup>15</sup> *Thayer*, 293.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

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God, as (1) the *orgē* or Divine wrath of God is poured out after the Tribulation period, and (2) the *orgē* of God is for those who reject the Messiah and suffer eternal punishment.

It should also be noted that numerous references exist throughout the Tanach or Hebrew Scriptures describing that the judgment of God is poured out on the Day of the LORD (i.e., Isaiah 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 30:3; 1:15; 2:1, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:14; Malachi 4:5). Although there are numerous interpretations that are given for the term “day,” more often than not this can be used in reference to the point when Yeshua returns and defeats His enemies at Armageddon, initiating His Millennial reign. Presumably, before this Day of the LORD takes place, Believers have been removed from Planet Earth, because this judgment of God is reserved for the unrighteous.

The Apostolic Scriptures also speak of the Day of the LORD, which we should assume is likely the same event spoken of by the Prophets in the Tanach (cf. Acts 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). The Word of God is clear that during this time period His wrath will be poured out.

**But what do we really consider the “wrath” of God to be?** Is the wrath of God just the Tribulation period? Here are some verses describing the wrath or *orgē* of God that need not escape our attention:

“For the wrath [*orgē*] of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath [*orgē*] for yourself in the day of wrath [*orgē*] and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH

PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS [Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12]" (Romans 1:18; 2:5-6).

"But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Messiah and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath [*orgē*] of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them" (Ephesians 5:3-7).

The above passages from Romans 1:18, 2:4-6, and Ephesians 5:3-7 speak of wrath or *orgē* of God in regard to eternal damnation. *Thumos*, on the other hand, is indicative more of the *anger* of God, not always related to eternal punishment. In some instances, it is notable that *thumos* is also used to describe the wrath, the indignation or anger, of Satan. The following are a selection of quotations from the Book of Revelation where *thumos* is used:

"For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath [*thumos*], knowing that he has *only* a short time" (Revelation 12:12).

"So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered *the clusters from* the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath [*thumos*] of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles" (Revelation 14:19-20).

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“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath [*thumos*] of God is finished” (Revelation 15:1).

In determining what the wrath of God actually encompasses, you need to be sure of what Greek term is used in the source text of the Apostolic Scriptures, and then compare the context of the passage. Ultimately, the “wrath” of God is rightfully considered to be eternal damnation, which all Believers—Tribulation saints or otherwise—will be spared from. However, once defining what the “wrath of God” actually is, and distinguishing the words *orgē* and *thumos*, we can then begin to address the more critical question: **Will Believers experience hard times?** This is a question that many pre-tribulationists answer incorrectly.

Many popular pre-tribulationists say, “Why would anyone want to go through the Tribulation?” None of us can blame them for asking this, because they would be correct as no one should want to go through the Tribulation. By no means is experiencing the Tribulation something one *should ever* wish for. If we post-tribulationists are wrong, and pre-tribulationists are right: ***Praise God!***

But sadly, many pre-tribulationists prey on people’s emotions rather than dealing with the facts that Believers in the Messiah have and will experience hard times—something American Christianity has never really had to face. We would be keen to heed the Prophet Isaiah’s words: “I seek You with all the spirit within me. For when Your judgments are wrought on earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. But when the scoundrel is spared, he learns not

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righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9b-10a, NJPS). The judgment of God is to teach His people more about the holiness and righteousness of Him as our Creator.

**“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because we are spared from the hour of testing.”**

A popular reference used to support the premise that Believers are removed from Earth before the Tribulation period comes from Revelation 3:10, where Yeshua the Messiah promises to spare those of the congregation or assembly of Philadelphia from the hour of testing:

“Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” (ESV).

What is automatically assumed by most pre-tribulationists is that the congregation of Philadelphia comprises all Believers and that the “hour of testing” is the Tribulation period. This is a major interpretational problem. It is not appropriate to assume that all Believers in Yeshua somehow classify as being “Philadelphian,” and furthermore that the “hour of testing” or “hour of trial” is the Tribulation period.

If we look at only a surface examination of who the Philadelphian Believers likely are, the Greek *Philadelphia*—the name of a city in First Century Asia Minor—means “*brotherly love*” (*LS*),<sup>17</sup> a key indicator of one of the spiritual characteristics that these people have. Revelation 3:10 says that the Philadelphians “have kept the

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<sup>17</sup> H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 657.

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word of My perseverance,” with *hupomonē* being “a holding out, patient endurance” (LS).<sup>18</sup> Yeshua issues a “command to endure” (HCSB) to the Philadelphians. Persevering in one’s faith is not only remaining true to the teachings and commands of Scripture, accomplishing the Lord’s tasks, but also regards how one *patiently waits* for the arrival of the Messiah.

Many people today are *most overanxious* in regard to the return of Yeshua and are not following the admonition of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, which says not to be disturbed in regard to the coming of the Lord. Through the advent of prophecy fiction books such as *Left Behind* and with pre-tribulationism indeed being promoted to an extreme, many people are **not** *patiently waiting* for the Messiah’s return. Many are literally sitting on the edge of their seats waiting for an any-moment escape. Equally so, there are post-tribulationists preparing for the worst, storing up food, guns and ammunition, literally chomping at the bit for the Great Tribulation to begin—and who are most eager to read messages into current events.<sup>19</sup> Are such people—in both categories—*waiting patiently* for the Messiah’s return? (How much has our own Messianic movement been

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 845.

<sup>19</sup> One of the absolute worst, recent examples of this that I can consider is how some people in the Christian “prophecy world” (with more than a few Messianic adherents), actually promoted the idea that the Gulf of Mexico Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster, which began on 20 April, 2010—as bad as it was for the economy and ecology of the Gulf Coast of the Southern United States—would *actually* kill a third of all sea life on Earth (cf. Revelation 8:9). And not only this, but others also promoted the idea that significant parts of the American coastline from Florida to Texas would be flooded underwater, after some kind of giant explosion, of which the oil spill was to only be a small part.

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plagued with various calculations and timetables regarding the Second Coming, all of which have kept us away from the day-to-day work of God's Kingdom?)

Those who belong to the true Philadelphian assembly have both brotherly love and are patient in regard to Yeshua's coming. They are patient because they are secure in the work of God's Kingdom on Planet Earth. **Not all who claim to have faith in the Messiah would classify as being "Philadelphian."** This is only a specific category of people.

The Greek term translated "testing" or "trial" in Revelation 3:10 is *peirasmos*, which can be indicative of "the temptation by which the devil sought to divert Jesus the Messiah from his divine errand" (*Thayer*).<sup>20</sup> *TDNT* adds to this, "Rev. 3:10 promises deliverance in the final hour of trial."<sup>21</sup> The Messiah further tells those of the Philadelphian assembly, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name" (Revelation 3:12).

The testing that those of Philadelphia are preserved from is what will deter them from their calling: **to persevere**. In Matthew 4:1-11, Satan tempted Yeshua three times and the Lord responded to him with Holy Scripture. Had Yeshua worshipped the Devil, He would have been made king of the world, but would not have

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<sup>20</sup> *Thayer*, 498.

<sup>21</sup> H. Sessemann, "test, attempt," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 823.

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fulfilled His destiny as the Divine Redeemer. In a similar manner, we must prevail and have faith in Him—patiently waiting for His return. Many in the Tribulation period will be forced to either worship Satan or be martyred, and it is this form of “testing” from which I believe the Philadelphian Believers will be spared. They will be preserved from the temptation to fall away and apostatize. And, we would eagerly point out that this **does not include everyone**. Only a certain segment, who God knows and specially calls out, will be spared from this temptation.

**“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because the Holy Spirit must be removed for the antichrist to be revealed.”**

Many pre-tribulationists believe that the antimessiah/antichrist can only be revealed after a “restrainer,” or one who holds back, is removed. This restrainer is believed to be the Holy Spirit indwelling “the Church.” When “the Church” has been raptured to Heaven, it is then believed that the man of lawlessness can be revealed. This is based on Paul’s words in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7:

“And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way.”

This restrainer is commonly interpreted by pre-tribulationists to be the Holy Spirit. It is only when the Holy Spirit, they say, is removed via the rapture of the Church, that the Tribulation period can begin and the antimessiah can be revealed—supposedly as it is the Holy Spirit resident in the saints which is restraining Satan from taking control of the world.

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We should find fault with this interpretation, primarily because the Book of Revelation speaks quite prominently of the Tribulation saints. These born again Believers without any doubt must have the Holy Spirit to have salvation. If the Holy Spirit is removed from Earth at this time, there can be no Tribulation saints—for a true Believer must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Those who would say that the Holy Spirit is removed for a short time and then “returns immediately” have no Scriptural support for their opinion.

The problem here lies in what the restrainer is. Who or what is presently holding back the full force of evil from being unleashed upon this planet? The restraining influence by no means has to be the Holy Spirit. Douglas J. Moo observes,

“[W]hatever one’s view, it is improper to base very much on a text that is so notoriously obscure—the verb [*katcheo*] can be translated ‘hold back’ or ‘hold fast,’ ‘occupy,’ and has been understood as signifying Rome/the emperor, civil government, God and His power, Michael the archangel, the preaching of the Gospel/Paul, Satan, general evil forces, a combination of benevolent forces, the Jewish state, and James, or a mythic symbol with no particular content.”<sup>22</sup>

I quote Moo here to indicate that there are alternative viewpoints to believing that the restraining influence is something other than the Holy Spirit. The able interpreter should be able to decide which option is best, based on a comparison of corresponding passages.

Of those which have been proposed, we should consider how Daniel 12:1 tells us, “Now at that time

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<sup>22</sup> Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in *Three Views on the Rapture*, 190.

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Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.” This verse speaks of the Archangel Michael arising, and afterward a great time of “trouble” or “distress.” The Hebrew noun is *tzarah*, rendered in the Septuagint as *thlipsis*, the same word generally rendered in the Apostolic Scriptures as “tribulation.” After Michael “arises,” a time of Great Tribulation will befall God’s people.

What is interesting about Daniel 12:1 is the context of this “standing up” by Michael. The verb *amad* appears in the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), meaning “**take one’s stand, stand,**” in this instance relating to “*stand, be in a standing attitude,*” or possibly even, “*take a stand against...in opposition to*” (BDB).<sup>23</sup> If the context of this verse has military implications, or at least implications regarding spiritual warfare, then when we examine Revelation 12:7-9, we see the position of Michael being the restrainer validated:

“And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

The rising or standing up that occurs in Daniel 12:1 is the Archangel Michael making a military stand in Heaven against Satan and his forces. We

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<sup>23</sup> BDB, 763.

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are told that when Satan is cast out, “For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has *only* a short time” (Revelation 12:12). Both this, and the latter half of Daniel 12:1, are all too reminiscent of Yeshua’s words in Matthew 24:21: “For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again” (NIV).

Many evangelical Christians have recognized the possibility that Michael may be the restrainer. Unfortunately they have had no way to really counter the reality that he is “the great prince who champions your people” (Daniel 12:1, CJB), that people being Israel. Pre-tribulationists have said that Michael cannot be the restrainer because of the fact that he is not guarding “the Church,” but only the Jewish people.

All Believers, be they Jewish or non-Jewish, have been made a part of the the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), being grafted-in to Israel’s olive tree by faith in Israel’s Messiah (Romans 11:16-17). The salvation of the nations is predicated on them being incorporated into an enlarged realm of Israel (cf. Acts 15:15-18; Amos 9:11-12). Presently, it is the Archangel Michael who is withholding Satan from unleashing the full force of evil upon us and upon this world—not the Holy Spirit.

**“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because the ‘falling away’ of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is the rapture.”**

I have observed that the defense offered from 2 Thessalonians 2:3—as it pertains to the “falling

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away” being the rapture—is primarily only used by what we might consider “hard core pre-tribulationists.” As 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 reads from the King James Version,

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come **a falling away first**, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.”

Some think that this reference is speaking of the pre-tribulation rapture, even though it actually refers to the Second Coming or *parousia* when Yeshua comes to defeat His enemies.

Is the “falling away” the rapture? The Christian textbook *Book of Revelation, Church History, and Things to Come* states that “the Greek word translated ‘falling away’ means ‘**departure, or going out**,’ similar to our word **exit**; it refers to the rapture.”<sup>24</sup> This is given as support for the pre-tribulation rapture. The commentary continues, saying that “Some interpret ‘falling away’ to mean apostasy (a departing from the faith), but the word *faith* is not in the text.”<sup>25</sup>

What this textbook fails to do is actually tell us what this “mysterious Greek word” is, which just happens to be *apostasia*. The *Liddell-Scott* lexicon, primarily concerned with classical Greek, defines it as “*defection*.”<sup>26</sup> *BDAG* says that it means

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<sup>24</sup> Beka Horton, *Book of Revelation, Church History, and Things to Come* (Pensacola: Pensacola Christian College, 1993), 196.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *LS*, 107.

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“defiance of established system or authority, *rebellion, abandonment, breach of faith.*”<sup>27</sup> *Apostasia* is the root for our English word “apostasy,” which itself means a rejection of or standing away from the faith. “Rebellion” is possibly another understanding, as the NIV renders 2 Thessalonians 2:3 with, “that day will not come until the **rebellion** occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.”<sup>28</sup>

In my opinion, this is blatant manipulation on the part of this textbook’s author, which is absolutely unacceptable when it pertains to proper Scripture interpretation.<sup>29</sup> The New American Standard Bible, a widely respected, modern evangelical Christian Bible translation, translates 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 with “apostasy”:

“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the **apostasy** comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.”

We must consider the fact that many (perhaps most) modern Bible versions are translated by pre-tribulationists, or at least have a significant

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<sup>27</sup> *BDAG*, 120.

<sup>28</sup> Other notable usages of *apostasia* appear in Joshua 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:19; and Jeremiah 2:19, and 1 Maccabees 2:15 in the Septuagint, and especially in Acts 21:21 where Paul was falsely accused of telling the Jews to “forsake Moses.”

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, I would say that any writings, pre-trib, post-trib, or otherwise, which mention Hebrew or Greek “words” without specifically saying what they are, are being manipulative. Such methodologies in my opinion are unacceptable for any Biblical teaching.

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number of pre-tribulationists involved. If “departure” were a legitimate rendering of *apostasia*, then it would be employed as such.<sup>30</sup> None of the major, modern English Bible versions render *apostasia* with anything close to “departure” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The Contemporary English Version has, “But don't be fooled! **People will rebel against God.** Then before the Lord returns, the wicked one who is doomed to be destroyed will appear,” and the New Living Translation renders it with “that day will not come until there is a **great rebellion against God** and the man of lawlessness is revealed.” The terms “rebel against” (CEV) or “great rebellion” (NLT) are a far cry from “departure.” Even the 1890 Darby Bible—translated by John Nelson Darby, the principal founder of modern-day dispensationalism and largely responsible for popularizing the pre-tribulation rapture—translates this verse with apostasy:

“Let not any one deceive you in any manner, because *it will not be unless the apostasy have first come*, and the man of sin have been revealed, the son of perdition.”

Is the “falling away” of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 the rapture? No. Depending on your perspective of the Greek word *apostasia*, it can either mean a rejection of the faith or a standing away from it. Both cases have negative implications, not one of a rapture or removal of the saints to Heaven prior to the Tribulation. It should be noted that according to this same passage of Scripture, Yeshua will not

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<sup>30</sup> A term best meaning “departure” is *analsis*, appearing in 2 Timothy 4:6:

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure [*analsis*] has come” (cf. Philippians 1:23).

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return until an apostasy takes place and the antimesiah is revealed to the world—and it is actually some of the strongest evidence *against* the pre-tribulation rapture. When put in its proper context, the “falling away” cannot possibly be the rapture. The rejection of/defection from the faith, and the revealing of the antimesiah, must take place first.<sup>31</sup>

**“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because the judgments of the Tribulation are just for the Jews.”**

Many would view the above statement as being highly anti-Semitic, and they would be correct. The major, contemporary teachers of the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine, are not knowingly anti-Semitic, *per se*—but a misunderstandings regarding Israel, the Jewish people, and the righteous from the nations do affect their interpretations of Scripture and how they view the Last Days. Many pre-tribulationists *only support* the State of Israel because they believe that Israel’s existence as a sovereign country in the Middle East will hasten the pre-tribulation rapture and their escape, not always because they love the Jewish people and have a sincere concern for them and for their knowing Yeshua (Jesus). They would never consider themselves to be a part of the polity of Israel.

Most pre-tribulationists believe that God has two groups of elect: Israel and “the Church,” “the Church” being exempt from the Seventieth Week

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<sup>31</sup> For a further examination of this issue, consult Chapter 7 of *When Will the Messiah Return?: “The Great Apostasy.”* Also consult the relevant sections of the author’s commentary *1&2 Thessalonians for the Practical Messianic.*

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of Israel or Tribulation. However, as post-tribulationists our ministry believes that God has only *one* group of elect, the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16), in which all Believers are a part—regardless of their ethnicity. (This Israel is also called to follow the Torah or Law of Moses as a part of holy living.)<sup>32</sup>

Some pre-tribulationists have argued, “Jesus was speaking to the Jews in Matthew 24 so that chapter only applies to the Jews.” As many non-Jewish post-tribulationists have observed, “If that is truly the case, then I need to dispense with most of Jesus’ teachings, because I am not Jewish.”<sup>33</sup> The argument which advocates that Yeshua’s Olivet Discourse on the Last Days is only for “the Jews” (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) runs into many interpretational problems. The foremost of these problems is that if these words do not apply to today’s non-Jewish Believers from the nations, **then what about the rest of the Messiah’s teachings?** The vast majority of Yeshua’s teachings in the Gospels are directed to a First Century Jewish audience. Do they no longer apply? (Is the ministry of the Messiah largely irrelevant to the vast majority of His followers today?)

The pre-tribulation rapture is based on a misidentification of Israel. It is notable that former Jerusalem chief Rabbi Chaim Richman, present director of the Temple Institute, states, “We [the Jewish people] do not appreciate the idea that the Jews are to be left behind and slaughtered while

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<sup>32</sup> For a further discussion, consult the author’s publication, *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?* (forthcoming 2013).

<sup>33</sup> And to this could be added, “Most of the Bible really does not apply to me, either.”

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Christians fly away to heaven.”<sup>34</sup> At the very least, the pre-tribulation rapture teaching is a serious deterrent to Jewish evangelism.

Paul warned the non-Jewish Believers in Rome, how those from the nations—the wild olive branches engrafted into Israel’s olive tree—that they were not to boast against their Jewish brethren. He writes that if God did not hesitate to cut off some of the natural branches so that wild branches might be grafted into His tree, then He would certainly not hesitate to cut off wild branches. Paul admonishes, “do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either” (Romans 11:18-21). **How many pre-tribulation rapture Christians take these words seriously enough?** Consider what Paul also says:

“*There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 2:9-10).

**Both Jewish people and those from the nations are to suffer tribulation together.** “God does not show favoritism” (Romans 2:11, NIV).

The issue of the pre-tribulation rapture becomes as much of a question of ecclesiology, or who God’s elect is, as it is one of the timing of the

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<sup>34</sup> *Orthodox Jews Want the Temple Rebuilt*, Charisma Magazine, June 1993.

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Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah. Pre-tribulationists (and many post-tribulationists for that matter) see “the Church” as an entity separate from Israel. Therefore, pre-tribulationists conclude that “the Church” is removed during the Tribulation period, in reality the Seventieth Week of Israel. *If* “the Church” and Israel are separate entities, and God has two groups of elect, then the pre-tribulation rapture has more validity. However, *if they are not*, and non-Jewish Believers are incorporated by their faith in Israel’s Messiah into an expanded realm of Israel, then the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine—at the very least—deserves some significant reevaluation (if not suffers strong defeat).

Dispensationalists claim that God has temporarily put Israel aside until the Tribulation. It seems that many conveniently forget that without Israel, there would have been no Ten Commandments, no prophesied Messiah, and no salvation. Such are the things that make up an “irrevocable calling” (Romans 11:29). In Ephesians 2:11-13, the Apostle Paul tells us that those who have faith in Yeshua “were estranged from the national life of Isra’el” (Ephesians 2:12, CJB), but now are joined to Israel as “fellow heirs and fellow members” (Ephesians 3:6).

### **“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because the Church isn’t mentioned after Revelation 4:1.”**

In the opening chapters of Revelation (chs. 1-3), the Apostle John was given specific instruction by Yeshua the Messiah, which he was to deliver to the seven assemblies of Asia Minor (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea). After John relayed

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Yeshua's messages to these congregations, John is told by the Lord, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things" (Revelation 4:1b). Notice what John said as this command was given to him: "After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like *the sound* of a trumpet speaking with me" (Revelation 4:1a). This was a directive that was given only to the Apostle John, as he was called to step into the Heavenly realm, and be shown a vision of the future that, as far as Yeshua and those assembled were concerned, had already taken place. John was asked to step forward in time and be shown things that he did not know about.

This is not a command that is given to "the Church." As Messianics are keen to emphasize, the Greek word *ekklēsia* should be properly translated as either "assembly" or "congregation" in our English Bibles, as opposed to the anachronistic term "church." Likewise, *ekklēsia* was used in the Greek Septuagint to render the Hebrew word *qahal*, referring to the congregation or assembly of Israel, and the Apostolic writers most often use *ekklēsia* with this understanding in mind.<sup>35</sup>

In Johannine literature itself (John, 1-3 John, Revelation) *ekklēsia* is never used to refer to the

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<sup>35</sup> Thayer, 196 describes how *ekklēsia* "in the Septuagint [is] often equivalent to [*qahal*], *the assembly of the Israelites*," and would have been specifically employed by the Apostles to describe the First Century Body of Messiah's undeniable origins in Ancient Israel.

Cf. K.L. Schmidt, "*ekklēsia*," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp 397-402.

For a further discussion, consult the author's article "When Did 'the Church' Begin?" (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*).

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**Body of Messiah at large, but instead the localized assembly.** Moo poignantly remarks in *Three Views on the Rapture*, “John, himself, never uses *evkkhlhsi*, a other than as a designation of a local body of believers. Moreover, it is important to note that John never in chapters 4-19 calls any group in *heaven* the church.”<sup>36</sup> The reason that *ekklēsia* does not appear after Revelation 4:1 is because the letters Yeshua had John relay to the seven, localized assemblies of Asia Minor were complete. It is not because “the Church” has been raptured into Heaven. In fact, at the end of Revelation, we are told that the apocalyptic revealing of Yeshua to John is for the *ekklēsia*, strongly implying that the Body of Messiah will be on Earth when these events take place:

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches.<sup>37</sup> I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16, ESV).

It is notable that there is an urban myth that frequently circulates among Messianic post-tribulationists relating to Revelation 4:1. It often goes along the lines of, “The Church is mentioned after Revelation 4:1—and it is the whore of Babylon!” Unfortunately for those who adhere to this line of reasoning, it is not based in a sound exegesis of the text, nor in a proper evaluation of what end-time Babylon actually is. (It is only based in the insecurities of Messianics who wish to denigrate the positive contributions of evangelical Protestantism.) While there are religious elements of the end-time Babylonian system, there are also political and economic elements. To simply say

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<sup>36</sup> Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in *Three Views on the Rapture*, 201.

<sup>37</sup> Grk. *epi tais ekklēsiais*.

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that end-time Babylon is “the Church,” is to misidentify end-time Babylon, which is the multifaceted, anti-God world system.

**“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because the ‘Day of the Lord’ is the rapture.”**

Many pre-tribulationists, mostly among laypersons, have a mixed view about what the “Day of the LORD” is, because they simply have not done their homework. Many unfortunately believe that the Day of the LORD, or *Yom-ADONAI*, speaks of their pre-trib escape. The Bible speaks quite profoundly about the Day of the LORD, each reference contingent on context. The Day of the LORD could be in reference to the day of the Messiah coming to judge the world at Armageddon, or it could be in reference to the time period when Yeshua is ruling and reigning from Jerusalem. The Day of the LORD can also be a reference to when God interjects Himself into human lives, enacting help, deliverance, or some other Divine action.<sup>38</sup>

Of a summary of prophecies per the Day of the LORD or *Yom-ADONAI*, we find that a large number of them speak of it being a time of judgment which will then initiate Yeshua’s Messianic Kingdom on Earth. Its inevitable arrival is intended to motivate sinners to repentance. Isaiah 13:9-12 tells us,

“Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. “day of the Lord,” in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), pp 151-152.

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from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. **I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold and mankind than the gold of Ophir.**”

The Apostle Peter also says,

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:9-13).

The Day of the LORD and what it composes, will continue to perplex many people who study prophecy until it actually occurs. Clearly, there are aspects of it that are contextual. However, when questioning whether or not “the rapture” is the Day of the LORD, we should compare what happens at the Messiah’s Second Coming when He defeats His enemies and rules in power to what the Prophets tell us. On the whole, the Day of the LORD is a time of judgment, not one of levitation up into the clouds.

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**“I believe in the pre-tribulation rapture because God would not have me experience the Tribulation.”**

This final reason for people believing in the pre-tribulation rapture is by far the most dangerous, because it has to deal directly with the character of God and who He is to an individual person. Many pre-tribulationists when presented with the very fact that they may have to experience general tribulation, *meaning hard times*, may claim that God would never allow it—perhaps suggesting immediately that their god is not the One whom we see depicted in the Holy Scriptures. In fact, some may even go to the extreme by saying that if the pre-tribulation rapture does not occur, then they would deny faith in Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus).

In John 17:15, Yeshua prayed, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.” The Apostle Paul also writes, “Who will separate us from the love of Messiah? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35). Are the Scriptures not replete with admonitions for Messiah followers to stand firm in their faith—*ever to the end*?

In His parable of the sower, Yeshua spoke of the one who “has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matthew 13:21; cf. Mark 4:17). Many, unfortunately, expect easy, instant answers—when there are none. The hard truth is that those who believe in Yeshua will be persecuted and tribulation does occur. All one has to do is look at a great deal of Church history, and many Believers

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today who live in the third world, and we see the testimonies of people who have faced extreme circumstances—and in some cases have had to die horrendous deaths for their faith in the Lord.

Some pre-tribulationists I have talked to and corresponded with have even gone as far to say that any microchip implant that could be released on the market for commerce is not the mark of the beast, because the rapture will have not taken place yet.<sup>39</sup> The same put their eternal destiny on the line for the sake of the non-established pre-tribulation rapture *theory*, which in its modern form is notably *younger* than Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.<sup>40</sup> The pre-tribulation rapture is not *an established fact and one would be foolish to put his or her eternal destiny on the line for it*. What if the pre-tribulationist's view of the rapture is incorrect and many so-called "Believers" do take the mark of the beast? Consider Revelation 14:9-11:

"Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a

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<sup>39</sup> While there is preliminary testing with microchip implants occurring today, we admittedly do not know if these chips will become "the mark," per se. However, we do not encourage *any Believer* to voluntarily receive such an implant.

It is, however, quite disturbing that at least one evangelical Christian voice has completely dismissed this subject, thinking that an implantable microchip for identification might be a good thing Hank Hanegraaf, *The Bible Answer Book 2* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 233 actually said,

"In October 2004 the Food and Drug Administration approved the marketing of a microchip implantable under the skin of humans for medical identification. Paranoid prophecy pundits immediately began touting Verichip technology as the mark of the beast spoken of in Revelation 13. Contrary to such newspaper eschatology, there is no biblical basis for believing that the mark of the beast is a silicon microchip."

<sup>40</sup> Useful to consider here is the FAQ, "Creationism."

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mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

Revelation 14:9-11 clearly states that those who receive the mark of the beast will be eternally punished. Why would a person put his or her salvation on the line for the sake of a doctrine—and one that is not foundational like the Divinity of Messiah or the inspiration of Holy Scripture? We will probably never know.

Being a pre-tribulationist, post-tribulationist, or holding to any other view does not save you; only having faith in Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) and being born again does. However, if being a pre-tribulationist dilutes one’s thinking to the extent that taking something that may be the mark of the beast is acceptable, then the pre-tribulationist should *seriously* reconsider his or her position. It makes one wonder about the spiritual fruit of this belief.

Furthermore, if the pre-tribulationist reading this has a difficult time comprehending the idea that God will allow Believers to experience difficult times, **then think again**. Believers have been persecuted and killed for their faith for centuries—and *our generation is no different*. Let us contemplate the fact that the early Believers in Yeshua, including the Apostles, were under the threat of constant persecution from the Jewish religious authorities, harassment from the

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Romans, and scores of problems from many pagan locals themselves. But the Lord did not see to it to remove them from those trials. Instead, they endured, and they often used terrible circumstances to testify of their faith (cf. Acts 16:30-32).

What makes us think that we deserve an escape from hard times when they did not get one? *Are we really that presumptuous?* Each one of us who lives in either America or the West needs to go in prayer before God each day and thank Him that we (still) have relative freedom to practice our religious beliefs. One day such freedom is going to be removed, and some are going to be rudely awakened. Some might be really shocked how little faith they actually do have, and others are going to find their faith during an intense time of trial.

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