

WHEN WILL THE MESSIAH RETURN?

J.K. McKee

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“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”

Matthew 24:29-31

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Abbreviation Chart and Special Terms

Special terms unique to this publication that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Lidell & Scott)
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	LXE: Brenton's English translation of the Septuagint
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	LXX: Septuagint
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	m. Mishnah
Ara: Aramaic	MT: Masoretic Text
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
BDDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	NIV: New International Version (1984)
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (CJB)	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
Ger: German	Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
GNT: Greek New Testament	Thayer: <i>Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
Grk: Greek	TDNT: <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	TWOT: <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
Heb: Hebrew	UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2001)	v(s). verse(s)
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>	Vine: <i>Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words</i>
ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	Vul: Latin Vulgate
IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>	WBC: <i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
KJV: King James Version	YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
Lat: Latin	
LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)	

INTRODUCTION

The study of end-time prophecy is like the “fighter jet” of Biblical Studies. It is something that is sleek, advanced, and it packs a punch. The problem is that very few people know how to use it. While they know it is an important part of the “Scriptural arsenal,” rather than getting into the plane and flipping switches that do who-knows-what, many think that it is best to just admire the plane for its awesomeness and let someone else get into it. The problem is that too many people who actually do get into the fighter jet called “Bible prophecy” are poor pilots. While they know how to use the instruments, and may have even gotten off the ground, on the whole they do not know how to fly this thing very well. In combat, some have crashed and burned, failing to eject. And on occasion, a few who get in the plane take off and start firing on their own people. Too many, seeing what happens when some get into that bird, choose to stay away.

With the challenges that our faith is experiencing today, Bible teachers need to be well-rounded in all aspects of Scriptural study. **This includes eschatology.** But too many who approach this issue are not familiar with “eschatology”—as much as they are familiar with “prophecy.” The *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* describes eschatology as “the theological study that seeks to understand the ultimate direction or purpose of history as it moves toward the future.”¹ While in a technical sense “eschatology” and “prophecy” are related, in a practical sense eschatology deals primarily with an area of study and attempts to be objective, whereas prophecy study can take a Biblical text and attempt to make it fit with the current trends of history. In modern times, this has led to too many people—from all over the spectrum—“ram-rodding” their interpretations of the end to fit current events.

As Believers, we are certainly called to be on the lookout for the return of our Lord and Savior. The Prophet Ezekiel was moved by God to say, “if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand” (Ezekiel 33:6). If the Scriptures warn of impending judgment upon humanity, and those who know the message do nothing about it, the Lord will hold them accountable. Of course, the challenge is determining whether or not what the Scriptures say will happen *is actually happening* in our generation.

This is the challenge that all followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob presently face. Obviously, we are one day closer today to the restoration of God's Kingdom on Earth than we were yesterday. But how close are we to the return of the Messiah? What are we to look for? Have we overlooked anything that is supposed to take place?

¹ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 46.

The Messianic community today is presently in a state of major theological development, much of which is focused around central doctrines of faith regarding the nature of God, the Divinity of Yeshua and His Messiahship, salvation, retribution, predestination, free will, discipleship, and examining the historical background of the Scriptures. Unfortunately, very few have taken up the challenge of looking at eschatology from a distinct Messianic point of view, without trying to predict the return of the Lord and place His return on a timetable. Unlike examining texts that deal with the past, or issues that pertain to daily spirituality, when examining prophecy we are looking ahead to the future, and oftentimes we have to blaze totally new frontiers.

One theological phenomenon that has arisen in the Messianic community since the mid to late 1990s has been what many are calling the “Two Houses of Israel.” Many non-Jewish Believers, who have been led to embrace their Hebraic Roots and their spiritual heritage in Judaism, consider themselves to be a part of Israel. This is not just on a spiritual level, but also on a physical level. They assert themselves to be “of Ephraim,” meaning of the scattered Northern Kingdom of Israel taken captive by Assyria in 722-721 B.C.E. Whether they truly are or not, *only God knows*. Suffice it to say, in many sectors this viewpoint is viewed by Messianic Jews with some extreme skepticism, if not hostility. This is largely because many of those defining themselves as “Ephraim” **really do not know what the Two Houses of Israel are all about.**

The end-time restoration of Israel is a theme that is resonant throughout the pages of the Bible. One day Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) will step foot on this planet, and things are going to be radically different. The center of authority on Earth will be Jerusalem, and everyone will go to this city to praise the Lord. The Torah or the Law of Moses will be enforced as the law of the land, and true peace and justice will reign. Consider Isaiah 2:3:

“And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”ⁱⁱ

While conservative Bible teachers do not doubt the end result of the eschaton, many, because of the volatile nature of studying prophecy, do not know how we are going to get there. If this is true about many evangelical Christian teachers, what is to be said about today’s Messianic movement—and most especially the people calling themselves “Ephraim”? Is the Two-House teaching something Biblically based? And if it is at all Biblically based, what is it?

We have three distinct choices that we can make when we look at what is being advocated by those who teach some form of the Two-House message:

1. It is a message of racial identity that advocates that most, if not all, non-Jewish Believers are physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This identity extends to specific nationalities.

ⁱⁱ Cf. Micah 4:2.

2. It is a message of knowing that you are “special” to God because you are physical Israel. It matters only what you feel about being “Ephraim,” because our Father wants to welcome you home.
3. It is a message that advocates that as a born again Believer, be you Jewish *or* non-Jewish, you are an equal member of the Commonwealth of Israel. As a part of Israel, you will be participating in the end-time prophecies that relate to Israel. This includes the regathering, reunification, and restoration of all Israel, including the scattered Northern Kingdom.

Of the three choices presented, **only the third can be truly supported by Scripture.** The first one is not based on an objective theology and scholastic view of history. The second is based often on emotions and human feeling. Neither the first nor second have anything to say about what being a part of Israel is about. Only the third is presented theologically and objectively. It recognizes the promises that God gave to Israel to multiply it, but that is not primary to being a part of the greater community of Israel—and certainly not primary to personal salvation. It advocates that as a part of Israel’s polity a born again Believer participates in Israel’s restoration. And, it just so happens that a critical, and often overlooked part of Israel’s restoration, is the regathering of that scattered Northern Kingdom, often referred to as Ephraim, and its reunification with Judah. It is not necessarily a teaching about a non-Jewish Believer’s identity in the Lord as is so commonly heard, but rather what awaits Israel in the future.

The Two-House teaching, whether anyone is able to recognize it or not, **is a teaching that needs to be firmly based and grounded in eschatology.** Those who do not deal with eschatology—whether Jewish, Christian, or Messianic—*cannot properly deal with it.* This includes both advocates of the message and critics alike. Those who do take up the challenge to address what the Two-House restoration actually is, need to be able to do so within a conservative framework of eschatology, and address the issues relating to the end-time restoration of all Israel. This cannot be subject to sensationalism or any timetables regarding the return of Yeshua, but instead needs to be understood as advancing the cause of Israel’s reunification in the eschaton. It needs to give us that missing piece of the prophetic puzzle that so many people overlook, while avoiding some of the mistakes that others have made when examining the return of the Lord. *When Will the Messiah Return?* takes up these challenges, and attempts to ask you some poignant questions about the Last Days that you may not have ever considered before.

J.K. McKee
Editor, TNN Online

THE TIME AHEAD

The Messiah has been crucified, has risen, and will come again! Amein! Such is the hallmark of our faith. If we believe that Yeshua (Jesus)¹ is the Redeemer, and that He came to Earth in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Tanach (Old Testament), that He has taken away our sin through His sacrifice at Golgotha (Calvary), and has ascended to the right hand of the Father in Heaven—then we rightly believe that He will indeed return. The major question we are left with is:

When will the Messiah return?

The subject of the Messiah's return is one of the most controversial in theology today. If we believe that Yeshua is the Savior, then hopefully we will believe His words and what He told us about how He would return. However, for some, simply taking the Messiah's words as our instruction concerning His Second Coming is difficult. Unfortunately, there exists competing factions, views, and creeds within the theological spectrum. Each often has an agenda and something at stake when it comes to the return of the Messiah.

Many believe that the Messiah can return at any moment, but ignore other Scriptures that indicate otherwise. What does the Bible say about the end-times? How are we to view eschatology from a distinct Messianic perspective? These are the things we need to be seriously considering.

A FUTURE EVENT

It is quite obvious that the Messiah has not returned to Planet Earth as He promised in John 14:3: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, **that where I am you may be also**” (ESV). We have yet to arrive at that place—the position of authority in His coming Kingdom that He is presently readying for us. Before we enter into His Kingdom on Earth, many things have to occur.

The final years of humanity before the return of the Messiah are going to be very severe. Yeshua says that “there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short” (Matthew 24:21-22). Many have speculated about what Yeshua means when He says that “no one would survive” (NIV) or “no flesh be saved” (KJV).² But there is the overwhelming

¹ *Yeshua* (ישוע) is the original Hebrew name of the Messiah meaning “He is Salvation” (Matthew 1:21). Jesus is the English derivation of *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς), the Greek transliteration of Yeshua.

² Grk. *ouk an esōthē pasa sarx* (οὐκ ἂν ἐσώθῃ πᾶσα σὰρξ).

realization in light of other prophecies—as well as the modern-day proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—that if the Lord does not return, fallen humanity will inevitably annihilate itself.

The end of the Book of Revelation concludes with Yeshua telling us, “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon’” (22:20). Many have eagerly been waiting for the return of the Messiah for centuries. However, one’s definition of, or approach to, “soon,” is critical in understanding *when He will return*.

At His trial before the Sanhedrin, Yeshua the Messiah said that they, the court, would not see Him again until He was “SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN” with great glory (Matthew 26:64; cf. Luke 22:69).³ Some prophecy teachers believe that in order for the Messiah to return, the Sanhedrin court must be reestablished in the Land of Israel. I personally agree with this opinion, but consider it to be a side issue as it is not directly discussed in the end-time prophecies of the Bible. On the contrary, there are many overlooked prophecies—***specific prophecies***—that discuss the restoration of all Israel in the Last Days that often go overlooked by today’s popular prophecy teachers. Specifically, these prophecies involve the joining of the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim, and those of the nations, to the House of Judah or the Jewish people. These prophecies affect the entire world and the complete restoration of God’s Kingdom. These prophecies culminate in the return of Yeshua the Messiah. **These prophecies must occur prior to the Messiah’s return.**

Following His crucifixion, Yeshua was buried for three days, and was then resurrected. After spending forty days with His Disciples, He ascended into Heaven. Prior to His ascension, the Disciples asked Him, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). After He ascended, the angels present asked the Disciples, “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). While many are keen to notice that the Messiah will return in the clouds just as He was taken into the clouds, how many overlook the Disciples’ question of Israel’s restoration? Do we not have the responsibility of understanding the ultimate answer of that question in relation to His return?

IT WILL NOT BE A SECRET EVENT

Based on the words of the angels, we need to know that when the Messiah does finally return, it will not be a “secret event” as so many expect it to be. Yeshua instructed His Disciples, “For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:27). He says that “it will be like lightning that flashes out of the east and fills the sky to the western horizon” (CJB). It will be an awesome sight to behold, and will instill an intense fear beyond belief in the enemies of God.

³ Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13.

The Disciples were very perplexed by Yeshua leaving them, because they were expecting Him to restore the Kingdom to Israel and to proclaim the beginning of the Messianic Age. Instead, Yeshua left them with the admonition that “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7). He reemphasized the promise He gave to them during His ministry, which is that the Helper would come to them when He was gone (John 15:26; Acts 1:8). This occurred ten days later when the Holy Spirit descended upon those at the Upper Room on *Shavuot*/Pentecost.

Since these events almost 2,000 years ago, there has occurred what many in Christianity call “Church history.” For the past 2,000 years following Yeshua’s ascension into Heaven, many of His followers have been diligently fulfilling the Great Commission, making “disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” hopefully instructing these disciples in the ways of God, remembering that He is “with [us] always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). Many over the centuries have experienced elements of God’s Kingdom that can be captured among His people here on Earth via the presence of the Spirit. But we still have not seen it consummated fully, along with the true justice and righteousness that only He can provide.

We have been waiting for the past 2,000 years, but the Messiah has still not returned as He promised. In an age of uncertainty and world unrest, we hear doubts from many people as to whether or not the Lord is coming back. The Apostle Peter wrote that in the Last Days many would ask the question, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?” (2 Peter 3:4, NIV). We are not living in the Messianic Kingdom, nor is the world getting any better.

But this has not always been the position of those claiming to know the Savior...

DARK DAYS

For almost 1,200 years of Christianity, a dark cloud loomed over those who claimed to serve the Messiah. Many of these people sincerely knew the Lord—at least to the best of their human ability—and will be in the Kingdom, yet many others used Scripture for their own benefit by withholding it from the general populace. So dark was the cloud that even today we are affected by it—both theologically and spiritually—as the teachings of Roman Catholicism are very much alive in our present age. And in its own convoluted way, the Catholic Church has declared, “He has returned.”

According to Roman Catholic dogma, the pope currently acts as the vicar, or *substitute*, of the Messiah on Earth. On the Vatican flag rest two keys: either representing the Keys of Heaven, or the Keys of Death and Hades. But these keys Biblically belong to Yeshua and to Him alone (Revelation 1:18). In their vision of the apocalypse, the Catholic Church claims that the world will “get better” and be “Christianized,” culminating in the physical return of the Messiah, and the pope “handing the keys to Him” as we enter into eternity. Any reference in Scripture to a literal thousand-year Messianic Kingdom with the Lord Himself present among us is spiritualized or allegorized away, and Rome supplants the position of Jerusalem in God’s

eternal plan. Many Protestants hold to similar views, thinking that the world will get better and better as the Church extends its influence over humanity.

But this is not what the Bible says. In His Olivet Discourse on the Last Days, Yeshua emphasized that “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). Concerning this, Catholicism has made “alterations in times and in law” (Daniel 7:25), changing many Biblical commandments and ordinances under the so-called authority of the pope, and over the centuries making it very difficult for true Believers to follow God’s Law.⁴ The Messiah never once told us that things will “get better.” Although He does have the final victory, and we should experience that victory in our individual lives, the current state of our world is going to get much, much worse. This Biblical constant is reemphasized in the Apostle Paul’s words to Timothy:

“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

We have been coming out of the darkness of Catholicism for the past 500 years, and those of us who constitute today’s Messianic movement have a major challenge before us. Those of us who are true to the principal ideal of the Protestant Reformation, *Sola Scriptura* or Scripture Only, realize that those in the faith who have gone before us have fought a good fight and finished their course. But there is still much more work to be done. The war between the Holy One of Israel and Satan is not over and new battles await the saints.

If we are true to Scripture, then we realize that the Messiah has yet to return, and any attempt to say otherwise is an outright lie from the enemy. As Yeshua warns, “if they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe *them*. For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:26-27). The Messiah has not returned, and we must seek to Scripturally understand His return. We need to know what the Second Coming is all about, and the events that are to precede it. We also must understand the history of what has been taught in the past concerning His return, and determine whether or not it is Biblically

⁴ It is important to note that the Aramaic word *dat* (דַּת), appearing in Daniel 7:25, is to be differentiated from the Torah or Law of Moses (תּוֹרָה). It specifically relates to “state legislation, public law” or “law as religion” (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. [Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001], 2:1856). When Daniel prophesied that the beast would have the power to change the law, he was referring to the state laws. Paralleling this, the Roman Catholic Church has made it very difficult for people to keep God’s Law, banning observance of Passover at the Council of Antioch in 341 C.E., and the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* at the Council of Laodicea in 363 C.E. (Consult the author’s book *Torah In the Balance, Volume 1* for a discussion of these issues.)

Future state laws prohibiting God’s people from keeping His Torah are guaranteed by the future regime of the antimessiah/antichrist.

accurate. Most important, we must be on guard and alert. Yeshua Himself warned us, “when you see these things happening, recognize that [I am] near, *right* at the door” (Mark 13:29).

In our time of global uncertainty, we need to acknowledge how the phenomena Yeshua prophesied about in His Olivet Discourse teaching on the Last Days are maturing. But are they maturing at the pace that *we* would like to see them? How “fast” will the end-times come about? How might we need to not be as zealous in regard to the end-times, and consider the important role that today’s emerging Messianic movement may play in the future?

THE TIME AHEAD

For the true Believer, the return of the Messiah is an exciting, yet sobering event to ponder. We know that He is returning for His own and that He will come to establish His Eternal Kingdom on Earth,⁵ of which every person who has put his faith in Him will be a part. Yet we also know, as the Psalmist proclaims, “You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware” (Psalm 2:9). Similarly, the Apostle Paul says, “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 Christ and God” (Ephesians 5:5). There will be those who not only do not partake of His Kingdom, but are consigned to a place where there “will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”⁶

The time that lies ahead is both exciting and terrifying.

It is a mainstay of our faith that the Messiah will return. Indeed, as the Apostle’s 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.”⁷

Holding to such beliefs, however, is very controversial, especially as current world trends indicate a strong rise in religious tolerance. Whether you realize it or not, we who believe in Yeshua advocate that He is returning to establish His Kingdom on this planet, and in so doing He will *violently overthrow the governments of this world*. Sometime in the future, those who will willingly give themselves over to the Devil will view Believers in Yeshua as “dangerous.” We know that the attempts of the Adversary to stop the Messiah’s return will be in vain, just as they were when he had Herod kill the Jewish male babies in Bethlehem prior to His birth, and just as when he tried to stop His ministry by having Him executed on a Roman cross. But rest assured, the Accuser will try to take as many with him to the Lake of Fire as possible.

For the past century, many projections and theologies have been rampantly promoting the return of Yeshua. Many have rightly preached a message of “Repent, for the Day of the LORD is at hand!” and have emphasized the eternal judgment that awaits those who refuse the message of

⁵ Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:32-33.

⁶ Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

⁷ Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26.

salvation, regardless of when He returns on a specific timetable. Some have propagated a message of “doom and gloom” concerning the worst to befall Planet Earth, but have perhaps been discredited due to false end-time projections. And others have disseminated a message of a quick escape via a “rapture” to Heaven, prior to the horrors that are prophesied to befall the world.

The issue of the Second Coming prior to the Twentieth Century was not at the forefront of Protestant Christian doctrine. The attitude of many who have gone before us may have been, “It is going to happen, but not in my lifetime.” But unlike them, we are living in *different times*. Many of those who first protested against the Roman Catholic Church saw the errors of “the Messiah returned” through the personage of the pope, but their purpose was different than ours. Their job was to restore the absolute essentials of Biblical faith: the final authority of Holy Scripture, salvation by grace through faith, and living a sanctified life unto God. Issues pertaining to eschatology, the study of end things, were at best *peripheral* to many of the Reformers—**but not to us today**. Eschatology needs to be understood as a very critical component of our overall theology.

The Messianic movement today is restoring more foundational truths to the faith. We are restoring the Hebraic background of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) as understood by the original Jewish Disciples and First Century Believers in Yeshua. We are restoring the eternal truths contained in the Torah or Law of Moses, which many have overlooked in centuries past, but are now studying today. Most notably, the understanding that God is in the process of restoring His people—the people of Israel—as one in Messiah Yeshua, is being received with great enthusiasm. But it is not just because of these reasons that we live in substantially different times than the early Reformers.

In the past century, Planet Earth has had two world wars, the establishment of the United Nations, and the creation of the State of Israel. We have nuclear weapons, mass transportation, and the Internet. We are the only generation that has truly seen knowledge increase and travel between the continents become commonplace as was prophesied (Daniel 12:4). We are the only generation that has been to the stars and has landed on the moon (Jeremiah 51:53). Arguably, we are the first generation in the history of this world in which end-time prophecies *could even occur*. Even more arguably, some believe we are the final generation. The study of the Messiah’s return is of paramount importance and should be critically examined! It will *somehow* affect our future.

I do not think that I am alone in thinking that the return of the Messiah is closer now than it ever has been before.

THE CAUSE OF ALL THE CONTROVERSY

One would think that the issue of the Messiah’s return would be easy for Believers to understand. Our individual attitudes should be, “I know He’s coming back. I’ll be ready for whatever happens. My faith is in the God of the Universe.”

If this were only the case...

If we truly put our faith in the God of Israel, then we will *indeed accept whatever happens*. For as it is written, “Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned *it*, *surely* I will do it” (Isaiah 46:9-11). The Lord already knows what is going to occur in His Creation and how things will specifically transpire, but we do not. As human beings we have no choice but to accept His will and place our trust in Him. The problem is that we often do not do this.

The controversy that ensues today among many Believers is between those who believe that the Lord will remove His people from Planet Earth before the time of horrors, or Tribulation period begins, and those who believe that God will preserve and guide His people during humanity’s final years. This controversy is commonly known as “the pre-tribulation versus post-tribulation rapture debate,” or “pre-trib versus post-trib” for short. Some of you are innately familiar with it.

At first glance, we should all agree that an escape from what is to befall this planet sounds comforting. Indeed, are we not told that this time of great distress will be “such as not was since the beginning of the world...no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21, KJV)? But at the same time, could it not also be argued that people seeking such a removal are *escapists* and do not desire to see the Lord perform His delivering power—just as He judged the gods of Ancient Egypt, and, just as He will judge the modern gods of convenience, technology, and self-indulgence? Regardless of what view one holds to, the prophesied apocalypse is not going to be a pleasant time. *Billions will die*. The Prophet Amos states quite candidly that **we are not to seek** the Day of the Lord when His judgment is poured out on Earth:

“Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, for what purpose *will* the day of the LORD *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light; as when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him. *Will* not the day of the LORD *be* darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?” (Amos 5:18-20).

The return of the Messiah will herald God’s true judgment on this sinful world. We should be in constant prayer and intercession for those who might be caught unaware and be judged. We should pray for the salvation of the world, so they do not experience the even greater punishments that await throughout eternity if people do not repent of their sins.

But in order to do this properly, what is the role that the Body of Messiah is to play in the end-times? What is the destiny of the saints concerning the Tribulation? *Escape or endurance?*

Yeshua the Messiah Himself, God Himself made manifest in the flesh, gives us a few clues in His Olivet Discourse:

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL FROM

the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:27-28).⁸

The Messiah tells us very plainly that He returns to gather the saints or His elect “Immediately after the distress of those days” (NIV), or what the Greek has as *eutheōs de meta tēn thilipsin* (Εὐθέως δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν).

The Apostle Paul reinforces Yeshua’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52:

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

Paul tells us that the Messiah returns at “the last trumpet,” *tē eschatē salpingi* (τῆ ἑσχάτῃ σάλπιγγι). The same Greek term for “trumpet,” *salpigx* (σάλπιγξ), is used in both 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and in Matthew 24:29-31, leaving us no doubt that the same instrument is being referred to.⁹ Not surprisingly, at the seventh or *the last trumpet* in Revelation, we are told that the kingdoms of this world become the property of the Messiah:

“Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Messiah; and He will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

It should seem that the controversy is over. The Messiah says that He returns after the Tribulation. The Apostle Paul confirms this by saying the Messiah gathers the saints at the last trumpet. The Apostle John confirms this by indicating that the last trumpet is the seventh trumpet of Revelation. **Yeshua the Messiah is clearly returning for the saints after the Tribulation.**

But it is not that easy. Many want to be removed from the coming Tribulation before it begins. Sadly, many evangelical Christians in America believe in an any-moment pre-tribulation rapture, and are often not concerned with what might happen if they face the Tribulation period, or even just hard times for that matter. In fact, many evangelical Christians support the State of Israel because they believe that by supporting Israel they will be accelerating God’s prophetic timetable and be “raptured sooner” rather than later. Consider the following quotation from the 06 October, 2002 issue of the New York Times, in an article called “Rapture and Rupture” by Maureen Dowd:

“Evangelicals fervently support Israel for theological reasons of their own, based on a literal reading of the Book of Revelation that entwines the Jewish commonwealth with the Apocalypse and the Second Coming.” This article also says, “When the Rapture comes, they grouse, the holy alliance

⁸ Cf. Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15.

⁹ Many Messianics associate the trumpet blown with the *shofar* (שׁוֹפָר), often seen throughout the Tanach for a scene of warning or spiritual intensity. It is first seen in Scripture associated with the Ancient Israelites being told to keep away from Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16, 19; 20:18).

between Christians and Jews will suddenly become unholy, with Christians levitating and Jews left behind to deal with the Antichrist, plagues, sores, boils, frogs...and locusts from the 'bottomless pit,' each with a human face, horse's body, scorpion's tail and a sting that torments for five months."¹⁰

Similar sentiments are voiced by Israeli journalist and author Gershom Gorenberg in his book *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*. He comments, "the Christians will safely exit to the wings, while on stage, the Jews will find themselves at the center of the apocalypse."¹¹ He also says, "On the Christian side are those who want to 'bless' Israel, and provide it with what they believe is the fuse for Armageddon."¹²

The real reason that many Christians support Israel is because Israel is a major player in the end-times. If they support Israel then they can be raptured out prior to the end-time Tribulation sooner. While it is certainly not the case with all Christians, it is definitely the case with many, especially among the evangelicals of America. These secular writers quoted see the truth; it is sad that many others cannot.

In my opinion, many Christians (but not necessarily all) who support Israel because of its role in the end-times, *although they are supposed to be "raptured out,"* do not support Israel because *they "love Israel,"* per se. ***They "support Israel" because they love themselves!***

The reason this is a serious problem is because such Christians often fail to see themselves as a part of Israel. While they may feel connected to Israel, they do not consider that the prophecies directly relating to Israel directly apply to them. But, the prophecies relating to the restoration of all Israel ultimately relate to the restoration of God's Kingdom on Earth. God's Kingdom on Earth just happens to be the Kingdom of Israel. Surely, all Believers in Yeshua—even if they just see themselves as "Churchy Christians"—will be a part of that Kingdom.

WE NEED TO SEE OURSELVES AS A PART OF ISRAEL

There are two reasons why mainstream Christianity has largely failed with Jewish evangelism and in presenting Jews with the truth of Messiah Yeshua. The first reason is that the Christian community, by-and-large, presents a messiah that came to do away with the Law of Moses, a concept that the Jewish people cannot accept because the Messiah is supposed to uphold the Law of Moses. This is also one of the principal problems that today's Messianics have with the modern Church. Yeshua prophesied that in the Last Days "many people's love will grow cold because of increased distance from *Torah*" (Matthew 24:12, CJB), and we are, sadly, seeing this prophecy fulfilled today. Many Christians have problems with Messianics because we strongly believe that we need to return to the Torah as the foundation of our faith. Those who reject the truths that the Lord is restoring

¹⁰ Maureen Dowd (2002). *Rapture And Rupture*, 06 October, 2002. *New York Times*. Retrieved 25 June, 2003 from <<http://www.newyorktimes.com>>.

¹¹ Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.

¹² *Ibid*, 29.

to His people—at the very least—reveal themselves as immature and unwilling to cede more control of their lives over to Him. Hopefully, they will not be those who promote the lawlessness that the Messiah warns about.¹³

The second reason is more complex. Many Christians believe that in order for Jews, who presently do not believe in Yeshua, to be saved, that they, the Christians, must be removed from Planet Earth via the pre-tribulation rapture. It is believed that this must take place so that the Jewish people who remain can experience another Holocaust at the hands of the antimessiah or antichrist, and then “seek salvation.” But anyone who has researched history can tell you that many Jews *rejected the existence of God* as a result of Hitler’s Holocaust and became atheists. Would Holocaust II do anything different? Many Jews that I have encountered find the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture insulting, or at least tantamount to making God impotent. I have been told personally by Jewish people that if God could preserve His people through the plagues of Egypt, the Exodus, the Babylonian exile, the Seleucid-Greek invasion and the period of the Maccabees, the Roman dispersion, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Holocaust—why can He not preserve them through the Time of Jacob’s Trouble? Pre-tribulation rapture Christians often do not have a sufficient answer.

Many Christians have problems with the Messianic movement because a sizeable portion of the Messianic community is post-trib (although some are pre-trib). Many of us are post-tribulationists and do not believe that the Body of Messiah is going to be removed from the difficult times that are prophesied. Many of us believe that the saints will be gathered into the clouds to meet Yeshua at the close of the Tribulation period.

I have been a post-tribulationist since 1995, and believe that coming to this position from a pre-tribulationist one was the “starting point” for me seeking greater truth in my spiritual walk. I could not refute the Biblical reality that Yeshua the Messiah plainly tells us that He returns for the elect “immediately after the tribulation” (Matthew 24:29-31). Upon thinking about it in greater detail, I found that the ideology behind the popular pre-tribulation rapture is exactly that: **it is popular, and post-tribulationism does not sell or make millions of dollars.** On the contrary, post-tribulationism instills in people the necessity to become more Biblical, repent of their sins, pursue holiness, and seek God more, because we will need to know Him and rely on Him should we go through the Tribulation period—*especially if we face martyrdom for the cause of the Messiah*. We should be in the position where we know the Lord so intimately that we never will apostasize from the faith; He has given us His Spirit as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:14).

Of course, this is only part of the story. Pre-tribulationists like to argue that the “elect” mentioned in Yeshua’s end-time teaching of Matthew 24 is only the Jewish people or “Israel,” and since the Messiah was speaking to the Jews in this case, it does not apply to non-Jews. The obvious hermeneutical problem with this is that most of Yeshua’s words are directed to Jews, and if

¹³ Consult the author’s book *The New Testament Validates Torah* for an examination of many Scriptures that are frequently used to say that the Law has been “done away.”

one is not Jewish then most of what He has to say in the Gospels does not apply. All of a sudden, very little of the Bible—including most of the New Testament—becomes irrelevant to you as a non-Jew if you follow this logic through to its obvious end.

But the Scriptures say otherwise. The Apostle Paul plainly writes non-Jewish Believers that prior to their salvation experience they were separate from the Commonwealth of Israel, implying that now they have been made one with their Jewish brethren in Israel's blessings—and responsibilities:

“Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ *which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Messiah Yeshua Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit* (Ephesians 2:11-13, 19-22).

The term *sumpolitēs* (συμπολίτης) means “**fellow-citizen/compatriot**” (BDAG).¹⁴ Paul writes that non-Jewish Believers in the Messiah have been given “citizenship in Israel” (NIV). They have come near no differently than how Psalm 148:14 describes, “He has lifted up a horn for His people, praise for all His godly ones; *even for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the LORD!*” (cf. Deuteronomy 4:7; Isaiah 56:3). Paul asserts “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6). Believers who have been redeemed by Yeshua are a part of Israel—whether they like it or not—and are indeed a part of the elect to whom the Messiah speaks in His Olivet Discourse.

Many non-Jewish Believers who have entered into the Messianic community know this to be true, and believe themselves to be a part of the polity of Israel and applicable to follow God's Torah, realizing that the prophecies detailing Israel's restoration somehow involve “them.” What is important is that when we review the prophecies of Israel's end-time restoration, a major theme of this restoration is the reunion of the House of Judah and the scattered House of Israel, or Ephraim. Judah, of course, is today's Jewish people who have been the principal torchbearers of Israel for millennia. Ephraim composes the scattered members of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was spread out and corporately assimilated into the nations of Planet Earth. They were to become “the fullness of the nations” as prophesied by Jacob (Genesis 48:19),¹⁵ understood by Paul as involving “the

¹⁴ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 959.

¹⁵ Heb. *melo-ha'goyim* (מְלֵאֵי הַגּוֹיִם).

fullness of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:25)¹⁶ coming to faith. According to Biblical prophecy, the Lord is going to restore all Israel in the Last Days. God’s plan is that by restoring Israel the message of salvation may finally reach to the ends of the Earth.

As a result of people discussing the prophecies of Israel’s restoration—and how they might be a part of it—many questions arise about issues that directly relate to the Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah. The Second Coming is one of the most passionately discussed areas of Biblical theology. With uncertainty in the Middle East and the rise in global terrorism, the study of the return of the Messiah and related prophecies is only going to increase. Many Christians are turning toward the Messianic movement because the traditional churches have, by-and-large, ignored the Tanach (Old Testament), which certainly contains many prophecies about the Last Days and the return of the Messiah. Messianics, who place a large emphasis on the Torah and Tanach, are the obvious group to which they turn to find insight. As the Messianic community today, we cannot afford to ignore the prophetic message of Scripture—and even more so we cannot ignore the prophetic message of Israel’s restoration.

But one thing that we must not fall prey to is pre-tribulationism. We must repent of this error if we have believed or taught it, because the pre-tribulation rapture is one of the major deterrents to the salvation of the Jewish people.

THE SUBJECTS WE MUST DISCUSS

The idea for the book you are holding in your hand came through a series of interesting circumstances. As editor of the Biblical news website TNN Online (www.tnnonline.net), it was my original intent to write a book that simply discussed the infamous pre- versus post-trib “rapture debate” and the problems that existed with the pre-tribulation rapture. But when I started to realize what we need to be discussing as the Messianic community, I discovered that *When Will the Messiah Return?* could not be exclusively about the rapture controversy.¹⁷ What needed to be written was something that would not only address the many problems of the pre-tribulation rapture and when the Messiah gathers the saints, but would also address **overlooked things** that must take place before the Messiah can return. These overlooked things involve the restoration of God’s chosen people in the end-times, and in particular the reunification of the House of Judah and the scattered House of Israel/Ephraim, and their end-time exodus to the Land of Israel.

The reunification of the Two Houses of Israel needs to be examined as a major end-time “event” that occurs before the Messiah’s return. Many do not realize this, and are swayed by many sensationalistic prophecy teachings that fail to consider the restoration of all Israel. Many others reject a Two-House teaching because they have seen a great deal of populist banter about non-

¹⁶ Grk. *to plērōma tōn ethnōn* (τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν).

¹⁷ The specific arguments of the pre- versus post-tribulation rapture controversy are, however, thoroughly addressed in the analysis *The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism*, which is a supplementary resource for this book.

Jews being of “this or that tribe,” when in actuality what needs to be done is an honest evaluation of the Biblical text and some unfulfilled prophetic passages. While we will be discussing things that many of us already know about the Last Days, we will also be discussing many things that some of you are not aware of—**even though they have been in the Scriptures for millennia.**

When we understand that via our faith we are all a part of the Israel Messiah Yeshua is returning for, we must realize that our mission is to seek the fulfillment of the Disciples’ question in Acts 1:6: “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Our actions today will effect tomorrow and how God’s Kingdom is ultimately restored on Planet Earth. We must diligently seek the Father to know how this goal will be accomplished and the role that we are to play. Once we do this, and recognize that we are a part of the process toward seeing the Kingdom restored and the Messiah return, then we can properly deal with the end-time issues that lie before us.

In order to fulfill our destiny as a part of Israel, we are required to have an interpretation of Bible prophecy. This does not mean that we will be able to “understand everything,” but the Lord will hold us accountable for what is in His Word, and what we choose to do, *or not to do*, with it. We have an advantage over those in the Egyptian Exodus some 3,300 years ago, as they only knew they were headed to the Promised Land, but were not told how they were going to get there. We have been told how we are going to get to the Kingdom, so shame on us if we do not read about it or discuss it. The appropriate starting point for us to correctly understand Bible prophecy and the new challenges before us is to have a correct understanding of the Second Coming—because the Kingdom will not be restored until the Messiah returns.

WE ARE ALL ON THE ROAD

As the existence of the Messianic movement should indicate, our faith has come a long way since the early days of the Reformation. But new challenges lie ahead. If we are living in the Last Days, we must seek to have a clear idea about what our future journey entails. Yeshua especially warns us, “For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24, NRSV). We must be fully grounded in our faith and not be “carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14)—especially regarding eschatology. We must not seek the approval or favor of others, but of our Father in Heaven alone.

The issue of the Messiah’s return is not solely limited to what occurs “after the tribulation,” “at the last trumpet,” or any other clues given to us concerning its timing. It also has a *direct impact* concerning God’s people, the end-time purpose of that people, and why there must be a Tribulation period. The issue of the Messiah’s return also plays a critical role in the eternal destiny of human beings. As Daniel prophesied concerning the end, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).

We are all on the road, and should all agree that truth must be our ultimate quest, regardless of the consequences. We must endeavor for Yeshua to tell us “Well done, good and faithful slave” (Matthew 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17), as opposed to “Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!” (Matthew 7:23, HCSB; 25:41; Luke 13:27).

As finite human beings, none of us has all the answers—especially as they relate to future events. We have to petition our Heavenly Father continually for truth and new understanding. Pertaining to the issue of the return of His Son, the Messiah, we pray that the most Scriptural solution be sought. We give all the glory and honor to Him who is returning, and hope that He is indeed “coming quickly” (Revelation 22:20). However, as these events are yet to occur, they are somewhat open for interpretation. But there is one constant: **the Messiah is returning.** *When the Messiah will return is the critical issue that lies before us.*

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 1

1. Why do you feel the subject of the Second Coming is controversial among many Believers?

 2. What is the problem with believing that the Kingdom of God has *presently* been “fully manifested” on Planet Earth?

 3. What attitude do you think Believers need to have when approaching end-time Bible prophecy?

 4. In what way might you consider yourself a “Reformer” today? Do you feel like you may be personally involved in the fulfillment of end-time Bible prophecy?

 5. In what ways do you believe that our present generation may be different than generations past? Do you believe we are the final generation? Why or why not?

 6. Do you believe that the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine is escapist? Why or why not? Do you think it has a substantial ideological basis? Why or why not?

 7. How do you interpret the Messiah’s admonition of Him coming “after the tribulation” (Matthew 24:29-31)? How do you interpret Paul’s admonition of the Messiah coming at the “last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)? Do you believe that these two concepts support a pre-tribulational or post-tribulational return of the Lord?

 8. How important do you think the study of Bible prophecy is for Believers?
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