

**THE
DANGERS
OF PRE-TRIBULATIONISM**

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OF PRE-TRIBULATIONISM**

**A SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS
TO WHEN WILL THE MESSIAH RETURN?**

J.K. MCKEE

**MESSIANIC
APOLOGETICS**
messianicapologetics.net

THE DANGERS OF PRE-TRIBULATIONISM

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ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

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

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
Ara: Aramaic	Ger: German
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	GNT: Greek New Testament
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	Grk: Greek
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	Heb: Hebrew
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	KJV: King James Version
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	

- Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
- LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
- LS: *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell & Scott)
- LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
- LXX: Septuagint
- m. Mishnah
- MT: Masoretic Text
- NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
- NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
- NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
- NEB: New English Bible (1970)
- Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
- NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
- NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
- NIGTC: *New International Greek Testament Commentary*
- NICNT: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*
- NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
- NIV: New International Version (1984)
- NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
- NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
- NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
- NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
- NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
- NT: New Testament
- orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world
- OT: Old Testament
- PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*
- REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
- RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
- t. Tosefta
- Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
- Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
- TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
- TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
- TLV: Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant (2011)
- TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
- TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
- TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
- UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
- v(s). verse(s)
- Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
- Vul: Latin Vulgate
- WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
- Yid: Yiddish
- YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

FORWARD

IS THE DOCTRINE OF PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE VALID OR INVALID?

by Jane J. McKee

“The end is near!” is a popular phrase heard around the world today. Many believe that Messiah is coming any day—possibly today—to take us to heaven before the Tribulation. Whether or not there will be a Pre-Tribulation or a Post-Tribulation rapture is one of the most controversial subjects today. I believe there will be a Post-Tribulation rapture because Jesus says it, Paul reiterates it, and John the Beloved explains it.

The doctrine of Pre-Tribulation rapture is preached in pulpits across the world as a known fact when in truth Jesus Himself says the exact opposite. In Matthew 24:29-31, He says, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken (see Revelation 6:12-13): And then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” In saying this, Jesus clearly states that Believers will go through the Tribulation.

Another commonly misinterpreted passage is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. In this Paul says, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Messiah shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." In saying those that are alive and remain, Paul is inferring to the ones who survive the Tribulation who are also called the assembly of Philadelphia in Revelation. Earlier in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, Paul said that Jesus would come back with his Tribulation saints, which in logical thinking would infer that the Tribulation had already happened. These Tribulation saints are known as the "non-survivors" or the assembly of Smyrna in Revelation. Also, in 1 Corinthians 15:52, Paul says, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the LAST TRUMP: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." This is a more specific verse of the time of the rapture than 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 but it says basically the same thing.

John the Beloved says in Revelation 11:15-17, "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Messiah; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned." Look at what happens at the sounding of the seventh or LAST trumpet. The kingdoms of this world become those of Christ Jesus. Obviously, what is being explained here by John is the return of Jesus and His coming to rule and reign for the Millennium.

One can see by reading what the Bible says and not what the doctrine of men says, that the Messiah will

come after the Tribulation and not before. He will come and take those who have survived the Great Tribulation away from the earth before God's judgment on "The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord." So take heed and be ready for what is ahead. Be like the assembly of Philadelphia who survives the Tribulation not Smyrna who perishes.

Special thanks are extended to the author's sister, Jane McKee, for permission to reproduce this article. This paper was originally written in 1996 as a middle school persuasive paper at the Christian academy Jane was attending. Although she was given an A+ and commended for her ability to prove her thesis, she was nevertheless censured and unable to share it with her fellow students because it conflicted with the views of the school.

INTRODUCTION

The report you are about to examine has been composed to address some doctrinal problems—and perhaps some serious spiritual issues—among various Believers today. Many are of the position that any moment, perhaps in the next sixty seconds, Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) can come and rapture us all to Heaven prior to the Tribulation period. This belief, known as **the pre-tribulation rapture**, is extremely popular among those of our generation.

All too often, those who do not agree with pre-tribulationism can be, at the very least, branded as being misguided. However, in some circles, such people can be considered heretics, denying one of the (*supposed*) principal beliefs of Biblical faith. It is imperative that while we recognize that one's position on the timing of the return of the Lord is **not** a salvation issue, those of us not holding to pre-tribulationism must address why we believe it is flawed. We must answer the claims made in support of the pre-tribulation rapture from Scripture in a fair and reasonable manner, which pre-tribulationists have a strong tendency to not often demonstrate toward many post-tribulationists.

My personal testimony of not believing in the pre-tribulation rapture is somewhat unique. I attended a fundamentalist independent Baptist elementary school in my early years, so when the subject of the end-times came up, we were simply taught to believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. Any deviation from this belief (or even from the King James Version) was considered dangerous, or perhaps even cultish. This may have been the exception, as in many denominations and churches

the end-times would not be considered that important, but it was my experience.

The end-times were always exciting to me, and I always wondered why I felt a deep fascination with the prophetic Scriptures, especially since we were not supposed to be here during the Tribulation but be raptured up to Heaven. Several years later when I entered into high school, I was exposed to alternative views that I had never heard before, and I began to question whether or not the pre-tribulation rapture had the validity which many gave to it. My salvation experience in 1995 had led me to conclude that since God was powerful enough to deliver me from all the sin and some various demonic forces that had been influencing me, certainly He could protect us through the prophesied Tribulation period.^a

As a new Believer I began a process of reading through one chapter of the Gospels every morning. I started with the Gospel of Matthew, and was enriched by being able to simply sit down and meditate on the text. Within the first month of doing this I got to Matthew 24, the Messiah's Olivet Discourse on the Last Days. The verses which caught my attention, in a morning quiet time, were Matthew 24:29-31:

"Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (NIV).

Perhaps you have read these same verses before, and have wondered...

^a This is discussed, in part in Chapter 13 of the author's book *Introduction to Things Messianic*, "The Assurance of Our Salvation," and his publication *Why Hell Must Be Eternal*.

Having read that Yeshua (Jesus) would gather the saints “after the distress of those days” in the NIV, I started comparing this text with some other Bible versions that I had convenient. I had been accustomed to using the King James Version in elementary school, and it confirmed my suspicions, saying that the Messiah returned “Immediately after the tribulation of those days.”

This was the first time I had ever really examined what the Scriptures told me about the timing of “the rapture.” I had never known that our Lord Himself plainly said He was going to gather the saints after the Tribulation, and not before it as I had been taught. I began to get my hands on as much information pertaining to “the rapture debate” that a 14-year old could find. Two books that really helped me formulate some early opinions, which my stepfather had contributed to our new family’s library, were George Eldon Ladd’s *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) and *The Church and the Tribulation* by Robert H. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973). Both of these works are considered “classics” in this debate, representing post-tribulationism. I also consulted some popular pre-tribulational works, as the *Left Behind* series of prophecy novels was just starting to be released, and a popular fiction book which had preceded it was *The Third Millennium* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993) by Paul Meier. While I was intrigued by the debate between pre- and post-tribulationists, I found myself moving more and more toward the post-tribulational position. I was eager to discuss it with people I knew.

When I shared my newly found convictions with my peers, most rejected it. Many told me that they could not believe that God would ever make them go through the Tribulation, especially as they were planning to get married, have children, and start careers. God, in their words, would never “ruin their plans.” God would never make them experience the horrors of the Last Days, including the possibility of being martyred for the faith. To them, the Lord would simply return unexpectedly to

take them to Heaven for a big “surprise party.” I was very shocked by these attitudes, because one with true faith in God should expect Him to provide total protection and guidance through whatever hardships life has to offer. ***True Biblical faith is not about “fun and games” at all.*** True commitment to the Lord requires sacrifices, and the Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah is by no means some “surprise party.” (Furthermore, all that one really needs in life are food, clothing, and shelter.)^b

I found the attitudes of my peers to be unacceptable. But, most of their words were simply immature and indicative of those who lacked life experience, yet perhaps among a few they were words of outright rebellion toward God. The responses I received as I was “entertaining” post-tribulationism were disconcerting and very disturbing. The escapist, “partying” attitude I encountered from the “next generation” of Christians was one of the reasons that finally pushed me over the edge to renouncing a belief in the pre-tribulation rapture. It was also at this same time that my family was investigating a local Messianic Jewish congregation. In 1996, we fully entered into the Messianic movement, and for me personally, becoming Messianic is very closely connected with me becoming a post-tribulationist. And as my loving sister Jane will half-jokingly observe, “Being Messianic and a pre-tribulationist is a contradiction in terms. It will cause someone to spontaneously combust!”

My life’s testimony has been one where God continually has “ruined,” or more appropriately has altered, my personal plans. I would certainly not be writing this unless the Lord has put me through some trials and tribulations that have been influential in molding me as a person and have given me the strong faith that I have. In 1992, my father Kimball McKee died of melanoma, a deadly form of skin cancer that he had for only five months.^c In 1994, my mother was remarried and

^b 1 Timothy 6:8.

^c A biographical sketch of Kim McKee is available as part of the K. Kimball McKee Memorial Fund <outreachisrael.net/kkm-fund.html>.

I was transplanted from my home of 14 years in the Northern Kentucky/Greater Cincinnati area to Dallas, Texas. Between 1994 and 1997 I attended four schools, because we moved around in the Dallas area, but it was hardly an ideal experience for someone trying to get established. In 1998, our family lived in the Bay Islands of Honduras for eight months to assist with a missionary endeavor. While there we experienced the deadly Hurricane Mitch. This is only a short list of various trials which I have experienced, but I would add to this that anyone who has been in full time ministry can tell you that trials and challenges *inevitably come with the job*.

I cannot agree with the assessment that God would not put us into difficult circumstances, including the Tribulation period. The Prophet Isaiah says, “when Your judgments are wrought on earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. But when the scoundrel is spared, he learns not righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9-10, NJPS). Through trials, we learn what the righteousness and holiness of God are all about, and we get to realize how much we need to rely on Him and be separated from the sinful world around us. Many of the First Century Believers in Yeshua the Messiah experienced persecutions, distresses, and even martyrdom. **They endured trials that we cannot hope to imagine.** Who are we to think that we are better than they? Who are we to think that we are better than those who walked and talked with Yeshua or His original Disciples? What gives us the right to be so presumptuous?

As editor of the Biblical news website TNN Online (now, Messianic Apologetics), I am continually facing trials. This website today addresses a substantial amount of controversial views that I receive criticism for—much of it being unfair and unwarranted criticism. Some of this criticism comes from those in the Christian community, and some of it actually comes from those in the very

with donations accepted by Outreach Israel Ministries, specifically established so that his Christian friends and associates can help to see his ministry work continue via his surviving family.

Messianic community I serve. As if that were not enough, my college experience at the University of Oklahoma from 1999-2003 had its fair share of negativity from Christians on campus who did not understand my Messianic beliefs and Torah obedience, nor gave me ample ability to speak and explain myself. Some of my Christian peers—once again—felt that it was more appropriate to insult and berate me rather than to search the Scriptures for answers and seek reasoned and polite dialogue. I hold no ill feelings, but I have faced my fair share of difficulty from those “of the faith.”

Aside from the fact that the Lord will obviously put us through hard times, comes the required analysis of the popular doctrine known as the pre-tribulation rapture. Is it valid? Or does it have a shaky foundation? *The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism* is intended to respond to many of the reasons why people believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. I intend to demonstrate to you why these reasons are flawed, are often based on a poor reading of the Scriptures, and in some cases I will expose the escapist agenda of its proponents. This report has been written as a supplement to my book *When Will the Messiah Return?* By necessity, various points discussed in *When Will the Messiah Return?* will be reemphasized in this analysis, and there is overlap between the two publications. However, it is still advised and recommended that you have read *When Will the Messiah Return?* before reading *The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism*.

The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism was originally written as an article on the (old) TNN Online website in 1999, which addressed the top twelve reasons why people believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. Many readers considered this article, at the time, to perhaps be the most provocative, compelling, and controversial article on the entire website. This report has taken and expanded that article, addressing many more reasons. It shows why believing in the pre-tribulation rapture can be dangerous and why it must be reevaluated and tested against Scripture.

It is my hope and prayer that this will prove to be a guide for many of you who are seeking a fuller understanding of the end-times, and a more Biblically sound eschatology. For those of you who have already seen some of the errors of the pre-tribulation rapture, this will be an excellent resource for you to use when encountering staunch pre-tribulationists. This treatise will reinforce what you already know to be true. For those of you who are pre-tribulationists, I encourage you to reevaluate your view and see if it really is Scripturally valid, as it will be seriously challenged and decompiled.

It is not the purpose of this publication to “blast” or condemn pre-tribulationists by any means, but rather force people to reevaluate the pre-tribulation rapture teaching. **Please understand that I do not consider pre-tribulationists to be “unsaved” because of their view.** But is their view truly taught in the Bible? Or is it popular, because it is unscriptural and escapist? These are some questions that I ask you to keep in mind throughout your reading. It is my intention to answer the pre-tribulation rapture claims reasonably, and with love and humility as demonstrated to us by the actions of Messiah Yeshua and His Apostles, as well as with a fairness that is often not given to post-tribulationists.

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