

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 blast, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:30-31)



INTRODUCING End of Days

A Study on Revelation, Discipleship,
and the End of the World

Introduction to *Torah Club: End of Days*
Study Begins October 2025



WHAT IS TORAH CLUB?

Torah Club is a small-group Bible study community discovering the Scriptures from a Messianic Jewish perspective.

LEARNING

Torah Club is for disciples who are curious, thoughtful, and ready to explore—those who want to know the foundations of their faith, discover Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah, and align their lives with God's prophetic promises to Israel. It's a place for rich learning, meaningful connection, and genuine spiritual growth.

COMMUNITY

Studying together helps us grow, as it brings both depth and challenge to our learning. In Torah Club, learning happens through conversation, shared insight, and mutual discovery. The bond of fellowship forms not from having all the same answers, but from hearts united in the search for truth and a shared desire to understand the Jewish foundations of our faith.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Torah Club is a year-long Bible study that begins each October, featuring forty-nine weekly lessons focused on the Bible and the teachings of Yeshua from a Messianic Jewish perspective. Clubs meet weekly, either in person or online, and are led by volunteer leaders. Participants receive printed or digital lesson books, weekly video teachings, and access to Club Hub—an online space for ongoing discussion, questions, and connection with the wider Torah Club community. Everything is designed to support a consistent, structured, and engaging study experience throughout the year.

MORE INFORMATION

The study begins October 2025. Plan now to join a club, start one, or invite others to be part of it.

endofdays.org or torahclub.org

Getting Ready for the End

Introducing an all-new, year-long Bible study that reveals the prophetic worldview of Yeshua and the apostles, and how it shaped the message of Revelation.

D. THOMAS LANCASTER

It's fun to read the book of Revelation to find out what's going to happen at the end of days. Unfortunately, the book of Revelation doesn't work like that. If you don't understand Jewish eschatology, you won't understand the book of Revelation. Or much else about the end of days.

You might be thinking, *Is it really necessary to endure another Bible study on the end times?* After nearly two thousand years of predictions, interpretations, and speculations “concerning that day and hour no one knows,” it's natural to feel a little jaded—maybe even a little cynical—regarding the contentious topic of New Testament eschatology (Matthew 24:26). *Eschatology* means the study of “last things.” It's the branch of theology that talks about what happens after death, the final judgment, the resurrection of the dead, the coming of the Messiah, the end of this age, and the World to Come. Broadly speaking, it's an investigation into the end of days.

I've been hearing about the second coming my entire life, and so far, no dice. So far, 100 percent of all predictions that set a date for the return of the Messiah have been 100 percent wrong 100 percent of the time. Those are pretty solid numbers, so if you are a betting person, it might seem like the smart money is on the horse named “Not Going to Happen.”

What's worse, people get seriously invested in this subject. Arguments about the end of days cause splits, schisms, and theological wars. Wouldn't we all be better off if we just agreed to let the end times happen when they happen in the way that they happen to happen, whatever that might happen to be? When the end of the age does finally roll around, God isn't going to consult us about our views on Armageddon, or the identity of the antichrist, or when to bring the rapture, or how long He should make the tribulation last. So why not just mind our own business and leave the end times where they belong: at the end of time?

END TIMES FATIGUE

I have not always been a follower of Messianic Judaism. When I was growing up in the Evangelical Church, one of our pastors used to quip, “I’m not pre-trib, mid-trib, or post-trib; I’m pan-trib because I believe that, in the end, it will all pan out!” (Translation for the uninitiated: “I don’t know if Jesus is going to come rescue His church from the end of days before the great tribulation, during it, or after it. I’m sure everything will be fine in the end.”) It was meant as a joke, but it also conveyed a general disinterest in Bible prophecy and the subject of the second coming of Christ primarily

interpretation got the ball rolling again. Each time this cycle repeated itself, the average person felt more wary about investing in that hope again. The whole enterprise of a second coming starts to feel dubious.

I guess I have end-times fatigue. There are two types of end-times fatigue. There’s the type that results from the long wait for the coming of the Messiah, punctuated by disappointments. Then there’s the type that results from all the zany sensationalism constantly dished out by the noisy, rabble end-times teachers. I suffered from both types before learning Jewish eschatology.

Each time this cycle repeated itself, the average person felt more wary about investing in that hope again. The whole enterprise of a second coming starts to feel dubious.

because of the divisive nature of such speculations. That’s not a new attitude.

Every so often, a new teaching, a new prediction, a new interpretation would rile up everyone into thinking the second coming was about to happen. Sometimes, geo-political events, natural disasters, or astronomical conjunctions were taken as signs and portents that the end of the age had commenced. But then, after nothing happened, everything returned to business as usual until the next exciting teaching, prediction, or

End-times fatigue is not a new development; it began to take its toll less than a century after the death and resurrection of Jesus. As King Solomon says, “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Proverbs 13:12). When Jesus kept not coming back, early Christians began to reinterpret his apocalyptic teachings with spiritual meanings. They de-emphasized teachings about the end of the age, the coming of the Son of Man, and the Messianic Era. They replaced the future redemption of Israel foretold by the prophets with the idea of attaining a spiritual

salvation (such as redeeming the inner soul and going to heaven after death) or a political salvation (such as Christianity conquering the world). They redefined the kingdom of heaven to mean, on the one hand, a spiritual destination beyond the sky where the souls of the deceased find reward and, on the other hand, a religious institution called the church advancing toward world conquest. Both ideas are still popular today, but neither of them has much to do with the original message of Jesus. (Note that, most of the time, we'll be calling him by His Hebrew name: Yeshua.)

If you grew up in a synagogue, you probably did not hear much about eschatology in the first place. After two failed wars with Rome and a bad run of false messiahs (I'm talking about Bar Kochba and Sabbatai Zevi, and everyone in between), the Jewish world also backed off from Bible prophecy and the end of the world. Sure, Orthodox Jews still "eagerly await Him every day," and mystics still make end-times predictions, but eschatology isn't a subject you study to become a rabbi. In Judaism, it seems like the Messiah is always coming but never arriving. So, Judaism chose to focus on legal interpretations and applications of the Torah and the commandments rather than sorting through the ambiguous and often conflicting prophecies and opinions about the end of days.

Nevertheless, a robust anticipation of the coming end of days is hardwired into Jewish text and liturgy. It's on every page of the siddur (Jewish prayerbook);

it's the main thrust of the holidays, and it informs the whole belief system of Judaism. What exactly did you think it meant when you poured a cup for Elijah at the Passover Seder table or concluded the meal with the declaration, "Next year in Jerusalem!?" You can ignore it, but you can't get away from it.

BOOK OF THE END OF THE WORLD

You can't ignore it if you are serious about being a disciple of Yeshua. All of His teachings are about eschatology. His good-news message proclaimed, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." His warnings, admonitions, wise sayings, invitations, and parables all orbit around that message. It's pretty much all He ever really talked about. By today's patronizing standards of self-sophistication, Yeshua would be dismissed as an end-times nut.

The end-times focus doesn't stop with the teachings of Yeshua. The apostles were just as obsessed with the coming kingdom and the end of days as He was. The whole New Testament is transfixed on the subject all the way to the grand apocalyptic crescendo commonly called the book of Revelation. Even the central event of the New Testament—the resurrection of Yeshua—is understood as a token and first fulfillment of Jewish eschatology. By today's patronizing standards, the New Testament would be dismissed as end-times sensationalism.

ESCHATOLOGY DRIVES DISCIPLESHIP

To call ourselves disciples of Yeshua and students of the New Testament while ignoring that eschatology is like calling yourself a mathematician without bothering to learn algebra. (Too many variables in those equations! Am I right?) It's not good discipleship.

Dr. John Harrigan, a scholar in New Testament and apocalyptic Jewish literature, insists, "Eschatology drives discipleship." That's because a clear goal dictates daily decisions. For example, if at the age of eighteen, you have a clear goal of becoming a millionaire by the age of fifty, you can do it, but it will require a definite plan of action, wise career choices, self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and patient endurance. The reward of the end goal will influence every financial decision you make. On the other hand, if you have no goals for the future, you might as well live and let live. Whatever happens will assuredly happen. As the Apostle Paul put it, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

Likewise, when setting out on a journey, it's important to know the destination. If you don't know where you are going, what direction will you take to get there? A traveler with no definite destination is called a wanderer. Without a strong grasp of eschatology, we spiritually wander like sheep without a shepherd—like a ship without a pilot, "tossed here

and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

Not only does eschatology drive discipleship, but discipleship also impacts eschatology. A Jewish approach to eschatology is not at all content to simply wait for God to bring the final redemption. The Jewish approach to eschatology engages with the end of days by constantly imploring God to send the Messiah and bring the redemption. It demands disconnection from this present world as we long for the final redemption and the restoration of all things. It's a life of prayer and petition, "Send the Messiah now!" Moreover, a Jewish approach to the end times has practical implications for how we live today. It seeks to speed the coming of the Messiah with "holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God" (2 Peter 3:11–12). Every righteous act and good deed contributes toward that outcome while storing up treasure for the day when "salvation comes; behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him" (Isaiah 62:11).

To put it simply, if we don't learn Jewish eschatology, we absolutely misunderstand Yeshua, the apostles, and the entire New Testament. We lose the motivating principle behind discipleship. You might say that we miss the whole point.

END TIMES CONFUSION

There's an enormous amount of confusion regarding the end times. For most

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New Testament readers, Yeshua’s statements about the future seem vague and shadowy. The words of the apostles lend themselves to more than one interpretation. The book of Revelation doesn’t exactly clear things up, either. That text enters the New Testament drenched in the symbolic and intentionally cryptic language of Jewish apocalypse. It marshals a staggering number of sometimes subtle and sometimes overt allusions to biblical prophecy that assume a high level of biblical literacy. It also assumes that its readers are first-century disciples living under the boot of Roman persecution—not twenty-first-century Christians trying to predict the rapture. To understand the book, we need some familiarity with the first-century historical context, the words of the biblical prophets, the genre of apocalyptic literature, and the general, broad strokes of Jewish eschatology. Without those prerequisites, we will find the text extraordinarily difficult to decipher. No wonder the end times are such a mess.

Here’s another reason why they are such a mess. The New Testament was written by Jews already conversant with the broad strokes and big ideas of apocalyptic Jewish eschatology. They were so familiar with those ideas, terms, and expectations that it never occurred to them to explain them to their readers. They rarely offered anything resembling basic definitions for their jargon. Terms like kingdom of heaven, great trumpet, last trumpet, last day, day of the LORD, judgment seat, books of judgment, book of life, justification, restoration, the perfect, table of Abraham, Abraham’s bosom, Gehenna, second death, this age, age to come, this present world, World to Come, antichrist, abomination of desolation, ingathering of the elect, and even the title Messiah get bandied about without clear definitions. The writers of the New Testament assumed that their readers already understood all of those terms and much more. Without that library of broader knowledge, readers of the New Testament are left trying to surmise the meanings. We end up supplying our own definitions, resulting in endless varieties of dogmatic speculation.

Another problem with understanding New Testament eschatology has to do with the common assumptions of replacement theology in the church. Replacement theology is the theological assumption that the New Testament replaces the Old, grace replaces the Torah, Christianity replaces Judaism, and Christians replace Jews as the people of God. It's a theological matrix that filters all church teachings, including eschatology. For example, replacement theology assumes discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

reinterpretations undermine the structural integrity of the Bible.

The Torah is the plumbline of the prophets. All the biblical prophecies are built on and expand on the promises and predictions spelled out in the Torah. The prophets are the foundation of New Testament eschatology. The predictions and prophecies spoken by Yeshua and the apostles merely repeat and expand on the words of the prophets. If we assume that the Torah has been canceled and the Jewish people are no longer the

If we assume that the Torah has been canceled and the Jewish people are no longer the chosen nation at the center of God's concern, a correct interpretation of apostolic eschatology becomes impossible.

It assumes that Jesus has canceled and fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. Under the weight of those assumptions, the Christian reader believes that the Law and the Prophets have little to contribute toward a conversation about the second coming of Jesus. Prophecies about Israel are interpreted spiritually to apply to the church. Prophecies about the kingdom are interpreted spiritually to apply to the church. Prophecies about the reward of the Messianic Era or the World to Come are spiritually applied to heaven. All of these assumptions and

chosen nation at the center of God's concern, a correct interpretation of apostolic eschatology becomes impossible.

Yet, many New Testament readers turn to the book of Revelation to find out what's going to happen in the future. There's nothing wrong with that, so long as you have also read the rest of the book. Imagine reading the final chapter of an enormous novel before reading the rest of the book. Sure, you can read the end of the story, but you won't understand it outside of the context of the rest of the book. You won't know who the characters are, what they are trying

to accomplish, what obstacles they face, who the villains are, or what their victories mean. That's why we are going to start our study of the end times at the beginning of the book.

THE END OF DAYS IS JUST THE BEGINNING

Torah Club's *End of Days* offers a solution to these problems by supplying the student with the missing information. Here's how we do it. Rather than skipping to the book of Revelation and trying to decipher it by guessing at the meaning or comparing it with current geopolitics, we are going to start at the beginning of days—the beginning of the Torah—and work our way forward to build a robust and well-rounded understanding of Jewish eschatology. We will do this over the course of a year of study modeled after the synagogue's weekly Torah reading cycle. With some initial reference to the weekly Torah portions, each week's lesson will explore one or two of the big concepts of Jewish eschatology that informed the apostolic worldview. Each lesson will present those concepts like episodes in an unfolding story. They will naturally assemble into a loose narrative that takes us through the end of days and ultimately into the New Jerusalem of the World to Come.

Piece by piece, we will rebuild the eschatological expectations of the first-century Jewish writers of the New Testament. We will assemble those concepts from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings (what the church

calls the Old Testament), and we will gather them from apocalyptic Jewish literature like *The Book of Enoch* (what the church calls apocryphal writings). In addition to all of this, we will collect important pieces of eschatology transmitted through Jewish sources like the Talmud, the Midrash, the Targums, and the Jewish sages (what the church calls rabbinics). At the same time, we will bring to the table the New Testament (including the book of Revelation) to help fill out the picture. We will assemble all these pieces of the puzzle into something resembling a coherent picture of the end of days. Once we have accomplished all of this, then we will turn to the book of Revelation and let it explain itself. Having mastered all the big concepts of Jewish eschatology, we will be ready to understand not just the book of Revelation but the whole New Testament and the broad sweep of history.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE TORAH CYCLE

Torah Club: End of Days can be considered a sequel to our commentary titled *The Beginning of Wisdom*, but it's not necessary to have completed the latter before beginning *End of Days*. The relationship between the two commentaries is a natural result of their respective themes. *The Beginning of Wisdom* is about obtaining the fear of the LORD—the conviction that God punishes sin and rewards righteousness. The fear of the LORD requires maintaining a clear view of a future reckoning on the Day

of the LORD. *End of Days* spells out the details of that day of reckoning and describes the punishment for sin and the reward of the righteous.

For the first thirty-three lessons (corresponding to the first three books of the Torah cycle), the weekly study materials will introduce concepts in Jewish eschatology. For the remainder of the year (corresponding to the last two books of the cycle), lessons will offer discussion and commentary on the book of Revelation—*The Apocalypse of John*. Each week’s lesson comes with study questions and group discussion questions. The accompanying *Portion Connections* video focuses on insights from the weekly Torah portions and practical applications of lessons learned around the theme of “eschatology drives discipleship.”

End of Days is not a commentary on the Torah. We simply use the Torah’s weekly reading cycle as an organizing principle, like scaffolding, to keep us moving through the material. We will make some ancillary connections to each Torah portion. For example, the story of Noah’s flood in the book of Genesis gives us a good opportunity to discuss how “the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah” (Matthew 24:37), and the story of the redemption from Egypt in the book of Exodus lays the groundwork for the tale of the final redemption. But our main focus will be on the concepts of Jewish eschatology and the book of Revelation, not the weekly Torah portion.

TALE OF THE END OF DAYS

Throughout the study, we will see how those concepts of Jewish eschatology can be strung together to construct something like an order of events. However, we will also discover that a fixed sequence and strict order of events are not necessary and might even hamper our efforts. Unlike the big charts, rigid timelines, and dogmatism of Bible prophecy teachers, Jewish eschatology is ever flexible, dependent on various contingencies, changing course over time like a river shifting its bed, and sometimes self-contradictory. Jewish eschatology is more like an author’s rough outline for the plot of a novel he intends to write than a completed manuscript. As such, it can adapt to world changes and the flow of history.

Think of it like a drama production still under development. The stage remains the same while the scenery and props get replaced between acts; the director has the liberty to rearrange the sequence of the scenes. The roles of the principal villains and heroes persist, but the actors playing those roles change with the generations. That’s why it’s necessary to get a broad view of Jewish eschatology before focusing on any one particular result.

PUTTING TOGETHER THE PUZZLE

To assist us along the way, we will be relying on the writings of nineteenth-century Messianic Jewish luminary Rabbi Yechiel Tzvi Lichtenstein (Even Tzohar,

Our study in *End of Days* focuses on that message of hope and optimism about a better future for this world and for all human beings.

1880–1915). His Hebrew *Commentary on the New Testament* provides valuable insights into Jewish eschatology and its application in the writings of the apostles. As a scholar with an unusually broad scope, he is adept at recognizing potential fulfillments of biblical prophecy that would escape the average reader. And he keeps the focus on Israel.

At the center of Jewish eschatology is God's relationship with His people Israel and the land of Israel. These are the biggest pieces of the puzzle. If we don't get these two pieces right, we can forget about ever putting the rest of it together correctly. That doesn't mean that the rest of the nations are excluded. Gentile disciples occupy a prominent role in the big picture—especially in the end of days. But it's important not to force puzzle pieces to fit where they don't belong.

As the puzzle comes together, we will discover that the message of the end of days truly is a message of good news and hope. Jewish eschatology looks past the turmoil that marks the end of the age in anticipation of the bright light of the coming Messianic Era and the ultimate perfection of the World to Come. The coming of the Messiah is not the

end of the story. It's the beginning of a whole new chapter of human history.

Our study in *End of Days* focuses on that message of hope and optimism about a better future for this world and all human beings. We discover that the resurrection of Yeshua is merely the beginning of a process that culminates in the redemption of Israel, the resurrection of the righteous, and the resurrection of the whole world. We spend a lot of time learning about the Messianic Era—the so-called Millennium—when the Torah goes forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. We discuss the administration of the Messiah's global government and what it means to reign with Him. We look into what it might be like to be a resurrected being or to have a neighbor who is one and what it will be like to enter the reward of the righteous. It turns out that the end of the world is just the beginning.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

If we want to understand Yeshua, the New Testament, and the destination toward which time carries us, it's necessary to study the end of days. Unfortunately, the Jewish view of the

end times does not accord well with most traditional interpretations from the church. If you are content with what you have already learned from pulpits and end-times teachers about the second coming, this Bible study is not for you. The things we learn will probably contradict the things you have previously been taught. This study is not likely to square well with theories about a pre-trib rapture, a mid-trib rapture, or a post-trib rapture. It's not going to sound like any end-times teachings you might have already absorbed, "and no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough'" (Luke 5:39).

On the other hand, if you are a genuine seeker, and the end-times teachings you have previously heard have left you with unsatisfactory answers and unresolved questions, jump on board for a year of Torah Club, unlike any Bible study you have done before. This is a completely different approach to the end of days, the book of Revelation, and the New Testament itself. If that sounds exciting, and you can approach the material with an open mind, this Bible study is for you.

Maranatha!

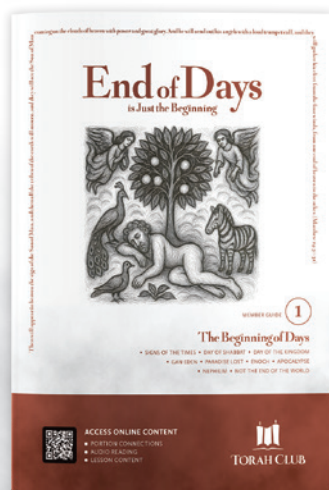
Begin at the Beginning

Free Download: *End of Days* Lesson One

End of Days opens with the statement, "If there is a beginning, there must be an end," and begins tracing the arc from creation to culmination—setting the tone for a year of thoughtful, hope-filled study. Preview the first lesson and acquaint yourself with the approach and voice of Torah Club. This learning journey is shaped by purpose and grounded in the conviction that all of this is going somewhere—and the best is yet to come.



**FREE CONTENT &
MORE INFORMATION**
endofdays.org





The Jewish Version of the Rapture

A Messianic Jewish perspective on the rapture reveals how familiar ideas gain new depth when viewed through the prophetic worldview of early Jewish thought and expectation. It offers a glimpse into the insight and approach that shape the *End of Days* study.

I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left. (Luke 17:34–35)

Many devout Christians look forward to an aspect of the messianic advent popularly called “the rapture.” They believe that before Jesus returns, he will make a brief visit to earth to snatch away true Christians, instantaneously transporting them to heaven. At the time of their rapture, believers will undergo a transformation, shedding their mortal state to put on the immortal state of the righteous resurrected. They will not, however, precede

the dead in Christ. The dead among the followers of Christ will be revived first, resurrected into immortal bodies and simultaneously transported into the air to meet Christ. The Christians who remain alive until his arrival will follow closely behind. With all these ascending hosts in tow, Christ will return to heaven.

In popular depictions of the event, unmanned cars careen off the road. Those left behind are baffled at the disappearance of thousands of people. Jesus, the “thief in the night,” pulls the greatest heist in history, stealing away a significant portion of the earth’s population.

In some versions of the theory, the raptured and resurrected remain in heaven forever afterward. In “pre-tribulation”

eschatological systems, they remain in heaven for seven years to wait out the seven-year “great tribulation” that is to precede the second (or third) coming of Christ. While they wait in heaven, God pours out his judgment upon the human beings who remain on the earth. Unfortunately, Jewish people who did not become Christians prior to the rapture are left to contend with the tribulation and the antics of the antichrist. At the conclusion of the seven-year tribulation, the raptured and resurrected return with Christ to the earth and fight the battle of Armageddon. This version of the rapture theory supposes a second coming of Christ followed shortly by a third coming.

The teachers who talk about a coming rapture disagree on the specific details. Those who call themselves “pre-tribulation” more or less endorse the above-described scenario, but the equally vocal “post-tribulation” camp believes that the rapture will not happen until after the seven years of tribulation. Some suggest other versions, including a compromise “mid-tribulation” theory. In any case, all these camps believe there will undoubtedly be a rapture.

RAPIEMU

Whence comes this idea? Only a narrow band of Christianity believes in the rapture—mostly dispensationalist Evangelicals. The notion of Christians being whisked away at the coming of Christ is foreign to most of traditional Christianity. Those who eschew the idea

of the rapture are quick to point out that the rapture is mentioned neither in the book of Revelation nor in any other place in the Bible. They say, “The rapture is not in the Bible.” That’s not quite accurate. The word *rapture* derives from the Latin *rapiemu*, meaning “carried off” or “caught up.” It appeared in the fifth-century Latin Vulgate translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17:

The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up (*rapiemu*) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18)

Dispensationalists often cite other texts to prove the coming rapture of the saints: 1 Corinthians 15:51–52, Philippians 3:20–21, and Matthew 24:40–41. On closer examination, however, none of these passages supports the idea of a heavenly air-lift evacuation from the planet.

WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED

First-century Jewish eschatology held that the dead will be raised when the Messiah comes. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians confirm that expectation with a clear view of the resurrection. The “dead in Christ” will rise at the sound of the trumpet of the Messiah. Those

believers who remain alive waiting on Christ's coming will undergo a parallel transformation into imperishable bodies. But Paul failed to mention the rapture. He did not say anything about anyone being caught up into the air:

Behold! I tell you a mystery.
We shall not all sleep, but we shall 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 shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

CITIZENSHIP IN HEAVEN

A second Pauline text dispensationalists employ to support the rapture theory appears in Philippians 3. It confirms the conviction that the coming of the Messiah will initiate a transformation from the mortal state to the immortal state, but it says nothing about anyone being raptured to heaven:

Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)

The statement "our citizenship is in heaven" does not refer literally to going to heaven any more than Paul's Roman citizenship required him literally to go to Rome. (It didn't.) Instead, heaven is the seat of authority issuing the credentials

of citizenship just as Rome extended its citizenship across its entire empire.

LEFT BEHIND

A third text rapture teachers often cite inspired Christian songwriter Larry Norman's 1969 hit "I Wish We'd All Been Ready," the 1972 movie *Thief in the Night*, and the popular 1990s *Left Behind* books and motion pictures. On the strength of so much Christian media, the interpretation of this text has become ensconced in Evangelical Christian culture:

Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. (Matthew 24:40-41)

These words are interpreted to mean that when Jesus comes to rapture the saints, the one left working in the field will be left behind because he is not a Christian. The one left grinding at the mill will be left behind for the same reason. However, the full context of this passage, especially when compared with its parallel in Luke 17, points to a completely different interpretation.

When Yeshua returns, he will come to usher in a day of judgment. He likened that day of judgment to Noah's flood (Matthew 24:37-39). While Noah was busy building the ark, the people of his generation carried on with the routine affairs of life. Yeshua told his disciples that, just as in Noah's day, the generation of the Day of the LORD will ignore the warnings leading up to the big event.

When catastrophe strikes the earth, life will be going on as usual. Just as the flood came and took people away in judgment, the “taking away” in Matthew 24:40–41 refers to people being taken in judgment.

If this meaning is unclear in Matthew 24, Yeshua made it explicitly clear in a parallel passage in Luke 17 in which those “taken away” correspond to those who drowned in Noah’s flood (Luke 17:27), to those who perished under the fire and sulfur in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:29), and to Lot’s wife, who turned into a pillar of salt (Luke 17:32).

Wherever it is that those who are “taken” go, we don’t want to go there. Yeshua’s disciples inquired, “Where [will they be taken], Lord?” (Luke 17:37). He replied, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” Better to be “left behind” than to become food for vultures. The corpses of those “taken away” will be food for the birds, much as those who perished in the flood became food for the carrion-eating birds, like the raven that Noah released from the ark. When Messiah comes, the wicked will be slain and left as food for birds, too (Ezekiel 39:17–19).

This macabre prophecy is echoed in Revelation 19:17–18, which speaks of the birds assembling “for the great supper of God” so that they can feast on the corpses of those Messiah will defeat at the time of his appearing. “All the birds were gorged with their flesh” (Revelation 19:21). Those “left behind” will be the righteous

who survive the Day of the LORD. They can be compared to Noah and his seven family members who survived the flood. As Peter said, “The Lord knows how to rescue the godly” (2 Peter 2:9).

THE RAPTURE IN THE TORAH

Having examined the prooftexts used to support the rapture theory, we can see that the premise—believers being caught up in the air with Jesus—hangs upon only one Pauline text: 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18. Just one passage constitutes thin evidence for an idea that so radically alters the established expectations of Jewish eschatology.

The apostles were not innovators. One rarely, if ever, finds ideas in the New Testament that exist wholly outside conventional Jewish thought. When Yeshua or the apostles taught a concept contrary to conventional first-century Jewish norms (such as the controversial concepts of healing on the Sabbath or the inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom), they supported the innovation with lots of argumentation and ample testimony from the Torah and the Hebrew Scriptures. More often, the apostolic writers simply endorsed the existing Jewish worldview, speaking with the same symbolic language and eschatological expectations of their contemporaries with little to no contradistinction.

How is it possible that Paul would introduce something so novel and significant as the rapture when Moses, the prophets, and Yeshua himself had not

mentioned it? Could the Master have passed over something of such incredible magnitude without so much as a single “as it is written”?

Critics of the rapture theory gladly point this out, and they are fond of reminding everyone that the rapture has enjoyed consideration only for about the last century or so. It first found traction in the teachings of the dispensationalist John Nelson Darby, who taught near the end of the nineteenth century. In the 1970s and 1980s, Hal Lindsey’s end-times bestsellers rocketed belief in the rapture into the American Evangelical consciousness with titles like *The Late Great Planet Earth*, *The Rapture*, and *Vanished into Thin Air*. Combined with its portrayal in popular Christian media, the rapture became a standard expectation of Evangelical eschatology. As a result, it has had a considerable influence on Messianic Jewish eschatology. Can this expectation be reconciled with a traditional Jewish perspective? Is there really a coming rapture?

MESSIAH AND THE INGATHERING

Near the end of Deuteronomy, the Torah delivers a terrifying litany of curses that culminate in the destruction of the nation and the exile of the Jewish people. Moses declared, “The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other” (Deuteronomy 28:64). God promised to regather his scattered people from that exile:

If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. (Deuteronomy 30:4)

In the first century, Jews expected the Messiah to be the agent of that ingathering. For example, *Targum Pseudo-Yonatan* (an early Aramaic paraphrase of the Torah for synagogue use) projects the ingathering as a component of the coming of Messiah:

Though you may be dispersed unto the ends of the heavens, from there will the Word of the Lord gather you together by the hand of Elijah the great priest, and from there will He bring you by the hand of King Messiah. (*Targum Pseudo-Yonatan* on Deuteronomy 30:4)

Ever since the days of the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Roman exiles, the people of Israel—the Jewish people—have remained scattered around the globe. Moses and the prophets promised that one day God would collect his elect and chosen people from the four corners of the earth and bring them back to their ancient homeland.

Jewish liturgy petitions God for the ingathering of the exiles three times every day:

Blast the great shofar [“trumpet”] for our freedom. Lift a banner to gather our exiles, and quickly gather us together from the four corners of the earth to our land. Blessed are You, O LORD, who

gathers the outcasts of his people
Israel. (*Shmoneh Esreh* 10)

The Talmud says, “The day of the ingathering of the exiles is as important as the day when heaven and earth were created.” The prophets all testify regarding this great return to the land. For example, the LORD said through Isaiah that he would “assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isaiah 11:12). He declared through Jeremiah, “I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold” (Jeremiah 23:3). Through the Prophet Ezekiel, the LORD said, “I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel” (Ezekiel 11:17).

THE GREAT TRUMPET BLAST

Isaiah connected the ingathering of the exiles and their return to the land of Israel with the sounding of a trumpet:

In that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem. (Isaiah 27:13)

Ezekiel connected the ingathering of the exiles with the coming of the Messiah in a passage that speaks of God returning the Jewish people to their land and appointing a Davidic king over the nation.

Notice how the prophet used the name “David” as a title for Messiah:

Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land ... And one king shall be king over them all ... My servant David shall be king over them.
(Ezekiel 37:21–24)

Based on these and many other similar prophecies, Jewish eschatology firmly links the ingathering of the exiles with the trumpet of Messiah, the coming of Messiah, and the final redemption. The Messiah will gather up all the scattered children of Israel from the four corners of the earth and return them to the promised land. Yeshua invoked all these messianic expectations and directly alluded to the above prophecies when he said that the Son of Man would “send forth His angels with a great trumpet blast, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (Matthew 24:31 NASB). His “elect” are not “the Christians,” as replacement theology assumes, but the chosen people: the people of Israel.

THE RESURRECTION AND THE INGATHERING

Ezekiel also linked the ingathering with the resurrection of the dead. At the conclusion of Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of the dry bones, the LORD explained to the exiles of Israel, “I will open your graves and raise you from [the nations],

O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel” (Ezekiel 37:12). That’s why Jewish eschatology associates the sound of the great trumpet that will herald the ingathering of Israel and the coming of Messiah with the resurrection of the dead. The trumpet of Messiah will summon the exiles and wake the dead. All these traditional elements of Jewish expectation connect perfectly to Paul’s words in both 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51–52. In other words, the so-called rapture, the resurrection, the ingathering of Israel, the coming of the Messiah, and the trumpet of the LORD are all aspects of the same event: the Day of the LORD.

Paul looked forward to the day when the Messiah would return to gather his elect from the four corners of the earth. When he spoke of that day in his epistles, he did not feel it necessary to provide proof texts. The ingathering of the exiles was a well-established point of Jewish doctrine so often repeated in the Torah and the Prophets that proof texts were unnecessary. When Paul mentioned those events, he assumed his readers would know he was speaking of the ingathering. His readers probably did, but Gentile Christians living eighteen hundred years later did not. Their expositors were left trying to fill in the blanks. They assumed that Paul was speaking about Christians taken to heaven by Christ. Instead, Paul was speaking about Jews being taken to Jerusalem by Messiah.

Paul narrowed the full scope of the ingathering event to Messianic Jews

when he said that those “in Christ” are the ones to be raised and caught up. Did Paul intend to exclude non-Yeshua-believing Jews? He remained silent about their participation in the messianic ingathering.

What about the Gentile disciples from the nations? Are they to be “left behind” when the Messiah comes to gather in the exiles of Israel? Not according to Paul. The redeemed in Messiah are privileged as fellow heirs with Israel; as such, they will share in her great exodus. They will be gathered with Israel into the kingdom:

The Sovereign LORD declares—
he who gathers the exiles of Israel:
“I will gather still others to them
besides those already gathered.”
(Isaiah 56:8 NIV)

In that day they “will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11).

CARRIED ON THE CLOUDS

Rapture teachers explain that Christians will be raptured to heaven. Those who anticipate beaming directly to heavenly Paradise should revise their trip itinerary. According to the prophets, the destination of the ones raptured is not heaven; it is the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Moses said, “The LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed” (Deuteronomy 30:5). The LORD declared, “I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they

have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land” (Ezekiel 37:21).

The preeminent Torah commentator Rashi lent weight to the idea of a “catching away” when he spoke of God picking up each exile in his hands at the time of the ingathering:

Great is the day of the ingathering of the exiles, and it will come about with much difficulty, as if God himself will be obliged to take hold of each person with his hands, each one from his place, like the matter which is spoken of [in Isaiah], “and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel. It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were ... scattered ... will come.” (Rashi

on Deuteronomy 30:3, quoting Isaiah 27:12–13)

Isaiah asked, “Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to their windows?” (Isaiah 60:8). The rabbi explained the phrase “fly like a cloud” to mean that the exiles will be transported on the clouds to the land of Israel: “The clouds will carry them to Jerusalem” (*Yalkut Shimoni*). This seems to fit well with Paul’s assertion that “we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). In that case, disciples of Yeshua can anticipate being transported along with the exiles of Israel to the holy city of Jerusalem for a grand celebration. We will all be carried up to Jerusalem for the great coronation of the King, and so, as Paul said, “we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

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- Can anything we do hasten His return?
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- Who, if anyone, gets left behind?
- Who will be on earth after the Messiah comes?
- What is the antichrist?
- What is the Great Tribulation—and who will go through it?
- Why did the apostles believe the end had already begun?
- What role does Israel play in the end of days?
- Who are the 144,000 in the book of Revelation—and where is the church?
- Who is the Beast, and what is the meaning of his number and his mark?
- What's the difference between going to heaven and being resurrected from the dead?
- Is Armageddon the same as the War of Gog and Magog?
- Why is there no Temple in the New Jerusalem?
- What's the difference between the kingdom and the World to Come?
- Is New Jerusalem the same as heaven?
- What did Yeshua really mean when He said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand"?
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- What does it mean to "reign with the Messiah" in the age to come?
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