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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

NINE COMMON RAPTURE MYTHS

BY GARY HEDRICK

Largely because of the popularity of Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* series, the term "Rapture" has entered the mainstream American English vocabulary. It's not unusual these days to hear a passing reference to a "rapture" event on a secular network, even if it's in a spirit of mockery or amusement.¹



I never met Dr. LaHaye personally, but did have an opportunity to spend some time with his colleague and co-writer Jerry Jenkins back in the early 2000s. We had been introduced by our mutual friend Sammy Tippit, a Baptist evangelist. We asked Jerry about a few *Left Behind* themes that some of us considered a bit far-fetched.² He was very kind and assured us that *Left Behind* was never meant to reflect a literal future reality in every detail. He and Dr. LaHaye had relied on their fertile imaginations to fill in gaps where the biblical data was scarce.

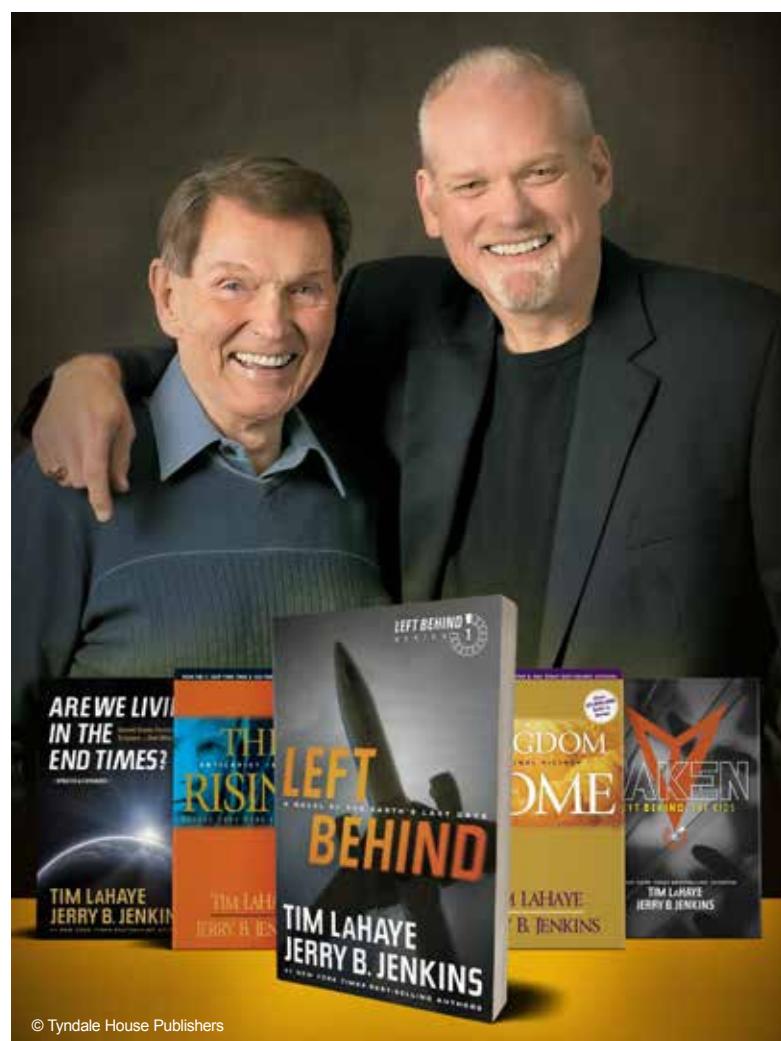
The finished product was offered as a *fictionalized* account of a possible scenario based loosely on the Bible's eschatological framework. They wanted to encourage believers to delve into the Scriptures for themselves, so they could come face-to-face with the literal reality of the Lord's return and consider its many possibilities.

¹ An episode in season 16 of *The Simpsons* ("Thank God, It's Doomsday") lampoons the Rapture by showing Homer miscalculating the date—and then he ascends alone, leaving everyone else behind. Also, HBO's *The Leftovers* is about a Rapture-like event and its aftermath. There are many such examples from contemporary culture.

² One questionable assumption in *Left Behind: Rise of the Antichrist* is where Pastor Bruce Barnes suggests that Christians can ask God to exempt them from being "caught up" in the pre-Trib Rapture. This would enable them to remain behind and conduct a ministry on earth during the Tribulation. It's a noble notion but lacks any biblical support whatsoever. It is an intriguing idea, certainly, but again, purely speculative.

Testing & Timing

According to our pre-Trib approach, the Tribulation is the seven-year period between the Rapture and, seven years later, the Coming in Glory. It's called a "tribulation" because it's when God will pour out His wrath and righteous judgment on the rebellious earth-dwellers—especially during the final three and a half years. However, the Church will already have been removed and taken to Heaven. We will be "caught up" at the end of the Church Age (that is, the span of time from Pentecost to the Rapture) to meet the Lord "in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). From there, He leads the way back to Heaven, where we will be judged for rewards³ and finally united with our Bridegroom, Messiah Jesus.⁴ Seven years later, we return with the Lord to the earth as His heavenly army to put down the Armageddon rebellion (Jude 14-15; Rev. 19:11-14).



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³ This will be the Judgment Seat of Messiah, or *Bema* (2 Cor. 5:10).

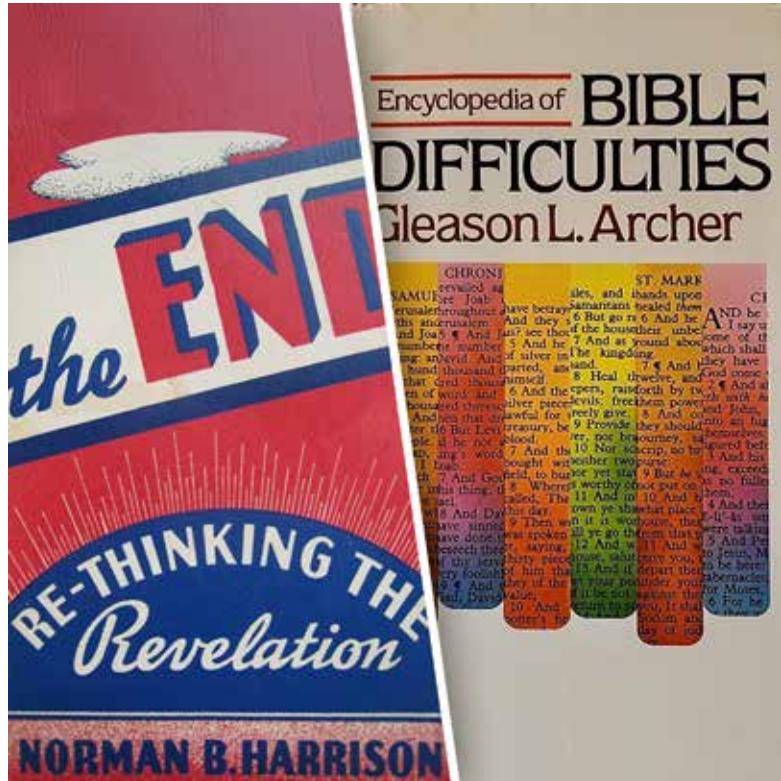
⁴ I.e., the Marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-9; Eph. 5:25-27).

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Regarding the timing of the Rapture, there are three major views. First, dispensational premillennialists embrace pre-tribulationism, which says the Rapture will happen *before* the start of the Tribulation. A second view is mid-tribulationism, proposed by interpreters like Norman Harrison and Gleason Archer, placing the Rapture at the mid-point (three and a half years) of the Tribulation, after the Anti-christ is revealed (Rev. 14). And the third view is post-tribulationism, common among evangelicals, particularly amillennialists, who say the Rapture and the Coming in Glory both happen in rapid succession at the *close* of the Tribulation. Post-tribbers, then, say that believers will experience the full seven years of God's righteous anger and judgment.

A fourth and lesser-known view is the late Marvin Rosenthal's "pre-wrath" proposal, a middle-of-the-road approach with similarities to mid-tribulationism. Marv was a respected prophetic teacher who said that the Church may experience part of the Tribulation—that is, the first half or up to the great outpouring of God's "wrath" in Revelation 16:1-21. However, she will be removed in the Rapture near the end of the seven years, before the advent of the great and terrible "Day of the LORD" that follows.⁵

Unfortunately, the Bible nowhere gives us a complete, beginning-to-end rundown of the end-time events in chronological order. Our dispensational charts and diagrams, as polished and ingenious as we may think they are, consist of elements drawn from many individual Bible passages. It's like putting together a jigsaw puzzle consisting of hundreds of pieces. So, we put the pieces together in the way that we think makes the best sense. That's why we should be charitable toward faithful brethren who put the prophetic puzzle together a bit differently: *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself* (Phil. 2:3).

⁵ In rabbinic parlance, the "Day of the LORD" is referred to as the "Day of Adonai" or the "Day of HaShem." This reflects their reluctance to use God's holy name (YHVH; יהוה) and risk mispronouncing it. Instead, they substitute *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי; "Lord") or *HaShem* (הָשֵׁם; lit., "the Name") for YHVH or Yahweh.

Dispelling Some of the Myths

The Rapture will be one of the most monumental events in the history of the world. No one will be untouched by it. Here's a summary from a pre-Trib perspective of nine common misconceptions about this momentous and epic event.

Myth #1: The phrase "wrath of God" refers specifically to the last part of the Tribulation.

The Book of Revelation mentions Jesus-believers who will be on earth during the coming Tribulation (7:9–14; 13:7; 14:12–13; 20:4). Some folks insist that this disproves the teaching of a pre-Trib Rapture. But does it really? Does it mean the Church (the *Kehilah*, the Bride of Messiah) will go through the full seven years of the Tribulation?

Our "pre-wrath" friends have come up with an innovative way of sparing the Church from most of the Tribulation Period without embracing a pre-Trib position. One of the foundational assumptions of Rosenthal's theory is that the biblical "Day of the LORD" (Heb., *Yom Yahweh*) refers primarily to the divine "wrath"—that is, the trumpet and bowl judgments of Revelation—that will be poured out on the earth's rebellious inhabitants near the close of the Tribulation. In this way, he claims that the Church, after having gone through much of the Tribulation, will finally be raptured and rescued from God's wrath.

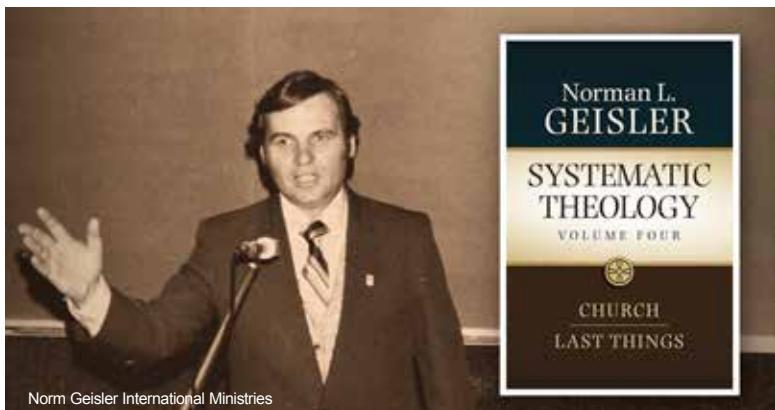
However, this narrow understanding of the "Day of the LORD" is not generally accepted by

Bible scholars. The late, great evangelical theologian Norm Geisler comments on the meaning and scope of the term "Day of the LORD":

"The day of the Lord" and similar terms, as used of end-time events, refer to the Tribulation period (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2) and on through the Millennium (2 Peter 3:10–13). Never once is the Rapture part of this day.

"Day of the Lord" occurs about twenty times in the Old Testament, often of end-time events. A parallel term, "the last days," has fourteen occurrences, always of the end times. "In that day" is used over a hundred times, generally of the same events. *Isaiah* uses all three of the same events (Isa. 1:2, 11–12), but never once does the Old Testament refer to the Rapture. . . .

Further, Paul tells the Thessalonians they will not go through "that day" (2 Thess. 2:3) and it will not overtake them; they will be delivered from it (1 Thess. 5:9) by the Rapture that comes before (4:16–17; cf. 5:1). *The Rapture is before the Tribulation period.*⁶



Norm Geisler International Ministries

⁶ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 622–23.

Charles Ryrie concurs:

But concerning the rapture, there is no Old Testament revelation. This omission from over a hundred passages seems hard to understand if the rapture is the first event of the Day of the Lord, as the post-trib view teaches. But if the rapture is a mystery unrevealed in the Old Testament, and if it precedes the beginning of the Day of the Lord . . . , then it is not strange that Paul had to inform them about the rapture.⁷

Messianic scholar Arnold Fruchtenbaum contributes this concise definition for “The Day of the LORD”:

The Day of the LORD is a broad term referring to a period of history when God actively intervenes to punish the world for its sins, to deliver Israel, and to establish the Messianic Kingdom. It is a period of judgment followed by blessing, always preceded by signs in the heavens.⁸

The assumption that the “Day of the LORD” is restricted in meaning to the outpouring of God’s wrath near the close of the Tribulation is biblically untenable.⁹ This stubborn fact is the downfall of any view that says this Day only occurs near the end of the seven years, but not before or after.

Myth #2: The Bible says the Church will be delivered *through* but not *from* the Tribulation.

Early in the Book of Revelation, God promised to keep the Church from the coming “hour of trial” (i.e., the Tribulation): “*Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth*” (3:10). Post-tribulationists take this to mean that the Lord will protect and preserve His people as they go *through* the seven years of the Tribulation, rather than keeping them entirely *from* those horrific years of divine judgment.¹⁰

To recognize the fallacy here, all that’s needed is some logic and common sense. Note, for instance, the Greek word for “I will *keep*” (Gk., *tereisō*; *τηρήσω*) in Revelation 3:10: “I will keep you from the hour of trial.” In its figurative sense, it means “to fulfill a command.”¹¹ This begs the question: How would the Lord protect us from something that we’re *already* immersed in? That would be like telling a child who’s already covered from head to toe with layers of muck and mire that you will keep him from getting dirty! *Well, he’s already dirty!* Similarly, the only way to be kept *from* an “hour” (v. 10) is not to be found in any part of that hour in the first place.¹²

Keeping us “from the hour of trial,” then, means that the Lord will keep us from entering the hour of trial in the first place. That is, the Church will be delivered *from* entering the Tribulation, rather than being helped *through* it, because the Rapture occurs first.

⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus, What You Need to Know About the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 118-119.

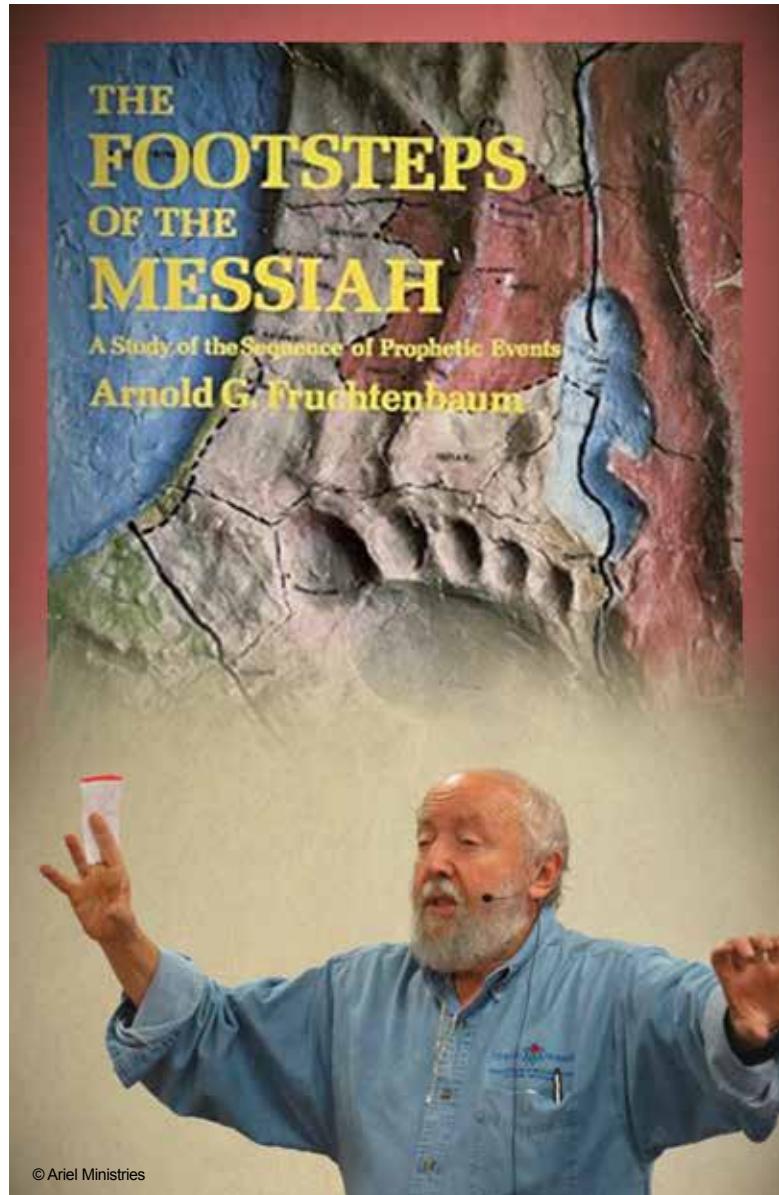
⁸ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 61.

⁹ We recommend the following monograph from Bible.org: “*The Comfort and Challenge Concerning the Day of the Lord*.” It’s full of solid research on the biblical meaning and various contexts of the term “Day of the LORD.”

¹⁰ For a more detailed explanation of the “through” vs. “from” Tribulation issue, see George Eldon Ladd in *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 85-86.

¹¹ This is one of several definitions that fall within the word’s semantic range of meaning according to lexical authorities like *Strong’s* or *Thayer’s* concordances.

¹² Geisler, *Ibid.*, 615.



Myth #3: The Church will be persecuted by the Antichrist during the Tribulation.

This one comes from a misunderstanding of several passages in Revelation where John mentions Jesus-believers being hunted down and persecuted on earth during the coming Tribulation (7:9–14; 13:7; 14:12–13; 20:4). So, how can this be if the Rapture happens before the Tribulation and removes the Church from the evil one's crosshairs? Does the presence of believers on earth during the Tribulation disprove the teaching of a pre-Tribulation Rapture?

The answer is: no, it doesn't. What it does prove, however, is that many Jews and Gentiles will accept Jesus as Messiah and Savior during the Tribulation *after the Church is gone*. Apart from his "pre-wrath" theory (where he mistakenly equates God's "wrath" with the eschatological "Day of the LORD"), Rosenthal makes a helpful distinction between the first and second halves of the Tribulation. He says the first three-and-a-half years are preliminary "birth pangs," or labor pains (Matt. 24:4–8; Rom. 8:22), and the second half is the "Great Tribulation," when all hell breaks loose and the Antichrist is unleashed to wreak havoc on the Tribulation saints.

The Tribulation saints, however, are not the Church. The Church is a more exclusive group consisting of individuals who came to faith from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture (at the beginning of the Tribulation), a time span (so far) of roughly 2,000 years.

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Myth #4: Believers will receive their reward at the end of (not during) the Tribulation.

This may be true of the Tribulation saints (i.e., those who are saved during the Tribulation) but not the Church. We will be in Heaven where we will experience the Bema judgment and be married to the Lamb (that is, Jesus). Paul says, *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad* (2 Cor. 5:10). Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming soon! **My reward is with me**, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12, emphasis added).

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (1 Cor. 3:11–15, NIV 1984 edition).

It is reasonably clear, then, that pre-Trib believers (the Church) will be rewarded in Heaven at the Bema while the Tribulation is happening on the earth.

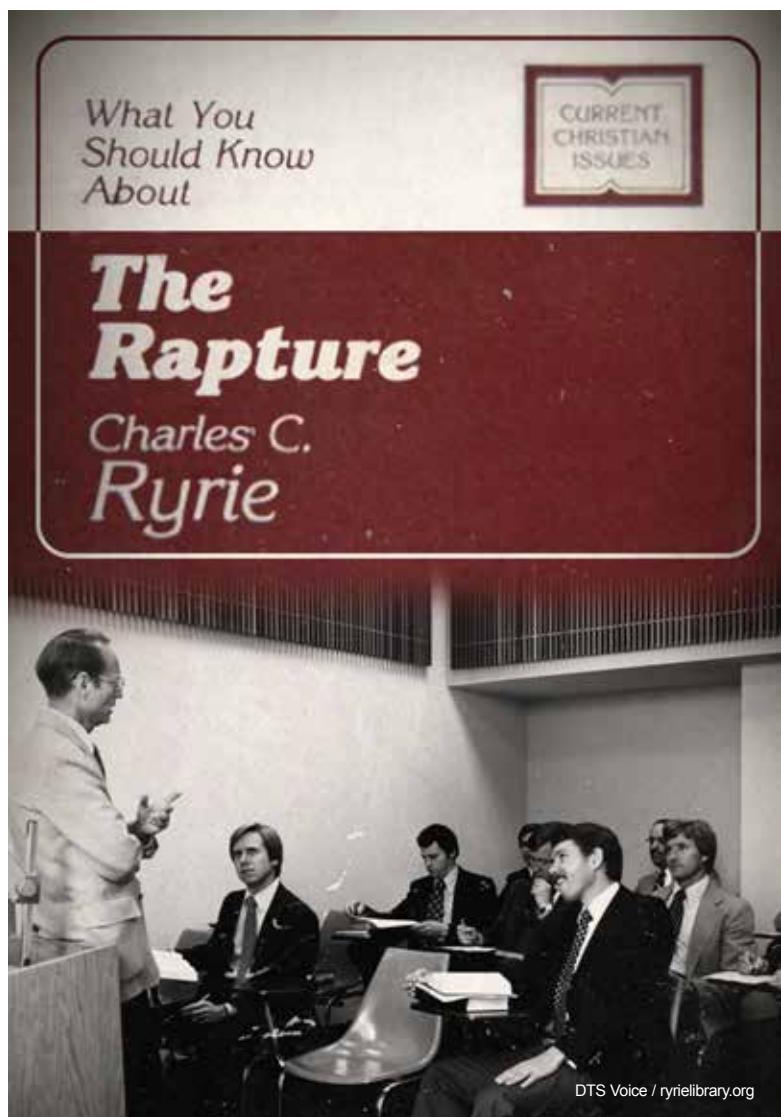
Myth #5: The Rapture is a single-stage phenomenon: All believers will be “caught up” at the end of the Tribulation in one, unified event.

On the contrary, the NT provides strong evidence that the Rapture is a two-stage event. It makes a distinction between the Lord coming first *for* His saints and then His coming seven years later *with* His saints. Jude wrote, “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones (v. 14 NIV; cf. Matt. 24:29-31). He obviously cannot come *with* them until He has first come *for* them.¹³

The late Charles Ryrie of Dallas Seminary lists the following five characteristics of the Lord’s coming in the air for the Church found in 1 Thessalonians 4:

- (1) A return of the Messiah (v. 16).
- (2) A resurrection of dead believers (v. 16).
- (3) A rapture of living believers (v. 17).
- (4) The *reunion* of believers with departed loved ones (v. 17).
- (5) Reassurance or comfort as we look forward to this event (v. 18).

Ryrie concludes: “No such traits are attached to Christ’s return at the Tribulation’s end.”¹⁴



¹³Geisler, *Ibid.*, 618-19.

¹⁴Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 28-31.



Myth #6: The Bible doesn’t mention any “Rapture.”

The term “Rapture” doesn’t appear in our English Bible, but that doesn’t mean the teaching itself isn’t there. After all, words like “Trinity,” “Incarnation,” or “Omniscience” don’t appear in the text, either, but they nonetheless express important biblical truths.¹⁵

The English “rapture” comes from the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, which is a thousand years older than our English versions. The Latin verb *rapio* (“I seize, snatch, or carry off”) appears as *rapiemur* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The past participle form is *raptus*, from which we get the noun *raptura* (“a carrying off or snatching away”). Saying, then, that the term “rapture” doesn’t appear in the Bible is an error.

¹⁵The Latin term in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is *rapiemur*, meaning “we shall be snatched away” or “we shall be seized.” The Vulgate scholars used it to translate the Greek NT’s *harpazo*, meaning “caught up” or “taken away.” These terms carry a sense of something that’s violent, sudden, or disturbingly disruptive. The phrase “in the air” may be a reference to the earth’s upper atmosphere (thermosphere or exosphere, up to an altitude of 700 miles or so), where we will be united with the Lord before returning with Him to Heaven (i.e., the New Jerusalem) for the next seven years.

Myth #7: Passages like Matthew 24:29-30 clearly teach that the Rapture will happen *after* the Tribulation (that is, post-Trib) rather than *before* it (pre-Trib).

The passage in question reads like this:

“Immediately **after** the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and **then** all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:29-30, time markers indicated in bold).

We see, then, that Messiah Jesus will return to Planet Earth *after* the Tribulation and snatch up the surviving Tribulation saints.¹⁶ Most serious Christians—including pre-, mid-, and post-Tribulation readers—agree on this.

However, the NT says He also returns *before* the Tribulation. So, how can it be both before and after? The solution is that we make a distinction between *two phases* of the Rapture—one that happens *before* the Tribulation and another that occurs *after* those seven years have expired.

When He comes the first time, prior to the Tribulation, He comes *for* His saints and meets them “in the air” before taking them with Him back to Heaven (Matt. 24:31; 1 Thess. 4:17). When He returns at the *close* of the Tribulation, they will come with Him and He will commence His earthly reign from the Davidic throne in Jerusalem (Luke 1:32; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).



¹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 indicates, even in a post-Trib scenario, that the saints who will be raptured at the end of the Tribulation will include resurrected Tribulation martyrs: “the dead in Christ [who have been killed during the Great Tribulation] will rise first [and] after that, we who are still alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

Myth #8: The Book of Revelation mentions Jesus-believers who will be on earth during the coming Tribulation (7:9-4; 13:7; 14:12-13; 20:4).

Yes, it does! However, as we saw earlier (in Myth #3), these Tribulation saints won’t be the Church (the *Kehilah*, the Bride of Messiah) because we will be in Heaven (i.e., the New Jerusalem) by this time. Rather, these Tribulation saints fall into one of two categories: (1) They will be a remnant of Jewish believers who come to faith in the Messiah *after* the pre-Trib Rapture of the Church; or (2) They will be Gentiles (*goyim*) who have responded in faith to the Gospel during the Tribulation.

DISPENSATIONAL DISTINCTIONS

“Tribulation Saint” describes someone who becomes a believer in Yeshua during the seven-year Tribulation—that is, after the Rapture of the Church.

“Christian,” in its more precise usage, denotes someone who has trusted in Messiah during the 2,000-year Church Age (see below). True Christians who are alive at the time of the Rapture will be “snatched up” to be with the Lord. Resurrected believers from past ages will join them.

“Church” (Heb., קהילה; *Kehilah*) refers to the Messianic Community (i.e., body of believers in the Jewish Messiah) who are saved during the roughly (so far) 2,000-year period from the Day of Pentecost in the first century to the end-time Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation.

“Israel” is an ethnic term for the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—past, present, and future. They are the primary beneficiaries of the Abrahamic promises, with non-Jewish Jesus-believers being “grafted in” to share in certain aspects of those promises.

Myth #9: No one can be saved during the Tribulation if they heard the Gospel before the Rapture and failed to respond.

Some preachers use this argument as leverage to convince lost people to get saved now, rather than waiting until after the Rapture (perhaps just to see if the prophecies are true). Although they might think it “makes good preaching,” the Bible nowhere says any such thing. If the Holy Spirit is dealing with someone’s heart, it is never too late for this person to be saved.

Note that Messianic groups like the 144,000 Jewish evangelists in Revelation 7 and 14 will be actively witnessing during the Tribulation. The response to their preaching will be overwhelming. However, many of their converts—thousands upon thousands of them—will evidently be martyred (Rev. 6:9-11; 7:9-14; 13:7, 15; 20:4).

John offers this description of the saints who will come out of the Tribulation: *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands* (7:9).

Picture in your mind, if you will, a beautiful bride dressed in an ornate, white wedding gown and veil with a long flowing train streaming behind her as she makes her way down the aisle. It’s a breathtaking scene as she approaches her groom who is standing expectantly at the altar with deep love and devotion in his eyes. Now imagine that an uninvited intruder burst into the ceremony and began attacking the bride, cursing and ripping her white dress and leaving the frightened woman battered and bruised. Do you think the groom would stand idly by while the unwelcome interloper ravaged his bride and wreaked havoc at his wedding?



Yes, it’s a ridiculous notion. A loving and committed bridegroom would never allow something like this to happen—not in a thousand years! He and his groomsmen would instantly swing into action and put a swift end to the threat.

Yet this is essentially what our post-Trib friends are suggesting—that is, that Jesus the Messiah would subject His beloved Bride, the Church, to the horrors of the Tribulation Period, leaving her battered, bruised, and dressed in tattered rags. It is simply inconceivable.¹⁷

¹⁷ Some post-Tribulation believers say that Christians will need to go through the Tribulation to be purified and made ready for Heaven. That is, enduring the trials of the Tribulation will have a purifying effect on the Church. However, this notion betrays an unfortunate ignorance about the issue of practical vs. positional righteousness. God declares us “righteous” (i.e., justified) at the moment of salvation. We gain access to Heaven based on our heavenly *position* in Christ, not because of our earthly *practice*. Sanctification is the Holy Spirit’s work of gradually conforming our daily *practice* to our heavenly *position*—and that’s a lifelong process.

Some of our post-Trib friends point out at this juncture that God can protect and provide for His people even during the time of Tribulation. This is undoubtedly true. There’s a problem, however. The problem is that John tells us that multitudes of Tribulation saints will suffer horribly at the hands of the Antichrist, many even to the point of martyrdom:

It was granted to [the Antichrist] to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. . . .

He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed (Rev. 13:7, 15).

So, according to the post-Trib scenario, the Lord’s precious Bride will be ravaged by the Antichrist during the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. John says that God will give the Antichrist “authority” to “make war with the saints.” But where, pray tell, does the Bible so much as hint that God will ever give the Antichrist authority over the Church? The answer is, nowhere. The very idea is ludicrous. The Lord Himself told His disciples: *“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you”* (Luke 10:19).

For His own inscrutable purposes, the Lord God gives the Antichrist the power to persecute the Tribulation saints. But they aren’t the NT Church.

Satan can tempt, accuse, intimidate, and persecute God’s people, but he has no authority over us. The only control the devil has over us comes from whatever concessions we make to him through our own faithlessness. Our Messiah, not the Antichrist, is the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). All authority in Heaven and on earth resides in Him (Matt. 28:18).

“ We are all looking forward to that glorious Day when Messiah Jesus will snatch us up to be with Him forever. ”

Conclusion

The historic Christian faith rests on the firm foundation of our Lord’s promise to return someday (John 14:3). Although all Christians don’t agree about the timing of these future events, virtually all of us affirm that the Rapture will happen—whether before, during, or after the Tribulation. We are all looking forward to that glorious Day when Messiah Jesus will snatch us up to be with Him forever.

May it be soon!



Dr. Gary Hedrick is president and CEO of CJF Ministries in San Antonio, TX.

Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger

Highlights From Israel

Yossi Ovadia, CJFM representative and pastor of *Kehilat HaDerech* (Congregation of the Way) Messianic Congregation (Karmiel, Israel), is blessed to report some positive news since the war in Gaza and the release of the hostages:

- Celebrating the Passover Seder together with 130 members at the congregation's new building together for the first time in six years.
- Supporting families, individuals and businesses who were traumatized and affected financially.
- Summer camping and hiking trips for young adults and youth groups with local congregations to study the Word and have fellowship together have resumed since their leaders are now back from reserve duty.
- Baptism of two members and more to come.
- Distribution of 75 food baskets to the needy and Holocaust survivors before Passover and Sukkot, respectively. Building a "sukkah" and joyful celebration in the background of the deadly attack on October 7 two years ago during Sukkot.
- A sailing trip to Greece for the young adults group, following the footsteps of Apostle Paul, for spiritual growth, healing of stress and loss, and bonding for the next generation of leaders.

Please join Pastor Yossi in praying for the protection of the 14 congregation members serving in the reserves, for the release of the remains of hostages and that God will use this time to touch peoples hearts and bring salvation.

Silver Sneakers, Teas and Passover

Michelle Beadle, CJFM representative (North Haven, CT), knew that when she moved from New Orleans to Connecticut, it would take time to get acclimated and meet Jewish people who did not know Messiah Jesus as their personal Savior. She prayed and waited for the Lord to open doors for her to meet new people. An opportunity came when a woman, who is also a member of Simchat Yisrael, a Messianic Synagogue, and also has a burden to share the Good News, invited her to attend a monthly tea. Through these ongoing teas, Michelle has met several Jewish women. While attending Silver Sneaker classes, Michelle also met a Jewish woman from Croatia. At another meeting, she met a woman who was a professor of Children's Literature. As Michelle gets to know these women better, please pray for openings to share the Gospel message.

Michelle has been celebrating Passover in her home and inviting guests for many years. Among the guests this year was a member of the Messianic Synagogue her son-in-law leads. During dessert, she said to Michelle, "You know, I don't believe in God." Michelle was shocked, since this woman had been attending the synagogue for ten years. Immediately, Michelle offered to meet with this woman after Shabbat services every week for a study in the book Michelle has written for evangelism and discipleship, *Messiah in Jewish Scripture*. They have been meeting and reading through the book together, and after just three weeks, Michelle gladly reports that this lady has prayed and asked Yeshua to come into her life. Michelle writes, "I cannot tell you how much joy she has brought into my life. It is so encouraging to know God used me once again. She has some medical complications, which I hope you will join me in praying for, but it is a joy to watch her grow spiritually. She now reads her Bible regularly and often prays."

Ministry of Dance

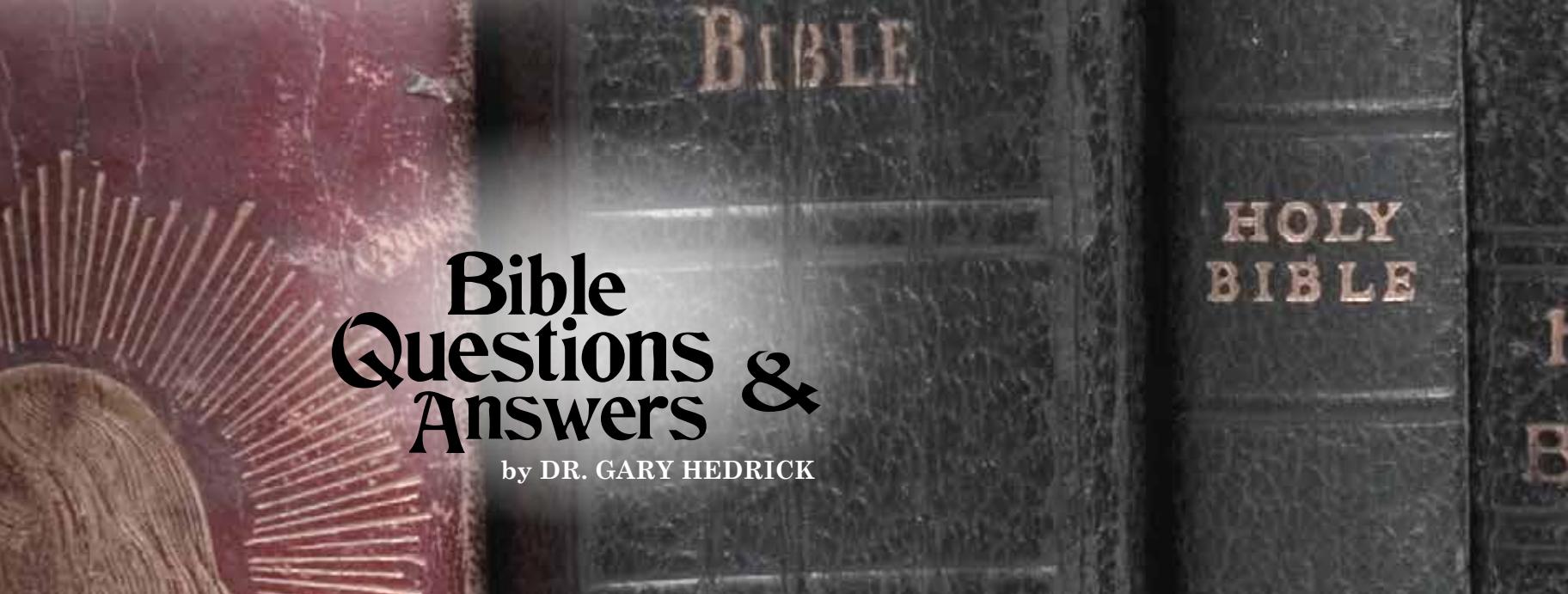
Diann Parkas, CJFM representative (Hopatcong, NJ), has been attending Ariel Ministries Camp Shoshannah every summer for many years as the worship dance leader and workshop director. During their Shabbat services, she has the opportunity to share dances she has choreographed. This year, she choreographed a dance for a group of seven girls in the Youth Program and another for a group of seven women and a young girl. The ministry of dance provides her with numerous opportunities to get to know and encourage other attendees. Diann is also greatly encouraged by Dr. Tim Sigler, CEO of Ariel Ministries, who wrote the following glowing recommendation:

*"I am writing to **HIGHLY RECOMMEND** Diann Parkas as a gifted choreographer, dancer, and worship dance coordinator whose ministry beautifully blends artistic excellence with a heart for Messiah Jesus. Whether leading workshops, clinics, or congregational dance, Diann creates an atmosphere where participants are inspired, equipped, and encouraged to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. . . . Her presence has been like having our own artist in residence, and we look forward to her return each year."*

A video of one of Diann's worship dances can be viewed on her YouTube channel, *WorshipDanceInstitute*, choreographed to a song called "The Truth" by Megan Woods.

Diann is also involved with the Haredi Ministry—individuals from an ultra-Orthodox background who have come to faith in Messiah Jesus and are secret believers. Diann is excited to announce that two Haredi women were baptized this summer. Please pray that God will protect the secret believers and that the remaining seekers will find their way to saving faith.





Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

QUESTION: *How can you consider yourself “Reformed” if you believe God gives grace to the non-elect?*

ANSWER: This is an excellent question because it brings up the controversial topic of prevenient (or common) grace. Reformed believers have been debating this issue for over four hundred years. The term “prevenient” refers, literally, to something that “comes before.” With respect to God’s grace, it relates to the grace (i.e., undeserved favor or mercy) that God uses to woo an individual *before* that individual is saved.

Hard-core five-pointers reject this idea because they believe God’s grace cannot be resisted. If it’s truly irresistible, like they say, it would mean that if God made His grace available to everyone, everyone would be saved. This would be a form of universalism, which is unacceptable. So, some Calvinists allege that prevenient grace is an Arminian notion that’s inconsistent with Reformed doctrine. Their position is that God *only gives grace to the elect* (i.e., His “chosen” ones). According to these hardliners, the non-elect (those who are not chosen) have no divine grace or mercy available to them. Some of them even go so far as to say that God “hates” the non-elect (based on their twisted application of Romans 9:13–15).

Historically, it is simply not true that prevenient grace is foreign to Reformed thinking. On the contrary, prevenient grace was one of the main points of contention between the followers of Calvin and those of Arminius at the history-making Council of Dort in the Netherlands (1618–19). But everyone there (except for a few observers) was a Reformed believer—it was an intra-group squabble. Non-reformers were not invited. Even Arminius (1560–1609), who had died a decade earlier, had considered himself Reformed in doctrine. It wasn’t until around the time of Dordrecht that Arminians began to be excluded from the “Reformed” category by traditional TULIP Calvinists, who won the final vote when it was tallied in 1619. Like they say, history is written by the victors!

At the same time, though, there’s something here that virtually everyone—Calvinist and Arminian alike—can agree on. It’s this: No one can come to the Lord on his own initiative, apart from the inner working of God’s Spirit. Yeshua himself affirmed this when He said, “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day*” (John 6:44). As fallen human beings suffering from the after-effects of Adam’s sin, we are alienated (or separated) from God down to our very

core (Eph. 4:17–19). This means that without divine activity in our hearts prior to salvation, we cannot find our way to God through logic, reason, emotion, or any other human means. Most Christians agree on this.

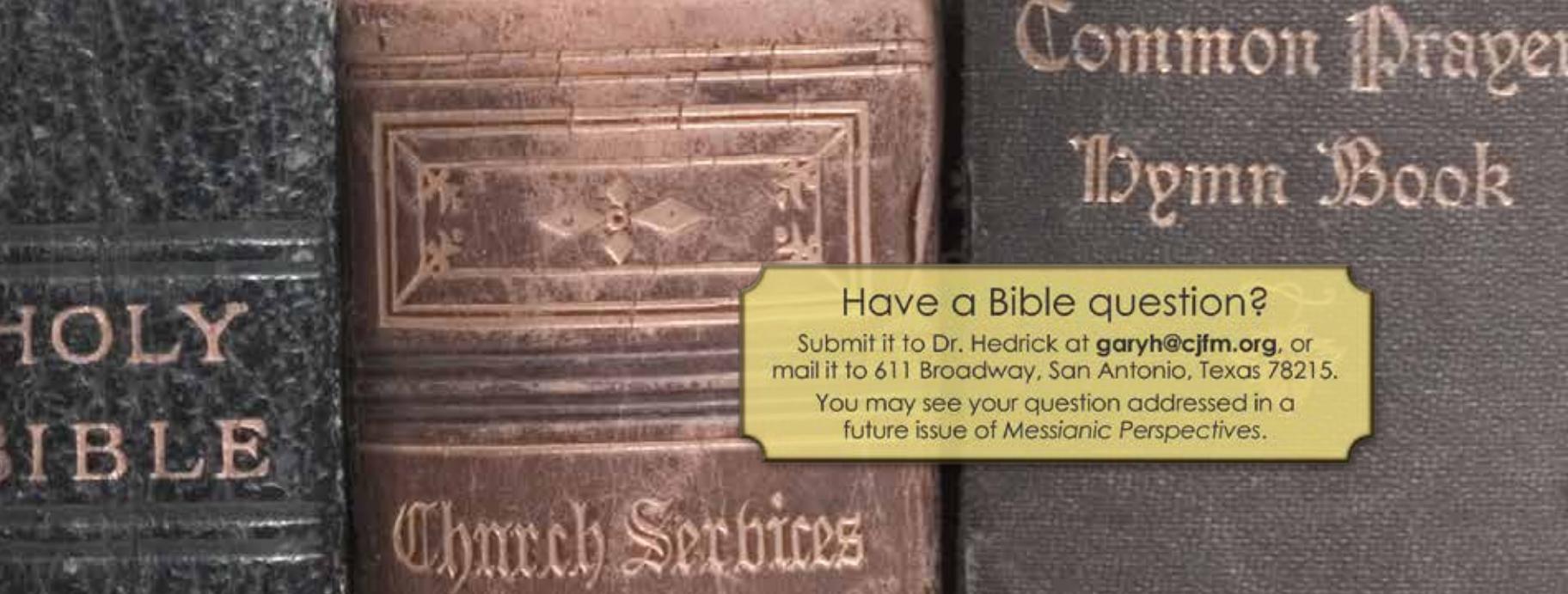
Where we disagree, however, is on the question of whom God influences with His grace. Our hardline, five-point Calvinist friends avoid like the plague the notion that God might show any sort of grace or mercy to the non-elect. After all, they reason, if a lost person isn’t one of the elect, what’s the point of wasting grace on that person since he can’t be saved anyway? Consistent, five-point Calvinists will say that God bestows His grace *only on the elect*—and His grace cannot be resisted. In fact, the elect literally have no choice in the matter. God does it all. This is what they say.

One problem with this position is that it doesn’t align well with the many invitations in the Bible where God offers salvation to lost people. In fact, the very last invitation in the Bible says, *And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely* (Rev. 22:17, emphasis added). Does this invitation sound like it’s exclusive? Or is it inclusive? You decide.

Consider the fact that the Lord doesn’t say that only certain chosen ones are allowed to come and drink. He doesn’t say that it’s futile for anyone who hasn’t been pre-selected by God to come. Nowhere does He say that the church is like a social club where only a few elites are invited to join, to the exclusion of everyone else. Over and over, He says things like, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matt. 11:28).

John’s gospel records a poignant scene that took place during the week-long Feast of Tabernacles (*Chag HaSukkot*), probably in the fall of AD 29, when Yeshua and His disciples had joined the vast throng of worshipers in the Temple. The Apostle recalls, *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink”* (John 7:37). Again, the invitation is clear: “Anyone” can come!

The typical, five-pointer explanation here is that the “anyone” in John 7:37 (and in other, similar passages) is qualified. In this instance, they would say that the “anyone” must be thirsty. That’s the qualification. Their point is that God only makes His elect, and no one else, thirsty.



Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

Therefore, only the elect will come and drink. In a certain sense, they are right about this; however, the fact remains that not everyone whose heart God touches with His preventient grace will respond positively. This is one of the takeaways from Revelation 3:20, where the Lord says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” His point is clear: We can respond either positively or negatively. He knocks on the door of our hearts and gives us the opportunity to invite Him in—but He doesn’t kick the door down. We can keep the door closed if we wish. *He wants us to want Him.* His preventient grace makes that possible, as it graciously nudges us in the right direction. But we must believe the Gospel in order for the Holy Spirit to do His saving work in our hearts (Acts 16:31).

Besides, we never know for sure who the elect are until *after they come*. So, then, shouldn’t we consider everyone a potential “chosen one,” until they demonstrate otherwise by their actions? After all, as we have already seen, the Bible’s many invitations to salvation appear to be inclusive (open for anyone and everyone who will come) rather than exclusive (that is, limited only to a privileged few).

There are, in fact, hard-core, five-point Calvinist groups—like the Primitive Baptists, for example—who don’t believe in giving public invitations at the close of a Gospel service. Their concern is that someone who is non-elect might come forward and want to be saved. So, sadly, they withhold the invitation. Their theological error is the failure to distinguish between *preventient* (or common) grace, which is available to anyone, but can be resisted (Titus 2:11; Jude 1:4), and *efficacious* (or special) grace, which will not be resisted (John 6:37–40; 17:2–24).

Dear reader, the Savior’s arms are open wide—and His saving, transforming grace is available to anyone who will believe: *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men* (Titus 2:11). It’s all about believing. Yeshua chastised the religious leaders in His day because they were unwilling to believe: *“But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life”* (John 5:40, emphasis added). They were excluded not by God, but by their own, stubborn unbelief.

Our Lord is, by nature, loving and gracious. He will save anyone who comes to Him in faith: *“Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other”* (Isa. 45:22).

GOD'S GRACE

(HIS UNDESERVED WORK IN US)



PREVENTIENT (COMMON) GRACE

CAN BE RESISTED

**Titus 2:11;
Jude 1:4**

EFFICACIOUS (SPECIAL) GRACE

WON'T BE RESISTED

John 6:37-40

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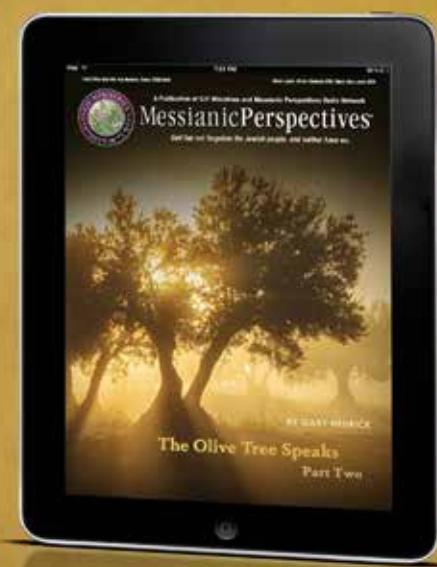
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