



A Publication of CJF Ministries and Messianic Perspectives Radio Network

Messianic Perspectives[®]

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

EXTREME WEATHER

**AND OTHER NATURAL DISASTERS:
ARE THEY A SIGN OF THE END?**

Every annual cycle brings extreme weather events to many parts of the world, including our own. Sometimes these events—whether they’re hurricanes, typhoons, tornadoes, thunderstorms, tsunamis, or floods—can be downright deadly.

The great Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, for instance, caused a series of killer waves on December 26 of that year, leaving 150,000 people dead by the end of that nightmarish day.

The deadliest tornado in modern history was the one that struck the Manikganj district of Bangladesh on April 26, 1989. It wiped out two towns and carved out a path of destruction a mile wide and ten miles long. The human toll was 1,300 dead and 12,000 injured.

Closer to home, who can forget the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf coast a decade ago? Fifty flood walls and levees failed around the city of New Orleans, with disastrous consequences. Thousands of people perished and tens of thousands of others were left homeless.¹

Whenever a natural disaster grabs the headlines, opportunists—including some in the religious world—are quick to capitalize on it for their own purposes. Some preachers, for example, declared that Katrina was God’s judgment on America for its wickedness.

Some well-meaning Christian antiabortion activists claimed that Katrina was God’s punishment for “the national sin of abortion.”² Even Muslim preachers joined the chorus of religious voices claiming that Katrina was the wrath of God on an evil nation.³

Extravagant and self-serving claims about extreme weather can backfire, however. In the 1980s, for example, one well-known TV preacher famously claimed to have harnessed the power of prayer to take control of an approaching hurricane and redirect it away from his Virginia-based headquarters. Sadly, however, the storm moved to the north, came ashore, did millions of dollars in damage, and killed 15 people.⁴

During the 2012 cycle, Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc in late October along the eastern seaboard, doing millions of dollars of damage to property and killing 285 people. In its aftermath, several religious bloggers and activists proclaimed that Sandy was God’s judgment on America for the sin of homosexuality.⁵ Even those of us who are opposed to the legitimization of homosexuality in our declining culture, however, can easily see the numerous fallacies in this reasoning. One problem with it is that there were many hurricanes before Sandy (some much worse, in fact), and they had no connection with homosexuality.⁶ So it seems a bit arbitrary to claim that God sent Sandy to punish America for the widespread practice of any particular sin. It also seems somewhat disingenuous to insist that God should punish Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi disproportionately for sins that are predominantly committed elsewhere.⁷

Crackpots in the religious-political world aren’t the only ones who try to use the weather to advance their own agenda. Hollywood has gotten in on the act, too. One case in point was Roland Emmerich’s 2004 film *The Day After Tomorrow*, which grossed over half a billion dollars at the box office.⁸ It dramatized the fictional consequences of climate change, suggesting how global cooling might lead to a catastrophic ice age and destroy modern civilization. The film was immensely popular in both North America and Europe.



So what about it? As believers, what are we to make of extreme weather when it occurs? Is it merely natural forces at work, or can it be an expression of God’s wrath—or maybe even a harbinger of prophetic events?

Let’s see what the Bible has to say.

Messianic Perspectives®

Dr. Gary Hedrick, *Editor in Chief*
Erastos Leiloglou, *Designer*



Messianic Perspectives is published bimonthly by CJF Ministries, P.O. Box 345, San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345, a 501(c)3 Texas nonprofit corporation: Dr. Gary Hedrick, **President**; Brian Nowotny, **Director of Communications**; Erastos Leiloglou, **Designer**. Subscription price: \$10 per year. The publication of articles by other authors does not necessarily imply full agreement with all the views expressed therein. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Visit us online at cjfm.org. Toll-free OrderLine: (800) 926-5397.
© 2015 by CJF Ministries. All rights reserved.



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee
Rembrandt

1. God is sovereign over all aspects of nature, including the weather.

God created the world—and that includes the forces of nature that collide in our atmosphere to produce all kinds of weather. Nothing is beyond His control—including even the capricious and seemingly unpredictable forces of nature.

King David affirmed this 3,500 years ago when he wrote: *The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters* (Psalm 24:1). In other words, He is LORD of all because He made it all!

But control *over* circumstances (God's sovereignty) isn't necessarily the same thing as control *of* circumstances (direct intervention).⁹ Most of the time, the LORD is content to allow nature to run its course according to the laws He has ordained. He doesn't usually intervene.

God doesn't control the weather the way a puppeteer controls a marionette with strings. Many of the OT verses that talk about God exercising direct control over weather are metaphors—like Psalm 135:7, which says, *He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures* (see also 147:8-9). These figures of speech are meant to convey the idea that God is sovereign over nature, but not necessarily that He actually reaches down and causes every event that occurs in the natural world.

Most of the time, events like cyclones and tornadoes are simply the result of natural processes (like the collision of updrafts and downdrafts of unstable air during a thunderstorm), without any specific divine design or purpose.

When tragedies happen, it's human nature to try to make sense of them. That's perfectly understandable. Saying that God caused a tornado, for example, is one way of explaining why it happened. For a believer, it seems like a more satisfying explanation than saying that it was the result of unstable air in the atmosphere. But is it really true? Did God *really* send the tornado?

We know that God sometimes literally and directly manipulates the weather for His own purposes. Aside from the story of Job (which we'll talk about later), the Bible provides us with some notable examples:

- God sent the Great Flood in the days of Noah (Gen. 6—9);
- He sent thunder and hail down on the Egyptians (Ex. 9:22-34);
- Divinely sent winds were instrumental in the events of the Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 10:19, 14:21);
- The LORD withheld rain to punish His people for disobedience (Lev. 26:18-20);
- Abundant rain and crops, on the other hand, were a reward for obedience (Deut. 11:13-15);
- As a form of punishment on His rebellious people, God sent stifling dust storms instead of rain (Deut. 28:24);
- Hailstones rained down on Israel's enemies, the Amorites (Josh. 10:11);
- Loud claps of thunder confused the Philistines so they could be routed by Israel (1 Sam. 7:10);
- The LORD sent thunder and rain at Samuel's request to get Israel's attention (1 Sam. 12:17-18);
- David petitioned the LORD to suspend a disastrous, three-year famine in Israel¹⁰ (2 Sam. 21:1);
- Solomon said that God sends rain in response to humility and repentance (1 Kings 8:35-36);
- The LORD sent an "east wind" to create drought conditions for the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Hosea 13:15);
- He sent a violent storm to change Jonah's course (1:4);
- Nahum declared that God metes out judgment on His enemies through tornadoes, storms, and droughts (1:2-4); and,
- When a violent storm was about to sink their boat on the Sea of Galilee, Yeshua's frightened disciples were astounded when He calmed the wind and the waves (Matt. 8:23-27).

The answer, then, is yes—God can and does manipulate the weather sometimes (we'll discuss this in more detail under Point 3). During a span of several thousand years of human history, though, we can only point to a handful of these instances in the Bible—so it's evident that direct intervention is not His usual practice. Most of the time, His control of the weather is indirect. As we mentioned above, God has ordained (and set into motion) natural laws and processes that govern the universe and control the weather (Job 38:33, Jer. 31:35-36)—and He normally doesn't interfere with those processes.

Laws, by definition, cannot be ignored. If God routinely allowed exemptions from His natural laws, we would live in a world of magic, a disordered world without predictable cause and effect. There would be no absolutes, no mathematics (because two plus two might make something other than four), and no science (because two molecules of hydrogen and one of oxygen might combine to form something other than water)—and that's not how He designed the world to function.

But the LORD can (and does) intervene when it's necessary. In either case, whether He intervenes or not, He is always sovereign. God will never, ever say, "I'm so sorry, but that tornado spoiled My plan." With one flick of His pinkie finger, He could bring the mightiest tornado or hurricane to its knees!



WARNING THE WORLD WILL END ON DECEMBER 21, 2012

Yes, we know. It didn't happen, in spite of the fact that the evangelical Christian world was bombarded with alarmist reports during 2012 warning that the Lord would return before the end of that year.

Would-be "prophets" and "seers" were having dreams and seeing visions about the Lord's approaching return. "Rapture alert" date-setting websites warned that the Lord was about to snatch us out of this world. A ministry in California splattered ominous warnings on roadside billboards in the Oakland area. The Lord's return was a matter of only days or weeks away. At long last, they said, the Lord was coming back!

Their "evidence" included the following:

- The Mayan calendar abruptly concluded on December 21, 2012, presumably because the ancient Mayans believed that's when the world would end.
- A planet or brown dwarf called the Nibiru (also dubbed Planet X or Eris) was said to be on a collision course with Earth.
- The planets in our solar system were supposedly coming into alignment in a way that would create unprecedented gravitational forces in our solar system with disastrous effects on the third planet (Earth).
- Earth was in danger of being hit by a gigantic meteor. They said this news was being suppressed by the government to prevent widespread panic, chaos, and looting.
- A gigantic solar storm, predicted by NASA, could fry worldwide communications with electromagnetic pulses and return much of civilization to a virtual Stone Age by leaving government infrastructure and interconnected economies in a shambles.
- Michael Drosnin, author of *The Bible Code*, found a hidden message in the Hebrew Bible warning that a comet would crash into the earth in 2012 and annihilate all biological life.

Sadly, false and irresponsible prophetic warnings like these have provided fodder for opponents of evangelicalism who are delighted when we shoot ourselves in the foot with ridiculous and irresponsible predictions.

As 2012 drew to a close without the Lord returning, many naïve, disappointed Christian believers were left scratching their heads and wondering how they could have been so wrong. Unwittingly, they had pinned their hopes on shallow, sensationalized, and misapplied prophetic interpretations promulgated, in many cases, by opportunistic religious snake-oil salesmen.

Will the Lord come back someday? Yes, He will—because He promised He would. He told His disciples, "*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*" (John 14:3).

Could He return soon? Of course he could—maybe even before you put down this paper. But in the meantime, we should make a reasonable effort to keep a lid on the juvenile, sensationalized wish fulfillment and irresponsible, "boy-who-cried-wolf" date setting among our ranks. We need to wise up, folks. Paul said, *See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise* (Eph. 5:15).

Many years ago, I found myself seated on a plane next to a well-known, date-setting preacher. He didn't know me, but I recognized him. I introduced myself and we had a very nice conversation—he was actually a nice guy and he knew about our ministry. I finally asked him, "Surely you know that most of the things you've been saying are nonsense." I thought he might become defensive, but he grinned and asked if he could speak off the record. I replied, "Sure, go ahead." He proceeded to explain that he considered himself an entrepreneur who was marketing a product—a product that gave people hope. Never mind that the dates he predicted for the Rapture always came and went uneventfully—at least his customers had some hope, if only for a brief time. That was his rationale.

At least one-third of the Bible is related either directly or indirectly to prophetic themes, so every believer should be interested in prophecy. Date setting and cheap, manipulative sensationalism, however, only detract from its legitimacy. And let's face it: Repeated false predictions are a terrible testimony to the world. It feeds the popular perception that Bible believers are a bunch of nincompoops—and it weakens our prophetic message. We should leave the silly sensationalism and crank journalism to the supermarket tabloids.

—Gary Hedrick

*See, for example, Chapter 2 ("The Folly of Faith") in *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (Amhurst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2009) by Victor J. Stenger.

2. Extreme weather isn't always evil or the work of the devil, even though its results can be tragic.

The Book of Job opens with an interesting story. There was a time when Satan¹¹ came before God and made an accusation against a godly man named Job (1:6). On that occasion, Satan claimed that the only reason Job served God was so he could enjoy His blessings. If God stopped blessing Job, Satan alleged, he would no longer serve Him. But God knew Job, so He granted Satan a special dispensation that allowed him to afflict Job and his family with a variety of painful circumstances, including natural disasters (1:12).

Shortly afterward, “the fire of God” fell from the heavens (v. 16)¹² and “a great wind” (possibly a devastating tornado) caused a house to collapse on his children, killing them (v. 19).¹³ Job was heartbroken, but he doggedly refused to give up his hope in the LORD. Even in the midst of unimaginable grief, he cried out, “*Though [the LORD] slay me, yet will I trust Him . . .*” (13:15).

This passage indicates that the devil does have the ability, at least to some extent (and only when God grants him permission), to manipulate extreme weather events. But we shouldn't jump to the conclusion that every instance of extreme weather is the devil's work.



Another interesting question is the extent to which weather and atmospheric conditions may have been affected by the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Are hurricanes, tornadoes, and other extreme weather events a result of the Adamic Curse (Gen. 3:16-19)? Do these things happen only because we live in a fallen, imperfect world? The Book of Genesis seems to suggest that the weather from Creation to the time of the Flood was much milder than it is today—even though the details in Scripture are sketchy. Evidently, there was no rain (Gen. 2:5-6)—so that would preclude any threat prior to Noah's time from thunderstorms and floods.¹⁴

But does any of this mean that extreme weather is always the work of the enemy, or a result of living in a fallen world? Not necessarily. In fact, most extreme weather events are the result of natural processes that were ordained by God himself and serve a useful purpose.

For example, most of us today see flooding as a bad thing. Here in south-central Texas, the rocky soil absorbs little moisture; so during the rainy season, there's lots of flooding. It's a major problem for us at certain times of the year! When flooding occurs, people sometimes drown when they foolishly try to drive through barricaded high-water crossings.

People in the biblical (Mediterranean) world, however, saw flooding in a different light. For the Egyptians, for example, flooding was necessary; in fact, it was a blessing! The ancient Egyptians recognized that the seasonal ebb and flow of the Nile River was nature's way of fertilizing and revitalizing the land so their crops could thrive later. Ancient people saw the earth as constantly changing and adapting. Water carved out valleys and canyons. It changed the contours of the land. They anticipated these changes every year.

The same thing could be said about volcanoes and earthquakes (both of which are related to weather). They play a vital role in the way our planet functions.¹⁵ Earthquakes happen because the earth's crust floats on the surface in sections called tectonic plates. Deep in the earth's interior, beneath the surface crust, is a swirling mantle of superheated, melted rock or lava. The surface plates that support the continents rub against each other at times, and it's along these fault lines (where the plates touch) that most earthquakes take place. The action of the earth's liquified, molten interior, in which a solid inner core and a molten outer core spin in opposite directions, helps generate the earth's magnetic field and protects us from harmful radiation from space.¹⁶ Also, volcanoes are nature's way of creating new landmasses and of relieving pressure that builds up in those inner regions of the earth. Are any of these things a result of the Fall? No, it's just the way the planet was designed to work.



As it turns out, even lightning—frightening as it may be—has its redeeming qualities. Lightning is one of the ways that nitrogen in the atmosphere is made available to living organisms on earth.¹⁷ Eighty percent of our atmosphere is made up of nitrogen. Lightning makes it possible for atmospheric nitrogen to replenish essential nitrates in the soil.

Again, there is nothing inherently evil about these natural processes. On the contrary, they are beneficial and necessary. The reason these extreme events can be dangerous is that we don't have the technology or understanding to predict them and to harness them for our benefit. We believe this problem will be remedied during the coming Millennium, when Messiah Yeshua will preside over a restoration of Paradise (like the ancient Garden of Eden) on earth. When God commissioned Adam to "subdue the earth" (Gen. 1:28), that may very well have included studying and harnessing the forces of nature for the benefit of humankind. During that magnificent Kingdom Age, human achievement and technology will no doubt take gigantic leaps forward. Extreme events that we see today as catastrophic will be predictable and utilized for constructive purposes.

3. God sometimes manipulates weather in answer to the prayers of His people.

Here's a study in contrasts. Back in the 1960s, when I was in high school, our family attended a Baptist church in Kansas where several of the leading families were farmers.

During the summers, I helped out on one of these farms. It was hard work—but it was also fun, and they paid well.

One summer, we found ourselves in the midst of a drought. Everything was dry and dusty that summer. Thousands of acres of corn and hay were burning up in the fields. Farmers and ranchers all over eastern Kansas were in danger of losing their crops. And as if that wasn't bad enough, there was more—if they couldn't feed their livestock, they'd have to sell the scrawny animals at a loss. It was a recipe for disaster.

So we prayed at church, asking God to send rain. We had special prayer meetings in homes—again, imploring the Lord to end the drought. The farmers themselves prayed in their fields. We sent messages to sister churches in other parts of the country, soliciting their prayers. But relief never came—at least, not in time to save the crops.

It was a disastrous year for those farmers. Some of them had to sell off land or borrow money to get their families through the winter. So why didn't the Lord send rain? Were these humble Christian farmers being punished for some heinous sin? I really don't think so. On the contrary, they were some of the most faithful, godly people in our community.

Now fast forward almost 50 years. Where we live in south-central Texas, Christians got organized during a two-year drought a few years ago and started getting together to pray for rain. It finally came—in torrents! We were very grateful!



Mathias Krumbholz



Bob Nichols

So what was the difference between Kansas and Texas? Why does God answer some prayers for rain and not others? Only He knows! Most of the time, whether we like it or not, He allows factors like climate, geography, seasons, and atmospheric conditions to determine the weather without Him intervening.

Today, Christians in African nations like Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan are praying for relief from drought and famine. Only God can decide how and when (or if) He will intervene on their behalf.

In ancient Israel, the Prophet Elijah prayed during a time of drought and “the heaven gave rain” (see James 5:18). So the biblical precedent clearly indicates that God does alter the weather in response to prayer under some circumstances. The NT says, *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much* (James 5:16b).

4. Extreme weather by itself is not a sign of the Second Coming.

The term “Second Coming” doesn’t appear in Scripture—and the way we use it, it doesn’t refer to a single event. “Second Coming” is an expression coined by theologians to encompass future, prophesied events associated with the Messiah’s return to Planet Earth. We believe those events take place in two phases and over a period of seven years.

The first of those events is the Rapture (or “catching up”)¹⁸ of the NT Church (i.e., the *Ekklesia*),¹⁹ described by Yeshua and Paul in John 14:3, 28; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; and 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.

One of the Pauline passages says, *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 incorruptible, and we shall be changed*” (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

The second phase of the Second Coming takes place (we believe) seven years later, with Messiah’s coming in glory at the climax of the Armageddon Campaign.²⁰

Sandwiched between these two phases is the seven-year Tribulation Period, which itself appears to be divided into two halves of 42 months each. The first 42 months will be a time of relative peace and security for the nation Israel. At the midpoint, the “abomination of desolation” occurs, followed by three and a half years of horrific conflict and carnage on earth while the devil (working through his “prince,” the Antichrist) makes one last-ditch effort to destroy the Jewish people.²¹

While it’s true that the NT enumerates certain prophetic signs and trends that will precede the Lord’s return, none of those indicators by itself is a sign of the end of the age. Several of those prophetic benchmarks are mentioned by the Lord himself in Matthew 24:3-14:

- False messiahs deceiving many people (v. 5);
- Wars and rumors of wars (v. 6);
- Nations and alliances of nations in conflict (v. 7a);
- Famines, plagues, and earthquakes in various places (v. 7b);
- Persecution of believers by the nations (v. 9);
- Apostasy and betrayal by former believers (v. 10);
- The rise of false prophets, with widespread deception (v. 11);
- Pervasive lawlessness (v. 12); and,
- The “gospel of the kingdom” preached to the whole world (v. 14).

TORNADOES AND OTHER TRAGEDIES

Does God Cause Them?

When we say that God is “sovereign,” what exactly does that mean?

A sovereign, of course, is a king or ruler with absolute, supreme authority in his realm. God’s realm is the universe—so He has supreme authority everywhere.

Does that mean that He causes everything that happens in the universe? Or even that everything that happens in the universe pleases Him?

The answer to both of those questions is no. God never creates or condones evil, but sometimes He allows it (see Romans 8:28).

Just because God doesn’t directly create evil doesn’t mean He can’t use or direct it for His own purposes. I have always admired Joni Eareckson Tada, the woman who dove off a raft in July 1967 and broke her neck, instantly becoming a paraplegic. Her older sister, Kathy, was also in the water that day and explains what happened a few moments after Joni dove in:

Suddenly, I felt a sharp pinch. A crab pinched my toe! Startled, I shouted to Joni, “Watch out for crabs!” She didn’t respond. In fact, she was nowhere in sight. Not on the raft. Not in the water. Something told me to go find her—quickly. I reached her just when she was beginning to drown! What are the chances of a crab pinching someone’s toe and getting her attention just in time to respond to an emergency? A million to one. Every time I’ve been tempted to doubt God’s hand in those terrible circumstances that day, God brings that humble little crab to mind. From the big events in life down to the tiniest of details, He is great, He is sovereign, and He is in control.

So why did Joni become a paraplegic? Was God mad at her?

Was she being judged for some sin? No, she became a paraplegic because she dove headfirst into water that was too shallow—and she suffered a spinal cord injury that left her paralyzed from the neck down. That’s what happened. But even so, we can see the sovereignty of God at work in the midst of that calamity in Joni’s life. He sent a little crab to bite her sister’s toe so that she, in turn, could save Joni from drowning.

We might wonder why God couldn’t have just kept Joni from diving into the water in the first place. The injury would never have happened. Wouldn’t that have been better? Well, that does seem to make sense. But think about this—if Joni had never suffered that injury, who would have ministered to all of the thousands of disabled people she’s helped all over the world for the last 40-plus years? Joni and Friends (joniandfriends.org) is an international Gospel-centered ministry that’s been a trailblazer and innovator in reaching out to people with disabilities all over the world. None of this would have happened if things had gone differently on that summer day in 1967.

So when a devastating tornado tears through a community and kills hundreds of people, how do we explain why it happened? The best answer is that first, there was a thunderstorm; then updrafts and downdrafts of unstable air interacted with wind shear to form a tornado vortex. That’s why it happened, plain and simple. Does it mean God was angry with the victims? In very rare instances, maybe—but most of the time, no.

The key to interpreting the “signs” passages correctly is the principle of convergence. That is, these events and trends only become prophetic signs when they converge at the same time and begin to increase in frequency and intensity.²² Yeshua told His disciples, “*So you also, when you see **all these things**, know that it is near—at the doors!*” (Matt. 24:33).

So when a hurricane happens, leaving horrible devastation in its wake, and the “Rapture alert” websites light up with discussion threads about how it’s a sign of the end of the age, they’re wrong. Those folks need to read their Bibles! Note the phrase “all these things.” It’s not one of these things, or some of them, but **all of them**. The events and trends outlined by Yeshua in Matthew 24 only become signs of the approaching end when they all start happening at the same time!

Strictly speaking, Yeshua is addressing His twelve disciples in Matthew 24. They represent the believing remnant of Israel, and He speaks to them as though He’s speaking to the nation. So the events He describes here will happen during the Tribulation Period, which is also known as “the time of Jacob’s [Israel’s] trouble” (see Jeremiah 30:4-9).

Should we infer from this that the believing remnant (i.e., Jewish believers who are living at the end of the age) is destined to go through the Tribulation? Not necessarily. The Lord is speaking to His disciples as proxies, as they sit on the Mount of Olives looking down on the Temple Mount—so He addresses them just as He would have spoken to the entire nation.²³ He’s telling them that their successors (i.e., Jewish believers living in Israel at the end of the age) will have the responsibility of proclaiming the message of the coming Kingdom to the unbelieving nation. So the question is this: Will Jewish believers (along with the rest of us) be here during the Tribulation (to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom to the Jewish nation), like our post-Trib friends suggest, or does Revelation 7:4-10 indicate that God will raise up His own end-time army of Jewish evangelists after the Rapture?²⁴

As we contemplate questions about the timing of the Rapture (i.e., whether it occurs before or after the Tribulation), it’s instructive to note the attitude of the biblical writers in their descriptions of the Lord’s return. They clearly thought they might be alive when it happened²⁵—and they looked forward to it with joy, excitement, and anticipation. They called it their “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

This begs the question: If believers will go through the Tribulation, why did the NT writers see the end of the age as a positive, glorious thing—something God’s people should look forward to with great expectancy? It doesn’t make sense! This seven-year period (and the final three and a half years, in particular) will be a time of rampant, horrific famine, disease, warfare, social and political upheaval, persecution, betrayal, death, and the unleashing of terrifying, supernatural evil on the inhabitants of the earth.²⁶ Why would anyone be eager to experience something like that? The answer is that they weren’t. What they were eager for was the Lord’s return to snatch them up to be with Him: “*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*” (John 14:3).

There’s a bit of irony in the fact that critics often accuse pre-Tribbers of promoting an escapist mentality because we believe the Lord will remove us prior to the Tribulation.

With all due respect, however, I’d like to point out that we’re not the ones who are out there marketing survivalist products to naïve believers. We’re not building underground bunkers so we can escape the savagery and wholesale destruction of the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. That crowd consists almost exclusively of post-Tribbers. It occurs to me that everyone wants to “escape” (in one way or another) the ravages of the Tribulation—including many critics of the pre-Trib position!

It irks me when I receive a letter from an elderly friend of our ministry wanting to know if she should pay some shyster preacher thousands of dollars for a huge stockpile of freeze-dried foods (and yes, I have heard from people like this). Let’s be clear: Even if you were to enter the Tribulation someday, an underground bunker stuffed with expensive, ready-to-eat meal packs won’t help you survive for long. Even if you have your own power generator, where will you get the fuel to run it for months or years on end? Unless you spent a fortune on a large array, your solar panels will probably produce barely enough power to keep your lights on. Do you seriously think that the lawless bands of thugs and scavengers who will be roaming the earth in those days won’t find the entrance to your underground bunker? And what about the powers of darkness that will be active during that time? Stockpiles of weapons won’t help when you try to confront them. If you have any illusions about escaping the Tribulation by going underground, you have no idea what you would be up against, my friend!

In contrast to all of this post-Trib paranoia, the NT writers saw the end of the age as a positive, glorious thing—and something God’s people should look forward to with great anticipation! The Jewish founder of our ministry used to say, “We’re looking for Christ—not the Antichrist!”

5. In the Bible, when God unleashed extreme weather, it was directed at believers just as often as unbelievers.

We have already determined that there were occasions in the OT when God used the forces of nature to mete out His judgment or punishment.

In the days of ancient Israel, however, extreme weather was most often a punishment directed at His own disobedient people, the Israelites, rather than at the unbelieving nations.

Yes, He did send hailstones down on the Egyptians and He flooded the world in the days of Noah—but those were extraordinary measures required by extraordinary times.

Some well-meaning Christian supporters of Israel have even tried to make a connection between weather disasters and the world not treating Israel well. They say, essentially, that when we adopt a policy that is contrary to Israel’s interests in the Middle East, God sends weather disasters as a form of divine retribution.

It’s easy to see extreme weather as a form of judgment on “those wicked unbelievers,” homosexuals, abortionists, or misguided anti-Israel policymakers in world capitals—including Washington, DC.

But maybe we should be looking closer to home for answers. Our whole Judeo-Christian culture is crumbling before our very eyes while we twiddle our thumbs, so extreme weather probably wouldn’t even make the top ten on our list of real problems.

When ISIS and other Islamists make the charge that Western “Christian” civilization has become degenerate and debauched, there’s some truth in what they say. We have strayed far from our Judeo-Christian roots—and what’s worse, no one seems to care! Many of our pulpits are strangely and awkwardly silent about issues of righteousness and God’s holy law. How sad that radical Islamists are more perceptive about the state of our culture than many professing Christians are!

Ruth Graham once said that if God doesn’t judge our decadent and corrupt culture, He’ll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. Sadly, signs of judgment are already evident—and many of our innocuous, shallow, feel-good evangelical churches are just as culpable as the LGBT or abortion lobbies.

Are we willing to humble ourselves as God’s people, recognize His discipline in our own lives, and repent of our sins, hypocrisy, and lukewarmness? The Bible says, *For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; . . .* (1 Peter 4:17a).



Dr. Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.

¹ The final tally was 1,833 lives lost and at least \$108 billion in property loss (see “Hurricane Katrina” from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Climatic Data Center at ncdc.noaa.gov).

² As much as we empathize with the pro-life movement, we believe it only hurts the cause when spokespersons are intemperate and ill-informed in their pronouncements. Activists like Flip Benham (Operation Save America) and Steve Lefemine (Columbia Christians for Life in South Carolina), among others, have claimed a direct link between natural disasters and God’s judgment. Lefemine, for instance, said a color satellite map of Hurricane Katrina looked to him like an image of a fetus at eight weeks—so he sent copies of the weather map to activists all over the country. He declared, “Providence punishes national sins by national calamities” (“Some Say National Catastrophe Was ‘Divine Judgment’” by Alan Coopeman in *The Washington Post* [Sunday, September 4, 2005], accessed online at *The Houston Chronicle* website at www.chron.com). Pro-life evangelicals uniformly agree that abortion is a national tragedy, of course, but some of us might ask why God would devastate Louisiana so horribly and singularly for this particular sin when many more babies—tens of thousands more, in fact—are aborted in states like California, Illinois, and New York (see “Table 103. Abortions—Number and Rate by State of Occurrence: 2000—2008” by the US Census Bureau [Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Divorces: Statistical Abstract of the United States], 76. Available online at www.census.gov).

³ Kuwaiti Muhammad Yousef Mlaifi wrote in the Arabic daily *Al-Siyassa* (under the headline “The Terrorist Katrina Is One of the Soldiers of Allah”), “It is almost certain that this is a wind of torment and evil that Allah has sent to this American empire” (Cooperman, *Ibid.*). Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam alleged that Katrina was “God’s way of punishing America for its warmongering and racism” (see “Louis Farrakhan Biography” on *The Biography Channel* website at www.thebiographychannel.co.uk).

⁴ In September of 1985, Pat Robertson claimed that his prayers caused Hurricane Gloria to veer away from Virginia Beach, Virginia. See “Pat Robertson’s World: In the Beginning There Was Hurricane Gloria” by Dinesh D’Souza in *American Spectator* (Nov. 1986), 16-19. Real-time footage of Robertson’s prayer is available on YouTube (www.youtube.com).

⁵ Following Superstorm Sandy, John McTernan blogged, “God is systematically destroying America.” A better way to express it is to say that we are destroying ourselves by our flagrant disregard of His moral law. What’s happening in this decadent age is our fault, not His. McTernan’s blog can be found at www.defendproclaimthefait.org.

⁶ Some hurricanes that rank ahead of Sandy are the 1935 Labor Day hurricane (Florida), the 1923 Southeast Florida hurricane, Hurricane Camille (Mississippi, 1969), Hurricane Andrew (Louisiana, 1992), the 1926 Miami hurricane, and the 1900 Galveston hurricane. Interestingly, one of our founder’s ancestors, Adolphe Halff, perished in an earlier Galveston hurricane in 1859, when the ship on which he was a passenger capsized.

⁷ See endnote 2 above.

⁸ *The Day After Tomorrow* was the highest-grossing film in Canadian history.

⁹ When a ripe apple falls from a tree, the principle of sovereignty would say that God is in control of that event in the sense that He established the physical laws that caused it—and perhaps also in the sense that He could have stopped it from falling if He wanted to. It doesn’t necessarily mean, however, that He acted directly to cause the apple to fall to the ground. It’s as simple as this: In the absence of any compelling reason to interrupt the process, He lets the apple fall. The overarching point here is that the principle of God’s sovereignty doesn’t mean that He causes everything that happens. It simply means that events never catch Him by surprise and circumstances are never allowed to thwart His ultimate purposes.

¹⁰ Famines were generally the result of extreme drought conditions. This is confirmed by the fact that God answered David’s prayer a few verses later by making the rain pour down (v. 10).

¹¹ The term “Satan” here in Job 1 appears to be more of a title than a personal name. The Hebrew word means “accuser” or “adversary” and includes the definite article (*HaSatan*, or “the Adversary”). There are other Bible passages that allude to the existence of a heavenly council whose members present themselves before the LORD on certain occasions (cp. 1 Kings 22:19, Psalm 89:5-7, Jer. 23:18, 22).

¹² The messenger told Job that the fire had come from God because that’s what he thought. However, the context makes it clear that the fire was orchestrated by Satan. Also, can fire from heaven be considered “natural”? Of course it can. Chances are, you’ve seen fire from heaven yourself—and probably more than once. We call it lightning—and yes, it’s a natural phenomenon. What we have here, then, is the devil utilizing forces of nature to do his bidding.

¹³ The LORD put one limitation on Satan: He could not touch Job directly (v. 12). He could only work through Job’s circumstances.

¹⁴ Some creationists have suggested that the reason it didn’t rain before the Flood is that there were fewer condensation nuclei in the pre-Deluge atmosphere than there are today.

Condensation nuclei are tiny particles around which water condenses to form raindrops—and precipitation cannot occur without them (see Ahrens and Henson in *Meteorology Today* [Boston: Cengage Learning, 2013], 117).

¹⁵ Some of this information is adapted from information on Rich Deem’s *God and Science* website at www.godandscience.org (see in particular his apologetic monograph “Where Is God When Bad Things Happen?”).

¹⁶ “Why Earth’s Inner and Outer Cores Rotate in Opposite Directions” by Laura Poppick in *Live Science* (Sept. 19, 2013). Accessed online at www.livescience.com.

¹⁷ The other way nitrogen is released from the atmosphere and made available to living organisms is “through bacteria in the soil that form nitrates out of nitrogen in the air” (“Nitrogen in the Earth System” by Nicole Gordon on the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research website at www.ucar.edu). She continues, “During electrical storms, large amounts of nitrogen are oxidized and united with water to produce an acid that falls to Earth in rainfall and deposits nitrates in the soil.” Without lightning (and the accompanying action of nitrate-producing bacteria), the soil would become depleted of nutrients and crops couldn’t grow.

¹⁸ The word “Rapture” doesn’t appear in the English NT. However, the Greek verb translated “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is *harpazō* (ἁρπάζω) meaning “to snatch up.” (The English word “harpoon” is another derivative.) The Latin Vulgate translates it in the same verse with a form of the verb *rapio*, which means “to snatch away.” Matthew Henry (1662-1714) used the word “Rapture” in his exposition of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, loc. cit.).

¹⁹ The Greek word *ekklesia* literally means “called out” (*ek* + *kaleo*). In the NT, it refers to believers in Yeshua the Messiah who have been “called out” of the world to become God’s unique people (Titus 2:14).

²⁰ Some good and capable interpreters believe the Rapture will happen concurrently with the Lord’s coming in glory—meaning the Church is raptured after the seven-year Tribulation rather than before it. This is the post-Trib Rapture view, in contrast with our own pre-Trib view. The timetable we are presenting here generally follows a premillennial, dispensational scenario. We recognize that a number of alternative views are represented among evangelicals.

²¹ Daniel 9:26-27 mentions a seven-year peace pact, presumably between Israel and her Arab antagonists, and most likely mediated by the “Roman” European Union. At the midpoint of this seven-year period (that is, after 42 months), the Antichrist breaks the treaty and moves in to occupy the Land. Taking his cues from the first-century Romans (who destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70), he desecrates the rebuilt Temple—an event referred to in Scripture as “the abomination of desolation” (Dan. 12:11, Matt. 24:15)—and tramples the Holy City underfoot for the final 42 months of the Tribulation (Rev. 11:1-2).

²² Referring to the signs of the end, Yeshua said, “All these [events] are the beginning of sorrows” (Matt. 24:8). The Greek word for “sorrows” is *odin*, which refers to the pains (contractions) a mother endures during childbirth. When the contractions increase in frequency and intensity, she knows she’s about to give birth. Likewise, when the prophetic signs increase in frequency and intensity, and they converge at the same time, Tribulation believers will know that the Lord’s coming is near. Since (technically speaking) this will be His coming in glory at the close of the Tribulation, does that mean there are no signs indicating the nearness of the Rapture seven years earlier? The short answer is yes, but a longer answer could explain that prophetic *trends* will become evident as precursors to the actual *signs* that will occur later, during the Tribulation.

²³ The correspondence between 12 tribes and 12 disciples is difficult to dismiss as mere coincidence. In fact, in John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, he makes the association when he mentions 12 gates, 12 tribes, 12 foundations, and 12 apostles (Rev. 21:10-14). However, we can’t make the claim that each of the disciples came from a different tribe, because some of them were brothers—and brothers who have the same parents obviously can’t come from different tribes. But the lack of any direct, one-to-one correspondence doesn’t mean that the disciples, corporately, didn’t represent the 12 tribes of Israel.

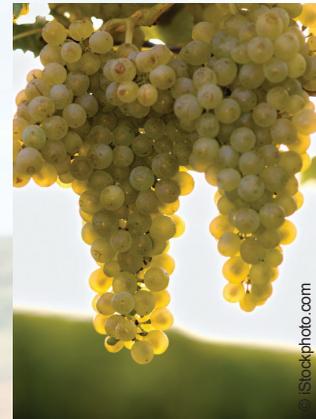
²⁴ Note that God will arrange it so that during the Tribulation, the Jewish nation hears the Gospel from fellow Jews who have come to faith in Yeshua of Nazareth as their Messiah and Redeemer. This is particularly significant in light of the animus that has poisoned relations between Jewish and non-Jewish religious communities during the past two millennia.

²⁵ Note, for example, Paul’s use of the pronoun “we” (including himself) in phrases like “we who are alive [and] remain until the coming of the Lord” (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15). The Lord intended that every generation of believers should have the hope that they might live to see His return.

²⁶ Some prophetic passages intimate that a significant percentage of the earth’s population will be decimated during the second half of the Tribulation (see Revelation 8:9, 9:18; Zechariah 13:8).

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



Eyes Wide Open

CJFM Northeast representative Peter Parkas (New Jersey) had an interesting spiritual encounter recently with “Catherine,” a young woman who works for a car rental agency. Peter rented a car for his speaking tour in upstate New York, and Catherine arrived at his home to drive him to the rental office. One thing led to another in their conversation, and they eventually began discussing spiritual matters, which gave Peter an opportunity to ask her two diagnostic questions: “If you were to die tonight, do you have the assurance that you would go to Heaven?” Catherine said that she did not know, so Peter asked her more specifically why God would *not* let her into Heaven. Echoing Peter’s own words, she responded, “Why would God *not* let me into Heaven?” Peter then described sin to her and shared the Gospel message. Catherine expressed that she wanted to know how to appropriate this truth into her life. After hearing what it means to be born again, Catherine acknowledged that she wanted to pray. As Peter led her in the sinner’s prayer, he also asked her to keep her eyes wide open as she drove. Please pray that the Lord would bless Catherine’s desire to find a Bible-teaching Hispanic church.

Spiritual Food

While eating at a Mexican restaurant recently, Peter Parkas was engaged in a conversation with the waitress, “Yamille,” who told him that she prayed for the dead. Peter cited, and explained, what God explicitly states in Deuteronomy 18:10-11 and Isaiah 8:19 about *not* talking to the spirits of the dead. He went on to share the Gospel message, to which she replied that she would like to pray with Peter and have the assurance that she would go to Heaven. Yamille promptly told her parents who were sitting in the next booth. Peter writes, “It turned out that Yamille was not only a waitress but also the owner of the restaurant!” She, too, is now looking to attend a Bible-teaching church.

The Fruit of Encounters

CJFM representative Eric Chabot (Columbus, Ohio) shares an encounter he had with a student during his campus ministry at Ohio State University (OSU). The young man walked up to him and asked, “Do you remember me?” Since OSU has over 60,000 students, it can be hard to remember, so the student refreshed Eric’s memory. He said that Eric had shared the Gospel with him about eight months earlier and that he had not come to faith because he had some objections to the claims of the Messiah. About a month later, however, another student, a believer, also witnessed to him, and this time he committed his life to the Lord. An additional blessing for Eric is that this student now also leads an outreach on campus. He told Eric, “You took the initiative and the time to share the message of the Gospel with me. I want to train others to do the same.” Eric writes, “So the lesson here is that ‘some of us plant, and others water, but it is God who causes the growth’”(see 1 Corinthians 3:7-8). “I praise God that He actually allowed me to be part of this process.”

Passovers

CJFM representatives lead Messiah in the Passover presentations and Seders throughout the year as a means of introducing Jewish and Gentile nonbelievers to their Redeemer, *Yeshua HaMaschiach* (Jesus the Messiah), and also to enlighten believers about the Jewish roots of Christianity. Following are some of the blessings:

CJFM Director of Missions Emeritus Barry Berger (Phoenix), although still in a rehab facility, was able to attend the 22nd Annual Citywide Passover Seder of his fellowship, *Tikvah Ba Midbar* (Hope in the Desert) at the Orange Tree Golf Resort in Scottsdale, AZ. More than 300 people attended, including seven staff members from his rehab facility. Five people, that he knows of, responded to the call for salvation.

CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation Richard Hill (Las Vegas) led a Passover Seder for his congregation, and one person gave his heart to the Lord that night. Rich also conducted a Passover Seder at the Veterans Home in Boulder City, and five veterans prayed to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

CJFM Southeast representative Michelle Beadle (New Orleans) has shared Messiah in the Passover in two homeless shelters, a women’s prison, and 17 churches during the Passover season. Nine individuals, from children to adults and of diverse backgrounds, prayed to receive Yeshua (Jesus) as their Messiah and Redeemer. They all had one thing in common—the need for salvation!

CJFM representative and pastor of Beith Shalom Gennady Brutzki (Minsk, Belarus) had the privilege of presenting the Passover and explaining the atoning death and Resurrection of our Lord, *Yeshua HaMaschiach*, to more than 100 people, of whom nearly all were Jewish. Following the service, a Jewish woman shared an extraordinary story of her life—her journey to salvation after meeting a group of Messianic Jewish believers. She was also baptized in the river and, “Despite the cold river waters,” Gennady relates, “her heart is on fire for the Lord—and God has radically changed her life and filled her with joy!”

Internet Passover Greetings

During a Shabbat service last year, led by **CJFM representative Marcos Morales (Argentina)**, a Jewish man, Herman Spiesky, and his son, Lionel, both came to faith in Yeshua. This year, as both Herman and Marcos led Passover Seders in their respective homes of Rosario and Mendoza, it was a blessing that they were able to “Skype” and exchange Passover greetings and encouraging words via the Internet. Please pray for the Spieskys’ unsaved loved ones and also for the Lord’s work among the Spanish-speaking Jewish people as Marcos and his wife, Deborah, minister in both Rosario and Mendoza.

“Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together” (John 4:35b-36). 

Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

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*.

QUESTION: *We have a ministry on a local college campus and students often ask us why, if there's really a God, He allows evil to exist. Why is there so much suffering in the world? If God exists, wouldn't He do something about it? Recently, in one of these discussions, someone pointed me to Isaiah 45:7, which says that God creates evil. How do we explain this?*

ANSWER: You're right—atheists and agnostics say that the existence of evil in the world proves that either (1) God doesn't exist or (2) He's not a good God. A good God would do something about the problem of evil. Sometimes unbelievers like to muddy the water by pointing to Isaiah 45:7, which reads: *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things* (KJV). But they're misinterpreting this verse. The Hebrew Scriptures are big on parallelism—and the parallelism here (i.e., light vs. darkness and peace vs. evil) explains the meaning.

The LORD isn't saying that He creates sin or evil. The Bible makes it clear that this is impossible. James, for instance, says, *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone* (1:13; see also 1 John 1:5).

The Hebrew word *ra* has a wide range of meaning, including "evil, bad, displeasing, sad, hurtful, unkind, distress, or calamitous" (see the entry for רע in Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament). So the context (the way it's used in the passage) determines which of those meanings it has in this verse. As we said, the LORD uses the word *ra* here to denote the opposite of *shalom*. *Shalom* means peace, contentment, wholeness, success, completeness, and well-being. So "evil," as used in Isaiah 45, is the opposite of those things.

In this context, the Lord is addressing the Persian King Cyrus—and He's telling the king that if the nations acknowledge Him, they will have His peace; and if they don't, He will send them calamity. Many newer English versions, like the NKJV, in fact, translate it "calamity."

The larger question you asked (i.e., why evil exists) has no easy answer. Theologians have a term for it: theodicy. They have wrestled with this issue for millennia. C.S. Lewis took on this weighty question in his book *The Problem of Pain*. In church history, Irenaeus, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, among others, all suggested solutions. So we're not going to solve it here.

My personal view is that God allowed evil to enter the world, and He has allowed it to continue, because He knows the only way to finally destroy it is to allow it to run its course. So that's what He's doing. Sin and evil will finally be destroyed, once and for all, at the end of the Millennium! 

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

We understand, as you do, that while we're here, there are no shortages of needs that take our time and resources. And though our intention is to remember the Lord's work with a financial gift someday, more immediate needs divert our attention. To our regret, that day of remembrance never comes, which is why including CJF Ministries in your will is an excellent way—without disturbing your current priorities—to ensure that your hard-earned assets will continue supporting the Lord's work even after you're gone. If you've never considered such a method of assisting, we'd be most grateful if you'd make it a matter of prayer. Should you require additional information, we'd be happy to provide helpful instructions.



CJF Ministries
PO Box 345
San Antonio, Texas 78292
(800) 926-5397
info@cjfm.org | cjfm.org

IN THIS ISSUE

Extreme Weather
by Dr. Gary Hedrick
Page 1

Fruit from the Harvest
by Violette Berger
Page 10

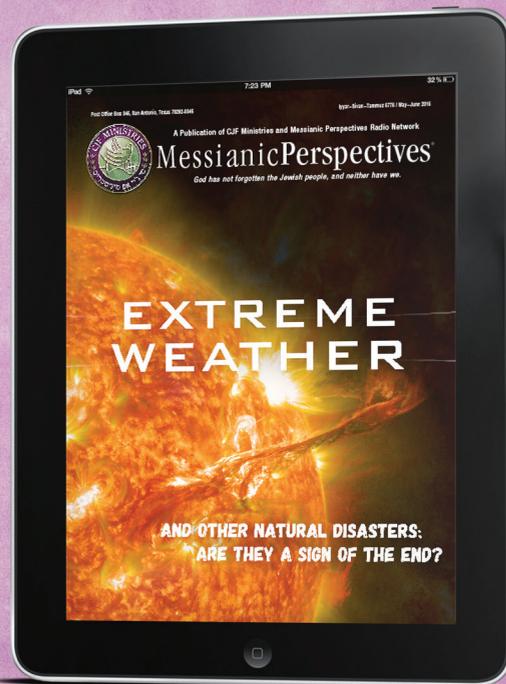
Bible Q&A
by Dr. Gary Hedrick
Page 11

CJF Ministries®

Post Office Box 345
San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345

DID YOU KNOW?

YOU CAN ACCESS THIS COPY OF
*MESSIANIC
PERSPECTIVES*
AS WELL AS OUR ARCHIVE
OF PREVIOUS ISSUES.



VISIT CJFM.ORG/PAPER ON ANY COMPUTER OR TABLET.