



A Publication of CJF Ministries and Messianic Perspectives Radio Network

# Messianic Perspectives<sup>®</sup>

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



**WHAT ABOUT  
THOSE WHO HAVE  
NEVER HEARD?**

**THE GOSPEL AND MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE**

**BY GARY HEDRICK**

This fourth and final installment in our series on the Neo-Reformed/New Calvinist movement deals with one last question relating to the issues of election and predestination—that is, what happens to people who die without ever having heard the Good News of salvation through Jesus the Messiah? Are they, without exception, eternally lost?

## THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD

It's a loaded question—and one that many traditional evangelicals answer in the affirmative. That is, they say that people who die without ever having made an outward profession of faith are indeed lost—even if they've never heard or comprehended the Gospel.

Millard Erickson, a well-known evangelical scholar whose textbook on theology is used in many of our conservative, evangelical seminaries, explains that there are three positions on this issue—exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism:

*Exclusivism* is the view that Christianity is true and that only those who overtly subscribe to its beliefs and practices receive salvation. *Inclusivism* insists that salvation is only through Jesus Christ or the church, but there may be people who are Christians without being consciously involved in Christianity. *Pluralism* teaches that all religions are actually speaking of the same thing, so that the different religions are simply alternate routes, leading to the same goal.<sup>1</sup>

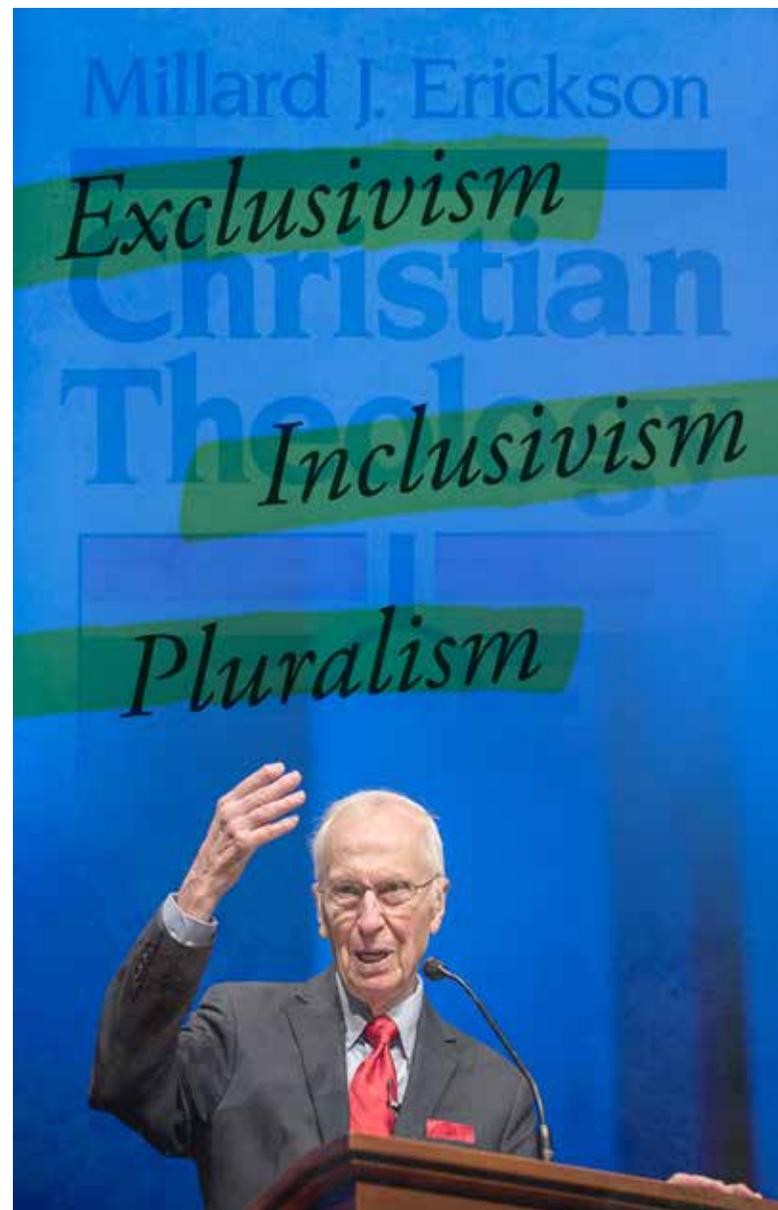
For Bible-believers, pluralism can be easily and quickly dismissed due to its failure to affirm that salvation comes only through Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ). This leaves exclusivism and inclusivism as the only remaining options.

One obvious problem with a strict exclusivism—which requires an outward, evangelical profession of faith, with no exceptions—is that it condemns individuals who die in infancy (without ever having made any such outward profession), or who are born with mental deficiencies (e.g., Downs Syndrome and other, similar conditions). It can also be construed to condemn the Old Testament saints, none of whom made an explicit, evangelical profession of faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, exclusivists sometimes claim that “federal headship” requires a blanket condemnation—even before they were born—of all of Adam’s descendants. However, this extreme form of federal headship has its problems.<sup>3</sup> For one thing, Scripture lays down a general rule that each generation answers for its own sins rather than for the sins of previous generations: “*The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself*” (Ezek. 18:20).

We also have this statement of the Apostle John about the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the age: *And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books* (Rev. 20:12, emphasis added). Why judge lost people “according to their works” if their relationship to Adam has already condemned them? It’s more reasonable to say that individuals are condemned because their sinful nature (inherited from Adam) causes them to commit their own, personal transgressions for which they are accountable.<sup>4</sup>

We conclude, then, that with respect to the fate of unevangelized people, the most biblical and reasonable position is some form of inclusivism.



## Messianic Perspectives®

Dr. Gary Hedrick, *Editor in Chief*  
Erastos Leiloglou, *Creative Director*



*Messianic Perspectives* is published bimonthly by CJB Ministries, P.O. Box 345, San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345, a 501(c)3 Texas nonprofit corporation: Dr. Charles Halff (1929-2000), Founder; Dr. Gary Hedrick, President; Brian Nowotny, Vice President for Administration; Erastos Leiloglou, Creative Director. Subscription price: \$10 per year. The publication of articles by other authors does not necessarily imply CJFM's 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](http://cjfm.org). Toll-free OrderLine: (800) 926-5397. © 2021 by CJB Ministries. All rights reserved.

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

Our Founder, Charles Halff, Jr., was born into a prominent Jewish family here in San Antonio. His ancestors were cattle ranchers who had immigrated from Alsace, France, in the 1800s. He accepted Yeshua (Jesus) as his Savior and Messiah when he was sixteen years old. God called him to evangelism, and his greatest passion, even at that early age, was sharing the Good News of God's salvation with his family and with the Jewish people.

He told us how, when he was a young preacher, Christians would sometimes approach him after a church service and say something like this: "Brother Halff, it must break your heart to know that your Jewish family and ancestors are suffering in Hell today." He said the first few times he heard that, it was like getting slapped in the face with a wet fish.



Alsace, a small region on the border between France and Germany, is where the Halff clan raised and bred cattle in the 1700s and 1800s.



But he gradually grew accustomed to it. He knew these were simple folk, and they meant well, so he would just nod his head, smile, and thank them for their concern. But on the inside, he said his mind was churning with questions: "How exactly did you come by this information? Are you the one who decides who goes to Heaven and who doesn't?"

Charles said he often thought about his Grandma Rosa (Shoshana) whenever this topic came up. His *Bubbe* had helped raise him and his sister in the 1940s while their parents were going through a messy divorce. Rosa was a diminutive, frail woman who loved her family and never had anything bad to say about anyone. She spent most of her daylight hours pattering around the kitchen, cooking meals and taking care of her family. He said she kept the radio blaring because she was hard of hearing—and when the windows were open in the summertime, you could hear it from a block away.

After he became a believer in Jesus, Charles continued living with his family for more than a year. They would later send him away; but for now, they thought he was just going through a religious phase that would eventually pass. He recalled sitting with his Grandma Rosa at the table in her "office" (Rosa's name for the kitchen) while his father and uncle were at work. As they chatted, he would deftly direct the conversation toward spiritual matters. He said Rosa always listened politely; but whenever he mentioned Jesus, she just didn't seem to get it. It was like he was speaking in a foreign language. And if he went into too much detail about Messianic prophecy or theology, he could see her eyes beginning to glaze over.

According to his account of those kitchen conversations, Rosa would end up saying something like, "Junior, I'm so glad you've found something that you feel gives your life more meaning. I really am! The good Lord knows you and your sister haven't had it easy since your parents split up. I've done my best to give you both as much of a normal life as possible." Then she'd get up from her chair, shuffle around the table to where he was sitting, lean down, and kiss him on the cheek. "Junior, I love you more than you'll ever know," she'd say. "Now, can I get you something? I baked some cookies. Or would you like a sandwich? I could make some fresh lemonade." That signaled that the spiritual part of the conversation was over.



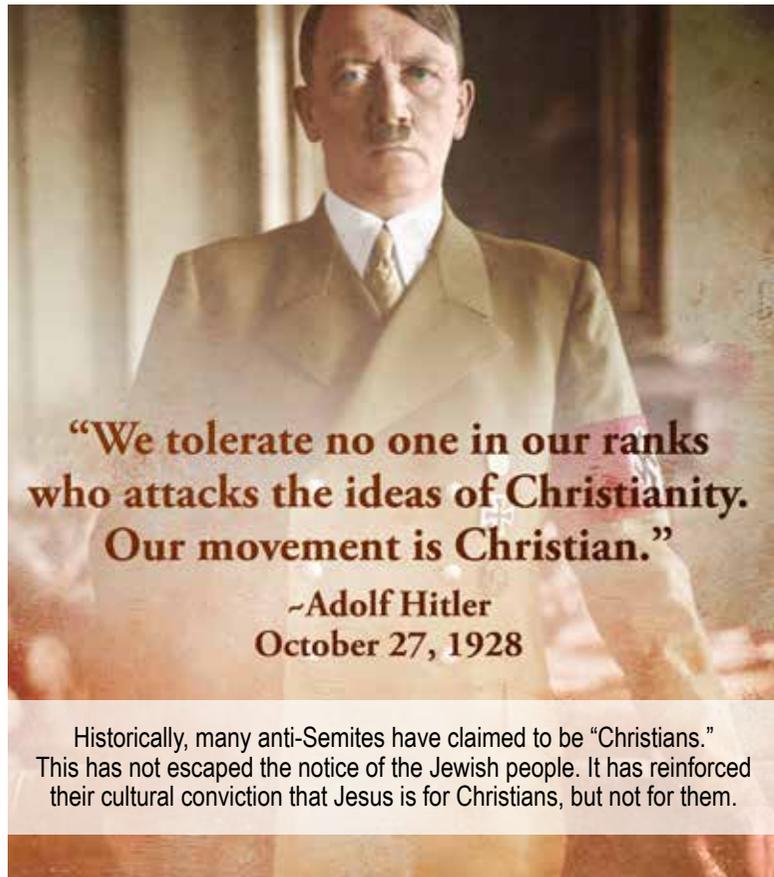
A depiction of someone like Charles' *Bubbe* Rosa.



Rosa died in 1953, when Charlie was 24 years old and had been a Jesus-believer for only a few, short years. Did she hear about Jesus? Yes, she heard—more than once, in fact. But she didn't understand it. She wasn't angry, stubborn, or defiant—Charlie's words simply didn't register with her. Like most Jewish people, she was enmeshed in the traditional matrix that says, "Jesus is the Christian God. Maybe He's okay for the Christians, but He's not for us Jews. We have our own God." This was engrained in her from childhood. It wasn't so much her personal belief, or something she had worked out on her own, as it was part of her spiritual heritage.

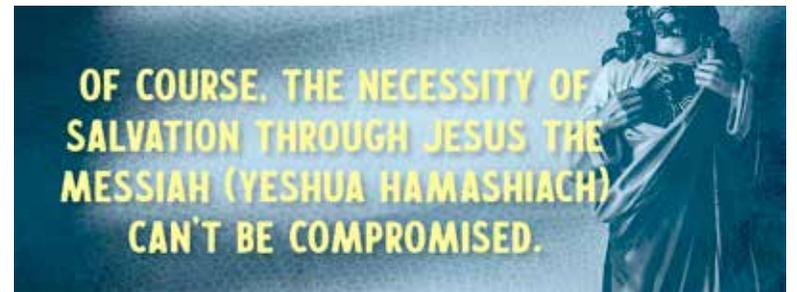
So, what was young Charlie to think about his beloved grandmother? Did she go to Hell when she died because, in his youthful exuberance, he didn't do a very good job of witnessing to her? And for that matter, what was the fate of all his Jewish ancestors going back to Alsace-Lorraine (France), and sixty-five or more generations before that, back to the Middle East and ancient Israel? We're talking about literally thousands of Jewish people here—and for many of them, their only exposure to Jesus or Christianity was in the form of Roman Catholicism. Can we say with certainty that they were all irretrievably lost? These personal issues generated a series of questions in young Charles' mind:

1. What about people who have never heard the Gospel? Will they be held responsible for something they never possessed (i.e., knowledge of the Gospel)?
2. What about people who may have *heard* the Good News about Jesus but didn't *understand* it? In practical effect, what's the difference between not *hearing* it and not *understanding* it?
3. More specifically, what about Jewish people whose only exposure to the Gospel came from their contact with anti-Semitic "Christians" who despised and persecuted them?<sup>5</sup>
4. What about people who are born with special needs or mental handicaps which render them incapable of understanding or responding to the Gospel?
5. What about those who die in the womb, or in infancy?



As our Founder pondered these questions, an answer began to coalesce in his heart and mind. That answer rested on the bedrock of divine election: *Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love* (Eph. 1:4). That is, God has known since eternity past who His people are (via His foreknowledge)—and He will move heaven and earth to bring every one of His elect Home.

Of course, the necessity of salvation through Jesus the Messiah (*Yeshua HaMashiach*) can't be compromised. Jesus himself said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6). He alone paid the price for Redemption, so salvation comes only through Him: "*Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).



This isn't negotiable. There is no salvation apart from the Son of God. But does Jesus the Messiah bring us all to God in precisely the same way? Is there any room for diversity in the way salvation is experienced by individuals?

### COOKIE-SHEET CHRISTIANS?

Young Charles knew that God is always the One who does the saving—and He does it through the merits of His Son. That's the salvific gold standard, and it never changes. However, does it mean that we all have the same, identical cookie-sheet salvation experience? Do we all pray the same evangelical "sinner's prayer"? Charles concluded that we don't.

Someone shared with him something Dwight L. Moody had said way back in the 1800s. The famous evangelist recognized a great diversity in the way people from different cultures and backgrounds come to the Lord:

From opposite standpoints of the Christian world, from different quarters of human life and character, through various expressions of their common faith and hope, through diverse modes of conversion, through different portions of the Holy Scripture will the weary travelers enter the Heavenly City and meet each other—"not without surprise"—on the shores of the same river of life.<sup>6</sup>

More recently, the late Robert Lightner, longtime professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, had a similar (but more theological) observation:

Since God is just He deals equitably and according to truth with all His creatures. He is never unfair. But if He demanded of any of His creatures something which they could not do, would He be unjust? Since God has made it clear in His Word that those who reject His Son as Savior will be damned, how would He be just in refusing into His presence those who were never able to receive or reject His salvation? The Son of God came, declaring God's righteousness "that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). But there are many who can't believe. What will happen to these? Based upon God's justice and the satisfaction of His offended righteousness because of the work of His Son, we believe He is the justifier of those who can't believe just as certainly as He is of those who do believe.<sup>7</sup>

The Old Testament saints never made an evangelical profession of faith in *Adon Yeshua HaMashiach* (the Lord Jesus Christ), either; but surely no one would suggest that we won't see people like Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, or Elijah in Heaven!

Every day, all over the world, the Holy Spirit uses His Word to penetrate the hearts of people wherever they are, whoever they are, however much spiritual light they may have had (or not had), and in whatever culture they may find themselves. Each case is different because everyone is unique. God knows this and will use whatever means necessary to cause the “scales” of spiritual blindness to fall from the eyes of anyone who earnestly seeks Him (e.g., Acts 9:17–18).

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* alludes to the various means God employs when bringing His people to faith. God calls some of His elect via normative, outward means, while others are called by a more specialized, inner working of the Spirit: “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, **who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth**. So also are all other elect persons **who are incapable of being outwardly called** by the ministry of the Word.”<sup>8</sup>

Note the emphasis on God’s sovereignty—He works when, and where, and how He pleases. He doesn’t ask for anyone’s permission.

Madeleine L’Engle writes in her foreword to C.S. Lewis’ *A Grief Observed*:

The medieval picture of heaven and hell hasn’t been replaced with anything more realistic, or more loving. Perhaps for those who are convinced that only Christians of their own way of thinking are saved and will go to heaven, the old ideas are still adequate. But for most of us, who see a God of a much wider and greater love than that of the tribal God who only cares for his own little group, more is needed. And that more is a leap of faith, an assurance that that which has been created with love is not going to be abandoned. Love does not create and then annihilate.<sup>9</sup>

So, there’s a great deal of diversity in the way individual believers experience His salvation. The Apostle Peter shared this truth when he spoke to the household of Cornelius, a Roman soldier in Caesarea: *Then Peter opened his mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him”* (Acts 10:34–35).<sup>10</sup>

## WHO ARE THE “ELECT”?

The word “elect” comes from the Greek *eklektos* (ἐκλεκτός) which means “chosen.” The NT refers to Jesus-believers as God’s “elect” (Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10). So, we are God’s chosen ones.

Our traditional, five-point Calvinist friends say that election is completely unconditional. According to them, there are no criteria (that is, other than God’s sovereign decree). Furthermore, they say that (1) God’s elective decree took place before the world was created, and (2) His elective decree wasn’t informed by any foreknowledge of who we would be or of anything we would ever say or do. As we saw earlier in this article, His choice of His people was, for all practical purposes, arbitrary and anonymous. This is the viewpoint of traditional Calvinism.

However, this traditional, “unconditional” view is wrong. Salvation (a term synonymous with election/predestination) has a condition—namely, our faith in the Son of God: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him** should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16, emphasis in bold added).

Likewise, the Apostle Peter said that God’s people are *elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 1:2; emphasis added).

That verse is crystal-clear, is it not? Election is conditional. It’s not unconditional. It’s based on God’s foreknowledge of who we would be (once we were born into this world) and how we would respond to the work of His Spirit as He nudges us to accept His offer of salvation through His Son.<sup>11</sup>

Who, then, are the elect? According to Revelation 22:17, they’re “whoever desires” to come to God. That’s who we are—anyone and everyone who (1) “hears” God’s invitation, (2) recognizes his need (“thirsts”), (3) responds to the wooing of “the Spirit,” and (4) drinks freely of “the water of life.” The invitation is inclusive rather than exclusive.

Can we come to God on our own initiative? Certainly not. Romans 3:11 puts it bluntly: *“There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.”* The Lord himself declared, *“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).

Clearly, we are dependent on some form of prevenient or common grace, whereby the Spirit moves in our hearts, enabling us to see our need for salvation and drawing us toward God.<sup>12</sup> Contrary to the claims of our five-point friends, however, that work of grace is resistible. The Lord himself 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”* (Rev. 3:20). Note that He knocks on the door of our hearts; but we must *open* the door. He doesn’t force His way in.

But how, exactly, does the Lord save His elect without compromising either His sovereignty or our freedom? It’s a difficult question to answer. However, we will propose at least one possibility that is gaining traction in the evangelical world.

## UNLIMITED OMNISCIENCE

Whenever someone asked Charles Halff about the fate of people who die without the Gospel, he had a simple, homespun answer. He would say something like this: “Don’t you think God knows what they would have done if they had heard and understood the Gospel?” In other words, God knows His elect, even if they never had an opportunity to make a profession of faith during their lifetime.

Is it too much of a stretch to imagine that some people will wake up in Heaven and not even know how they got there? Think, for example, about babies who are aborted or still-born. They have no meaningful consciousness until they awaken in Heaven—so, at least at first, they won’t know where they are or how they got there. Nonetheless, they will indeed be there if they are one of God’s elect.

This is why divine election is so critical to our understanding of salvation. With the benefit of His omniscience and foreknowledge, God knows how every unevangelized individual would have responded if they had grown to maturity and heard the Good News of God’s salvation. Even though they never prayed a “sinner’s prayer” or made a normative evangelical profession of faith, there is provision for their salvation in the Lord’s atoning death on Calvary.



# THE ETERNAL DESTINY OF INDIVIDUALS

SIR J.N.D. (NORMAN) ANDERSON (1908–1994)

NOTED BRITISH EVANGELICAL LAWYER, MISSIONARY, AND THEOLOGIAN

What can we say about the eternal destiny of those who follow these other religions? If we believe that all men, whatever their religious allegiance, are sinners; that no sinner can ever enter into the presence of a holy God; that all men, therefore, need forgiveness and need a Savior; and that there is in fact only one Savior—then does this mean that all those who, through no fault of their own, have never heard of this Savior are necessarily lost? That would be an agonizing doctrine (held though it was by many of our missionary ancestors—and by a number of evangelicals today). Yet what other view can one who believes in the revelation of the Bible, and the finality of Christ, legitimately hold?

Light on this pressing problem can, I think, be found in the experience of the Jews under the Old Covenant. There can be no doubt that Abraham, Moses, David, and John the Baptist, for example, died in a “state of grace,” or that they were saved by the only Savior (to whom they had in fact borne their testimony). But what of the multitude of less-enlightened Jews who, truly convicted of sin, brought the prescribed sacrifices and threw themselves on God’s mercy—or, in the case of sins such as David’s, threw themselves on that mercy, quite apart from any sacrifice, in repentance and faith? It would seem certain that they, too, were saved, not by an animal sacrifice, which can never atone for human sin, but by the Christ who was still to come and on the basis of the final atonement he was to make. For the apostle Paul states unequivocally that “by observing the law [including those sacrifices that were divinely ordained signposts, as it were, pointing on to the Lamb of God, whose advent and death the prophets dimly foresaw] no one will be justified” (Gal 2:16). It was not that all those Jews who took their part in the sacrificial system shared in this salvation (as the prophets made crystal clear), but only those who brought their sacrifices, or threw themselves on God’s mercy, in repentance and faith. Nor could even this repentance and faith in any way “earn” their salvation; this could rest only on that redemption—still to come—which was to provide the essential basis on which alone a holy God can (and does) accept the repentant sinner. It is only through the atoning death of Christ that OT believers now enjoy the redemption that “set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant,” and have received “the promised eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15, cf. Rom 3:25).

What, then, can we say—or surmise—about the eternal destiny of those others who, through no fault of their own, have never heard of the only Savior? What is certain is that they can never earn salvation through their own religion, whatever that may be; but neither could a Jew through Judaism, nor can a Christian through the church to which he happens to belong. But surely there is a similarity as well as a difference, between a man like that and his Jewish counterpart, is there not? The difference is obvious: The Jew in OT days had a revelation that was both valid and trustworthy, even if partial and incomplete, while the non-Christian today may have a concept of God that is not only incomplete, but positively mistaken. But there is, I think, an essential similarity as well. Just as the Jew of the OT was utterly dependent for salvation on a Savior he did not know, so too are those today, from whatever religion, who have never heard the gospel. And just as the Jew of the OT was saved in and through Christ, not by his direct knowledge of the Savior but rather by a sense of sin, a repentance, and a casting of himself on the divine mercy prompted by God himself, may not this—in some cases—be the experience of others, too? Surely the Spirit of God can still speak directly to men and women in their need—whether through dreams, visions, conscience, or an inner voice. So if, and where, the Holy Spirit (who alone can do this) convicts individuals in other religions of their sin and enables them to throw themselves on the mercy of the God whom they seek in the twilight, will they not also be saved in Christ—on the basis, that is, of what God himself did in Christ on the cross for the sins of the whole world?

It is quite inadequate to say (as many do) that those who have never heard the gospel will be judged and justified by a different standard, according to the “light” or truth that was in fact available to them. This is true, no doubt, insofar as the standard by which they will be judged is concerned; for we have biblical authority for the statement that, whereas the Jew will be judged on the basis of the Law revealed on Sinai, non-Jews will be judged according to the criterion of the requirements of the law “inscribed on their hearts” (Rom 2:11–15). But the fact remains that, just as no Jew has ever succeeded in keeping the Mosaic Law or the injunctions of the prophets, so no one else has ever succeeded in living up to the standard of the moral and ethical principles according to which he knows that he ought to regulate his life. The verdict of God is explicit and unequivocal: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

What, then, did the apostle Peter mean in the house of Cornelius when he said, “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34)? He cannot have meant that anyone can earn salvation by trying to be religious and moral, for that is contrary to the whole burden of biblical teaching. But may not his words mean that the man who realizes something of his sin and need and throws himself on the mercy of God with a sincerity that shows itself in his life (which would always, of course, be a sure sign of the inward prompting of God’s Spirit), will find that mercy—although without understanding it—where it is always available, at the cross where Jesus made propitiation for “the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2)? Or, to put it another way, is it not possible that an omniscient God will judge such people, if they have never heard the gospel, on the basis of what he knows would have been their response if they had heard—a response manifested instead, in their ignorance, by that search after God and abandonment to his mercy that only the Holy Spirit could have inspired? After all, the Bible is full of promises that those who truly seek shall find (e.g., Jer. 29:13).

If such persons subsequently hear the gospel adequately explained, may we not surmise that they will be among the company of those whom one does meet on occasion in a non-Christian land who accept it at once and say, “Why did you not come and tell me this before? It is what I have been waiting for all my life.” And if they never hear it in this world, then may we not believe they will awaken, as it were, on the other side of the grave to worship the one in whom, without understanding it, they found forgiveness? But it is important to emphasize that this suggestion is in no sense a doctrine of a “second chance,” since here the basis of salvation is firmly related to this life; and it is still further removed from any concept of “universalist” (i.e., that everyone will ultimately be saved)—for the few verses in the Bible that can be quoted in support of the universalist thesis must be set against the far more numerous and explicit verses to the contrary.

But, finally, might not the view expounded here weaken the urgency of our missionary incentive? Surely not. To begin with, the Christian is under an explicit command to go and tell the gospel. Then again, if we ask ourselves what enabled us to give up trying to save ourselves and to throw ourselves on God for salvation, the answer will almost certainly be the message of the gospel. So it is imperative that we should give others the same opportunity. Yet again, those who find forgiveness in this way may sadly lack assurance, and will almost certainly lack a message they can pass on to others or the joy and victory that a knowledge of the risen Christ alone can give. How, then, can we withhold from them the full truth as it is in Jesus?

—Adapted from Section VI of the General Articles in Volume One of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank Gaebelin, General Editor (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 154–56. Emphasis added in bold. For a more complete treatment of this subject, see Anderson’s book *Christianity and Comparative Religion* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1971), 91–111.

## GOD'S MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

Election and free will are both biblical and must, therefore, be affirmed and maintained. The challenge is for us to learn how those two realities work together without one canceling out the other.

Christian theologians have haggled over this quandary since the time of Augustine (354–430). On one side, there have been those who (like Augustine) subscribe to a strong view of divine sovereignty and God's control over His Creation. On the other side, there have been those who have had a strong view of human free will and responsibility. So, which side is right?

This is where Molinism enters the picture. It gets its name from a Spanish priest, Luis de Molina (1535–1600). Molina sought to resolve the seeming contradiction between divine sovereignty and human free will by theorizing that God possesses a unique and mysterious *scientia media* (“middle knowledge”). This special, divine knowledge, he suggested, encompasses all present and future reality, both real and potential.

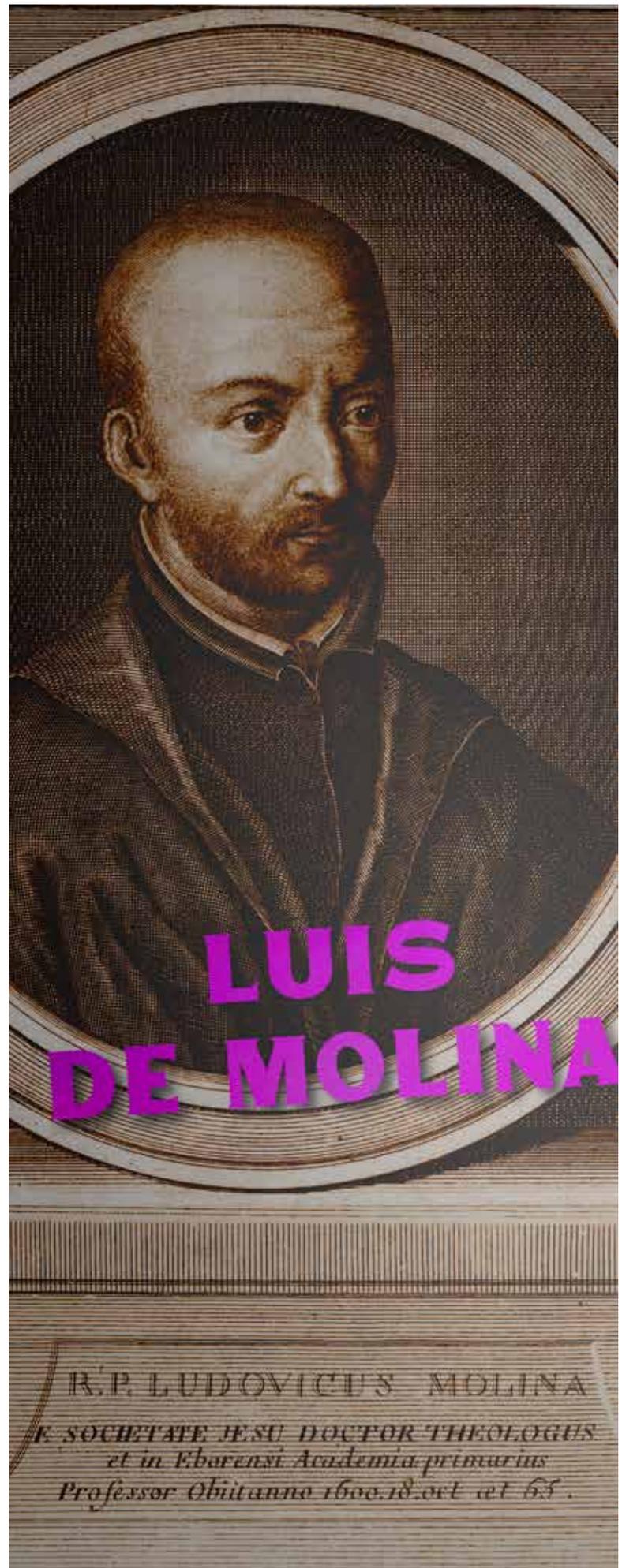
Molina's revolutionary idea was that God, who is all-knowing, used His all-encompassing knowledge of all possible outcomes to formulate His predestinating decree (i.e., election) in Eternity past. Without compromising human freedom, God sovereignly chooses the version of reality that effectively accomplishes His purpose. **The crux of Molina's argument, then, is that divine sovereignty works via the agency of human free will.** So, it doesn't minimize sovereignty; it expands it. With Molinism, human freedom gets folded into divine sovereignty so the two work together. Neither one cancels out the other.

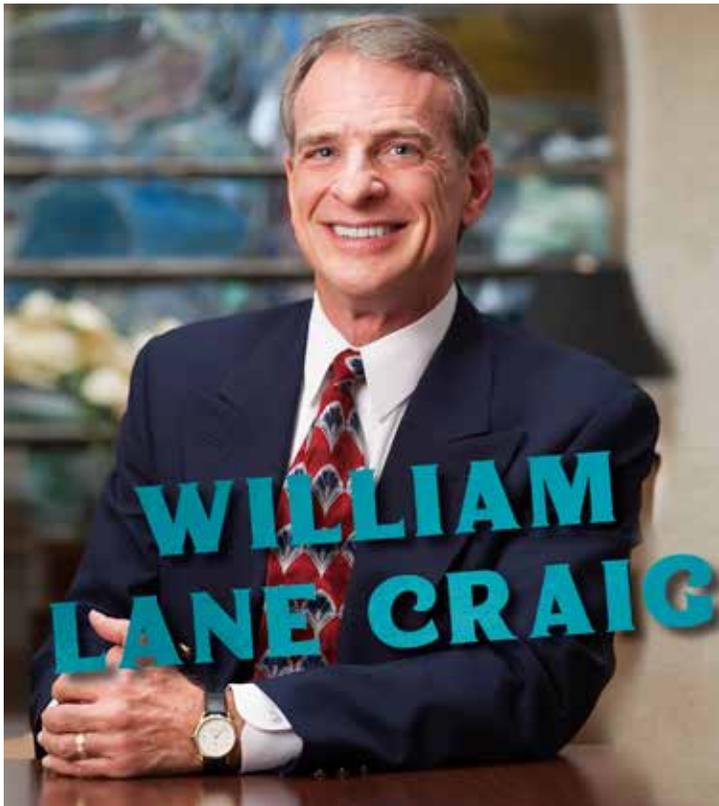
Traditional Calvinism, on the other hand, employs a classic example of “zero sum” thinking, insisting that the more control God has, the less freedom humans have (and vice versa). Middle knowledge, however, shows that premise to be false. It says God's sovereignty is so all-encompassing, He not only *gives* us freedom, but He also *uses* our freedom to accomplish His purposes.

Thomas Flint acknowledges that both sides of the debate—that is, the pro-sovereignty and pro-freedom camps—can, right on cue, rattle off a litany of supporting Scripture passages. But he says there's a third group to whom we should pay attention:

A third group of Christian theorists holds that *neither* the strong, traditional picture of providence *nor* the libertarian notion of freedom is negotiable; each is manifestly supported by reason and/or by revelation. But, these Christians say, the appearance of conflict between providence and freedom is *merely* an appearance. Once we see that God's sovereign control would operate *through* his creatures' free decisions, and (more specifically) through his knowledge of what those decisions would be, we see that none of the radical moves advocated by the two camps described above [i.e., sovereignty and free will] needs to be made. This attempt to reconcile freedom and providence is usually called *Molinism*.<sup>13</sup>

Flint further notes that “via His middle knowledge, God can providentially control people without taking away their (libertarian) freedom and thus can bring about the results that He desires.”<sup>14</sup> This is how middle knowledge works—and how it preserves both divine sovereignty and human freedom.





Evangelical apologist-philosopher William Lane Craig unpacked some of the complexities of middle knowledge in a debate with Paul Helm, a Reformed historian-theologian from Scotland, on a UK radio broadcast in 2014. Here, in part, is what he said:

The key to understanding Molinism is Molina's doctrine of what he called middle knowledge. This is God's knowledge of everything that would happen under various circumstances, and he called it "middle knowledge" because it is in between, so to speak, God's natural knowledge, which is His knowledge of everything that could happen, and His free knowledge, which is His knowledge of everything that will happen. So, in between everything that could happen and everything that will happen is everything that would happen under different circumstances. The doctrine of middle knowledge says that God knows what you would have freely done if you had been in the Apostle Peter's shoes. He knows whether you would have denied Christ three times or whether you would have been faithful or what. And so, the key to Molina's doctrine of providence is that **by means of His middle knowledge God knows what free agents would freely do in any set of freedom-permitting circumstances that God might put them in.** So, by creating those circumstances and putting the agents in them, God then, so to speak, takes hands off and **He lets the agent freely choose how he wants,** but He knows how that agent would choose (emphasis added).

"Molinism vs. Calvinism—William Lane Craig and Paul Helm," Premier Christian Radio (January 4, 2014). The YouTube video is available for viewing at *Reasonable Faith with William Lane Craig* at [reasonablefaith.org](http://reasonablefaith.org).

Some evangelicals have been skittish about adopting a view that originated in medieval Catholicism—and who can blame them? The Protestant Reformers rose up in the 1500s to denounce the Catholic practice of indulgences. The Vatican was literally telling people they could purchase the forgiveness of sins by contributing to the pope's building fund in Rome. It was a despicable and ungodly practice.

However, should all Catholic beliefs be summarily rejected by Bible-believing evangelicals? Of course not. What about important doctrines like the Trinity and the Virgin Birth? These are teachings that we, like our Catholic counterparts, wholeheartedly embrace. Our assessment of doctrines, then, should be based on whether they're biblical—not on who else might believe them. Middle knowledge in no way contradicts our historic Christian faith. On the contrary, evangelical apologist William Lane Craig, has said that middle knowledge is "one of the most fruitful theological ideas ever conceived."<sup>15</sup>

Besides, Molina's teaching about middle knowledge was bantered about in Catholic circles for years but was never officially endorsed by the Vatican. On the contrary, "his ideas were criticized by the Dominicans of his day, who felt that he was out of step with Catholic doctrine, especially that of the great theologian Thomas Aquinas."<sup>16</sup> So, middle knowledge was never really a "Catholic doctrine."

Numerous evangelical scholars, including such notables as William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, Kenneth Keathley, and Tim Stratton, have recognized the potential value in middle knowledge. Bible-believers in increasing numbers are intrigued by the possibilities it holds. The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) has hosted study sessions about middle knowledge and Molinism at its annual conferences.

Many traditional Calvinists, understandably, see no need for anything like middle knowledge.<sup>17</sup> And they're right! Anyone who's willing to settle for a system that suppresses human freedom and in so doing makes God ultimately responsible for everything that happens—even acts of human sin and disobedience—effectively renders middle knowledge superfluous.

Others of us, however, reject this longstanding Calvinist status quo. We recognize the need for both divine sovereignty/control and human freedom/responsibility to remain fully intact—and middle knowledge (or something like it) makes that possible.

## HOW MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE (MK) HELPS

1. MK preserves both divine sovereignty and human freedom without compromising either one. Neither one cancels out the other. Humans are free to choose within the framework of divine Providence. The "zero-sum game" is resolved.
2. MK does away with the need for Calvin's "horrible" doctrine of reprobation (or "double predestination").<sup>18</sup> Reprobation is where we end up if we emphasize divine control to the exclusion of human freedom. With middle knowledge, divine sovereignty and human freedom are both fully preserved.<sup>19</sup>
3. MK explains how God ultimately judges the unevangelized when they die. The Lord knows everything that is knowable about every man, woman, boy, or girl who has ever lived (or ever will live) on Planet Earth. He uses that comprehensive knowledge to make sure everyone is judged fairly and equitably. Regarding people who die without ever having heard the Gospel, God, the Great Judge, knows how they would have responded if they had heard it.
4. MK ultimately leaves God in charge of who goes to Heaven and who doesn't. That is, after all, what election is all about. A traditional, formulaic "sinner's prayer," if it doesn't come from a contrite heart, has no saving efficacy by itself. Some outwardly religious people are farther from the Kingdom of God than the unpretentious folks who hang out at the local tavern. Our Founder used to say that when we get to Heaven, we may be surprised to see who is there and who isn't.

## CONCLUSION

In the Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul alludes to the fact that divine election happens in Eternity. It transcends limitations of mortality, time, or space. He writes, *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (8:38–39).

Note the five things these verses say cannot separate the elect from God's love:

1. Mortality—*Neither death nor life*. God's love transcends death, even if we die without hearing the Gospel.
2. Supernatural attacks—*Nor angels nor principalities nor powers*. Any barrier thrown up by the powers of darkness will crumble before the King.
3. Temporal barriers—*Nor the present nor the future*. The Gospel is timeless.
4. Physical distances—*Nor height nor depth*. God reaches His elect anywhere. No spatial limitations.
5. The Universe—*Nor any other created thing*. We are never outside the realm of God's protective care. Since He himself is the only uncreated entity, that realm encompasses all of reality.

Dear reader, God knew you in Eternity past, eons before you, your parents, or your grandparents were ever born. He knew you and loved you even then—and He sent His Son to die and pay your sin-debt. Salvation is a gift, so it's already paid for. You can't earn it. All you can do is reach out and receive it. Trust Him today and He will save you:

*Look unto me, and be ye saved,  
all the ends of the earth:  
for I am God, and there is none else.*

Isaiah 45:22, KJV



*Gary Hedrick  
is president of  
CJF Ministries.*

<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 814.

<sup>2</sup> The standard response to this objection (i.e., that strict exclusivism condemns OT saints) is that they lived in a different dispensation during which they achieved salvation by other means. This, however, is a gross misinterpretation of the biblical facts. Salvation has always been by God's grace, applied through our faith in Him (Gal. 3:11; Hab. 2:4). There has never been any other way (Rom. 4:13–25).

<sup>3</sup> According to some theologians, "federal headship" means that all of humankind—past, present, and future—is guilty of the sin that Adam committed. That is, he was our proxy in the Garden of Eden. The problem with this attribution of Adam's specific sin to the entire human race is that Adam is the one who committed the sin—not his descendants. A more moderate view of federal headship, however, says that we all inherit a fallen nature from Adam, and that's what causes us to sin (Rom. 5:12–21). Because God is perfectly just, He would not, as a matter of principle, condemn an individual for someone else's sin. See Millard Erickson's explanation of federal vs. natural headship in *Christian Theology* (Ibid., 577–78).

<sup>4</sup> One possible answer to the objection is that the judgment "according to their works" is necessary to determine the degree of a lost person's punishment in Hell. Many of us, after all, believe in degrees of punishment in Hell (as well as degrees of reward in Heaven); however, how exactly does this work if predestination and reprobation are both unconditional and anonymous? After all, if there are no human conditions of any kind, works are irrelevant.

<sup>5</sup> For more information about historic "Christian" anti-Semitism, see Dr. Michael Brown's book *Our Hands Are Stained with Blood: The Tragic Story of the "Church" and the Jewish People* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> *Heaven: Where It Is, Its Inhabitants, and How to Get There* by Dwight L. Moody (Shawnee, Kansas: Primedia eLaunch, 2013), 22. Original Moody Publications printing date: 1880.

<sup>7</sup> *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation: The Theology of Everlasting Life* by Robert Lightner (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 1996), 186.

<sup>8</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 10, Point 3. Emphasis added in bold. Accessed at reformed.org.

<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), ix.

<sup>10</sup> See J.N.D. Anderson's monograph on "The Eternal Destiny of Individuals" elsewhere in this issue.

<sup>11</sup> Hardline, five-point Calvinists are adamant about election and predestination being unconditional. That's because their theological system—which rests on the foundation of limited atonement and unconditional predestination—depends on it. They claim that unconditional predestination is the effective line of demarcation, historically, between Calvinism and Arminianism. However, that is simply not true. From the earliest days of the Reformed movement, voices have been raised in support of some form of conditional predestination. Moses Amyraut (1596–1664), for example, was a French Reformed theologian who believed that the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) had departed from the original intent of John Calvin (who had died in 1564) and gone to seed on Theodore Beza's unconditional version of God's predestinating decree. Critics

accused Amyraut of heresy (and some still do, even today); however, he was put on trial on three separate occasions (1637, 1644, and 1659) and acquitted each time because his opponents failed to show how his teachings contradicted biblical truth. Reformed supporters of Amyraut's ideas have included such notables as Richard Baxter, Augustus H. Strong, and Lewis Sperry Chafer, among others. For more details, see Bruce Demarest's articles on "Amyraut, Moise" and "Amyraldianism" in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 52–54.

<sup>12</sup> Theologians distinguish between "saving grace" (which traditional Calvinists say is irresistible and bestowed only on the elect) and "common grace." Common grace is available to both believers and unbelievers and restores the unbeliever's ability (lost in the Fall) to respond to God. It's similar to the concept of prevenient grace in Arminian theology. Some Reformed people—particularly those of us who don't accept the notion of unconditional election (see the previous endnote)—are sympathetic to these ideas about common or prevenient grace.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas P. Flint, "Divine Providence," Chapter 12 in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2009), 263.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Stratton, *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism: A Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Philosophical Analysis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Wayne Grudem and Paul Helm are examples of well-known Calvinists who dismiss middle knowledge as unnecessary. Dr. Grudem, for example, says, "The doctrine of 'middle knowledge' . . . is sometimes proposed as a way to reconcile Calvinism and Arminianism on the question of the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's free will. But in fact, it turns out to be just a complicated variety of the Arminian position that election is based on God's foreknowledge of our faith (it adds the qualification that God creates the kind of world and arranges the kind of circumstances in which he knows that a person will 'freely' choose to believe, and then he predestines that person to be saved)" (*Systematic Theology*, Second Edition [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020]), 1275.

<sup>18</sup> Remember, Calvin himself referred to reprobation as a "horrible (or dreadful) decree" in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (III.xxiii.7). Nonetheless, he thought it was unavoidable.

<sup>19</sup> Sovereignty is preserved because God is fully in control of which "world" or timeline He actualizes in order to accomplish His will; and human freedom is a reality because each potential "world" is populated by beings who have been sovereignly endowed with the power of choice. So, in effect, God is working through human freedom to accomplish His sovereign will and purpose. Some people are put off by this notion of other, potential "worlds" where timelines differ from our own. It may seem far-fetched; however, even modern quantum theory suggests the existence of parallel universes—that is, "worlds" that are much like our own except for the way decisions are made and things happen. We're not arguing for the existence of science-fiction-style parallel universes; all we're saying is that it's not such a far-fetched idea to say that our omniscient God, by definition, knows everything that would, could, or will ever happen.

# Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger

## Everything Under the Sun

**Larry Dubin, CJFM representative (Florida)**, shares how the Covid-19 shutdown impacted our lives so that we had to reevaluate and realign our priorities and how to carry out our calling “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Although the world remains in transition, Larry writes how modern technology provided him with a platform to declare the promises of God from the year 2019 to an unknown time and destination. For the past 14 months, he and his wife, Deb, have been “hosting” a diverse weekly online group that engages in discussing Bible passages from Genesis to Revelation. During the C-19 pandemic, community has been created through this group. Among the incredible blessings was “the amazing maturation process of understanding and applying the Word of God to everything under the sun.” Larry states: “Therefore, the C-19 pandemic appears as a horrible period of human history; yet, following the imperatives of Scripture in good times and bad times may create a moment of rejoicing (Phil. 4:4).”

**Deb Dubin, CJFM representative (Florida)**, writes about her friendship with “R,” a lively 96-year-old non-believing Jewish woman she met in one of her Jewish immersion groups. Being isolated, like the rest of the world, Deb and Larry began a tradition of preparing and eating meals at R’s house every week, which also includes taking care of any of her household needs. R is aware of their faith and that they “work” for a Messianic Jewish ministry. As is their custom, Deb and Larry pray before partaking in their meal. One day, R asked if she could “pray to the God I don’t believe in” and began her prayer with “to whom it may concern.” Chuckling aside, Deb and Larry feel that they have made an impact on R’s life. Over the many months of having meals together, they have engaged in numerous conversations about spiritual issues, and R always asks about what their pastor preached at church on Sunday morning. Although she doesn’t “yet” know who Jesus is and why He died for her, Deb and Larry continue to demonstrate who Jesus is through their love and service in her life. Deb writes, “Please pray for R’s salvation. What a joy it would be to have her join us around the greatest banquet table of all tables!” Amen!

## A Grateful Heart

**Violette Berger, CJFM representative (Phoenix)**: I thank everyone who prayed for my healing and full recovery following my accident on March 26, 2021. I was setting up the elements for our tables in preparation for our Passover Seder on Zoom at my home church when I fell on the sidewalk while walking back to my car. This resulted in two fractures on my pelvis, and I was unable to walk. I watched our Zoom Passover Seder that evening on my phone while in the ER at Mayo Hospital—with a nurse and doctor looking over my shoulder. (It is available for viewing on our website, [hopeinthedesert.org](http://hopeinthedesert.org).) I praise God that following hospitalization and rehab, I have graduated from a wheelchair to a cane (and now only have to use it when I leave the house). I also praise the Lord for the believers I met while in the hospital and rehab, and for the opportunities He gave me

to share the Gospel with unbelieving Jewish and Gentile individuals. Please pray for the salvation of “J,” a physical therapist I saw every day, who is Jewish and admitted to knowing nothing about his Jewish culture or faith. We had many interesting conversations. I also had quite a discussion with someone on staff at the rehab facility who claims to be a believer but adheres to replacement theology—the belief that God is finished with the Jews. In his words, “The Jews killed Jesus and will never believe! The Church is now spiritual Israel!” Please pray for “A.”

## New Jewish Believers

**CJFM Northeast representative Diann Parkas (New Jersey)** was available for online outreach about a year ago and met a young Jewish man who had been a believer for a short time. He was eager to learn, and Diann has been regularly teaching him Bible studies over the phone throughout the year. He also attended some of the classes she has taught on Zoom. Diann also writes about an exciting new development: This young man’s unbelieving Jewish mother has expressed interest in the Gospel, and was willing to attend Diann’s Messianic Passover Seder on Zoom. In that context, she heard about Yeshua, the final Passover Lamb. Diann asks that we “pray for the Lord to open her heart to the truth, and to a personal need for salvation.”

Praise God that one of the Jewish women who attended Diann’s Sukkoth (Feast of Tabernacles) service in the fall has opened her heart to Jesus! Diann began discipling her, but she prefers to continue at her own pace. She has, however, met Diann and attended services at a local Messianic congregation and has even attended services on her own. Diann requests that “we please pray for her to grow strong in her new faith.”

## A New Faith

**Eric Chabot, CJFM Midwest representative (Columbus, OH)**, is blessed that Ohio State University (OSU) was back in session this term, and he was able to resume his apologetics ministry on campus. (Columbus State University, his other apologetics ministry, is still entirely online.) In response to his “Does God Exist?” question asked on OSU’s campus, Eric and his team had the opportunity to share the Gospel message with nearly **130** people in one month, and **12** students made first-time commitments to the Lord. Eric says that they saw more openness to the God question this year than any other year on campus, and more people came to faith than any previous year as well. “Perhaps they are tired of political solutions and division over Covid and social ills. Between fall of last year and this spring, we have seen over **50 people make first-time commitments to the Lord!**” Recently, a Muslim girl approached their table on campus. She said that she had read the Quran in Arabic, and it made no sense. After spending 45 minutes with her explaining the Good News, she committed her life to Messiah Jesus. Please pray for her to continue and grow in her new faith.



## Snakes

CJFM Midwest representative **Michael Campo, Jr. (Chicago)** visited Florida recently. While sitting outside enjoying the outdoors one day, a snake nearly crossed his leg at the same time a man sitting next to him was warning Michael about snakes in Florida. As they began talking, Michael prayed for an opportunity to witness to him, especially after the gentleman told him about his children and the need to find his baptismal records because he had been diagnosed with leukemia. He added, with concern, that he had been prescribed a drug that costs \$150,000 per year. Michael then shared the Gospel message with him—why we need a Savior, namely Jesus. The man’s response was, “No one has ever told me these things.” Michael thought about the irony that a 71-year-old man had never heard the Gospel and that he warned Michael about the snakes in Florida. In return, Michael warned *him* about the snake in the Garden of Eden. Please pray for his salvation.

## UNLV Campus Outreach

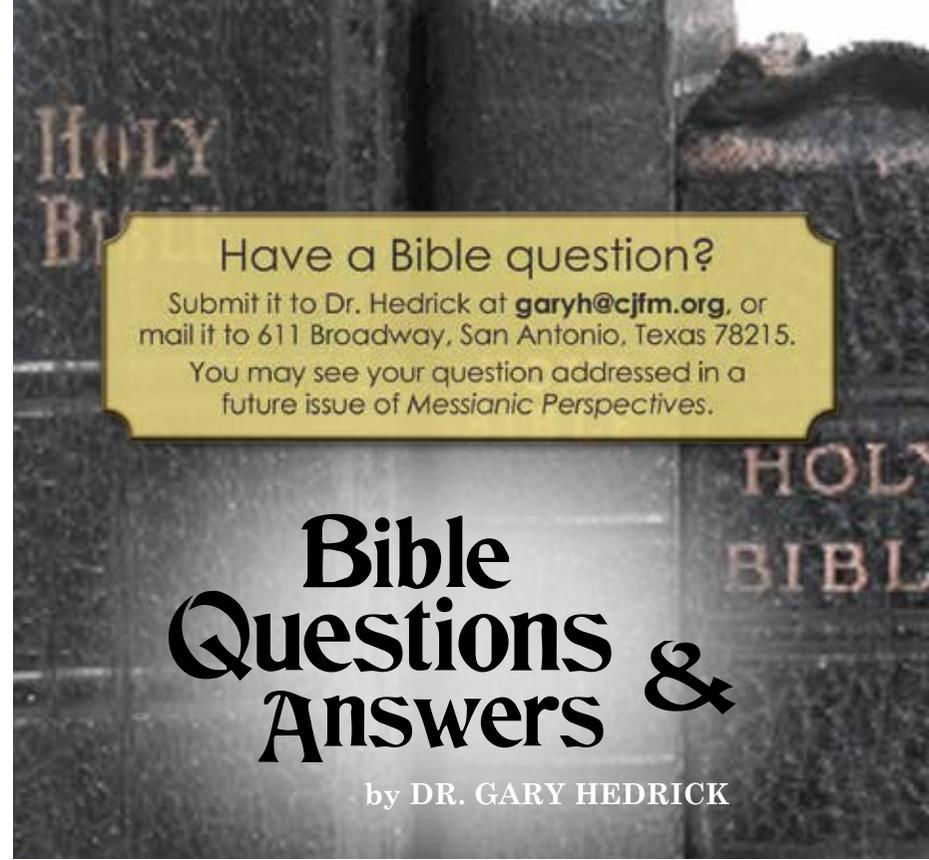
**Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation (Las Vegas)**, and his team of volunteers were blessed while witnessing on the UNLV campus this past semester, despite the restrictions due to Covid-19. Although UNLV only allowed 20% of its student population to attend classes on campus, their ministry led **10** students to the Lord. Full occupancy of students is scheduled for the fall semester. Rich asks that we join him in “praying for a great revival on campus and in Las Vegas.”

To date, Rich has served 21 years in ministry in Las Vegas. He and his team have led **1,324** souls to the Lord (including **69** Jewish individuals). He writes, “We praise the Lord for using us to His Glory!” Please pray for God’s blessings on Rich’s live weekly video show, “Messiah in Prophecy,” on [messianiclambnetwork.com](http://messianiclambnetwork.com) every Tuesday. He also asks for prayer that funds be raised for a possible new venture: a TV show on the Christian Television Network (CTN). Rich was also blessed that they were able to have an in-person Passover Seder finally—100 people attended, and four people prayed to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior that night. Please pray for their spiritual growth.

## A Good Read

**Michelle Beadle, CJFM Southeast representative (New Orleans)**, writes about a text she received recently from one of her supporters in Louisiana. The woman said that she recommended Michelle’s new book, *Messiah in Scripture: An 11-Week Study*, to her prayer partner who purchased it and is reading it with her Jewish husband. Michelle asks for prayer for this couple, “that the husband will embrace what he reads and join his wife in following Yeshua (Jesus).”

*“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people”* (Jer. 31:33). 



Have a Bible question?  
Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at [garyh@cjfm.org](mailto: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*.

# Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

**QUESTION:** *I don’t like mind-games. I’ve never been a particularly religious person, but since hearing about this theory [that God judges each of us based on what He knows we would have done if we had heard and understood His message during our lifetime], I find myself being haunted by the thought that this might already be Judgment Day and I’m somehow in an alternate reality where God is showing me, in real time, what I would have done if I had heard about Jesus. My problem is that I’m not ready to make a commitment to Him at this point in my life.*

**ANSWER:** Please don’t over-think this, dear friend. Your note was long (we condensed it for this Q & A), but it sounds like you’ve heard and understood the Gospel. So, go ahead and do what you already know you should do. Ignore all the worldly distractions and focus only on Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah and Savior of the world. Fall at His feet and acknowledge Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. He loves you and gave His life for you.

Just talk to Him like you would if the two of you were sitting together in your own living room. You can do it right now! He will hear you; we promise. Here’s His invitation: *“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”* (Rev. 3:20).

The point isn’t your being “ready to make a commitment.” In salvation, God is the One who makes the commitment—not us. We have nothing to commit to Him—no righteousness, no good works, no merit of any kind. All we can do is place our faith and trust in His Son’s finished work on Calvary (John 3:16). It’s a simple and straightforward faith transaction where we reach out to Him and exchange our sin for His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

The Bible says that salvation is a “gift” from God to you (Rom. 6:23). A gift, of course, is something someone else has paid for and given to you free of charge. All you have to do is accept it.

This is not a game. It is more real than you know. If we can help you in any way, please write to us at [info@cjfm.org](mailto:info@cjfm.org). Our staff members are available for anyone who’s in need of spiritual help or advice. 

## IN THIS ISSUE

**WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO  
HAVE NEVER HEARD?  
The Gospel and  
Middle Knowledge**  
by Gary Hedrick  
Page 1

**Fruit from the Harvest**  
by Violette Berger  
Page 10

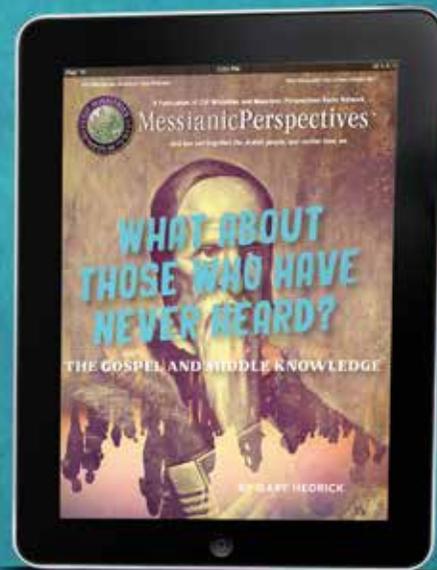
**Bible Questions & Answers**  
Don't Overthink It  
Page 11

## 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](http://CJFM.ORG/PAPER) ON ANY COMPUTER OR TABLET.